

**Music From Japan Festival 2003**  
Naoyuki Miura, artistic director  
presented in association with The Japan Federation of Composers

## Keiko Nosaka, koto

Tuesday, February 18, 2003, 8 pm  
First Congregational Church

### PROGRAM

Keiko Nosaka Tsugaru (1986)

Ryohei Hirose Ukifune (2002)

Akira Ifukube Ballata Sinfonica (2001)  
for treble and bass 25-string kotos  
with Mizuyo Komiya, bass koto

### INTERMISSION

Hirose Variation on Midare (1980)

Ifukube Pipa Xing (1999)

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Tsugaru (1986)

#### **Keiko Nosaka (b. 1938)**

The Tsugaru shamisen has a distinctive earthy sound, richly evocative of the rigorous climate and landscape that characterize the Tsugaru region, which is located in the northern prefecture of Aomori. Tsugaru shamisen master Chikuzan Takahashi's music provided the starting point for my piece. The season is winter and, in Chikuzan's words, "There ain't a thing but snow and wind and waves . . ." So I thought of that land and I thought about human beings and the severity of human life, and then finally the coming of spring, and I composed this work. It premiered in May of 1986, in Seoul, South Korea.

—Keiko Nosaka

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Ukifune (2002)

#### **Ryohei Hirose (b. 1930)**

Ukifune represents my first attempt at composing for 25-string koto. I have worked with Keiko Nosaka since she performed in my debut as a composer more than 30 years ago. This is, however, the first time I have composed a solo work for her.

I am greatly indebted to—and have been for a long time—Akira Ifukube, whose solid, down to earth, and very human music has exerted a great influence on my own.

“Ukifune” (“Drifting Boat”) is the name of a chapter toward the end of the famed *Genji Monogatari* by Murasaki Shikibu

(c. 978–1014). The *Tales of Genji*, one of the first and certainly among the finest novels in the world, centers on the Heian imperial court in the early 11th century as experienced through the amorous adventures and subtle interactions of Prince Genji. “Ukifune” actually occurs after the passing of the handsome and sensitively romantic prince, and this latter section of the *Tales* takes on a rather somber, reflective tone mirroring a keen yearning toward a more transcendent and philosophical existence than could be found within the material and sensual concerns of court life. Uji-gawa, the lone river that flows from Lake Biwa (near Kyoto), at some times rushes forward urgently, at other times may be deeply muddied, and always seems to harbor the contradictions and struggles, euphoria and remorse, anxieties and thirst for purity that are part and parcel of the human condition. Even now the surface of its waters shimmers with the moon at dawn and carries the floating snowflakes that have danced down from the heavens.

—Ryohei Hirose

**Ryohei Hirose** was born in Hokkaido, Japan, in 1930, and studied composition at Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music with Tomojiro Ikenouchi and Akio Yashiro. His works include instrumental, choral, and electronic compositions, as well as pieces for renaissance or traditional Japanese instruments. The *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra* (1979), premiered by Yuriko Kuronuma and the Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra under Tadaaki Otaka, received its American debut in Carnegie Hall at the *Music From Japan* concert in January 1981.

Hirose’s career is marked by several major periods of development. After scoring a composition for traditional Japanese instruments to accompany a 1963 drama by Yoshie Hotta, he received a succession of commissions for works incorporating various combinations of Japanese instruments. He became something of a champion of the shakuhachi during this time, when other well-known composers like Makoto Moroi and Toru Takemitsu were developing a curiosity about the instrument, but Hirose, who wished to return the shakuhachi to what he felt to be its essential roots, was clearly following a different path.

In the 1970s, he began to move toward a more western approach, writing for solo percussion, harp, celeste, piano, cello, and viola, among other instruments. This new dimension came to occupy an equal position in his work with the composing for traditional instruments. In fact, they were opposite sides of the same coin: the voice of the solo cello for Hirose is fully capable of singing in timbres recognizable to the traditional Japanese inner ear. An interest in shamanism and deepening spirituality at this time received a sharp boost from two trips to India (1972 and 1973), reflected in a group of compositions during the following years, many of which have Sanskrit titles. Since then, Hirose’s music has continued to mirror what seems to some the rough, untamed climate of his native Hokkaido. Through his use of Japanese instruments in a western idiom, one can hear Hirose hurling himself in opposition to various western moral concepts.

Hirose has been awarded numerous prizes both in Japan and abroad. Among these are the Otaka Prize, the National Arts Festival Prize, the IMC (Paris) Prize, and the Festival D’Automne Prize.

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**Ballata Sinfonica (2001)**

**Akira Ifukube (b. 1914)**

In the summer of 2000, I was asked by Keiko Nosaka to write a piece for her recital commemorating the 10th anniversary of the creation of the 25-string koto. She said it did not matter to her whether the piece was an original or an arrangement. I recalled what one critic had said when the recording of *Ballata Sinfonica* was released by Victor Japan: the concept of the work reminded him of the Japanese koto. I thought it might be possible to arrange that work for 25-string koto and promised her I would give it a try. It is very difficult to arrange an orchestral work for two kotos, especially because a symphony in sonata form is full of modulations, for which the koto is manifestly unsuited. Such an arrangement would require the frequent shifting of the bridges and the repeated use of difficult harmonics. For a while, I could not make up my mind to do it, but Nosaka’s enthusiasm for challenging the limitations of the instrument overruled my misgivings.

As expected, there were many problems along the way. I was not satisfied with my use of the instrument in the arrangement, so for verification I wrote the beginning part anew and had it played and recorded on a mini-disk. When I heard the disk, I decided to scrap the arrangement and write the whole work from the beginning as a composition for two kotos. The end result is this piece. It requires the absolute ultimate in technique, which is

displayed brilliantly by Nosaka and Komiya. I admire their performance from the bottom of my heart. I could not be more obliged to them.

—Akira Ifukube

**Akira Ifukube** was born in Hokkaido, Japan, in 1914, and first studied forestry at Hokkaido University. While serving as official forester in a small village at the eastern tip of Hokkaido, he composed his first orchestral work, *Japanese Rhapsody* (1935), which won first prize in the Tcherpnin Competition in Paris and was premiered by the Boston Symphony in the following year. This paved the way for his study under the tutelage of Alexander Tcherpnin, who was responsible for the premiere of Ifukube's first ballet, *Bon Dance*, in Vienna in 1938. The same year, a piano suite was played at the ISCM Festival in Venice. His orchestral works include *Ballata Sinfonica* (1943), *Rhapsody for Violin and Orchestra* (1951, an award-winning piece at the International Contest for Composers in Genoa), and *Lauda Concertata* (performed at Carnegie Hall by Keiko Abe in the 1981 Music From Japan concert).

Although many of Ifukube's works are Japanese folk music-based (use of Japanese pentatonic scale, etc.), they have a largeness about them that is continental or cross-cultural in feeling. His Hokkaido upbringing and greater experiences with northern Asia and

the Eurasian continent led him into a more expansive, pan-Asian style. In the period before World War II, Ifukube—as a scientist—was attracted to the more scientifically objective, serialist styles that were gaining ascendancy in western musical circles. But with the end of the war and the accompanying disillusionment, he returned to his earlier track and emerged as a leader in a new kind of Asian modernism.

In addition to his work as a composer, Ifukube joined the faculty at the Tokyo College of Music in 1974, serving as president beginning in 1976. He has published *Orchestration*, a 1,000-page book on theory. The Japanese government has decorated him with the Order of Culture and the Order of the Sacred Treasure.

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### **Variation on Midare (1980)**

#### **Hirose**

Both Ukifune and Midare were inspired by the city of Kyoto after I moved there to teach at Kyoto University of Music and Arts. Midare, as created in the early 17th century by Yatsushashi Kengyo, is a standard in the classical 13-string koto repertory, performed by every student of the instrument. On taking up residence in Kyoto, near the Shogo-in Temple, I was excited to find that Yatsushashi had lived in the very same place.

Here I have written a work for Keiko Nosaka's 25-string koto that is meant to hint at and retain some of the classical flavor of the original piece and yet stand as a modern composition following the first by almost 400 years.

—Ryohei Hirose

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### **Pipa Xing (1999)**

#### **Ifukube**

Although Keiko Nosaka's 25-string koto is a new development from the early 1990s, a 25-string zither by the name of *se* (Japanese, *shitsu*) was an important instrument of ancient China. Its muted elegance was often the subject of poetry. A legend concerning its origin can be found in the *Classic Poetry* (*Shi-jing*), while an excellent example of the instrument with its strings intact and movable bridges still standing was unearthed in 1972 from the Ma Wang Dui tomb in Changsa, Hunan Province, which dates back to the second century BC. Although the Japanese koto and the Chinese *se* differ somewhat in construction, it is of great significance that we can again hear the possibilities of the 25-string zither after so many centuries.

This piece was inspired by the narrative poem *Pipa Xing* ("The Lute Ballad") by the Chinese Tang-dynasty poet Bo Ju-yi (772–846). He is said to have written this poem when he was relegated to a minor governmental position in the provincial town of Jiujiang, on a branch of the Yangtze River. One autumn evening, he went to the riverside to bid farewell to a visiting friend. Exchanging parting cups of wine in the boat by which his friend was to depart, they heard the sound of someone playing a 4-stringed lute in a nearby boat. Reminded of the old performance style of the capital, the poet asked the player where she was from and learned that she had, indeed, once been a celebrated player at the Imperial court of Chang'an. Struck by their shared misfortune, he requested another piece, and she responded with a fast but mournful tune that left the men in tears as they listened by the light of the autumn moon reflected on the surface of the river.

The composition borrows some aspects of the form of the poem, and has a free three-part structure.

This piece was commissioned by Keiko Nosaka and was premiered in November 1999.

—Akira Ifukube

**Keiko Nosaka** (koto) graduated from the Department of Japanese Music at Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music and attended the post-graduate course at the same institution. In 1965, she held her first solo recital, and in the same year she joined Pro Musica Nipponia, continuing as an active member for 17 years. She was awarded the Arts Festival Encouragement Award in 1969 for her second recital, where she introduced the 20-string koto, a new instrument she herself had developed. An invitation to perform at the 1975 Menuhin Festival in Switzerland led to a series of recitals in Europe and the United States. The program included selections from the traditional repertoire as well as new works by Minoru Miki.

Nosaka returned to Europe in 1981 for a series of seven recitals in Spain, Holland, Belgium, and East Germany. From 1986–89, she gave 150 concerts throughout Japan in association with the theater group Jian-Jian. At her thirteenth recital in 1991, she played her newly developed 25-string koto for the first time. Nosaka received the Matsuo Award for Excellence in the Performing Arts the following year. In 1994, she began studying with the composer Akira Ifukube, leading to increased collaboration between the two artists. Her compositions included *Tsugaru* (1986), which she performs on today's program, *Shiki no Kyoku* ("Songs of the Four Seasons," 1991), and *Kaze no Oto* ("Sounds of the Wind," 1995). In 2000, her recital presentation of Akira Ifukube's *Pipa Xing* for 25-string koto earned her the Music Pen Club Award.

A lecture series—Keiko Nosaka Lectures: Listening to the Masters—began in 1998 and is held five times each year. Nosaka also received the Minister of Education Award for the Arts for 2001. At present, she is a member of the board of the Ikuta-school Association, and heads the group *Matsu no Mi Kai*.

**Mizuyo Komiya** (koto) was born in Tokyo and studied the koto from a young age with her mother and grandmother, Keiko and Soju Nosaka. She first appeared on stage at the age of four in a memorial concert of the group *Matsu no Mi Kai*, at the National Theatre, Tokyo. She entered the Berklee College of Music, Boston, in 1991. The following year, Komiya began the Contemporary Improvisation course at the New England Conservatory, majoring in the 25-string koto and taking courses in ethnomusicology and composition.

After graduating in 1995, Komiya returned to Japan and began her performance career. She received the Encouragement Award at a national *sokyoku* competition held in 1996, and took the name Eri Nosaka at a 1997 concert of *Matsu no Mi Kai*. Since then, she has studied *jiuta shamisen* with Satomi Fukami. Her first solo CD, *Color*, was released on the Pacific Moon label in 1998. Her second CD, *Lullaby*, was released in August 1999. She currently teaches at Tokyo Metropolitan Harumi Sogo Senior High School.

**Music From Japan**, founded in 1975 by Naoyuki Miura, continues to preside as the leading presenter of Japanese contemporary and traditional music in the United States. After two decades of touring throughout North and South America, Central Asia, and Japan, Music From Japan has presented nearly 400 works, including 42 world premieres and 32 self-commissions. Over the course of 28 years, approximately 100 Japanese composers have been showcased as well as many traditional Japanese pieces. Most recently, Music From Japan was honored for its efforts when artistic director Naoyuki Miura was awarded The Japan Foundation Special Prize in October 2001.

Music From Japan's Festival 2002 was marked by the organization's first endeavor in Tennessee. The *gagaku* group Ensemble Harena made its North American debut at the Middle Tennessee State University, premiering Kikuko Massumoto's *Divertimento*. This MFJ commission was also performed in Washington (DC), New York City, and Toronto. The Festival New York featured composer Akira Nishimura, including a newly commissioned 90-minute piano work premiered by the virtuosic Aki Takahashi.

Music from Japan's 25th anniversary season began with a commemorative tour to Central Asia in September 1999 and continued in February with the Festival 2000, featuring a world premiere of Hikaru Hayashi's commissioned work, *Lament*, composed for the Tokyo String Quartet. Additionally, MFJ presented the American recital debut of *Tsugaru shamisen* artist Chikuzan Takahashi, II. The season concluded with a celebration of Japanese orchestral music on November 9, 2000, at Carnegie Hall, with the Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra.

The American premiere in 1995 of Toshiro Mayuzumi's grand opera *Kinkakuji* was a co-production with New York City Opera as part of Music From Japan's 20th anniversary season. The following year, MFJ presented a lecture/demonstration and symposium featuring the *gagaku* ensemble Reigakusha at the Lincoln Center Festival '96. MFJ's annual festivals, symposia and other educational events have helped broaden the audience for Japanese music and encouraged the dialogue between composers and musicians in Japan and the United States. Music From Japan began the series of Featured Composer's Concerts in 1993 with Akira Miyoshi. These concerts have enjoyed wide acclaim, presenting works by such renowned representatives of Japanese music as Shin-ichiro Ikebe and Maki Ishii.

Music From Japan's Festival 2003 features Keiko Nosaka touring Annandale (NY), Washington (DC), Nashville (TN), and Berkeley (CA). In New York City, MFJ presented Keiko Nosaka as well as the *New Works* by Young

Japanese Composers concert. Commissioned works by Atsuhiko Gondai, Keiko Harada, Sunao Isaji, Misato Mochizuki, Mica Nozawa, and Toshiro Saruya received their world premieres at this venue.

Among the organization's citations are the prestigious Ongaku-no-tomo-sha Award (1985), as well as the Japanese Foreign Minister's Award and Best Producer of the Year Award, bestowed upon Naoyuki Miura in the same year. Miura also received the Sixth Nippon Steel Music Award and the 14th Kenzo Nakajima Music Award in 1996.

Music From Japan's compact disc, Music From Japan Vol. 1 (CMCD-1027), includes works by Yuji Takahashi and David Behrman. Both the commission for Takahashi's Tree and the production of this CD were made possible with generous support from the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust.

**The Resource Center for Japanese Music** opened its doors in 1994 as a repository of information on Japanese composers, performers, music, and culture. The Japanese Composer Database, accessible both on and off the Internet, serves the needs of the public as the most comprehensive database of its kind available in the English language. In addition to the database, the Center maintains a wide collection of printed and recorded research materials.

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