

Takemitsu, Tōru (1930-1996): brief presentation of his writings

Takemitsu regularly wrote throughout his life: concert programs, correspondences, articles for musical and artistic reviews, autobiographical and literary texts... His writings are thus numerous. After his death in 1996, the Tokyo publishing house Shinchōsha gathered almost all of his texts in five volumes, each of which is about four hundred pages long (*Chosakushū [Écrits]* (2000)). The interviews, most of which are not included in *Chosakushū*, also represent an important part of his writings.

In the artistic whirlwind that animated the post-war city of Tōkyō, Takemitsu frequented musicians as well as artists of other fields, among them the poets Shūzō Takiguchi and Shuntarō Tanikawa or the writers Kōbō Abe and Kenzaburō Ōe. It was in this context that he understood the importance of making his voice heard. Takemitsu has always attached a particular importance to writing. The fact that he himself funded the publication of his first book, *Takemitsu Tōru←1930.....∞* (1964), and the short story *Kotsugetsu – arui ha a honey moon [La lune d'os ou La lune de miel]* (1973) testifies his eagerness in this line of work.

Takemitsu's writings are also linked to his career as a composer. The 1960s marked a turning point in his career, particularly with the success of November Steps for shakuhachi, biwa and orchestra at its premiere in New-York in 1967. In the 1970s, Takemitsu was one of the major figures of the Japanese musical scene. From that time onwards, his works as well as his interviews were regularly published. His books mainly contain written articles for magazines or newspapers. From the late 1950s onwards, Takemitsu wrote articles for the major Japanese daily newspapers (the Yomiuri Shimbun, the Asahi Shimbun or the Mainichi Shimbun). His texts, which appeared sporadically in the 1960s, increased over the years. He ended up writing a column for the Mainichi Shimbun in the 1990s, writing an average of one article per month.

The number of interviews he has done is impressive: a dozen books dedicated to the interviews have been published so far, not counting the numerous interviews published in books and magazines. Nonetheless, it is the diversity of the personalities with whom Takemitsu has interviewed that makes this corpus unique and not their sheer amount. Here are a few names: the composers John Cage, Iannis Xenakis et György Ligeti; "classical" musicians Seiji Ozawa, Simon Rattle and Michel Béroff ; jazz musicians George Russell, Keith Jarrett et Toshiko Akiyama ; rock musician David Sylvian ; traditional Japanese musicians Watazumi Dōso (shakuhachi) and Seigō Tsutsumi (biwa) ; sculptor Isamu Noguchi; writers Kōbō Abe and Kenzaburō Ōe; poet Shuntarō Tanikawa; film-maker Akira Kurosawa; film critic Shigehiko Hasumi; and psychiatrist Bin Kimura. This list testifies to the many

and diverse friendships Takemitsu has had throughout his career, as most of his interlocutors are either people with whom he has carried out projects (Ozawa, Rattle, Kurosawa, Abe, Ōe and Tanikawa) or artists who have influenced his thinking and music (Cage, Ligeti, Russell, Noguchi).

If one were to attempt a classification, most of Takemitsu's writings would fall within the genre of the essay. They deal with very diverse topics: music (Western music, traditional Japanese music, jazz...); other artistic disciplines (cinema, painting, literature...); musical and artistic personalities; nature; social problems and other more specific themes such as cooking. Takemitsu has also left behind a few literary essays. In [*Chosakushū*](#), there are three short-stories and seven poems. Most of these poems are in fact the lyrics of songs he created for movies or plays. His short stories describe very special worlds and are often both fictional and autobiographical.

His reflections on music are essentially aesthetic. For Takemitsu, writing is not a means of theorising or demonstration, but a means of artistic expression in the same way musical work is. Thus, he often talks about the motifs or scales used in such and such a piece, without detailing how he used them. Above all, these texts suggest a certain state of mind for listening to or playing his piece. Thus, in his texts filled with puns and metaphors, it seems that Takemitsu takes care of his writing to give the reader the possibility to interpret them in a “polysemous” way – one of the terms that appear most often in his writings.

Takemitsu's writing style has evolved somewhat similarly to his musical style. The literary style of the 1950s and 1960s, which is both sought-after and daring, reflects the image of a young composer in search of his language through various musical and artistic experiences. However, musical works written from the 1970s onwards, which show a certain maturity, gradually present a more homogeneous and conventional style. The same is true of his texts, which gradually evolve towards a simple and refined style and are generally short (an average of two or three pages), while the writings of the 1960s are of varying length.

The quality of his writing has been noticed by many personalities including Kenzaburō Ōe, who considers that “Takemitsu's texts are the best among those written by today's artists” (in the preface written for [*Oto, chinmoku to hakariaeru hodo ni \[Le Son, aussi intense que le silence\]*](#) (1971), p. 13). The collective work *Ongaku no techō - Takemitsu Tōru [Le Cahier de musique - Tōru Takemitsu]* (1981), mainly composed of texts written about Takemitsu by about forty personalities from different disciplines (music, anthropology, painting, cinema, literature...), shows that these authors knew the composer's writings as well as, or even more, than his musical works. Indeed, his writings which are never solely addressed to his musicians, acquired a certain notoriety in intellectual circles. Nonetheless, they are not well known outside Japan. The language barrier is the major cause of this. Right before the composer's trespassing, an English volume entitled [*Confronting Silence*](#) was published and it remains the main reference in the West. But this collection of one hundred and fifty pages is far from representing all of his writings. The French edition of [*Écrits*](#), published by Symétrie in 2018, provides translations of a much larger body of texts.

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