

A Combination of Japanese Traditional Aesthetics and Western Music:
Toru Takemitsu's *Rain Tree Sketch* and *Rain Tree Sketch II*

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ABSTRACT

The music of Toru Takemitsu (1930 – 1996) is often described as an integration of Japanese traditions and Western music. He learned the works of various composers from the West, such as Arnold Schoenberg, Anton Webern, John Cage, and most significantly Claude Debussy and Olivier Messiaen, who influenced his use of colorful timbre, sense of time, and the use of modes. Additionally, he studied the unique aspects of sound, silence, and forces of nature from Japanese traditional music.

Rain Tree Sketch (1982) and *Rain Tree Sketch II* (1992) are examples of Takemitsu's nature works, specifically to his "waterscape" series. The *Rain Tree Sketches* integrate techniques of Western music such as regular and irregular rhythmic gesture, motives and pitch collections, and a simple ternary form with the silence effects of Japanese music. The purpose of this study is to examine how Takemitsu combined Japanese traditional aesthetics and Western music in his piano music. This study contains Takemitsu's biographical information, solo piano music, and the influences of Japan and the West, especially Messiaen in *Rain Tree Sketch* and *Rain Tree Sketch II*.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT		iii
I. Biography		1
II. Takemitsu's Solo Piano Music		5
III. Takemitsu's <i>Rain Tree Sketches</i>		7
IV. Influences of Japan in Takemitsu's Rain Tree Sketches		12
Nature		12
<i>Ma</i>		15
V. Influences of West – Messiaen		18
Modes of limited transposition		19
Octatonic collection		21
Reminiscence of Messiaen's sound		23
Conclusion		25
Appendix		26
Bibliography		27

I. Biography

Toru Takemitsu was born on October 8, 1930, in Tokyo, Japan. His family moved to Dalian in China shortly after Takemitsu's birth because of his father's business. Takemitsu returned to Japan alone in 1937, when he was 6 years old, to attend a Japanese elementary school. While in Japan, he lived with his aunt who was a koto¹ player. Takemitsu's parents returned to Japan later in 1937 after his father became gravely ill. Sadly, his father passed away when Takemitsu was only 7 years old. The young boy, however, faced another difficulty in 1944. Due to military conscription during World War II, Takemitsu could not receive formal schooling once he turned fourteen. Although he grew up listening to Japanese traditional music, the young Takemitsu was charmed by Western classical music after hearing it on the American Forces Radio in Japan during the military camp. The French chanson "Parlez-moi de l'amour," written by Jean Lenoir, impacted Takemitsu, but Western culture, including the music, was forbidden in Japan during the war.²

Takemitsu took ill after the war and was in the hospital for an extended period. During that time, he listened to the American Forces Radio and was further influenced by Western music and instruments. Upon hearing, Cesar Frank's *Prelude, Chorale et Fugue* for solo piano, he experienced a strong impression that he described as his "second discovery."³ Frank's piano work was shocking to Takemitsu because there were no solo instrumental works in traditional Japanese music.

¹ A thirteen-string zither associated with Japanese traditional music.

² Tomoko Isshiki, "Toru Takemitsu's Cosmic View: *The Rain Tree Sketches*" (D.M.A diss., University of Huston, 2001), 6.

³ Noriko Ohtake, *Creative Sources for the Music of Tōru Takemitsu*. (Aldershot, Hants, England: Brookfield, Vt.; Ashgate Pub., 1993), 76

Takemitsu had little formal education even after the war because he had dropped out of high school. He never received a basic music education. Nevertheless, he began to compose music at the age of 16 because of his interest in Western music. In the late 1940s, Takemitsu took an entrance examination to the Tokyo University of Fine Arts, but never entered the university because the university system could not help him become a composer.

Takemitsu worked in the U.S. Armed Forces office in Yokohama as a canteen helper instead of going to college. Although he was interested in learning to play the piano, his family could not afford to buy him one. Fortunately, there was a grand piano in the hall of the U.S. Armed Forces office, and Takemitsu had an opportunity to play piano whenever he was not working. Aside from working as a canteen helper, he had several part-time jobs to help pay his living expenses. While working these many jobs, Takemitsu met a variety of people who were in similar situations. Some were also pursuing dreams to become composers and had little formal education. Through these friends, Takemitsu spent time studying and discussing a variety of classical music, scores, and listening to all forms of music including jazz. This helped Takemitsu to develop a sense of his own musical tastes.

Takemitsu rented his first piano, a Pleyel, with the money he had saved. He spent a great deal of time studying and practicing Western music, especially the music of Gabriel Fauré and Claude Debussy. Early on, Takemitsu's interests were focused on modern music rather than Japanese traditional music. He was influenced by the French music he heard during his time in the military. He was particularly fascinated with the music of Debussy and Olivier Messiaen. Takemitsu said about Debussy, "I am self-taught, but I consider Debussy as my teacher. From

Debussy, who impressed me particularly, I identified ‘color, light, and shadow’ as important elements.”⁴

He also mentioned that the most significant elements in Messiaen’s music are “color and shape of time.”⁵ As time passed, Takemitsu quickly acquired a taste for Western avant-garde music by Karlheinz Stockhausen and John Cage, as well as their philosophies. He agreed with Cage’s beliefs that every sound coexists with our daily lives.⁶

Takemitsu was later impressed with the First Violin Sonata by Yasuji Kiyose (1900 – 1981), founder of the Japanese section of the International Society for Contemporary Music.⁷ The musical ideas of Kiyose are composed of a unique structure that represents a contemporary Japanese classical music, and his music was an important example for Takemitsu. Beginning in 1948, Takemitsu studied music for three years under Kiyose. However, these lessons focused primarily on discussing the art of music instead of learning to play music. Takemitsu also studied under Japanese teacher Humio Hayasaka (1914 – 1955), who was introduced to Takemitsu by Kiyose. Both teachers helped Takemitsu develop a personal artistry through Japanese views to help him create a dynamic expression as a composer.⁸ Takemitsu learned two different perceptions: Kiyose pursued “a realistic cognition,” but Hayasaka suggested “a dreamy hallucinatory eye.” Although the teachers had different thoughts, they wanted Takemitsu to develop contemporary music in relation to Japanese music.

⁴ Akiko Taniguchi, “Performance Issues of Toru Takemitsu’s Solo Piano Works” (D.M.A diss., California State University at Long Beach, 2008), 3

⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁶ Toru Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence: Selected Writings*. (Fallen Leaf Monographs on Contemporary Composers; 1. Berkeley, Calif.: Fallen Leaf Press, 1995), 28.

⁷ Ohtake, 15.

⁸ Ibid., 15.

In 1951, Takemitsu joined a club, *Jikken-kobo* or Experimental Workshop.⁹ The club was known as a Japanese art and performance collective group, and was made up of fourteen people who were artists, composers, a pianist, an engineer, and a music critic/poet. The group's primary goal was to produce a series featuring avant-garde music, including works of Béla Bartók, Messiaen, Norman Dello Joio, and other twentieth-century Western composers – none of which had been heard in Japan.¹⁰ Over the next several years, because of his experience with *Jikken-kobo*, Takemitsu produced a variety of music using experimental techniques, graphic notation, indeterminacy, and serialism.

Takemitsu initially tried to avoid anything related to Japanese tradition and culture because he did not want to be reminded of wartime. In the early 1960s, however, he changed his mind when he attended a *Bunraku*¹¹ puppet show.¹² He said, "I had been looking at only the mirror of Western music for a long time. However, I was really shocked at 'Bunraku' performance when I saw it. I realized there was such a wonderful music in Japan! If Japanese music exists, my own music also exists! After that, I studied various traditions and analyzed the difference between many cultures. As those things are in myself and I am living in them, I studied them much harder."¹³

Takemitsu was no longer bound by Western music only; instead he began to compose music that incorporated Japanese traditional features. As a result, many of his works have characteristics of both Western and Japanese music. Takemitsu produced many wonderful works as a composer, lecturer, and writer from the late 1950s until his death in 1996. He had a strong

⁹ Hugh De Ferranti and Yōko Narazaki. *A Way a Lone: Writings on Tōru Takemitsu*. (Tokyo: Academia Music, 2002), 3.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Traditional Japanese puppet theatre.

¹² Toru Takemitsu. "Contemporary Music in Japan." (*Perspectives of New Music* 27, no. 2, 1989), 201.

¹³ Akiko Taniguchi, 5.

faith and philosophy that is reflected in his music. Through these works, he became a major composer worldwide.

II. Takemitsu's Solo Piano Music

Piano music was central to Takemitsu's life. He composed solo piano music from the early years of his musical career until his death (see Appendix). Takemitsu's piano works represent the styles and influences of Western and Japanese aesthetics.

In his early musical career, Takemitsu purposely avoided traditional Japanese music because he did not want to be reminded of wartime. Therefore, the representative works of his early years are greatly influenced by Western music, especially that of Debussy and Messiaen: *Lento in Due Movimenti* (1950), *Uninterrupted Rests* (1952–59), and *Piano Distance* (1961). Takemitsu was fascinated with Debussy's gradations of colours, light, and shadow, and he adopted the "pan-focus."¹⁴ He was impressed with Messiaen's piano *Preludes*, adopting his modes of limited transposition, especially octatonic collections. Like Messiaen, Takemitsu also incorporated sounds of nature into his music. These effects merged with much of his music throughout his career. In addition, Takemitsu was impressed by Webern and employed his use of sparse texture, sensuous sound, intense use of time, fragmentary melodies, short lengths, and *Klangfarbenmelodie*.¹⁵

Takemitsu was deeply impressed with experimental music after attending a performance of John Cage's *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra* in 1961. The piece led him to compose music

¹⁴ Ohtake, 7.

"pan-focus:" Takemitsu's term which means many focal points of sound as opposed to the significance of one theme.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

Klangfarbenmelodie: a style of composition that employs several different kinds of tone colors to a single pitch or to multiple pitches.

using graphic scores as well as to use indeterminate features for pieces such as *Corona* and *Crossing* in 1962.

Takemitsu did not compose piano music from 1962 to 1973. Instead, he focused on writing a variety of instrumental pieces and film music. One of the most significant works in this period, *November Steps*, led to international notoriety for Takemitsu. During that period, his compositional style changed, and he brought traditional Japanese music and culture into his works, eventually synthesizing Japanese cultural idioms with Western musical elements. The piano piece *For Away*, which exhibits Takemitsu's new musical characteristics, was published in 1973. It demonstrates dense textures and a broad range of notes, as well as Japanese features such as sustaining a single pitch. However, Takemitsu continuously employed Western features and recalled the elements of his earlier works, such as sustained harmonics and dynamic markings.

The remarkable works *Les yeux clos I & II* and *Rain Tree Sketch I & II* are representative of the style of his late musical period. The pieces strongly express contemporary Western musical ideas such as atonality, unmarked changing meters, irregular rhythmic groupings, modes of limited transposition, and octatonic collections. Many aspects of the pieces in the late period are deeply based in Western aesthetics; however, Japanese aesthetics such as naturalness and silence become almost equally important.

III. Takemitsu's *Rain Tree Sketches*

Rain Tree Sketch

Rain Tree Sketch was composed in 1982 and was dedicated to Takemitsu's friend, Maurice Fleuret, for his fiftieth birthday gift.¹⁶ The piece was first performed by Japanese pianist Kazuoki Fujii in Tokyo in 1983. Takemitsu was inspired by the novel *Clever Rain Tree*, written by Kenzaburo Oe (b.1935), who was a Japanese author and a close friend of Takemitsu from his early musical career.¹⁷ They discussed and gave suggestions about each other's works, and *Rain Tree Sketch* was the last work the two friends discussed.

Rain Tree Sketch is written in ternary A-B-A form (Example 1) without meter signatures. Takemitsu provides two tempos: Tempo I (Dotted eight-note = 63~56) and Tempo II (Eight-note = 84~80).

Example 1: Form of *Rain Tree Sketch*

Introduction	Tempo I	mm. 1 – 6
A	Tempo II	mm. 7 – 13
	Tempo I	mm. 14 – 27
	Tempo II, Tempo I	mm. 28 – 38
B	Tempo II	mm. 39 – 55
	Tempo I	mm. 56 – 58
A	Tempo II	mm. 60 – 65
	Tempo I	mm. 66 – 78
	Ending: Tempo II, Tempo I	mm. 79 – 83

¹⁶ Maurice Fleuret (1932 – 1990) was a French composer. He and Takemitsu first met at a music festival, *Music Today* and traveled to Indonesia together in 1972.

¹⁷ Ohtake, 87.

Takemitsu provides detailed musical notations such as three kinds of accents, fermatas, and pedal markings. He describes the approach to these marking in the preface to the score (Example 2):¹⁸

Example 2: Notations in *Rain Tree Sketch* (preface)

Most of the piece is played softly, except for those few places where the dynamics are specifically indicated.

There are three different types of accent: \wedge , $>$, \vee . \wedge indicates the use of a strong accent; $>$ indicates that a moderate accent should be used and \vee is used to indicate the use of a soft accent.

Three different kinds of fermatas also appear: \frown , \odot , \sqcap . \frown is very long; \odot is medium and \sqcap is short.

The \sharp and \flat signs apply to one note only.

R., L., and Sus. are guides for pedalling. R. stands for right pedal (damper), L. stands for left pedal (soft), and Sus. refers to the middle pedal (sostenuto).

He marked when and where performers should use the pedals, and how long they should maintain and release the pedal (Example 3). Dynamic markings are also shown in detail, with the majority of the piece written *piano* or *pianissimo*, except for a few places.

Example 3: *Rain Tree Sketch*, mm. 7-8

The image shows a musical score for two staves, piano and left hand. The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 2, \text{♩} = 84 \sim 80$ (Tempo II). The piano part starts with *in pp* and *poco più mosso*. The left hand part has a *l.v.* marking. There are various accents (\wedge , $>$, \vee) and fermatas (\frown , \odot , \sqcap) above the notes. Pedal markings are shown below the staves: R. (right pedal) and L. (left pedal) with arrows indicating duration. A *Sus.* marking is also present.

¹⁸ Toru Takemitsu, *Rain Tree Sketch* (Tokyo: Schott Japan Company, Ltd., 1982)

Takemitsu used the opening melodic motive of A-G#-E-F in the introduction section by alternation of each hand and each measure in different rhythms and accents (Example 4). The motive continually reappears by using transpositions throughout the piece (Example 5).

Example 4: Rain Tree Sketch, mm.1-4

$\text{♩} = 3$ $\text{♩} = 63 \sim 56$ (Tempo I)

in p *mf*

R. \wedge L. \wedge

Example 5: Rain Tree Sketch, mm.7-10

$\text{♩} = 2$ $\text{♩} = 84 \sim 80$ (Tempo II)

in pp *poco più mosso*

R. \wedge L. \wedge

Rain Tree Sketch II

Takemitsu heard of Olivier Messiaen's death on April 27, 1992. He was deeply shocked since he admired and was strongly influenced by the composer's work. Takemitsu recalled *Preludes pour piano*, one of Messiaen's works that he first heard in 1950. Inspired by his memory of Messiaen, Takemitsu composed *Rain Tree Sketch II – In Memoriam Olivier Messiaen* in 1992. The piece was premiered by Alain Neneus on October 24, 1992.¹⁹

Rain Tree Sketch II is similar to *Rain Tree Sketch: A-B-A* form (Example 6), no time signature, and marking of two tempos. However, Takemitsu did not use many expressive markings or articulation notations, such as accents, fermatas, and pedal markings. For example, there is only one fermata at the end of piece. Unlike the precisely notated pedal markings in *Rain Tree Sketch I*, Takemitsu marked the pedaling *ad lib.* in measures 9 and 63 (Example 7).

Example 6: form of Rain Tree Sketch II

A	Tempo I	mm. 1 – 34
	Tempo II	mm. 9 – 16
	Slightly slower, Tempo II	mm. 17 – 21
	Tempo I, Tempo II	mm. 22- 29
	Slightly slower, Tempo II	mm. 30 – 34
B	Tempo I	mm. 35 – 49
	Tempo II	mm. 50 – 55
A	Tempo I	mm. 56 – 63
	Tempo II	mm. 64 – 75

¹⁹ Lilise Boswell. Notes 52, no.1 (1995): 310

Example 7: *Rain Tree Sketch II*, mm.7-11

Musical score for Example 7, *Rain Tree Sketch II*, mm. 7-11. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It shows a piano accompaniment with a right hand (RH) and a left hand (L.H.). The tempo is marked "Poco meno mosso" with a metronome marking of ca. 72 (Tempo II). The dynamics range from "poco mf" to "p". The score includes a "poco riten." section and a "poco" section with a 5-measure phrase. The left hand has a "2" and "5" marking and is marked "ad lib.".

In *Rain Tree Sketch II*, the opening melodic motif of A-D-C#-F# appears in the right hand (Example 8). It reappears by using transposition in the next phrase; however, the motif is used less frequently than the motive found in *Rain Tree Sketch*.

Example 8: *Rain Tree Sketch II*, mm.1-2

Musical score for Example 8, *Rain Tree Sketch II*, mm. 1-2. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It shows a piano accompaniment with a right hand (RH) and a left hand (L.H.). The tempo is marked "ca. 90 (Tempo I)". The dynamics range from "p" to "poco". The score includes a 3-measure phrase and a 4-measure phrase. The right hand has a "3" marking and the left hand has a "4" marking.

IV. Influence of Japan in Takemitsu's Rain Tree Sketches

A. Nature

Nature have been considered in Japanese culture as a special and a unique element in their lives since ancient times. For example, a change of seasons is represented as very meaningful in relation to life; seasons are associated with beginning, growth, progress, and ending, as well as emotions. In addition, the Japanese have been interested in almost every sound in nature, including birdcalls, leaves blowing, ocean waves, and others.

Takemitsu was also deeply interested in nature, which is revealed in his collection of thirteen essays *Nature and Music* and in the titles of his musical works, which frequently use natural images such as garden, water, and tree.²⁰ He strived throughout his life to demonstrate aspects of nature in his composition. For example, Takemitsu explained the significance of trees in an essay. "I like trees. I prefer a forest of trees to shrubbery, rather prefer one big tree standing toward the sky... Tree can spatialize 'time.' No matter where tree is born, tree is always absorbed in making its particular shape more complicated and in achieving to express itself."²¹

Another important element of nature to Takemitsu is water. He wrote many pieces related to images of different states of water, and these are linked to form the "Waterscape" series.²² There are four rain-related works in the series: *Garden Rain* (1974) for brass ensemble, *Rain Tree* (1981) for percussion trio, *Rain Tree Sketch* (1982) for solo piano, and *Rain Dreaming* (1986) for harpsichord.²³ Throughout the series, Takemitsu employs the "SEA" motive, which is created by spelling the word SEA using the musical notes Es [E-flat in German nomenclature]-E-A, a pitch class set of [0 1 6].²⁴ The letters motivate the melody and appear in various

²⁰ Ohtake, 15-26.

²¹ Taniguhi, 36.

²² Peter Burt, *The Music of Toru Takemitsu* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 176.

²³ Ohtake, 36.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 177

transpositions and in various rhythmic and harmonic gestures in the works of the “Waterscape” series.

The concept of the words “rain” and “tree” merged into one in Takemitsu’s *Rain Tree* series. Although Takemitsu had his own thought about the words, there was another influence. He was greatly inspired by the novel *Clever Rain Tree* by Japanese writer Kenzaburo Oe. For Takemitsu, the most impressive image in the novel was “many leaves of a Rain Tree gathering the water inside them and keeping the ground moist the whole time.”²⁵ This scene lead Takemitsu to compose the *Rain Tree* series and is expressed as a metaphor of water circulating in the cosmos in his composition. The series consists of three pieces: *Rain Tree* (1981), *Rain Tree Sketch* (1982), and *Rain Tree Sketch II* (1992).²⁶

In *Rain Tree Sketch*, Takemitsu demonstrates the influences of nature and the images of rain tree. The general mood of *Rain Tree Sketch* is calm and quite; however, section B (mm.39-58) expresses more varied characteristics, allowing for the inference of an image of various scenes about rain trees. The section portrays stormy weather at the beginning and ending of a rainstorm. The heavy chords in measure 41 seems to forewarn that the rainstorm is approaching (Example 9). The rainstorm is depicted in the mm. 42-45 (Example 10), and the near-end of the rain is shown in mm. 46-51 (Example 11). The next passages in measure 52, have an ascending pattern with big leaps, describing the image of many leaves falling out of the trees (Example 12).

²⁵ Isshiki, 75.

²⁶ Ohtake, 87.

Example 9: Rain Tree Sketch, mm. 39-41

Tempo II

p

cresc.

poco stringendo

cresc.

Example 10: Rain Tree Sketch, mm.42-44

legatiss. rapidly

pp

p

cresc.

marcato e cresc.

Sva

Tempo II

R. ^

Example 11: Rain Tree Sketch, mm.45-51

Senza misura

Tempo I

Senza misura

ff

p

pp

ppp

dying away

SUS. ^

Example 12: Rain Tree Sketch, mm.52-53

Tempo II (rapidly) *gradually - - - - - cresc - - - - - en - - - - - do*

legatiss.

pp

pp

mf

8va

B. Ma

The other significant and unique concept in traditional Japanese music is *Ma*. The Japanese considered *Ma* to be closely related to all aspects of life. *Ma* is depicted with an emptiness in space, and a pause in time. The Japanese believed that if space and time did not exist, they could not grow. In other words, it is a fundamental element in Japanese people's lives including their culture, traditional art, and architecture. Isao Tsujimoto, former director general of The Japan Foundation in New York, offered a good explanation of the meaning of *Ma*:

Ma means empty or distance or blank... blankness. When you see Japanese Noh theater²⁷ with Japanese music, you encounter plenty of *ma* and plenty of silence. Even in a daily conversation with Japanese people, there are lots of *ma*. I always... sense the difference between a sense of time between Japanese people and Western people, especially Americans. In conversation with American people, you need to keep talking..... so I think [non-Japanese] people feel

²⁷ A traditional Japanese theatrical form and one of the oldest extant theatrical forms.

somewhat afraid of having *ma*. But somehow, Japanese people sense to enjoy that the kinds of blankness... it's traditional culture.²⁸

Ma in music signifies the time and space intervals between the sounds and silence. Simply, *Ma* is the sense of hearing and feeling the silence, not counting the beats.

Takemitsu uses the concept of *Ma* in his composition by using different lengths of fermatas and different lengths of rest. He stated his thoughts of *Ma* as follows, “The most important thing in Japanese music is space, not sound. Strong tensions. Space: *ma*: I think *ma* is time-space with tension. Always, I have always used few notes, and many silences, since my first piece.”²⁹

Rain Tree Sketch uses musical notation to demonstrate *Ma* as three different kinds of fermatas (see Example 2 in section III). Takemitsu did not provide the exact duration or tempo for the piece. That is, the fermatas are related to the concept of *Ma* that the duration depends on the performer. There are two places in which the concept of *Ma* appears in *Rain Tree Sketch*.

The first *Ma* in the triad of measure 37 is the shortest fermata with a dynamic of *piano*; in measure 38, it is the medium fermata at *pianissimo* (Example 13). These present a tension as well as an expectation to the approach of the rainstorm section.

Example 13: *Rain Tree Sketch*, mm.37-38

²⁸ Isao Tsujimoto, interview: “The Concept of “Ma” in Japanese Life and Culture,” 2011 (<http://youtu.be/V10xgxCOf8E>)

²⁹ Timothy Koozin, “Toru Takemitsu and Unity of Opposites,” (College Music Symposium 30, no.1, 1990), 44.

The section of *Senza misura*, which means “without measure” in measures 45 to 51 represents the characteristic of *Ma* as well (Example 14). The bass note A with the longest fermata continues to appear as if it were a long pedal note until the last chord with the shortest fermata in measure 47. The passage is repeated, like an echo with a different rhythmic pattern, again marked *Senza misura* with the additional indication of *dying away*. It is unclear how long the performer should hold the notes for fermata; however, it depends on the performer’s emotional state because *Ma* should not be counted or control the beats.

Example 14: Rain Tree Sketch, mm.45-51

The musical score for Example 14, *Rain Tree Sketch*, measures 45-51, is presented in a grand staff format. The piece is marked *Senza misura* (without measure) and begins with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic. The tempo is marked *Tempo I*. The score features several dynamic markings: *p* (piano), *pp* (pianissimo), and *ppp* (pianississimo). The piece concludes with the instruction *dying away*. The score includes fermatas over various notes, particularly in the bass line, and a long pedal point on the note A. The score is annotated with performance instructions: *sus.* (sustained) and *R.* (ritardando) with arrows indicating the duration of these effects. The score is divided into sections by vertical dashed lines, with the *Senza misura* marking appearing at the beginning and end of the section.

V. Influence of the West: Messiaen – in Takemitsu’s Rain Tree Sketches

Takemitsu had a deep connection to French music from a young age. When studying Debussy’s *Jeux* for orchestra and *Images* for solo piano, Takemitsu was charmed by Debussy’s method for expression in his music. Takemitsu was introduced to Messiaen’s *Préludes pour piano* through a Japanese composer of avant-garde music, Toshi Ichianagi.³⁰ This inspired Takemitsu to use many of Messiaen’s techniques, such as modes of limited transpositions and the integration of nature sounds.

Before discussing *Rain Tree Sketch* and *Rain Tree Sketch II*, the very early piece *Lento in Due Movimenti* should be examined. *Lento in Due Movimenti* was his debut work and was performed in 1950 by Hruko Fujita in a concert of the New Composers Association in Tokyo.³¹ The piece is comprised of two movements, “Adagio” and “Lento misteriosamente,” which strongly reflects Messiaen’s style. *Lento in Due Movimenti* was rewritten in 1989 to mourn the death of Takemitsu’s friend, Michael Vyner, and was given a new name, *Litany – In Memory of Michael Vyner*. Takemitsu’s use of the second and third of Messiaen’s modes of limited transposition in the middle section of *Litany*³² (Example 15 and 16) bring to mind Messiaen’s music.

³⁰ Burt, 31.

³¹ Ohtake, 78.

³² Toru Takemitsu, *Litany – In Memory of Michal Vyner*. (Tokyo: Schott Japan Company, Ltd., 1989)

Example 15: Takemitsu, *Litany I* in mode 3, mm. 34-36

Example 16: *Litany II* in mode 2, mm. 23-24

A. Messiaen's Modes of limited transposition

Messiaen wrote a compositional technique book called *The Technique of My Musical Language* in 1944. The book considered three aspects of compositional technique: rhythm, melody, and harmony.³³ One of the major concepts is the modes of limited transposition, which means a set of scales which fit specific criteria relating to their symmetry and the repetition of their interval groups.³⁴ The technique is very different from the diatonic scale, which can be transposed to any tonic pitch with 12 transpositions. The seven modes of limited transposition

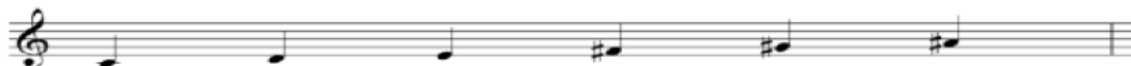
³³ Oliver Messiaen, *The Technique of My Musical Language* (Paris: A. Leduc, 1956), 58-61.

³⁴ Donald Street, "The Modes of Limited Transposition," (The Musical Times, vol. 117, no. 1604, (1975), 819.

are presented by Messiaen, and each mode is limited to 2, 3, 4, and 6 transpositions (Example 17).

Example 17: Messiaen's modes of limited transposition

Mode 1: Whole tone scale (2 transpositions)



Mode 2: Octatonic scale (3 transpositions)



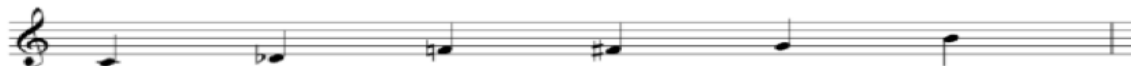
Mode 3 (4 transpositions)



Mode 4 (6 transpositions)



Mode 5 (6 transpositions)



Mode 6 (6 transpositions)



Mode 7 (6 transpositions)



Takemitsu studied Messiaen's technique book and frequently used these modes in many of his compositions. One representative work that shows respect to Messiaen is *Rain Tree Sketch II – In Memoriam Olivier Messiaen*. Takemitsu frequently used Messiaen's mode 3 [0 2 3 4 6 7 8 10 11]. It comprises a nine-note collection with four transpositions, which alternate a whole

tone with two semitones. The pitch collection of mode 3-III appears in mm.17-22 (Example 18). In mm.17-19, the mode is represented in the only treble clef as [0 6 7 8 10 11] with octatonic collection of bass clef. The next passage of pitch collection in measure 22 is also based on mode 3-III.

Example 18: *Rain Tree Sketch II*, mm. 17-24

B. Octatonic collection

Messiaen's mode 2 [0 1 3 4 6 7 9 10] is labeled an octatonic collection. It comprises an eight-notes collection that alternates whole steps and half steps and that has three transpositions. The octatonic collection or mode 2 is used throughout *Rain Tree Sketch* and *Rain Tree Sketch II*. It frequently employs mode 2-II [C#, D, E, F, G, Ab, Bb, B] and mode 2-III [D, Eb, F, F#, G#, A, B, C]. In *Rain Tree Sketch*, the octatonic collection appears in measure 14 as mode 2-II, and it is transposed a whole step down as mode 2-III in measure 18 (Example 19). Alternately, these

two octatonic collections appear in a long passage with the whole-tone scale (mode I-II) in measures 54-58 (Example 20).

Example 19: Rain Tree Sketch, mm.14-18

Mode 2-II
Tempo I
8va
pp
8va
sf

Mode 2-III

Example 20: Rain Tree Sketch, mm.54-59

6
(8va)
Mode 2-III
Mode 2-II
loco
Tempo I
piuf
p
mf
f
R. ^
R. ^
R. ^

8va
poco (mf)
Mode 2-III
Mode 2-II
loco
Tempo II
p
pp
pp
pp
R. ^
L. ^

In the same manner, the octatonic collection can be seen in *Rain Tree Sketch II*. The dark sonority in the middle section, mm. 39-40 (Example 21) is presented in mode 2-III. The echo in the highest register appears in mode 2-II in measure 42 (Example 22).

Example 21: *Rain Tree Sketch II*, mm. 39-40

Example 22: *Rain Tree Sketch II*, mm. 41-42

C. Reminiscence of Messiaen's Sound

Rain Tree Sketch II was composed in memory of Messiaen; therefore, there are several places besides the modes where one can hear and feel Messiaen's music. The "Joyful" section begins on a G# tonal center with canonic technique, and it is transposed a whole tone step down

on F# in mm. 35-38 (Example 23). The passages recall one of the passages from Messiaen's "Regard de l'esprit de joie" from *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant Jésus* (Example 24).³⁵

Example 23: Rain Tree Sketch II, mm.35-37

Joyful
Tempo I

Example 24: Messiaen's Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant Jésus, Regard de l'Esprit de joie, mm.135-137

Très modéré, Tempo rubato (♩=104) 69

(Thème de joie) (*)
(dans un grand transport de joie)

Nature was already discussed in the previous section on the *Influence of Japan*. Messiaen and Takemitsu had the same belief about the importance of incorporating sounds of nature in music. However, the ways they approached it differed. Messiaen was greatly influenced by sounds from nature, especially birdsong. He mainly translated and expressed actual bird songs into music, while Takemitsu generally indicated his thought of nature throughout his music.

³⁵ Olivier Messiaen, *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant Jésus*, "Regard de l'esprit de joie."

Conclusion

Toru Takemitsu was one of the most influential Japanese composer of the twentieth century. The diversity of his experiences and influences helped him to compose a variety of music. Western music is a huge part of Takemitsu's compositions; however, his music was expanded through his knowledge of native Japanese culture and music, including traditional instruments. In the late period, Takemitsu's music gained a special richness through the integration of Japanese and Western music. Takemitsu's solo piano music demonstrates the fullness of Takemitsu's style and evolution. Based on the year of composition, it is possible to understand the basic elements of each piece's characteristics, influences, and his own philosophy as well.

The music of Takemitsu does not seem to require virtuosity in the traditional sense. However, the musical and artistic virtuosity is of the highest level. The *Rain Tree Sketches* are among the strongest examples of Takemitsu's blending of traditional Japanese culture, Western classical music, and his own philosophies. Every performance of these works demonstrates the individual artists' reinterpretation of Takemitsu's original ideas. But by faithfully following Takemitsu's detailed markings, listeners can always be guided to understand Takemitsu's intentions. His beliefs, philosophies, influences, and ability to translate them into beautiful music lead him to become the most recognized Japanese composer of the 20th century, and established his music as a connection between East and West.

Appendix
List of Piano Works

- 1948 *Kahehi (Conduit)*
- 1949 *Romance*
Two pieces for Piano
- 1950 *Lento in due movimenti*
- 1952 *At the Circus*
Uninterrupted Rest I
- 1959 *Uninterrupted Rest II, III*
- 1960 *Awaremitamae (Miserere)*
Ai shite (Love me)
- 1961 *Piano Distance*
- 1962 *Corona for Pianist(s), graphic score*
Crossing, graphic work for piano(s)
- 1973 *For Away*
- 1979 *Les yeux clos*
Little Piano Pieces for Children
 1. *Breeze*
 2. *Cloud*
- 1982 *Rain Tree Sketch*
- 1988 *Les yeux clos II*
- 1989 *Litany – In Memory of Michael Vyner*
- 1992 *Rain Tree Sketch II – In Memory of Oliver Messiaen*
Golden Slumbers (arrangement of John Lennon and Paul McCartney)

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