

In Partnership with Carnegie Hall
JapanNYC Festival
Seiji Ozawa, Artistic Director



The Institute for Medieval Japanese Studies
is honored to present

**Concert I: Glories of the Japanese
Traditional Music Heritage**
“Winds and Strings of Change”

Featuring the master artists

Yukio Tanaka - *biwa*

Kifū Mitsuhashi - *shakuhachi*

Yōko Nishi - *koto*

James Nyoraku Schlefer – *shakuhachi*

A concert of traditional and innovative works
honoring the memory of



Tōru Takemitsu (1930-1996)

one of Japan's greatest composers whose works have
transformed the soundscapes of the 20th-century

Thursday, December 16, 2010 at 6:00 PM
Miller Theatre, Columbia University
(116th Street & Broadway)

Columbia University
in the City of New York

Tôru Takemitsu

For the Degree of Doctor of Music

Small of height, great of heart, giant among twentieth-century composers, Tôru Takemitsu enriched the concert halls of the world. Through an era of noise, he championed the quiet beauty and strength of phrases that reflected on the human condition with gentleness and power. In the words of one appreciative musician, he heard "the water dreaming." With masterpieces like *November Steps* and *Fantasma/Cantos*, he built a great bridge linking the cultural traditions of East and West, bringing the world closer together, awakening sensitive listeners to a transcendent cultural unity. As a man, Tôru Takemitsu was generous of friendship, keen of wit and intelligence, all-embracing in his warmth. We miss his extraordinary presence especially on this day, when Columbia would have honored him in person. But the greatness of his music, the radiance of his spirit, live on. With sadness and with affection and profound gratitude for the joy he has brought to us, Columbia University is privileged to award Tôru Takemitsu the Degree of Doctor of Music, *honoris causa*.



George Rupp
President

18 April 1996



Tōru Takemitsu
(1930-1996)

Columbia University Honorary Doctorate Recipient, 1996

Tōru Takemitsu is one of the most extraordinary world-class composers of music to emerge in our post world war era. His music speaks across all cultures and is loved and admired both by musicians and non-musicians alike. His long career of creating, and being commissioned to write, major works for orchestras, chamber groups and all manner of individual performers throughout Europe and America, to say nothing of Japan and Asia, has led to his being awarded the 1994 Grawemeyer Award, known as the “Nobel Prize” for music. Takemitsu’s music navigates powerful traditional Japanese and modern Western musical forces toward what he believes to be a common global future for classical music. A profound “philosopher of music” as well, he has written seminal and highly influential essays about his creative process, his understanding of “sound” in human life, and his hopes for the future of world music.

~Quoted from the original Columbia University
Honorary Doctorate designation~

Tōru Takemitsu

Tōru Takemitsu's first encounter with Western music was as a boy during the war when a mentor secretly played for him records of French chansons. During war time, when foreign music was banned, it was a revelation to his ears, and after the war he became a devoted listener of Western music on the US Armed Forces Radio. Determined one day to become a composer himself, Takemitsu was essentially self-taught. His first influences were French composers such as Debussy and Messiaen, but his tastes were eclectic and included the full range from pop to jazz and electronic to avant-garde.

In 1951, together with pianist Takahiro Sonoda, composer Jōji Yuasa, and artist Shōzō Kitadai, he formed the collaborative *Jikken Kōbo* or Experimental Workshop. At first he had totally avoided traditional Japanese music, which had been put to the service of nationalism and militarism during the war. In the 1960s, however, the American composer John Cage, who had become colleague and friend, persuaded him to explore the potentials of Japanese musical instruments and traditions. By 1958 his music had already become known abroad and he won the Italy Prize that year. He won the Paris International Modern Composer First Prize in 1965; and was then given a commission by Leonard Bernstein for the New York Philharmonic Orchestra's 125th Anniversary Celebration in 1967, for which he wrote the masterpiece *November Steps*.

In addition to his hugely influential orchestral and ensemble works, Takemitsu wrote nearly 100 film scores for Japan's most famous movie directors. He was awarded the Los Angeles Film Critic Award in 1987 for his score to Akira Kurosawa's *Ran*. This week's *JapanNYC Festival* has included a 14-day festival of movies scored by Takemitsu which has been curated for the Film Forum by his daughter Maki Takemitsu.

The Center for Ethnomusicology, Department of Music,
The Columbia University Music Performance Program,
and
The Institute for Medieval Japanese Studies
are deeply grateful to the following,
whose financial support has made possible
tonight's concert,
the Master Classes for Columbia Students, and
the Tokyo Summer Instrumental Training Program:

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Sumitomo Corporation of America Foundation (New York)
International Foundation for Arts and Culture (Tokyo)
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and Japan Society is deeply appreciated

Mr. Mitsuhashi and Mr. Tanaka appear in tonight's concert courtesy of the Sai-
to Kinen Festival Mastumoto

PROGRAM

Part I:

Midare (Disarray)

by Kengyō Yatsushashi (1614-1685)

koto solo

Yōko Nishi

Tsuru no sugomori (Nesting Cranes)

Composer Unknown

Kizenken/Renpōken Version

shakuhachi solo

Kifū Mitsushashi

Dan no ura (1964)

Music by Kinshi Tsuruta (1911-1995)

Lyrics by Yōko Mizuki (1910-2003)

Satsuma biwa
and vocal solo

Yukio Tanaka

Haru no umi (The Sea in Spring) (1929)

by Michiyo Miyagi (1894-1956)

duet for koto

Yōko Nishi

and shakuhachi

James Nyoraku Schlefer

Intermission (15 minutes)

Part II:

Gaku (Bliss) (1988)

by Tadao Sawai (1937-1997)

koto solo

Yōko Nishi

Chikurai goshō (Bamboo Soundings in Five Movements) (1965)

by Makoto Moroi (b. 1930)

shakuhachi solo

Kifū Mitsuhashi

Yūkyū no shirabe (Meditation on Eternity) (2001)

by Yukio Tanaka

for Satsuma biwa
and voice

Yukio Tanaka

November Steps, Number Ten (1967)

by Tōru Takemitsu (1930-1996)

for biwa

Yukio Tanaka

and shakuhachi

Kifū Mitsuhashi

(from *November Steps* for full orchestra,
biwa and shakuhachi)

Part I:

Midare (Disarray)

by Kengyō Yatsushashi (1614-1685)

koto solo

Yōko Nishi

The koto was brought to Japan from China some 1400 years ago, and though the materials out of which it is made have changed, in form it remains essentially the same. In ancient days it was more than a musical instrument made of wood and strings; it was a ritual tool for eliciting communication to and from the deities and for celebrating and honoring them. Eventually the music played on the koto was influenced by other instruments, and its music evolved in the context of Japanese regional cultural history and those who played it.

For kotoist Yōko Nishi, a koto has a lifespan, and the music that emerges is the voice of the wood, the resonance of which changes as it ages. Players, rather than subjecting the instrument to their will, must listen to the instrument and weave the music around that voice.

The composer of *Midare*, Kengyō Yatsushashi, who died the year Johann Sebastian Bach was born, was originally a master shamisen player in Kyoto, but sometime during the 1630s-1640s he turned up in Edo (present Tokyo) as a student of the koto and became a renowned composer of many koto works that have become classics of the repertoire.

Many of Yatsushashi's works are *danmono* (works divided into *dan* or steps, as in a sequential staircase) where each *dan* or section in a standard work has the same number of beats and, overall, begins with a slow tempo, which increases with each *dan*. This *dan* structure is

common to the major genre of Japanese traditional performing arts. The present work, *Midare*, however, breaks the mold. Tempos change unexpectedly and there is no fixed number of beats to each *dan*.

The Japanese word *midare* (disarray) is used most often to refer to the human world (when in disorder) or the spoken word (when jumbled) or a person's hair (especially a woman's) when in disarray, often with a slightly erotic overtone. It is thought that *Midare* acquired its title because it disturbs the neat patterns typical of the *danmono* genre. The pace at which *Midare* is played is to be chosen freely by the performer depending on preference and the atmosphere of the venue. Practically every koto performance technique is utilized in this work, and one can hear throughout all manner of soundings, with overlap of left and right hand renderings that give the music glorious coloring.

Midare has no "theme", but Yōko Nishi has said one can feel the whole flow of nature, time, space, and seasons and hear all the anxieties of our world rising in it through the cries of summer insects, the sound of gusting autumn winds, tossing trees, snow storms drifting, and in blizzard-like gusts of cherry blossom petals in the spring wind.

It is significant that Tōru Takemitsu's magnificent *November Steps* for Western orchestra, shakuhachi, and biwa was entitled "November" (for the month it was commissioned to be premiered in New York), and "Steps" reflecting the deep influence of Japanese traditional *danmono*. The cadenza for biwa and shakuhachi from this long orchestral work, known as *November Steps Number Ten*, will conclude today's program.

Tsuru no sugomori (Nesting Cranes)

Composer Unknown

Kizenken/Renpōken Version

shakuhachi solo

Kifū Mitsuhashi

The shakuhachi was introduced from China in ancient times, but its classic Japanese repertoire as a solo instrument was created by itinerant mendicant monks called *Komusō* who belonged to the Fuke sect, a branch of Rinzai Zen Buddhism that emerged in the 13th and 14th centuries and flourished during the 17th and 18th centuries until it was officially abolished in 1871 by the Meiji Restoration.

Playing the shakuhachi for these monks was a spiritual discipline—a living, breathing, meditation practice. They would then also travel continually around Japan playing at the gates of residences as a mendicant practice, their heads and faces completely hidden inside deep basket-like sedge hats. The classic repertoire reflects both the meditation and the mendicant aspects to this haunting and mesmerizing instrument.

Eventually each temple where these monks stopped on their travels throughout Japan developed unique shakuhachi repertoires which subsequent monks would then learn as they traveled. One representative work is *Tsuru no sugomori (Nesting Cranes)*, of which more than ten versions remain. Among them, however, the version from the now vanished temples Kizenken and Renpōken in Fukushima is an acclaimed masterpiece that utilizes virtually every difficult technique of the shakuhachi instrument. It begins with a pair of cranes arriving; their search for a nesting place; then joy at finding the perfect spot; weaving the nest; the pain of bearing the eggs; after the hatching, the murmurs between the parent and baby cranes; teaching the

chicks to fly, and then the sad parting between parents and offspring as the chicks fly away; then the parent cranes' subsequent reminiscences of it all; and the concluding section depicting the aging cranes as the sun dies away in the West and they take their last breaths. Actually a very long work, it will be performed today only in abbreviated form.



Dan no ura (1964)

Music by Kinshi Tsuruta

Lyrics by Yōko Mizuki

Satsuma biwa
and vocal solo

Yukio Tanaka

In the year 1185, the final battle between the Genji clan and the Heike clan took place in the straits of Dan no ura, between the main island of Honshu and the island of Kyushu to the south. The Heike had fled the capital of Kyoto with the child-emperor in tow. It was a cataclysmic moment in Japanese history marking the downfall of the proud and powerful Heike clan—an event relived for centuries in many genre of Japanese art, literature, and the performing arts.

Kinshi Tsuruta, the great master of the biwa, based this, her famous version of *Dan no ura*, on the medieval epic *Tales of the Heike*. When the New York Philharmonic commissioned a work from Takemitsu for their 125th celebratory concert, he wrote his revolutionary *November Steps* incorporating the shakuhachi and the biwa into the Western orchestra. It was Kinshi Tsuruta whom he chose to play the biwa in this 1967 world premier in New York. Throughout her life she performed in men's apparel and so many never realized this great genius musician was a woman.

The biwa has since time immemorial been an instrument used by itinerant priest-musicians at the site of battlefields to sooth the souls of those who had died violent deaths in wars, both soldiers and innocent victims. Traditionally, biwa narratives have retold in moving, poetic prose the circumstances of violent encounters and the manner in which the perpetrators and victims met their deaths. The biwa sounds out the clash of weapons, the whirl of arrows, and even more, the tearing pain of souls. The plectrum strikes the strings as if directly on flesh and nerve. Its sounds penetrate the heart. The cry of the biwa is a lament for war's folly. To sooth their passage into a better world, it conveys to the souls of those sacrificed to that folly, the deep lament of the still living for those they have irretrievably lost. In the end it is a prayer for peace.

The time had come.

It was the second year of Genryaku (1185),

twenty-fourth day of the third month,

at the Hour of the Hare.

The warships of both the Genji and Heike clans

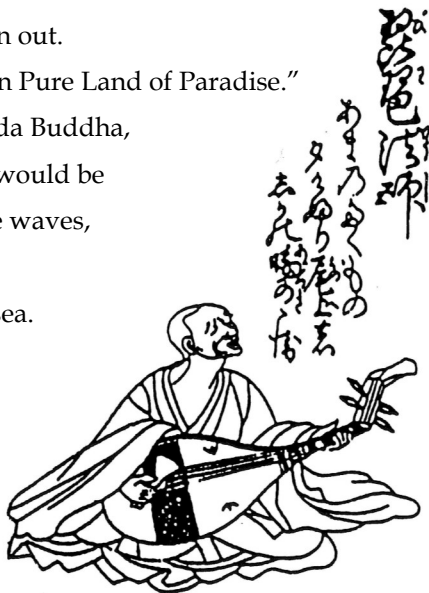
set sail to exchange arrows

at Dan no ura.

Three thousand manned vessels
surrounded the Heike
and thrust through their defenses.
General Yoshitsune headed one Genji squadron.
In the vanguard Heike fleet
with five hundred boats was
Hyōdōji Hidetō of Yamaga,
the strongest archer in the Nine Provinces.
The Matsuura League comprised the second squadron
with three hundred boats.
And in third place lay
the ships of Heike lords and royalty.
The Genji boats, on the breast of the swift tide
pierced through the Heike line,
and hand-to-hand battle began.
The straits became clogged with ships
like autumn leaves
caught in the weirs of a rapid stream.
High seas barred flight to distant shores.
Genji archers lined the beaches,
denying escape to shore.
Heike captains and oarsmen alike
pierced with arrows, fell dead.
Ships, masterless, floated aimlessly
or sank.
This day indeed seemed destined
to witness the end of the
endless violence between Genji and Heike
over mastery of the realm.

The Nun of Second Rank,
 her grandson, the child emperor,
 wrapped in her bosom, murmured
 “You were born to be Emperor
 but your good karma has now run out.
 I will take you now to the Western Pure Land of Paradise.”
 Intoning the sacred name of Amida Buddha,
 and assuring the child that there would be
 a city waiting for him beneath the waves,
 she plunged them both
 into the boundless depths of the sea.

(English version by Barbara Ruth)



壇の浦 水木洋子・作詞 鶴田錦史・作曲

時こそ来たれ、元暦二年三月二十四日の卯の刻に、源平両軍船出して壇の浦にて、矢合わせとぞ定めける、兵船もろとも三千余艘、平家の軍を囲まんと、あせり競いて突き進む、この一団ぞ義経の麾下なりと知られける、平家の先陣は九国一の強の者、山鹿の兵藤次秀遠の精兵五百余艘、二陣は松浦党三百余艘、平家の公達二百余艘で、三陣に続きたり、速潮にのる源氏の軍船、またたくうちに平家方の真只中をつき破れば、敵も味方も入り乱れ、さしもの瀬戸も舟に覆われ、落ち葉浮ぶる川波の網代に寄する如くなり、かの岸に遁れんとすれば浪高くしてかないがたく、この汀に上がらんとすれば源氏、矢先を揃えて待ちうけたり、船手漕手も討ち果され、行方も知らず平家の船、あるいは沈み、あるいは漂い、源平の国争い今日を限りと見えたりける、二位殿は帝を抱き奉り、君は万乗の主と生れさせ給えども、御運既に尽きさせ給いぬ、西方浄土の来迎に与らんとし召し、はやはや御念仏唱え給え、浪の下にも都の候ぞと、幼き帝もろともに、千尋の海へぞ入り給う。

Haru no umi (The Sea in Spring) (1929)

by Michiyo Miyagi (1894-1956)

duet for koto

Yōko Nishi

and shakuhachi

James Nyoraku Schlefer

Michiyo Miyagi, blind from the age of seven, became Japan's most famous early 20th-century koto player and composer. His creative genius extended to the instrument itself. He was the first to devise the 17-string koto and even an 80-string koto. Miyagi also had an astute appreciation for Western music, which influenced his activities as a composer. He was the first to introduce the beauties of the koto to world audiences. *The Sea in Spring* for shakuhachi and koto is perhaps his most famous work. (It has also been written for violin and koto.) One can hear in it the gentle sound of the rippling waves in Japan's Inland Sea, the call of the gulls soaring overhead, and the oars of small fishing boats plying the water on a spring day.

INTERMISSION (15 minutes)

Part II:

Gaku (Bliss) (1988)

by Tadao Sawai (1937-1997)

koto solo

Yōko Nishi

The kotoist and composer Tadao Sawai began study of the koto as a child under the tutelage of his father, who played the shakuhachi. His progress was swift and soon he mastered even the complex classic *Midare (Disarray)*. While still in high school he began to compose for the koto. After graduating from Tokyo University of the Arts, where he specialized in traditional music, he began his career as a professional koto performer and became a prolific composer of dynamic new koto works based on traditional principles but influenced by 20th-century Western music. In 1964 he joined several shakuhachi players to form the *Minzoku Ongaku no Kai* (Traditional Japanese Music Association) to perform new works for Hōgaku instruments. At the same time he expanded his own koto performances radically into popular, jazz, and Western classic genres. In the 1970s he began concert tours in the U.S. and Europe. He and his wife, the kotoist Kazue formed the Tadao Sawai Ensemble and the Sawai Koto Institute in Tokyo of which she remains head. The eminent kotoist Masayo Ishigure now heads the New York Sawai Koto Academy.

Tadao Sawai died young at age 59; but *Gaku (Bliss)* was composed a decade before his death. It is comprised of three parts: Perpetual Motion; Variations; and Rondo. He has written, "Music brings pleasure through its timbre and rhythm. It pervades one's whole body, flowing, spreading out, dancing gently, delicately, and at times trembling with passion."

Chikurai goshō (Bamboo Soundings in Five Movements)
(1965)

by Makoto Moroi (b. 1930)

shakuhachi solo

Kifū Mitsuhashi

Makoto Moroi, son of the well-known composer Saburō Moroi, was one of the first Japanese composers to introduce European-style avant-garde music to Japan in the 1950s soon after his graduation in 1952 from the Tokyo College of Music. His reputation was made from his compositions for piano, violin, and Western orchestra, and he is one of the first in Japan to experiment with 12-tone composition. It was not until 1960, when in his 30s, that he became interested in traditional Japanese music and composed for one of the great masters of the shakuhachi. Though works for Western instruments dominate his output, he has composed several works for shakuhachi as well as for the koto and the shō.

Chikurai goshō was a definitive work that placed the traditional instrument, the shakuhachi, squarely in the arena of modern music for which Moroi was famous. *Chikurai* means both the sounds of wind in a bamboo grove and the sounds produced by the bamboo shakuhachi. He composed this work at Funda-in (Hall of the Fragrant Buddha) at Sesshūji Temple, part of the Tōfukuji Monastery complex in Kyoto, famous among other things for its bamboo groves. The piece is divided into five parts (*goshō*) which carry throughout both the resonance of the meditational Buddhist origins of shakuhachi playing in Japan and a high level of modern musical innovation on the instrument. The first movement takes the name of the hall and is entitled *Funda* or Fragrant Buddha. The second movement, *Sōchiku* or Fresh Young Bamboo, is

straightforward and airy like a young bamboo grove and utilizes a fresh new tremolo technique. The third movement, *Kyorai*, is slow, serene and deep. It echoes the quiet of a mind empty of thought. The fourth movement, *Hachiku*, or Splitting the Bamboo, utilizes a staccato technique new to shakuhachi music and depicts the cutting down of the bamboo as if destroying illusions. In this movement the performer has considerable leeway to express his own skill. The finale, *Meian*, or Light and Darkness, is a culmination and recapitulation of the four preceding movements, all of which are resonant with Zen-like approaches to human stages of spiritual struggle and enlightenment. The words “Light and Darkness” comprise human existence and are also the name of a Kyoto Temple (pronounced Myōanji) famous among *Komusō* shakuhachi-playing monks. The mendicant collection bags worn by itinerant shakuhachi-playing monks were inscribed on the front with the words *Meian* (Light and Darkness).

Yūkyū no shirabe (Meditation on Eternity) (2001)

by Yukio Tanaka

for Satsuma biwa
and voice

Yukio Tanaka

Biwa master Yukio Tanaka composed this work reflecting on a poem written by the 12th-century Heike clan warrior, Tsunemasa, who was also known as a superb player of the biwa. Tsunemasa, with other Heike warriors and entourage, had fled Kyoto, and died in 1185 in the battle of Dan no ura memorialized in the work performed in Part I of tonight’s program. Tsunemasa’s poem is recorded in the epic work, *Tales of the Heike*.

Tabi koromo

Yona yona sode o katashikite
omoeba ware wa
tōku yukinamu

On the Road

Night after night, alone in a half-empty bed
I ruminate.
How very far away from home I've come.

November Steps, Number Ten (1967)

by Tōru Takemitsu (1930-1996)

for biwa

Yukio Tanaka

and shakuhachi

Kifū Mitsuhashi

(from *November Steps* for full orchestra,
biwa and shakuhachi)

There is no better way to honor Tōru Takemitsu, one of Japan's greatest modern composers, than to perform at least a part of *November Steps*, which is among the most extraordinary and influential of his voluminous body of works. Leonard Bernstein, then Music Director of the New York Philharmonic, had heard and admired an earlier work by Takemitsu that incorporated Japanese instruments; as a

result he commissioned 37-year-old Takemitsu to write a work for the 125th anniversary celebratory concert of the Philharmonic in 1967. On November 9th, under the baton of a young Seiji Ozawa, and starring Kinshi Tsuruta on her biwa (see *Dan no ura* above) and Katsuya Yokoyama on his shakuhachi, *November Steps*, for full orchestra, biwa and shakuhachi, was performed at Lincoln Center to great acclaim.

The Philharmonic orchestra members had never before heard the music of a biwa or shakuhachi. The deliberate rough rubbing of the plectrum along the strings to create *sawari* that dramatically punctuates intense moments, or the shakuhachi's strong audible breathing techniques that produced what sounds like random gusts of wind in a bamboo grove were anathema to these players of instruments that had been designed in modern times deliberately to eliminate all possible so-called extraneous emanations. Here Japanese instruments reveled in such sounds. It is said that at the first warm-up of biwa and shakuhachi at rehearsal there were some patronizing titters from among the orchestra members. But in full rehearsal at the conclusion of the cadenza part, the reaction turned to astounded awe, and spontaneous applause broke out among the orchestra members, who recognized they were hearing superb musicians.

Takemitsu divided the orchestra on stage into two parts, like petals around the stamens of a flower, enclosing the centrally placed biwa and shakuhachi. He said the very different natures of the musical sounds ideally elicited from the Japanese instruments on the one hand and Euro-American instruments on the other should be displayed, not erased, when united in a composition, and he admitted that it takes an unusual composer to be able to achieve that. He said that Western music walks a linear line like the horizon, whereas the music of the shakuhachi and biwa crosses that line at right angles and emerges vertically

and organically like the branching of trees. He hoped to achieve a new shape to the orchestral sound and to create many layers of music rising into the towering space of the hall.

Although he had scored it in 5-line Western fashion, he actually drew a visual map-like drawing to illustrate his conception of how it should be played, and left the Japanese performers great freedom of innovation for pace and for the key *ma*, or momentary silent pauses. The cadenza has been registered now as an independent piece entitled "*November Steps, Number Ten.*" The two master soloists produced a version so superb, and *November Steps* has since been performed hundreds of times by many orchestras but with the same two Japanese masters, that in subsequent performances flexible freedom seemed to solidify into the Tsuruta/Yokoyama version, which has become almost fixed into a classic form.

Columbia's new Japanese Gagaku-Hōgaku Academic and Ensemble Performance Program, in which we are nurturing new generations of instrumentalists and composers for these magnificent instruments, takes inspiration from pioneers such as Tōru Takemitsu, who brought these superb instruments into the mainstream of our Western world. He was a kind and selfless supporter for many years and we have kept him very much in the forefront of our thoughts as we enter this next era where Japanese music is taking its place center stage with Western instruments. Who better to be our musical patron saint.

-Program notes by Barbara Ruch-

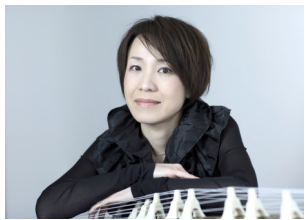
MUSICIANS' PROFILES

(in alphabetical order)



Kifū Mitsuhashi was born in 1950 in Kunitachi, a suburb of Tokyo. As a child he played the violin and trumpet and grew up in a world of Western music. When at 18 he turned to the shakuhachi, it is fair to say he became one of the earliest players to treat the shakuhachi not as a tool of spiritual enlightenment but purely as an instrument to produce music. Nonetheless he immersed himself in studying the classic Kinko-style and mastered its repertoire under Sōfū Sasaki. In 1972 he graduated from the NHK Japanese Traditional Music School in Tokyo and two years later began study with the shakuhachi master Chikugai Okamoto of the Fuke sect's classic Meian Sōryū school. From that point on Mitsuhashi has almost yearly been awarded the highest music prizes for his shakuhachi solo and group performances and his recordings. He has been invited to perform solo and with orchestras world-wide, and been honored by the Japanese government. In recent years he has been active as well, as a producer of numerous music festivals and concerts and has issued many outstanding shakuhachi CDs. Mitsuhashi is head of the Shakuhachi Kifū School of Kinko-style performance in Tokyo.

In the current Carnegie Hall *JapanNYC Festival* he was selected to be the shakuhachi soloist with the Saito Kinen Orchestra under the baton of Seiji Ozawa in this week's full performance of Tōru Takemitsu's *November Steps*, from which *Number Ten* (the cadenza) he performs for us tonight with Yukio Tanaka on the biwa.



Yoko Nishi, was first given her first lessons on the koto at age four. At age 12 she began formal study with the eminent koto masters Tadao and Kazue Sawai, and already at age 16 became a prize winner in the 1980 All

Japan Sankyoku Traditional Music Concours. After graduating from the Traditional Music Program of Tokyo University of the Arts, she performed at an event organized by the Imperial Household Agency at the Imperial Palace for the Japanese Emperor and Empress as a representative from the university. Her first album appeared in 1999, and since then she has developed her own unique interpretations of famous koto masterpieces by Michio Miyagi and Tadao Sawai while collaborating on works for Western instruments by John Cage, Yūji Takahashi and other modern Western music composers. In 2008 Nishi performed at an event organized by the Tokyo Governor at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. She was then the same year invited to the London Chelsea Festival and held solo concerts in Washington D.C., New York, and Chicago.

In 2009 she performed in India, Switzerland, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Taiwan and had solo concerts in Budapest, Hungary as well as in Germany (Berlin, Koln, Frankfurt, Munich), and performed at the 2010 Shanghai Expo. Her musical activities are many and include performing reconstructed ancient musical instruments from the Shōsōin Repository in Nara that were predecessors to the modern koto. She performs with orchestras, engages in improvisational play with artists both in Japan and abroad, and collaborates with artists in various fields including Japanese traditional musicians, artists, authors and poets, and holds recital series. In her own compositions for the koto she is always focused on what she considers the fundamental essence of each koto's individual voice, both

in rendering ancient traditional works and modern pieces. She has released two solo albums.

Nishi is a visiting professor at Kansai University near Osaka and also trains private koto students. This fall semester of 2010 she is at Columbia University as Visiting Resident Fellow, where she is investigating the thousand-year history and traditions of koto music as it evolved to the present, as well as participating in Columbia's new Gagaku-Hōgaku academic and performance program.



James Nyoraku Schlefer is a leading performer and teacher of the shakuhachi in New York City. He received the *Dai-Shi-Han* (shakuhachi Grand Master certificate) in 2001, one of only a handful of non-Japanese to

receive this high-level recognition, and a second *Shi-Han* certificate from Mujūan Dōjō in Kyoto in 2008. Schlefer began his career as a flutist, earning a Master's degree in the Western flute and musicology from Queens College. It was during that time in 1979 that he first heard the shakuhachi. There was a musical soiree in New York's famous Dakota residence hosted by one of the professors at the CUNY Graduate Center. Following the recital of a koto, shakuhachi, and shamisen ensemble Schlefer, as a flutist, was offered the opportunity to try playing the bamboo

flute, an effort that met with total failure. This encounter led to his now three-decade-long pursuit to master the shakuhachi. His first teacher was New Yorker Ronnie Nyogaku Seldin. In Japan he subsequently worked with Reibo Aoki, Katsuya Yokoyama (of *November Steps* fame), Yoshio Kurahashi, Yoshinobu Taniguchi, and tonight's master artist Kifū Mitsuhashi.

Schlefer currently teaches music history at the City University of New York and is head of the Kyo-Shin-An shakuhachi teaching studio and music innovation center in New York. He is a member of the Japanese music group *Ensemble East* which performs traditional and modern music for Japanese instruments, including the shamisen and koto. An exceptional shakuhachi soloist, he has appeared in several orchestral settings including the New York City Opera and Karl Jenkin's *Requiem*. He has performed and lectured at the Juilliard School, Manhattan and Eastman Schools of Music, and widely in universities on the East coast and at music festivals in the U.S., South America, Asia, and Europe. As a composer he has written many solo pieces for shakuhachi and compositions for string quartets and shakuhachi, as well as for other Japanese instruments. His recordings include *Wind Heart* (which traveled 120,000,000 miles aboard the Space Station MIR), *Solstice Spirit* (1998), *Flare Up* (2002), and *In the Moment* (2008). Schlefer is an advisor to Columbia's new Gagaku-Hōgaku curriculum and performance program.



Yukio Tanaka grew up playing the guitar. He first encountered the biwa at age 19 when by chance he heard Tōru Takemitsu's work *Eclipse* for biwa and shakuhachi. For the young guitarist, the sound of the biwa was startlingly fresh, a whole mysterious new world never encountered before, and the experience led him to study how to play

it. Completely out of the traditional music loop, he first was at a loss how to find where to purchase a biwa or how to find a teacher. He accidentally located the very master biwa artist who had played Takemitsu's *Eclipse*, Kinshi Tsuruta. In those days there were few young people interested in the biwa and to Tanaka's astonishment, Tsuruta happily agreed to teach him. Deeply concerned that the biwa repertoire be taught to the next generation, she taught him with great care, sometimes taking a full year on a single piece. Although she was a woman in a largely male world she was unquestionably a musical genius, and her biwa-playing technique represented the highest level in Japan. She insisted that one cannot produce a fine performance until one masters how to create and control the *sawari*, that unique reverberation produced by the plectrum striking with an interrupting rubbing sound that then resonates in several strings at once and that punctuates climactic moments. It was a time when new music was just beginning to be composed for Japanese instruments. Since Tanaka could read Western scores, and most new music was scored in this 5-line Western notation, he found many opportunities to perform new music for the biwa, and his depth as a biwa artist deepened.

In 1973 Tanaka graduated from the NHK Japanese Traditional Music School, whereupon, as a mature biwa artist, he began to perform the biwa in various performance genre and ensembles around the world. He became concerned that in assembly with other instruments in a

large modern concert hall the biwa's projection often seemed too small, and was swallowed up in environments different from the venues from which it had originated. To overcome this problem he became involved in redesigning biwa construction.

Since 1992 Tanaka has been the foremost biwa artist to play in Tōru Takemitsu's *November Steps* with orchestras throughout Europe, America, South East Asia, and Japan, and is known as a specialist in other Takemitsu works that incorporate the biwa. Since the 2000s, he has also brought to audiences traditional biwa works from the medieval *Tales of the Heike* and yearly throughout Japan is celebrated at concerts devoted solely to his performances. Tanaka serves as chief biwa advisor and instrumentalist in NHK's famous yearly historical "Taiga" drama series.

Tanaka now teaches at Tokyo College of Music as well as his own studio and has many biwa students even in their teens and 20s. He heads the Tsuruta Biwa Association and the Japan Association of Biwa Music. Many recordings of his music are available on CDs.

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