

Between Canons: Formal Process as Intersection of East and West in the Music of Toru Takemitsu

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Toru Takemitsu is regarded as one of the most influential and important Japanese composers of the twentieth century. His compositions have entered the postwar canon of art music largely because of their cross-cultural significance. In contrast to the generation of Japanese composers at the turn of the twentieth century, who merely emulated the French or German style of composition, Takemitsu was able to appropriate and adapt features from both Eastern and Western traditions to create his own unique compositional voice. Takemitsu's music, on the one hand, does employ Western compositional materials and techniques, and as such his style is related to the contemporary Western musical canon through figures such as Debussy and Messiaen. On the other hand, Takemitsu's music is also distinctly "Japanese" in character. This results not only from his employment of some of the "sound" of traditional Japanese music, but as well from his use of "form as process," a concept which draws upon Japanese aesthetics and the Japanese mode of consciousness.

In this paper, I discuss how I perceive form in Takemitsu's music, using his *Requiem for Strings* (1957) and *Piano Distance* (1961) as examples. Starting with the premise that there are no pre-existing standard formal types in Takemitsu's music, I analyze these two pieces from the perspective of what Judy Lochhead has called "form as a processive entity," which I relate to the definition of "the Japanese consciousness" given by Japanese scholar Masao Maruyama. Maruyama identifies three basic concepts that lay the foundation of the Japanese mode of thought: *naru* ("to become"), *tsugitsugi* ("in succession"), and *ikioi* ("force"). When combined, the notions of *naru*, *tsugitsugi*, and *ikioi* become "force that becomes one after another." With "force" interpreted as the idea of process, I argue that this phrase describes the principle governing the creation of form in Takemitsu's music.

I address process-oriented form in terms of how segments of music relate to each other, and how they emerge through associations to past musical events. My analyses of these two pieces reveal an opposition to the canonical norms of musical form. According to the Western concept of form, music is developmental, is presented in discrete internal sections, and is goal-oriented. In both these works by Takemitsu, however, a sense of development is largely absent, even though musical materials do undergo variation. Further, the individual formal sections of both works seem to merge into one another continuously, rather than having a clear boundary or frame. Finally, rather than being goal-oriented, Takemitsu's music consists of recurring patterns that create a sense of circularity.

Although the *Requiem* and *Piano Distance* were composed only four years apart, their musical styles seem very different from one another on the surface. The *Requiem*, for example, has an obvious distinction between melody and supporting harmony, whereas no such distinction exists in *Piano Distance*. But despite such differences, both pieces share features in common with traditional Japanese music, which expands in time through a perpetual transition between repeated events, while lacking a defined formal framework.