



日本作曲家選輯

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Toru  
**TAKEMITSU**

**Piano Music**

**Romance • Rain Tree Sketches I and II • Litany**

**Kotaro Fukuma, Piano**



## Toru Takemitsu (1930-1996):

### Piano Music

Undoubtedly the most significant classical composer that Japan has produced, Toru Takemitsu was born in Tokyo on 8th October 1930. Although he decided upon a career as a composer when only sixteen, he had little formal training and remained essentially self-taught. Perhaps owing to his having heard recordings of French popular songs in wartime, French music held a special attraction, notably that of Debussy and Messiaen, whose influence can be detected right from his earliest scores. International attention first came when his *Requiem* for strings (1957) was hailed as a masterpiece by Stravinsky, and his success abroad was consolidated over the following decade in such scores as *November Steps* (1967) which, as a 125th anniversary commission from the New York Philharmonic, broke new ground in employing indigenous Japanese instruments within a Western orchestral context.

At the forefront of musical experimentation during the 1960s and early 1970s, Takemitsu thereafter evolved a more approachable but hardly less individual idiom, one in which the fusion of an essentially Japanese ethos with Western techniques (as in the much-played orchestral work *A Flock Descends into the Pentagonal Garden* [Naxos 8.557760]) gained a following on both sides of the Pacific. Although he wrote the scores for almost a hundred films (such as Kurosawa's acclaimed *Ran*), his reputation rests largely on his extensive output of orchestral and chamber music. He died in Tokyo on 20th February 1996.

Although not a complete edition, this selection of Takemitsu's piano music, extending over 43 years, offers an inclusive overview of his stylistic development as a composer, one in which the urge towards greater experimentation is balanced by the later move towards consolidation and synthesis. Pellucid chords and impressionistically 'blurred' harmonies are salient features of *Romance* (1949), the nineteen-year-

old composer's earliest surviving piano work. Building calmly but assuredly to a brief but forceful climax, it manages to evince an expressive range far greater than its modest duration might suggest.

Completed in 1950, and having the distinction of becoming the composer's first publicly performed work, *Lento in due movimenti* already suggests appreciably greater ambition and resourcefulness. The initial *Adagio* opens with the motivic interest firmly in the bass register, its harmonic intricacy lending to the music a certain ominous quality as it searches for some manner of tonal resolution. The ensuing *Lento misteriosamente* is even more inward yet also more capricious in the way its sudden keyboard runs and ostinati create an atmosphere redolent of Messiaen's early piano pieces. The central climax brings with it a degree of energy rare in Takemitsu's music of any period.

It is only with *Uninterrupted Rest*, composed in 1952 then revised and extended seven years later to form three related miniatures, that a recognizable Takemitsu style starts to coalesce. Thus the first section, '*Slowly, sadly and as if to converse with*', again invokes Messiaen but now with audibly greater lightness of touch. The second section, '*Quietly and with a cruel reverberation*', alternates glowering chords with limpid passagework, while a tendency to inhabit extremes of the keyboard anticipates the improvisational tendencies of the composer's music during the 1960s. The third section, '*A Song of Love*', comes as total contrast: a restrained piece that yet touches on depths of emotion more surprising for its brevity.

Composed in 1961, *Piano Distance* remains one of Takemitsu's most performed piano works and a salient example of his music at this time. For all that its soundworld is indebted to the aleatoric practice of such

figures as John Cage (whose influence on Takemitsu in accepting of his Japanese heritage should not be underestimated), the piece elegantly integrates its contrasts between sudden attacks and reverberating gestures to ensure an underlying coherence and sense of direction.

By the time that he composed *For Away* (1973), Takemitsu had all but arrived at the mature idiom that was to hold good for much of his music over the ensuing two decades. Although much recourse is still made to either end of the keyboard, the appreciably fuller textures and more developed figuration evince a textural richness alluring in pianistic terms, while the often dense harmonic writing sounds French merely by association. Moreover, the music's balance between the poles of 'staying still' and 'moving forward' here achieves a poise such as Takemitsu equaled but only rarely surpassed in his later works.

Dating from 1979, *Les yeux clos* became one of the diptychs that Takemitsu often favoured in his later years with the addition of a second piece some nine years later. *Les yeux clos* is one of his most considered explorations of keyboard sonority (making it the more surprising that the composer orchestrated it as the second part of his Chicago Symphony commission *Visions* in 1989), one where a sense of resolution, tonal or expressive, is conveyed more by implication than in actuality. Although its natural successor, *Les yeux clos II*, first performed in November 1989 by Peter Serkin, is yet more restrained in demeanour, with the striking

initial gesture assuming the guise of a motif that permeates the musical discourse at all levels.

A not dissimilar gap in time separates the two pieces with the title *Rain Tree Sketch*. Composed in 1982, *Rain Tree Sketch* evinces a greater harmonic and tonal directness, though without any loss of pianistic finesse, while *Rain Tree Sketch II* (1992) has a more distanced repose and intimacy that are both highly appropriate in a piece which turned out to be its composer's last for solo piano.

The two *Piano Pieces for Children* (1979) demonstrate Takemitsu's flexibility in writing pieces of a more didactic nature. '*Breeze*' has a nonchalance that recalls salon music from the early twentieth century, while '*Clouds*' has a wistful charm evoking the lighter music of Delius.

Although dating from 1989, *Litany* is a recomposition of the *Lento* pieces (tracks 2 and 3) from four decades earlier, undertaken as a memorial to Michael Vynner who, as Artistic Director of the London Sinfonietta for seventeen years, had played a decisive rôle in the promotion of Takemitsu's music in Britain. *Litany I* confirms the greater formal focus, without loss of character, that the composer brought to the revision, while *Litany II* slightly and discreetly extends the original in music whose thoughtful sincerity makes of it a touching tribute.

**Richard Whitehouse**

## Kotaro Fukuma



Kotaro Fukuma was born in Tokyo in 1982. He began his piano studies at the age of five and in 2001 entered the Paris Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique, where he studied the piano with Bruno Rigutto and chamber music with Marie-Françoise Bucquet. He now studies with Klaus Hellwig at the Berlin Universität der Künste and participates regularly in the Como International Piano Academy in Italy. Among other competition awards, Kotaro Fukuma took second prize and the special prize for the performance of a Finnish piece in the Helsinki Maj Lind International Piano Competition and was the first-prize winner of the 2003 Fifteenth Cleveland International Piano Competition. He made his début recital in the Lincoln Center (Alice Tully Hall) in New York and has gone on to give over forty concerts in the United States, with appearances throughout Europe, in South Korea, Taiwan, South Africa and Japan. He boasts an extensive repertoire, including over 25 piano concertos. His first recording, a disc of Schumann piano music for Naxos (8.557668), was released in 2004 and received wide international critical acclaim.

<http://kotarofukuma.free.fr>

Now regarded as one of the most important composers of the second half of the twentieth century, Toru Takemitsu was the first Japanese composer to gain international status. This selection of his piano music, extending over 43 years, offers an inclusive overview of his stylistic development from *Romance* (1949), the nineteen-year-old composer's earliest surviving piano work, to the hypnotic *Rain Tree Sketch II* (1992), Takemitsu's last work for solo piano. The music ranges widely in style from *Pause ininterrompue* (Uninterrupted rest) (1952-59), which shows the influence of Debussy, Scriabin and Messiaen, and the aleatoric *Piano Distance* (1961), to the nocturnal and meditative *For Away* (1973) inspired by Indonesian gamelan music.

## Toru TAKEMITSU

(1930-1996)

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|--|------|--|------|
| <b>1</b> <i>Romance</i> (1949)<br>Lento in due movimenti<br>(1950)   | 4:15 | <b>8</b> <i>For Away</i> (1973)                            | 6:51 |
| <b>2</b> I. Adagio   | 4:27 | <b>9</b> <i>Les yeux clos</i> (1979)                       | 6:17 |
| <b>3</b> II. Lento misteriosamente<br>Pause ininterrompue<br>(Uninterrupted Rest Nos. 1-3)<br>(1952, 1959) | 4:45 | <b>10</b> <i>Les yeux clos II</i> (1988)                   | 6:44 |
| <b>4</b> I. Slowly, sadly and as if to<br>converse with  | 6:20 | <b>11</b> <i>Rain Tree Sketch</i> (1982)                   | 3:35 |
| <b>5</b> II. Quietly and with a cruel<br>reverberation   | 3:06 | <b>12</b> <i>Rain Tree Sketch II</i> (1992)                | 4:11 |
| <b>6</b> III. A song of love   | 1:18 | Piano Pieces for Children<br>(1978)                        |      |
| <b>7</b> <i>Piano Distance</i> (1961)  | 4:16 | <b>13</b> No. 1 Breeze                                     | 0:49 |
|  |      | <b>14</b> No. 2 Clouds                                     | 1:37 |
|  |      | Litany (recomposition of Lento<br>in due movimenti) (1989) |      |
|  |      | <b>15</b> I. Adagio  | 4:37 |
|  |      | <b>16</b> II. Lento misterioso                             | 5:12 |

## Kotaro Fukuma, Piano

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