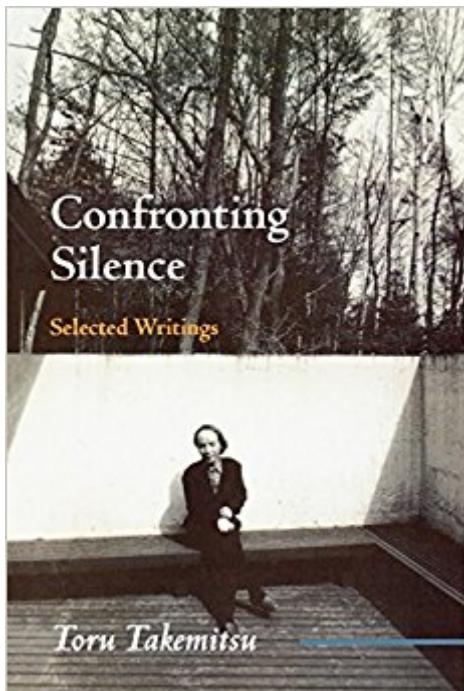


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Confronting Silence: Selected Writings (Fallen Leaf Monographs On Contemporary Composers)



Synopsis

In these writings, available here in English for the first time, the distinguished Japanese composer Toru Takemitsu reflects on his contemporaries, including John Cage, Olivier Messiaen, and Merce Cunningham; on nature, which has profoundly influenced his composition; on film and painting; on relationships between East and West; on traditional Japanese music; and on his own compositions.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"But I think of time as circular and continuity as a constant changing state." So said Toru Takemitsu in this modest yet profoundly readable book. He has been writing on his music, all of it where his creativity has touched all genres including a sizable repertoire in film, since 1960s. This work here is haiku-like excerpts, But for Takemitsu that's all we really need for he ascends right to the center of where creativity occurs squarely on point. If thinking on music knows some geometric graphic, the shortest distance between two points it is here. He is a deep thinker, when his November Steps for Orchestra was performed by The New York Philharmonic, he wandered the streets around his hotel in Manhattan trying to get the experience inside him, to wind it down in a way. Silence is what nature has given us, we then as creators fill it, or structure sounds around silence. He keeps his own culture rich in complexity always in the forefront of his thinking. He compares for instance the simultaneous complexity of the Japanese instruments, the shakuhachi flute and the biwa, like a lute, and the overwhelming experience when he first heard a Western size orchestra in The United

States. He has written for both in an interesting way, trying to forge an East-West amalgam, knowing the conceptual limitations of both genres. Takemitsu's music comes from nature, he has essays here on water, trees, silence and gardens, and he equates the durational part of his orchestral work as like a quiet private walk in a garden. If you ever heard his music it is rich in textural display, colourful knowing full the uniqueness of timbre from any instrument. Frequently his orchestral work features an instrument to function almost like a concerto.

CONFRONTING SILENCE is a slim (143-page plus index) collection of writings by the Japanese composer Toru Takemitsu published in 1995, a year before his untimely death. Translated and edited by Yoshiko Kakudo and Glenn Glasgow, the contents come from varied sources, some magazine or newspaper articles, others lectures to university crowds. The advertised foreword by Seiji Ozawa is a single paragraph saying basically "I am happy you can read my friend's work." A few of the writings here are useful towards appreciating Takemitsu's work and aesthetic, but I found that most were of limited value. "Notes on November Steps" is a series of reminiscences on the 1967 composition and premier of Takemitsu's great piece combining the Western orchestra with two Japanese instruments, the biwa and shakuhachi. The description of the challenges Takemitsu faced in combining these two traditions, and of the tension between the modern composer and conservative orchestra are highly interesting and make for greater appreciation of the piece. "Dream and Number" is an exegesis of his several of his pieces, most notably "A Flock Descends into the Pentagonal Garden", telling of inspirations from dreams and the abundance of reference to the number five. It is lavishly illustrated with score samples. It is the only substantial musicological writing here. "Sound of East, Sound of West" consists of musings on the special traits of certain indigenous musical traditions of the world, and contains some worthwhile thoughts on Japanese music and their exportability. Most of the pieces, however, are fluff. An obituary essay in memory of Feldman, Nono, and Messiaen is just a simple explanation of who they were and when they died, without any clear information on how they influenced Takemitsu's music.

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