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Contact: A Journal for Contemporary Music (1971-1988)

<http://contactjournal.gold.ac.uk>

Citation

Jones, David. 1973-1974. 'Review of May 6th: The Roundhouse, London'. *Contact*, 7. pp. 37-38. ISSN 0308-5066.

concerts

May 6th: The Round House, London

THE MUSIC OF TORU TAKEMITSU

with Aurele Nicolet, Ursula Holliger, Heinz Holliger, Roger Woodward, Michiyoshi Inoue, Kinshi Tsuruta, Katsuya Yokoyama, Stomu Yamash'ta, Della Jones, Gilbert Biberian, Brian Fieldhouse, Una O'Donovan and Tristan Fry.

Unlike certain other European capitals, London does not normally practise days devoted to the music of unfamiliar composers. Following the pattern established in recent years by the Parisien Journées de Musique Contemporaine, the London Music Digest devoted a day to the music of the versatile Japanese composer Toru Takemitsu, as seen and heard in film and concert scores written since 1961.

The experiment seemed to work on this occasion: moving the listener towards a better understanding of a composer of discernment whose technical equipment allows him to realise sounds that are meaningful in the various medias in which he moves with ease. The opportunity for such a retrospective survey exposes the dilemma of the man from the east equally attracted by both continents; the rapprochement between the two worlds on their own terms as demonstrated in the well-known November Steps is the meeting of opposites in an untenable position. The tenth Step for biwa and shakuhachi alone, played in this concert by Kinshi Tsuruta and Katsuya Yokoyama, is, however, an entirely different proposition - a traditional eastern point of departure towards new timbral possibilities in a closed intense world of sound. It is a journey into new regions where the melodic line of the shakuhachi may move in surprising directions.

Takemitsu should continue in the direction indicated by this work, and by Eclipse for the same two traditional Japanese instruments, also played in this programme. They are genuine expressions of the old world through new ears. Though he handles a mixture of cultures with greater care than many of his lesser compatriots, I feel that this approach is less successful. Examples of such western influence were evident even in his most recent music: an over-dependence on the harmonic vocabulary of post-Messiaen impressionism in Far Away for piano (here receiving its first

performance), and a strong dose of outmoded Darmstadt gestures in the earlier Stanza I for female voice and chamber group.

The composer's preoccupation with the relationship between sound and silence is demonstrated in all the works for chamber combinations by an emphasis on attack, resonance and decay coupled with the use of tape and microphone techniques. The multiphonics of Heinz Holliger were demonstrated in Eucalypts II and Distance. In the latter work he was partnered by an electronic organ in the absence of a sho (Japanese mouth organ), which plays long sustained sounds with soft perceptible beats, against decorative lines and mixtures.

Stanza II for harp, and tape, played by Ursula Holliger, displayed more contrasting and substantial material, where the known potential of the modern harp deployed delicate sounds interacting against a tape of sine waves, harp and sounds of the environment. This is one of the most impressive new works for the instrument, creating a natural music removed from the derivative sources that are so often a feature of contemporary harp works. It is a piece to be heard and accepted in the Round House, where the external world intrudes too often. For in Takemitsu's music, peace is required for the audience to give the necessary concentration to his precisely controlled, sparse textures.

DAVID JONES.