

# Program Notes

by April L. Racana

**Sun. January 22** The 888th Orchard Hall Subscription Concert

**Fri. January 27** The 889th Suntory Hall Subscription Concert

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**Tōru Takemitsu** (1930-1996)

## Ceremonial - An Autumn Ode – (ca. 8 min)

Having spent the first years of his life living overseas in China due to his father's work, Takemitsu was exposed to Western music (his father apparently had an extensive jazz collection) that otherwise would have been off-limits to him in his home country, given restrictions in Japan at the time. Once he returned to Japan, it wasn't long before he would be conscripted into service for the war, at age fourteen. It was while working for the military efforts that he again got a glimpse of music from the outside, this time a French tune, "Parlez Moi d'Amour", (which apparently was played for him by a superior in secret on a gramophone with a makeshift bamboo needle). This music moved him so deeply, that once the war was over, he was determined to make music (and composing) his life's pursuit.

With American troops occupying Japan, the young teenager now had access to even more 'outside' music via the radio from the American base, and became engrossed in listening to Western music as much as possible while he was bed-ridden with an illness. Having had no formal musical training, other than a short time studying with Yasuji Kiyose, Takemitsu was basically self-taught in pursuing this newfound ambition to

become a composer. In 1951 he co-founded the Experimental Workshop together with other artists of various disciplines, where he could explore his avante-garde approach to music composition.

After composing several smaller works in the 1950's, Takemitsu composed his first orchestral work, *Requiem*, in 1957. It was two years later, in 1959 that Igor Stravinsky happened to be visiting Japan, and while in a studio listening to various pieces by other Japanese composers, Takemitsu's *Requiem* was played by accident. The music immediately caught Stravinsky's attention to the point that he requested that the music be allowed to play so he could hear the remainder of the work. Commenting on the 'intensity' of the music, Stravinsky asked to meet the young composer and continued to share his interest in Takemitsu with others after returning overseas. Consequently this first orchestral work of Takemitsu became the piece that would open doors for him, gaining commissions from Western groups from that point on.

Takemitsu was always open to new ideas, and as such one might note influences from other composers such as Messiaen, Webern and John Cage.

From the beginning he experimented with sound, juxtaposed with silences, improvising and creating some of the most unusual combinations of textures and tonalities. The formation of the Experimental Workshops (*Jikken Kobo*) was key to promoting these explorations. And in 1967 he received a commission from the New York Philharmonic Orchestra on the occasion of their 125th anniversary.

It was at this point that Takemitsu had begun incorporating traditional Japanese musical instruments into his works. The inspiration for many of his works came from nature, and in particular the nuances of a traditional Japanese garden: "I love gardens.... There one can walk freely, pause to view the entire garden, or gaze at a single tree, plant, rock and sand.... changes, constant changes." *November Steps* (1967) was written to highlight the sounds of the biwa and shakuhachi, while *Distance* (1972) paired the oboe and shō, and *In An Autumn Garden* (1973) explored the timbres of the gagaku ensemble.

As his compositional style developed in the 1970's and on into the 1980's, Takemitsu began to explore the theme of water, including *Toward the Sea and Rain Tree* (1981), *Rain Coming* (1982), *riverrun* (1984), and *I Hear the Water Dreaming* (1987). Eventually Takemitsu's interest in incorporating Japanese instruments into his works lessened, writing only one more work in this genre in 1992, *Ceremonial - An Autumn Ode* for shō and orchestra, and the one being performed for this concert series.

The composer also returned to an idea he had used in earlier works,

where the theatrical positioning of the musicians was nearly as important to the performance as the music itself. In this score, it is indicated that three pairs of flutes and oboes are positioned to the left and right of the stage, as well as behind the audience. This arrangement is similar to one he used for *In An Autumn Garden* nearly two decades earlier. In addition, Takemitsu includes some of the Dorian themed excerpts from this earlier work as main thematic ideas in his *Autumn Ode*.

Takemitsu was known for highlighting the unique instrumental tone color combinations in his works, and this continued into his later works. This also meant that his ability to write skillfully for specific solo instruments was well-known as well, often composing for musicians he had a personal connection with. The work being performed for this concert series - *Ceremonial* - was written for the then young Japanese shō musician Mayumi Miyata.

And although Takemitsu would no longer directly compose for traditional Japanese instruments, he continued to incorporate the aesthetics from his native country, both musical and non-musical. As Anthony Burton wrote: "... at a deeper level, his music reflects a Japanese aesthetic in its avoidance of regular rhythms, fast tempos, symmetrical forms, and strongly contrasting blocks of sound, in favour of a slowly and organically unfolding flow suggested by meditation, dreams, landscape, weather, the elements, and the seasons." (Oxford)

**Instrumentation:** 3 flutes (1~3rd doubling on piccolo), 3 oboes, 3 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, percussion (vibraphone, glockenspiel, antique cymbals), harp, celesta, strings, solo shō

## Anton Bruckner (1824-1896)

### Symphony No. 9 in D minor, WAB 109 (Edition Nowak)

- I. Feierlich, misterioso (ca. 25 min)
- II. Scherzo. Bewegt, lebhaft ; Trio. Schnell (ca. 11 min)
- III. Adagio. Langsam feierlich (ca. 27 min)

Bruckner had begun work on what would be his final symphony as many as nine years before his death. However, due to his inclination to make multiple revisions of many of his works, it would ultimately leave this Ninth Symphony unfinished, though he is known to have worked on it even up until the day he died. The greatest distraction came from revisions to his Eighth Symphony, which he had begun composing in 1884. After having presented the completed work to the renowned conductor, Henry Levi, and then receiving strong criticism from him, Bruckner was thrown back into a state of self-doubt after having had strong success with his Seventh Symphony. This set him to working on revisions to his penultimate symphony and kept him from continuing work on his last.

For the next three years Bruckner would continue to revise his Eighth Symphony as well as some of his earlier works. But having had made sketches of two movements of the Ninth Symphony, he finally began to re-focus his efforts on this work in 1891. His health was already beginning to deteriorate at this point, however he was able to finish the first movement in 1892, with the second movement (*Scherzo*) completed the following year. The third movement (*Adagio*) was completed in 1894.

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Over the next year and a half, Bruckner would compile almost two hundred pages of sketches for the final movement in his efforts to complete this work before his death. It is believed that the composer himself realized his time was short and suggested substituting his *Te Deum* in place of the final movement should he not be able to complete the movement himself. Instead, there have been several attempts to complete the fourth movement from the numerous sketches that were left.

In addition, there have been a number of editions that have been published over the years. The first by Bruckner's protégé, Ferdinand Loewe, in the early 1900's, contained a great many editorial liberties that were later disputed by scholars. Later editions attempted to restore the composer's original intentions, with the Nowak edition being performed for this concert series. The premiere of Bruckner's Ninth Symphony was conducted by Loewe in 1903 in Vienna, using his own edited version. Most modern performances present later editions with only the first three movements of Bruckner's final symphony, which had been dedicated "*dem lieben Gott*", reflecting his deep devotion to God. Concluding the work with the *Adagio* aptly brings to a close not only his final symphony but also what the composer may have referred to as his 'Farewell to Life.'

**Instrumentation:** 3 flutes, 3 oboes, 3 clarinets, 3 bassoons, 8 horns (5-8th doubling on wagner tuba), 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, strings