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WIND IN THE BAMBOO GROVE: JAPANESE AESTHETICS AND PERFORMANCE PRACTICE IN MARIMBA MUSIC

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Abstract

Wind In The Bamboo Grove: Japanese Aesthetics And Performance Practice In Marimba Music

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This paper will explore Japanese aesthetics and culture and how they manifest in and influence Japanese marimba music and marimba performance practice. The history of marimba and its ubiquity in Japan from the 1930s to the 1970s will be examined. An overview will be provided of the first popular performers and their contributions to advocating for the marimba as a formidable solo instrument, and their efforts in commissioning and performing new works. Background information on concepts of Japanese aesthetics will be provided so that performers may be able to integrate them into a more informed interpretation of Japanese compositions. Through interviews with modern Japanese marimbists I have found that the characteristics that constitute a distinct "Japanese" marimba style are mainly concerned with *ma*, and *mono no aware,* which I will discuss in detail. Finally, I will apply the above mentioned concepts in the form of a performance and practice guide for *Wind in the Bamboo Grove*, by a well-known marimba piece by Japanese composer Keiko Abe

Introduction

Knowing about a culture and its aesthetic conceptions can greatly influence how a performer will interpret and recite a given piece. There are always implied performance practices in music whether the consideration is historical period, genre, ensemble type, or culture. For example a dance piece composed in the 1600's, such as a courante or allemande, will be performed differently than a dance piece written in the 1800's such as a polonaise or waltz. For instance, a modern musician without some background regarding the performance practice of the period will likely accurately perform the notated pitches and rhythms, but will probably lack the knowledge to know how to interpret a mordent or trill symbol or know how and when to execute rubato in a Romantic piano solo. Likewise, a person without knowledge of Japanese culture or aesthetics will likely be unable to faithfully recreate the subtleties and unwritten implications of what a Japanese composer would have conceived of when composing a piece. I have not encountered any writing that discusses how to play marimba, or even how to play music in a more "Japanese" way. How are performers from outside of the culture expected to understand the significance of space, silence, and non-fixity that is present in much Japanese marimba music?

This paper will attempt to provide general guidelines for a "Japanese" marimba performance practice" as it pertains to *Wind in the Bamboo Grove*, by Keiko Abe. I hope to inform those unfamiliar with Eastern and Japanese aesthetic practices as they relate to music in order to enhance their understanding and interpretation of marimba music by Japanese composers. Additionally, understating the culture of marimba that exists in

Japan and its ubiquity in the country will help to contextualize the instrument and the music written for it by Japanese composers.

First, I will provide a survey of the history of marimba and its place in the culture of Japan in the early 1900s. Next, I will give an overview of the xylophone and its role in ushering in the early marimba performers and composers that helped to popularize the instrument in the 1960s and 1970's. Then, I will provide an overview of *ma*, *mono no aware*, and the relevance of nature in the Japanese aesthetic. Finally, I will give a practice and performance guide of *Wind in the Bamboo Grove*, and discuss how the aforementioned Japanese aesthetic concepts manifest in the music. Additionally, insight gathered from interviews with modern Japanese marimba performers will be given for musicians seeking to perform Japanese music more authentically.

Western culture and Eastern culture are disparate schools of thought with many of their constituent notions being nearly diametrically opposed. To put it succinctly, the dichotomy is generally centered on individualism vs collectivism,

> …whether you consider yourself to be independent and self-contained, or entwined and interconnected with the other people around you, valuing the group over the individual. Generally speaking - there are many exceptions - people in the West tend to be more individualist, and people from Asian countries like India, Japan or China tend to be more collectivist.[1]

As an example to illustrate the difference,

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[1] David Robson, "How East and West Think in Profoundly Different Ways," *BBC,* January 19, 2017, accessed May 1, 2019, http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20170118-how-east-and-west-think-in-profoundly-different-ways

> Suppose you are asked to name the two related items in a list of words such as “train, bus, track”. What would you say? This is known as the “triad test”, and people in the West might pick “bus” and “train” because they are both types of vehicles. A holistic thinker, in contrast, would say “train” and “track”, since they are focusing on the functional relationship between the two – one item is essential for the other’s job.”[2]

In a general sense, the main reason for the contrast is the result of the “prevailing philosophies that have come to prominence in each region over time. Western philosophers emphasised freedom and independence, whereas Eastern traditions like Taoism tended to focus on concepts of unity.”[3] As Robson points out, “These diverse ways of viewing the world are embedded in the culture’s literature, education, and political institutions, so it is perhaps of little surprise that those ideas have been internalised, influencing some very basic psychological processes.”[4] Donald Keene, in his introduction to his research about Japanese aesthetics, writes about small details that are likely ‘invisible’ to a native Japanese individual, but would be conspicuous to a Westerner.

> “The visitor to Japan never fails to notice the flowers, real or artificial, clustered in a little holder near the bus-driver's head; or the flowers gracefully bending down from a wall-bracket over the toilet; or the artistically brushed signboard in the railway station which proves to mean ‘Left Luggage Room’; or, for that matter, the maddening artistry with which a parcel is likely to be wrapped in a department store when one is in a hurry.”[5]

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[2] Ibid

[3] Robson.

[4] Ibid

[5] Donald Keene, “Japanese Aesthetics,” Philosophy East and West, Vol. 19, No. 3, Symposium on Aesthetics East and West (Jul., 1969): 293. Accessed: October 7, 2018, URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/1397586

The propensity for selecting 'train' and 'track' in a triad test, and the aesthetic presentation described by Keene is the result of a long history of a radically different culture from the Western one. The manifestation or expression of aesthetic concepts by an individual or society is usually a passive/unconscious process that is integrated by simply being immersed in the culture. It is implicitly "indoctrinated."

Non-Japanese musicians are at a disadvantage when it comes to performing Japanese music. Certain aesthetic concepts must be learned, or at least understood. There are numerous books and articles written about Japanese aesthetic concepts that focus on the most salient features of Japanese aesthetics, most of which are non-musical. The most commonly explored musical aesthetic concepts are ones found in traditional visual arts and traditional performing arts: Kabuki Theater, Noh Theater, and Gagaku (imperial court music). I found only brief mention of general aesthetic concepts related to music. Furthermore, I did not encounter any writings about modern Japanese performance practice. However, much is written about general Japanese music practice from the Meiji Restoration[6] in 1868 to the modern day. Specific individuals are referenced which allows an evolution of performance practice and aesthetic concepts to be extrapolated.

[6] A shift in political power from the Shogun, military dictator, to an Emperor, which ended a generally isolationist policy and opened trade with the West.

The Culture of Marimba in Japan

Before the marimba was introduced to Japan in 1950, a strong culture surrounding the xylophone had already existed. The xylophone had been known in Japan since around 1780[7] and entered popular culture when it was featured onstage in the *Kabuki* drama *Tenjiku Tokubei ikoku-banashi* (1804; "Tokubei of India: Tales of Strange Lands")[8] written by Tsuruya Namboku IV.

The 1920's would see the xylophone's emergence into the popular mainstream, and give rise to its first superstars, Yoichi Hiraoka and Eiichi Asabuki. They were the most popular performers of the instrument at the time. They regularly preformed solo concerts consisting of arrangements of Japanese popular tunes, Western concert music, concertos, duos and other chamber music configurations. Their presence on the radio (especially Asabuki's) was a regular occurrence in the form of a daily broadcast of xylophone arrangements of classical music, opera, and fantasies that children would listen to in the morning as they got ready for school.[9] Regular exposure to their xylophone performances cemented Hiroaka and Asabuki's names and the instrument in the popular culture of Japan. Sumire Yoshihara is quoted as saying, "The principal reason that any marimba player exists in Japan is in thanks to Ei'chi Asabuki and Yoichi Hiraoka."[10] Additionally, Hiraoka spent more than 10 years in America giving concerts

[7] Mutsuko Fujii and Senzoku Marimba Research Group. "The Development of Music for the Xylophone and Marimba in Japan PAS Website Fujii Database Vol. 3." P*ercussive Arts Society.*
[8] Michael Ray and The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. *"Tsuruya Namboku IV Japanese dramatist," Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed November 9, 2018. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Tsuruya-Namboku-IV.
[9] Rebecca Kite. *Keiko Abe: A Virtuosic Life: her musical career and the evolution of the concert marimba*. (Leesburg, Virginia: GP Percussion, 2007), 15.
[10] Ryan C. W. Scott. "The Art of Marimba in Tokyo: Emergence in the Twentieth Century." PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2015, 42.

and performing live on NBC radio.[11] As result of wartime tensions between Japan and the United States, Hiraoka returned to Japan in 1942. Upon his arrival he quickly found employment at NHK Radio (Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai, Japan's state radio and television broadcast corporation). He reconnected with Asabuki and continued their performing partnership both on the radio and in live concerts.

The post-war era in Japan is when Asabuki and Hiraoka's influence would reach its apex. Riding on the already established popularity of the xylophone and his celebrity, Asabuki established the Japan Xylophone Club with Hiroaka as an advisor. It was an extracurricular ensemble to encourage people to play xylophone and to provide performance opportunities.[12] Interest in the xylophone grew so much that membership outside of Tokyo outnumbered the membership within Tokyo, so the organization changed its name to Japan Xylophone Club.

As with many other Japanese musicians, Abe first encountered the marimba in 1950 when Lawrence L. Lacour[13] organized a musical group and toured Japan on a Christian missionary effort with marimba and other instruments to accompany his sermons. They were invited by Takefuji Tomio, the head of the *Nichibei* Language School to help raise money for a Christian church.[14] "During their five-month stay, they gave 128 performances from Hokkaido to Kyushu, to approximately 430,000 people, and

[11] Akiko Goto. "Yoichi Hiraoka: His Artistic Life and his Influence on the Art of Xylophone Performance." PhD diss., University of North Texas, 2013.
[12] Goto, 50.
[13] "Dr. Lawrence Lacour, brought several Musser marimbas to Japan. As a college student, Lacour had toured with Clair Omar Musser's 1935 International Marimba Symphony Orchestra in Europe. During World War II, he was a Navy chaplain and was stationed in Japan for the first six months of the occupation." Excerpt from, "The Marimba in Japan," by Kathleen Kastner, *from Percussive Notes* Vol.33 No.1, (1995): 71.
[14] Scott, diss, 46.

collected more than 1,400,000 yen in contributions."[15] This, in fact, was the first time marimba proper was introduced to Japan. "The instruments they used were from Musser's International Marimba Symphony Orchestra … Another tour began in 1954 and included a contrabass marimba built by Musser…"[16]

Japan's unique music education history contributed to its musical aesthetic. From its inception in 1879[17], Western music was used in the curriculum. Military band music was the first musical style to be integrated. Shortly after, protestant hymns were used to teach music, "clear melodies, solid harmony and predictable structure offered and attractive type of song through which schoolchildren could be encultured into the European musical tradition."[18] Legislation, by the Japanese Ministry of Education in 1947, "directed all domestic elementary schools to use the xylophone as a pedagogical instrument based on guidelines taken from the Fundamental Education Act."[19] The legislation helped to make the xylophone a familiar instrument to young children which primed that generation for an affinity for it. Once the legislative groundwork had been laid, nearly all music education in Japan was taught using Western music. Japanese musicians and other students of the arts who studied abroad returned to Japan with Western arts training. With their newly acquired skills and experience they became teachers in Japan and further reinforced a foreign style of art, dance, and music into the

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[15] Scott, diss, 46.

[16] Kastner, 71.

[17] "In 1879, Izawa Shūji established the *Ongaku torishirabe-gakari,* an organization to investigate the implementation of music education. (The *Ongaku torishirabe-gakari* is the predecessor to the Tokyo University of Fine Arts.) The *Ongaku torishirabe-gakari* established the fundamentals of music education with the creation of the Shōgakkō shōka-shū… (Primary School Songbook) and instruction in instrumental music." Fujii, Database Vol. 3.

[18] Bonnie C. Wade. *Music in Japan: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture.* (New York; Oxford University Press, 2005), 14.

[19] Mutsuko Fujii and Senzoku Marimba Research Group. "Fujii Database Vol.2 Evolution of the Japanese Marimba: A History of Design Through Japan's 5 Major Manufacturers. (2009): 2

culture. Additionally, recordings of popular and classical music form America and Europe in the 1920s also played a big role in familiarizing Japan with Western musical aesthetics.[20]

The presence of Western music in Japan's national music education system coexisting with Japanese folk music has resulted in a unique kind of composer and musician; one who is wholly able to compose or play in either style, or combine both idioms to form a new blend. Japanese children's early exposure to xylophone and marimba in school would not have been possible without the establishment of *Ongaku torishirabe-gakari* in 1879 and the Fundamental Education Act in 1947. The use of Western music as a means of teaching music, the influence of artists who studied abroad, and through the importing of western musical recordings through the 1920's helped to establish Western aesthetic ideals in Japan. The efforts of Eichii Asabuki and Yoichi Hiraoka starting in the 1920's introduced the xylophone as a popular mainstream instrument. "This, in addition to Asabuki's radio broadcasts, is the primary reason the general Japanese public was familiar with the xylophone repertoire in the decades to come."[21] With the xylophone cemented in Japanese popular culture, Lawrence Lacour's marimba tours in 1950s were the final prop in setting the stage for a marimba revolution in Japan.

[20] Wade, 19.
[21] Scott, 42.

Marimba Enters the Mainstream

The next pivotal event in the history of marimba in Japan is when Keiko Abe took it upon herself to showcase the capacity of the instrument. Her initial attempt was when she founded the Xebec Marimba Trio. Her intention was to "…perform and record popular marimba music, and introduce both the music and instrument to the Japanese public."[22] The group enjoyed a great popularity. The trio recorded seven albums, played live concerts, and was featured on "Good Morning Marimba," a show on Radio Kanto. The group's repertoire consisted mostly of what was popular at the time: light classical, Japanese folk tunes, Latin pop tunes, jazz, and Western movie themes. [23] The marimba at the time was considered a novelty instrument for entertainment and not much else. It was a good match for passive listening that often occurs with popular music styles. "There was a lot of social energy and activity in Japan during this period and marimba sound matched that energy."[24] It was a sound and style that the "Japanese public of the post-WWII era seemed to be craving…"[25] However, Abe became uninterested in performing that kind of repertoire, "I wanted to perform more serious work, and that's why I started to commissioning composers to write pieces for marimba."[26]

She started another project, The Tokyo Marimba Group. This group's repertoire was intended to be music for marimba and not transcriptions of popular tunes. The group enjoyed a positive reception and commissioned repertoire that would go on to become influential classic marimba literature; *Suite for Marimba: Conversation and Torse III*, both by Akira Miyoshi. Due to financial limitations the trio performed only two concerts

[22] Kite, 36.
[23] Ibid, 36-40.
[24] Ibid. 41.
[25] David K. Via,"An Interview with Keiko Abe" *Percussive Notes* Vol.29 No.6. (1991): 11.
[26] Kite, 42.

– in 1962 and 1965 - before disbanding, but Abe's was satisfied that her purpose of cultivating an interest in serious repertoire for marimba had been met.[27] She had a grander project in mind.

Abe wanted to organize first concert consisting exclusively of music written for solo marimba. She was met with a considerable barrier when the 1968 Japan Arts Festival to which she applied to perform in did not allow her to perform. "I was told the marimba was a public 'amusement' instrument and not suitable for a cultural event."[28] Ultimately, she was allowed to perform, but Abe asserts that popular perception of marimba in Japan at the time was quite biased.[29] The concert would prove to be one of the most influential concerts in elevating the status of marimba as a solo instrument both in Japan and in the international scene. Abe's motivation was twofold: to "establish marimba as fully capable of performing classical or art music repertoire,"[30] and for her brand as a performer to transition away from popular music toward classical and art music.[31]

Public opinion certainly changed after the Abe's solo concert. It was by all accounts a raving success. The public and critics lauded her effort. She won the 1968 Prize for Excellence, and her program went on to be recorded by Columbia Records. The resulting album, *Keiko Abe: The Art of Marimba*, itself won another Prize for Excellence

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[27] Ibid, 44.
[28] Via. 11.
[29] I have deduced that Abe was finally allowed to perform in the festival because she funded her own program. The detailed account of the events leading up this concert found in chapter 4 of, "A Virtuosic Life," confirms that she and her husband payed for the production themselves. The chapter makes only a brief mention of "reluctance" from festival organizers. Only in a 1991 interview with David K. Via in Percussive Notes does she mention an outright denial of her participation.
[30] Kite, 50.
[31] Ibid.

in 1969.[32] Selections from that album appeared on an American album, *Contemporary Music from Japan: Vol 1: Music for Marimba*. Emboldened by the success of her first concert, she decided to organize two more concerts of the same nature. She commissioned additional pieces by Japanese composers - notable selections include Mirage by Yasuo Sueyoshi, and Meniscus by Katsuhiro Tsubonoh. Riding on the momentum from her solo recitals she formed another chamber group, The Tokyo Quintet, which included wind instruments and a percussionist. The group released an album of popular music in 1973 which was comprised exclusively of light classical arrangements to introduce the group to a wide audience. Having established themselves, the group began work on a program of concert music comprised mainly of premiers. "It was a surprise success to the classical music world which led to an album entitled The Tokyo Quintet: Contemporary Music from Japan, which won a Japan Fine Arts Festival Award 1974."[33]

Rebecca Kite offers a succinct summary of the significance of the Keiko Abe's concert for solo marimba, "It is not too grandiose to say that the three marimba recitals Keiko Abe produced and performed in the late 1960s and the early 1970s altered music history. Without these concerts, it is hard to imagine how the marimba would have achieved its rightful place on the classical concert stage…"[34]

Keiko Abe is undoubtedly the most recognized Japanese marimba virtuoso. She is often referred to as the most influential marimba player in the world. As explained above, her efforts in exploring and showcasing the capabilities of the marimba put the instrument on the international stage. She generated an interest to play and compose for it

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[32] Ibid, 58.
[33] Kite, 61-62
[34] Kite, 60.

as well as garnered an acceptance for it into the classical mainstream. Her fame often overshadows the efforts of other excellent marimba players at the time who contributed much to the instrument's popularity and the development of a Japanese style. The following section will explore other notable figures and their contributions.

Notable Players, Composers, and Works

Michiko Takahashi premiered *Music for Vibraphone and Piano* by Yoshiro Irino in 1961. She gained notoriety which helped her secure a teaching position at Geidai (Tokyo University of the Arts) in 1967, and at Musashino University in 1970. While Abe was developing the reputation of the marimba in Japan, Takahashi looked beyond Japan for composers. She commissioned Dutch composer Ton de Leeuw (1926-1996) who wrote *Midare* in 1972. She performed the piece at the 1973 International Gaudeamus Competition for Performers of Contemporary Music in Rotterdam and won first prize. “The jury was unanimous, the public breathless and all the composer's wishes were fulfilled.”[35] Takahashi also commissioned *Gitimalya* by Toru Takemitsu, *Five Scenes from the Snow Country* by Hans Werner Henze, and a concerto, *Oscillation*, by Yoriaka Matsudaira. Unlike Abe, Takahashi was focusing her efforts mostly around Europe, though she did also collaborate with Japanese composers.

Mutsuko Fujii was an early pioneer of the marimba boom alongside Keiko Abe and Takahashi. Much like Abe, Fujii too won competitions, performed live on radio broadcasts, and has performed in the major concert venues of Japan, China, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, and the United States—twice at Carnegie Hall, which included the American premiere of Miyoshi’s *Etude Concertante.*[36] “Her career started as a marimba prodigy, winning first prize at a prestigious children’s music competition sponsored by the Ministry of Education and The National Broadcast Station

[35] Program notes for Midare.
[36] Alan Zimmerman. “The Fujii Family: A Japanese Marimba Retrospective” *Percussive Notes* Vol. 47 No4/5. (2009):40.

at age 15."[37] As of 2012 Fujii commissioned over 60 works by Japanese composers.[38] In 2001, she released an all-Miyoshi album. "She worked closely on the interpretation with Miyoshi, and the recording session was done under his supervision. Also, as an educator, Mutsuko is concerned about passing down the accepted performance practice of the literature."[39] One of her most notable contributions to marimba is the Fujii Marimba Database which consists of: Fujii Database Vol. 1: Japanese Marimba Works; Fujii Database Vol. 2: Evolution of the Japanese Marimba - A History of Design Through Japan's Five Major Manufacturers, and; Fujii Database Vol. 3: The Development of Music for the Xylophone and Marimba in Japan. Mutsuko Fujii's reputation as an outstanding performer, researcher, and advocate for appropriate performance practice earned her the title of one of Japan's most influential marimba performers and contributors to a Japanese style.

There have been over 700 pieces by Japanese composers for marimba, or any combination of instruments which includes marimba, commissioned and premiered from 1929-2003.[40] Some of the classic, most influential works and/or best examples of distinctly Japanese compositions are: *Time for Marimba* by Minoru Miki; *Torse III* by Akira Miyoshi; *Mirage pour Marimba* by Yasuo Sueyoshi; *Monovalence* I by Ikebe Shin-ichiro[41]; *Conversation (Suite for Marimba) by* Akira Miyoshi; and *Five Pieces after*

[37] Haruka Fujii. "The Fujii Duo: A Family Quest for the Japanese Marimba." *Percussive Notes* Vol. 50 No. 5 (2012): 70-71.
[38] This number probably includes non-marimba percussion works as well, or works with for marimba and percussion, such as "Afro Concerto" for percussion soloist and orchestra by Maki Ishii.
[39] Zimmerman. 41.
[40] Mutsuko Fujii and Senzoku Marimba Research Group. " Fujii Fujii Database Vol. I: Japanese Marimba Works Vol 1," *Percussive Arts Society.*
[41] This collection of pieces is from "Modern Japanese Marimba Pieces I". Tokyo, Japan: Ongaku No Tomo Sha, 1969

Paul Klee by Toshiya Sukegawa. [42] Other pieces include *Meniscus* by Katsuhiro Tsubonoh; *Dream of the Cherry Blossoms* by Keiko Abe; *Gitimalya* by Toru Takemitsu; *Ahania I&II* by Yoshio Hachimura; *Etude Concertante pour 2 Marimbas* by Akira Miyoshi; and *Oscillation* by Yoriaki Matsudaira. Another excellent collection is found in the album "The Tokyo Quintet: Contemporary Music of Japan[43]" which includes *Nocturne* by Akira Miyoshi; *Obsession* by Teruyuki Noda; *Pentalpha* by Yoshihisa Taira; *Ripple of the Wind* by Katsuhiro Tsunoboh; *Territory* by Joji Yuasa; and *Synkretismen 1* by Maki Ishii.

The previously mentioned compositions, composers, and performers were, or are, key figures in the development of the Japanese marimba style. Abe took the marimba into the mainstream and popularized it mostly in the United States; Takahashi took the Japanese influence to Europe; and Fujii continued the popularization in Japan and also dedicated herself to the documenting the history of the marimba in Japan. The list given is only a small selection of the many hundreds of Japanese compositions. Since Western music and the marimba are newly introduced concepts to the culture there was a deeply interconnected relationship and collaboration that resulted in a co-creation of a Japanese marimba sensibility. Keiko Abe says, "It seems to me that the marimba is more deeply rooted and revered in the minds of Japanese composers than composers in any other country.[44] The following section will explore how aesthetic concepts found in Japanese culture informed the development of a unique style of performance and composition.

[42] These pieces are from "Modern Japanese Marimba Pieces II". Tokyo, Japan: Ongaku No Tomo Sha, 1978.
[43] Columbia GX-7003-4, 1974
[44] Via. 11.

Japanese Musical Aesthetic

As previously mentioned, Japanese and Western philosophies are nearly the exact opposite from one another. As such, individuals without an understanding of the concepts that are present in the Japanese tradition are at disadvantage when it comes to performing its repertoire. The following section will explore the concepts of *ma*, *mono no aware*, and nature. A performer must be aware of those concepts to present a Japanese composition in a more culturally accurate fashion.

The concept of *ma* is perhaps one of the most distinguishing features of Japanese aesthetic. It is "particular to the arts of Japan and paradigmatic to the arts of Japan as a whole."[45] It is often defined as negative space, or emptiness. While that description is not incorrect it fails to encompass what it really is. Rupert A. Cox explains it as "an objective dimension, referring to measurements of space and time, and a subjective, experiential aspect, as a heightened sensory awareness of interval."[46] Physical space and interval are the most easily comprehensible components of *ma*, but is the emotion and internal experience that accompanies the sensation of space and "nothingness" that completes it. The most important factor of *ma* is the "tension in the silence and in the space surrounding sounds and objects."[47] Luciana Galliano extends its reach to encompass the relationship between people, or "that moment in a person's mind between thoughts." Dr. William Malm juxtaposes the Japanese tendency of *ma* against the Western tendency of handling silence. When asked if space is more important in Japanese culture, "In general, yes; this is why I think Asian music has become so very interesting to contemporary

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[45] Richard B. Pilgrim, "Ma: A Cultural Paradigm," *Chanoyu* 23 (1986) Quoted in Rupert Cox, *The Zen Arts: An Anthropological Study of Aesthetic From in Japan*, (New York ; RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 127-128.
[46] Cox, 128.
[47] Luciana Galliano. Yogaku: Japanese Music in the 20th Century. (Maryland: Scarecrow Press 2003), 14.

music people - because there is more room for sounds. Handling the silence correctly, powerfully, is very difficult. There is a difference between silence and space, in a sense. I guess that is the difference between silence and 'MA.'"[48]

A related concept is *yohaku.* It is often translated to "margins," but for a better understanding we will use the literal translation, "leftover blank" provided by Takashina Shūji.[49] He explains that in a Western oil painting, "a blank patch with nothing painted on it would be viewed as an incomplete section."[50] Using *Pine Trees*[51] to contrast the Western aesthetic, Shūji explains, "between the stands of dark pines and the stands of pines so light they seem to be fading away, there is a space containing nothing at all. It is this space that gives the painting its mystical depth; the atmosphere of the painting seems to come from the empty space itself."[52]

The idea that negative space and emptiness can meaningfully contribute to the emotion of music can be difficult to reconcile with the Western conception of nothingness. It usually carries a negative, nihilistic connotation. Stepping away from a mechanical perspective of what *ma* and *yohaku* physically "looks like," the following, more abstract, description will further clarify how emptiness can have meaning and can be perceived by an observer:

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[48] William Malm, "William Malm: Japanese Music," *Percussive Notes* Vol. 24 No.5, (1986): 26.
[49] Shūji, 161.
[50] Ibid.
[51] *Pine Trees*, by Hasagewa Tōhaku, is an iconic Japanese painting and is an excellent example of the Japanese use of *ma* and *yohaku*. I highly recommend seeing it for a better grasp of *ma* and the use of space in Japanese art.
[52] Shūji , 161.

> "For the beholder, the pregnant empty space of yohaku is calming as well as energizing. It gives our eyes a place to rest. But empty space also stimulates and holds our attention, engaging our imagination…We [the observers] love to "fill in" empty spaces. Watching our minds do so, we consciously encounter and participate in the field of potentiality: we come face to face with emptiness.[53]

Though *yohaku* is more of a physical concept and *ma* is more of a metaphysical concept, they both serve to illustrate the significance and reverence that Japanese culture holds for space and nothingness in its aesthetic ideal.

Mono no aware is another major concept that is found throughout the Japanese culture. It is commonly translated as "the bittersweet poignancy of things."[54] It is the awareness and acceptance of the temporary nature of existence extending to abstract non-physical things such as love. "Japanese media… can often end with people fading out of each other's lives, despite once being an integral part of them, and audiences are completely satisfied with this narrative."[55] The fact that something is temporary, fragile, or fleeting is precisely what is valued. As opposed to values in the West which, "…has generally been to achieve artistic immortality, and this has led men to erect monuments in deathless marble."[56] In Japanese culture; scrapes, cracks and other signs of wear and the passage of time on objects is valued more than a mint condition item.[57] Keene illustrates the Japanese appreciation for perishability and the transience of things by describing great fondness the Japanese feel for a particular flower, "Their [the Japanese] favorite

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[53] "Yohaku no bi: The Beauty of Empty Space." *Seattle Japanese Garden*. Last modified March 16, 2016. https://www.seattlejapanesegarden.org/blog/2016/03/15/yohaku-no-bi-the-beauty-of-empty-space. Accessed December 9, 2018

[54] Taylor Bond, "Mono no Aware: The Transience of Life," *Georgetown UniversityBerkley Center for Religion, Peace and Word Affairs*(Blog), January 18, 2017, https://berkleycenter. georgetown.edu/posts/mono-no-aware-the-transience-of-life

[55] Ibid.

[56] Keene, 304-305.

[57] Ibid, 305.

flower is of course the cherry blossom precisely because the period of blossoming is so poignantly brief and the danger that the flowers may scatter even before one has properly seen them is so terribly great." [58]

Nature is another omnipresent concept in the Japanese aesthetic. It is held in a different regard in Japanese culture than in the Western culture. In Japan, nature is intermingled with manufactured objects and is something that coexists with humanity and not something to be dominated – there is closeness to nature.[59] The differences become most apparent in comparing gardening practices. The general difference between East and West can be summarized, according to Shūji, by saying that Western gardens are, "entirely the result of imposing an artificial order on nature," and Eastern gardens are designed in way that is supposed to be absent of the human touch.[60] Even how nature is visually depicted is distinct. Multiple, sometimes all four, seasons are depicted in a single artistic work.[61] The closeness to nature even exists within urban planning and design. Shūji describes a " Western fondness for towering monuments," he goes on to say, monuments like the Eiffel Tower and the Arc de Triomphe are placed right in the middle of a city. They are made to catch the eye. That is not done in Japan. Looking through Hiroshige's *One Hundred Famous views of Edo*[62]…, it becomes apparent that Edo had almost nothing that could be called a monument."[63] To this day, he continues, "it is all but impossible to find a postcard that depicts a building alone. A postcard of Himeji

[58] Keene, 305.
[59] Shūji, 50.
[60] Ibid, 50.
[61] See Chapter titled, " he Four Seasons in Japanese Painting" in The Japanese Sense of Beauty by Takashina Shūji for more information about the seasons and nature in Japanese art.
[62] A series of prints by Hiroshige published in the late 1850s that depict scenes from Edo, Japan's capital city from 1603–1868.
[63] Shūji, 53.

Castle[64] will also show the cherry blossoms to full effect. Kinkakuji[65] might be depicted in the snows of winter" [66]

How can a performer use this information about *ma*, *mono no aware*, and closeness to nature to influence their musical presentation? The following section will discuss some strategies to employ the concepts and how to approach a Japanese composition using *Wind in the Bamboo Grove* as an example.

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[64] Himeji Castle is a medieval castle registered as an UNESCO world heritage site
[65] Kinkakuji is a Buddhist Temple that is popular among visitors to Japan.
[66] Shūji, 53.

Wind in The Bamboo Grove Practice And Performance Guide

In the following section I will provide a practice and performance guide for *Wind in the Bamboo Grove.* Included will be tips and suggestions based on the aforementioned aesthetic concepts, personal experience of the author, and interviews with Japanese marimba performers.

Wind in the Bamboo Grove was composed in 1984. It was among Keiko Abe's first compositions. It is a part of collection entitled, "Works for Marimba Volume 1." Abe composed the piece from the memory of feelings and sensations she felt when she visited a bamboo forest. The feelings and emotions behind a composition are of utmost importance to Japanese culture. The very first thing Keiko Abe asked Makana Jimbu when she had a lesson with her on this piece was if she had ever been to a bamboo forest.[67] Hiromu Nagahama highlights the importance of being familiar with the sensations, "Come see and experience a bamboo grove and see the cherry blossoms, experience it with all your senses: touch, smell. I think it is important to have those experiences to play a piece more convincingly."[68] He continues, "I have heard the sound of the wind in the groves, I have seen bamboo move in the wind. When I see the title and listen to the piece I can understand why Keiko would compose it like that." Jimbu provides a general description of what an experience in a bamboo grove might be like based on what Abe said to her in a lesson, "because a bamboo forest is a very quiet place, she wrote the piece to evoke a quiet moment. Abe's visit was in the early morning and it gave her a "mysterious feeling." Every section has a different meaning and is tied to a

[67] Makana Jimbu. Video chat, April 18, 2019.
[68] Hiromu Nagahama. Video chat , March 31, 2019.

memory of an experience at the grove.[69] If visiting a bamboo forest is impractical, a quiet wooded or natural setting would be a suitable alternative to experience the ambient noise in nature. Recreating emotions and memories of emotions is a common practice in Japan. There are classes in Japanese universities that teach composition based on memories of events or emotions.[70] The entire conception of the piece shows how closeness to nature is so infused within the Japanese aesthetic

Wind in the Bamboo Grove is a good example Abe's compositional style which contains elements from Western and Japanese traditions. About half of the piece is generally straightforward in a harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic sense representative of the Western influence. The other half - the introduction and cadenza - is marked at a slow tempo, contains many pauses, lacks measure lines, and the loosely related figures are more akin to brief, fleeting episodes indicative of an improvisatory style. These sections are the ones that will most lend themselves to interpretation, and are the most fertile for exploring the previously mentioned Japanese aesthetic concepts. The general format of the piece is Introduction, A, B, Cadenza, A', Coda. Each section has its own unique challenges, and potential for a variety of interpretations, some of which will be discussed below.

The introduction is meant to recreate the quiet, early morning atmosphere in a bamboo grove. The opening is "very soft and spacious,"[71] It can be thought of as a series loosely related episodic phrases each representing a moment or event one would experience while visiting a bamboo forest. Inserting pregnant pauses, *ma*, in between the gestures throughout the section will generally work. Likewise, the exact rhythmic

[69] Jimbu.
[70] Ibid
[71] Ibid

proportions are not of paramount importance, so judiciously truncating or elongating some note values will also generally work.

The first phrase of the piece is a low A pedal (Figure 1) with a sustained rolled response in a higher register. Silence can be inserted either after the low A notes, or after the higher response – either one will generally work. I personally opted for having a pause after the pedal note, and elongating the roll.

Figure 1. *Wind in the Bamboo Grove*; page 1, line 1.

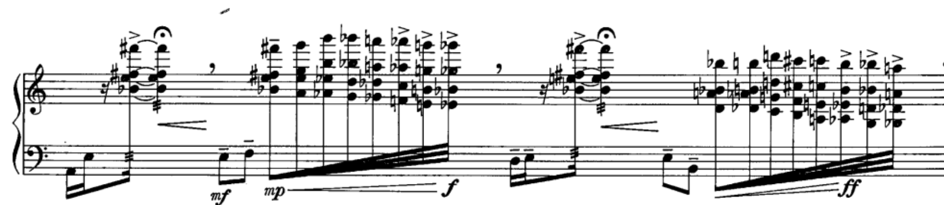
The next phrase is similar to the previous one, but contains accents and dissonant, rolled chords (Figure 2). Care must be taken not to play the accents too loudly, and the chords should be sustained at a low volume. Here too, is a good place to experiment with *ma,* and to be flexible with rhythmic proportions. I kept the same pause and elongation formula from the previous phrase.

Figure 2. *Wind in the Bamboo Grove*; page 1, line 2.

The next phrase contains breath marks, fermatas, crescendi and feathered rhythms (Figure 3). The fermatas and breath marks here can be a longer than what might feel comfortable – another opportunity to experiment with space. The feathered rhythm is

undoubtedly inspired by the feathered rhythms of *kabuki* theater, so knowing what they sound like would greatly add to the effect. This is a passage that will require slow deliberate practice. It is easy to get distracted by trying to play the accelerating rhythm such that pitch accuracy will suffer. It is important to initially disregard the acceleration, and instead practice these gestures slowly to develop a familiarity with the movements.

Figure 3. *Wind in the Bamboo Grove*; page 1, line 3.



The next passage has an eighth rest separating each gesture (Figure 4). Again, experiment with holding that rest for longer than its notated value. It would be a good exercise to see how long you can hold the silence before it loses its effectiveness.

Figure 4. *Wind in the Bamboo Grove*; page 1, line 4.

The last brief episode of the introduction is meant to have drastic contrast within itself. It goes from very soft and slow to fast and loud into the final descending cascade leading into the A section, as if a gust of wind begins to agitate the bamboo stalks (Figure 5). This passage is difficult to execute at the indicated tempo. Naoko Takada offers her advice for situations like this, saying, “If you cannot play the notes accurately

at the indicated tempo by the day of performance, take the gesture instead."[72] What this means is that a downward descending motion is what should be conveyed, and that spending too much time trying to develop the technique to accurately perform the gesture is time better spent on developing the musicality of the gesture and the rest of the music. For me personally, I was able to execute the passage consistently accurate at about 60-70% of the tempo. I spent much time practicing this passage over the course of many months gradually able to play it at about 80% tempo. Taking Takada's advice, I prioritized the purpose of the gesture, which in my interpretation is like a big, sweeping gust of wind propelling the listener into a blustery bamboo forest. I found that so long as it was fast, descending, and retained the intervals of fourths and thirds, it achieved the desired effect.

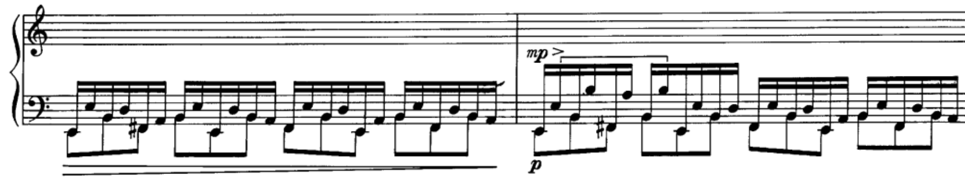
Figure 5. *Wind in the Bamboo Grove*; page 2, line 1.

The entire introduction is rife with opportunities to exercise your imagination and to explore *ma.* Given that it is made up of loosely related moments, it is best to treat each one as an individual self-contained entity with its own beginning, middle, and end. They do not have to necessarily lead one into the next. Each one simply exists, and then it does not - each one is fleeting, "poignantly bittersweet," (*mono no aware*).

[72] Naoko Takada Sharp. Video chat interview, March 24, 2019.

The section labeled *con energia* is the "Western" section. This part is to be interpreted more concretely and straightforwardly. The first hurdle a performer would have to master is executing the 4:3 note cycle ostinato accompaniment pattern. In general, it should be played softly to allow the melody, indicated by brackets, to be clear (Figure 6). Visualizing the accompaniment pattern as the ambient noise in a bamboo forest will help to provide an interpretive model. There are two possibilities for phrasing the E, B, F#, B bass line. The easier option would be to phrase it in groups of six by accenting every sixth note. The second way is to accent every fourth, or eighth note to give it a more pronounced polymetric effect. The second way will take a greater degree of practice to develop the coordination to play the polymeter effectively.

Figure 6. *Wind in the Bamboo Grove*; page 2, line 2.



The D minor sonority passages are the first departure from the ostinato (Figure 7). I personally approached them with a slight *ritard* before landing on the D minor chord, and a *subito piano* after the accent. The melody is played by the bass voice in this passage so make sure to play the right hand part well softer than the left. The indicated crescendo and diminuendo marks can be greatly exaggerated to heighten the drama of the minor chord.

Figure 7. *Wind in the Bamboo Grove*; page 3, line 1.

The B section is meant to contrast the A section. The sonorities are dissonant, a new timbre is introduced, and the rhythmic density decreases. The left hand ostinato pattern remains the same, but in a new harmonic guise. Whereas the original is composed of a fourth and fifth, this new harmony is a tritone and major third. The new harmony is in keeping with overall dissonant harmonic shift in the section. Dissonances far outnumber consonances. In fact, the same intervallic relationship between the lower voice and higher voice is presented six times – minor ninth, tritone, major ninth, perfect fifth, major second, minor ninth. The fifth and sixth times, the last interval is changed to a major ninth. (Figure 8)

Figure 8. *Wind in the Bamboo Grove*; page 3, line 4, measure 3.

The rhythmic density lessens in this section. Instead of alternating eighth notes between the hands to form a composite sixteenth note rhythm, the eight notes are in phase resulting in a rhythmic unison. The thinner rhythmic texture creates a reposed mood, but

the dissonant intervals maintain a sense of unease. The last six measures of the B section close with a return to the original ostinato pattern two octaves higher in a rhythmic unison, and with a variation in the melody in the left hand. (Figure 9)

Figure 9. *Wind in the Bamboo Grove*; page 4, line 3.

The cadenza is a return to a quiet, mysterious ambience. Like the introduction, it is a series of loosely related episodic phrases. A new timbre, playing with the shafts of the mallets, of is featured in this section, which alternate with normal playing from phrase to phrase throughout the section. Jimbu referred to this as the "chorale" section.[73]

The first four gestures in this section are consonant and sweet which evoke a bucolic daydream, yet the phrases with the shaft timbre retain a harder "edge" which hint to a pensive, introspective mood. It may take some experimentation with stance to find a comfortable position to perform the shafts on the bars. I found a wide stance with knees bent (reminiscent to the form of a weightlifting style squat), square with the instrument resulted in the most comfortable angle for playing, and the least amount of wrist fatigue. This is especially important for practicing this technique for extended periods.

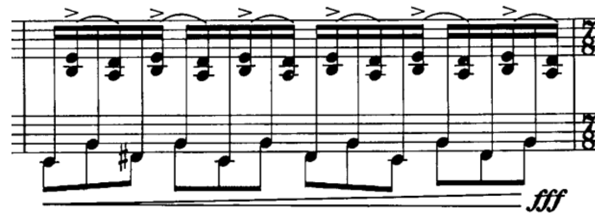
Following the cadenza, is the A' section and Coda. The A' section is at a faster tempo, but otherwise is an exact repetition of A with a five-measure extension. The extension is a continuation of the simple melody from the A section and does not require much explanation other than it should be played loudly as marked. It should be played as

[73] Jimbu.

such both to add contrast, and to build anticipation which is resolved in the Coda.

The closing section begins at the measure marked 7/8. A metric modulation occurs and the new tempo is faster. This is a difficult passage to play at the indicated tempo, but Naoko Takada often tells her students to prioritize the gesture instead of the tempo.[74] In this case, it would mean to not adhere too strictly, if at all, to the new tempo. What I did in this passage was insert a *ritard* and a vamp on the previous measure (Figure 10) which allowed me to gradually slow the momentum, but build the volume leading to the low A chord. With a slow tempo adequately prepared, the 7/8 passage can be played accurately and forcefully as indicated.

Figure 10. *Wind in the Bamboo Grove*; page 7, line 3, measure 2.



The closing descending scale could be played as a general descending gesture, as per Takada's advice, if it cannot be performed accurately at the indicated tempo. Pitch accuracy can be sacrificed at the expense of volume and speed. Loud and fast is the function of the passage. I took an additional interpretational liberty and inserted a slight *ritard* and brief pause before playing the final chord at a medium- low volume instead of a loud volume.

In addition to the technical considerations mentioned above, Jimbu, Nagahama,

[74] Takada

and Takada have additional suggestions one can take to perform this and other Japanese compositors in a more culturally informed way. Hiromu advises;

> Read books about Japanese culture, visit Japan and go to Kyoto, spend time at a shrine or temple. Sit at a temple and feel time [go by] - spending one hour at home will be different than spending one hour at a shrine. Sitting in silence looking at the trees and flowers, it's like Zen. The quietness of shrines allows for a person to hear water, and wind, and the sounds of nature – you can feel the Earth turning. [75]

It is imperative for a convincing recital that a performer be acquainted with the Japanese culture. Within Hiromu's advice lie the three previously mentioned aesthetic ideas: *ma*, *mono no aware*, and closeness to nature. Since they are usually located within a natural setting, spending time at shrine or temple will allow for contemplation of nature and its inherent temporariness. Feeling the difference between one hour at a shrine and one hour at home will be an excellent step towards understanding *ma*.

Takada advises to watch Kabuki Theater, and to learn about and even practice Japanese garden design and meditation. Through a familiarity with *Kabuki* Theater, one can gain a greater understanding of an influential and still pervasive musical style which draws heavily on *ma*. An understanding of Japanese garden design will surely acquaint one with *mono no aware* and cultivate closeness to nature.

Jimbu says, "It's easy to study the culture: watch videos of *wadaiko*, *taiko*, and *mishingaku*. Watch Japanese marimba on YouTube. I strongly think that without knowing the cultural aspects it's hard to play Keiko's music."[76] Jimbu's advice can certainly extend to include Japanese music in general.

[75] Nagahama.
[76] Jimbu.

Conclusion

Marimba in Japan has a distinct culture that merits an understanding. Numerous studies about the traditional arts (*Kabuki, Noh, Gagaku*, etc.) are available, however little is written about modern Japanese music performance practice. Being from a radically different philosophical perspective from the West makes it difficult for a Westerner to give a culturally informed rendition of a composition. Furthermore, there exists a "culture of marimba" in Japan.

The current culture surrounding the instrument is a result of three functions. The first is the distinct history of blending Western and Eastern aesthetic tendencies. The public education system taught music using Western tunes. Radios stations would broadcast Western pop styles, and live concerts also programmed many Western tunes. However traditional Japanese aesthetic values, found in; architecture, the visual arts, gardens, temples, shrines, and centuries of Eastern philosophy prioritizing the collective over the individual, were ever-present. The second function is a nationwide exposure to xylophone via radio broadcasts and live concerts by Eiichi Asabuki and Yoichi Hiraoka. Their celebrity as xylophone performers primed Japan for an affinity toward keyboard percussion. Finally, it was the collective effort of legitimization and popularization of marimba by Keiko Abe, Mutsuko Fujii, and Michiko Takahashi and others which gave birth to the modern culture of marimba in Japan. Abe's contribution generated interest to compose concert art music for marimba and focused her popularization efforts in the United States. Fujii contributed much the Japanese marimba repertoire and sustained the legitimacy of the instrument in Japan. Takahashi focused her efforts around touring

Europe and commissioning European composers for new marimba solos. Those elements have resulted in modern Japanese marimba style that observes Eastern cultural and philosophical values while incorporating influence of Western values. *Wind in the Bamboo Grove* is an excellent model for learning the Japanese marimba style. It contains *ma*, *mono no aware*, and closeness to nature, aesthetic principals and attributes that are distinctly Japanese. It also contains elements of the Western style making it an accessible piece of music for Westerners to listen to and study for performance.

This scope of this research is quite small, yet provides a general framework for future studies of a Japanese marimba style. A greater number of interview subjects both Japanese and non-Japanese with experience exclusively in Japan, or in and outside of Japan would provide clearer parameters to define a Japanese marimba style

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