

# THE WORLD OF TORU TAKEMITSU

*Project Muse* Guide – April 2009



Southwest Chamber Music presents mesmerizing works from Toru Takemitsu's expansive "Waterscape Series." Students will be introduced to the Japanese concept of "Ma" – space, breath, pause and silence – through brilliantly colorful musical works.

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## ABOUT THE ARTISTS



**ALISON BJORKEDAL**, harp, received her bachelor's degree from the University of Oregon and her Doctorate of Musical Arts and Master's degree from the University of Southern California's Thornton School of Music. She performed the world premiere of William Kraft's *Encounters XII* and has recorded that work for an upcoming release with Southwest Chamber Music. She performed on the ensemble's *Complete Chamber Music of Carlos Chávez, Volume 4*, which was nominated for Best Classical Album in 2007 by Latin Grammy.



**LISA EDELSTEIN**, flute, is an active freelance musician in the Los Angeles area. She regularly plays with the Pasadena Symphony, the Long Beach Symphony, the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra, the Los Angeles Master Chorale and the San Luis Obispo Mozart Festival. In Pasadena, she is a Hudson Fellow at the California Institute of Technology, where she teaches chamber music to very interesting students.



**JAN KARLIN**, viola, is Founding Executive Director of Southwest Chamber Music. She has played with the Boston Pops, Opera Company of Boston, and the Pacific and Long Beach Symphonies in California. She received her Bachelor's Degree from Tufts University, and her Master's Degree from Boston University. Ms. Karlin performed on Southwest Chamber Music's *Complete Chamber Works of Carlos Chávez, Volumes 1 and 2*, which received consecutive 2003 and 2004 GRAMMY Awards.

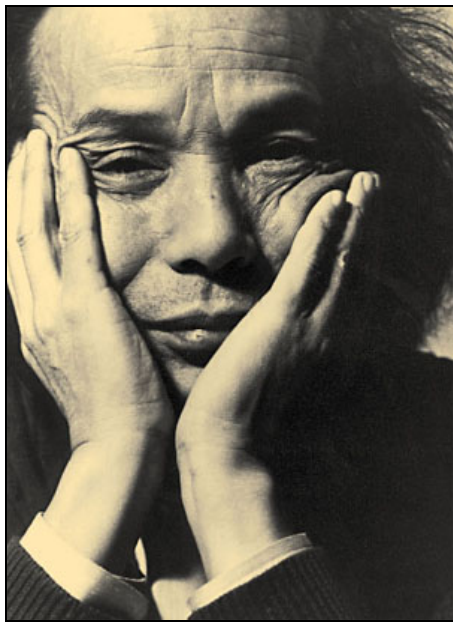
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## ABOUT SOUTHWEST CHAMBER MUSIC

GRAMMY® Award-winning **Southwest Chamber Music** has been bringing *PROJECT MUSE* in-school performances to schools throughout Los Angeles County since 1994 with music that reflects the vast diversity of art music from around the world. We perform throughout the year at the Armory Center for the Arts, Colburn School of Performing Arts, and a summer festival at The Huntington Library. To find out more about Southwest Chamber Music, visit our website at [www.swmusic.org](http://www.swmusic.org).



## FEATURED COMPOSER



### [Toru Takemitsu \(1930-1996\)](#)

*Air* was composed for Swiss flutist [Aurèle Nicolet's](#) approaching 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, and is, sadly, the last completed piece by Takemitsu. It was projected to be part of a work for flute, harp and orchestra that was never finished. Composed at the end of 1995, the work is a haunting testimonial, distilling the natural breath into the melodic world of Takemitsu's eternity.

*Toward the Sea III* was written in 1981 as a contribution to the Greenpeace Foundation's *Save the Whales* program. The titles of the movements were inspired by [Herman Melville's](#) *Moby Dick*. Takemitsu quoted Melville in the score: "Let the most absent-minded of men be plunged in his deepest reveries...and he will infallibly lead you to water...Yes, as everyone knows, meditation and water are wedded together."

*Toward the Sea III* was transcribed from the original version for alto flute and guitar. Takemitsu quotes the S-E-A in the German notation E flat - E natural - A.

*And Then I Knew 'Twas Wind* was composed in 1992 for Swiss flutist Aurèle Nicolet. The title is a quotation from a poem of [Emily Dickinson](#). Takemitsu explained that the work "has as its subject the signs of the wind in the natural world and of the soul, or unconscious mind (or we would even call it 'dream') which continues to blow, like the wind, invisibly, through human consciousness." This piece demonstrates the influence Takemitsu took from the French composer, [Claude Debussy](#).

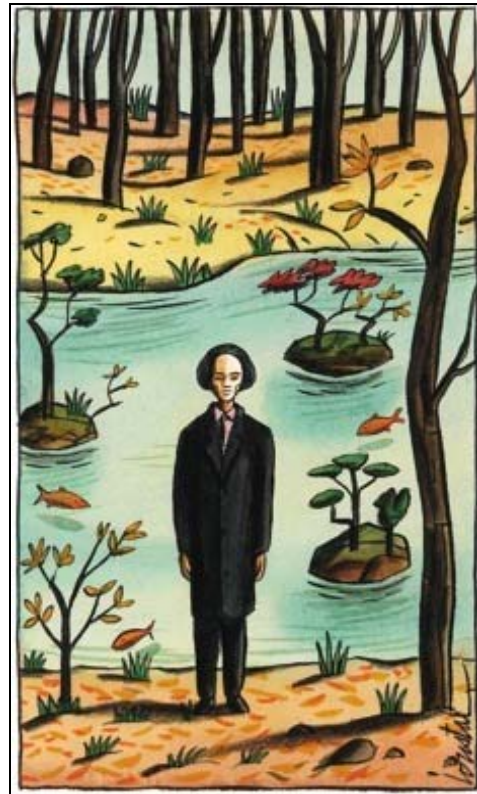
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**Toru Takemitsu** was born in Tokyo in 1930. After the war he began to study composition, though he remained basically self-taught. He wrote his first piece, *Lento in due movimenti*, at the age of twenty. Takemitsu was interested in many nonmusical art forms, such as modern painting, literature (particularly poetry), theater and film. In 1951, together with other composers and artists from the most divergent disciplines, he founded the "Experimental Workshop", a mixed-media group which soon became known for its avant-garde multi-media activities.

Takemitsu's interest in different artistic fields and his self-taught status deeply influenced his avant-garde style. He was using tape recorders to create musical collages out of "real" sounds, a style known as [musique concrete](#). In the early sixties two new influences established themselves in Takemitsu's music: traditional Japanese music and nature. Whereas the influence of [Arnold Schoenberg](#) and [Alban Berg](#) were noticeable in the works of his early period, the French style of composition, particularly that of Debussy, remained the basis for his works thereafter. Takemitsu was also very receptive towards other music (jazz and pop) and, being an ardent film fan, he has also composed film music (e.g. *Ran*, *Dodes'ka-Den*). Although at home in the electronic media and film music, his most characteristic works are perhaps for chamber ensemble and large orchestra.

**Fun Fact:** Toru Takemitsu also wrote a detective novel, and appeared frequently on Japanese television as a celebrity chef.

**“My music is like a garden, and I am the gardener. Listening to my music can be compared to walking through a garden and experiencing the changes in light, pattern and texture.”**



### **‘MA’ – Space, breath, pause and silence**

The Japanese concept of Ma greatly influenced the later music and life of Toru Takemitsu, while he rediscovered the music of his native Japan. Ma is an aesthetic sensibility that in music is often presented as an open space, a breath, a pause, or a silence found between one sound and another.

There is a spatial aspect to the idea of Ma. It can be experienced in the environs of a formal Japanese garden. Takemitsu often compared composing and listening to music to walking through a garden. He thought of instruments as similar to a garden’s various rocks, plants, and artifacts that together form a harmonious whole where no one part overpowers the rest. There is a spiritual element to Ma as well. The vacant space defined by sounds is rich ground for meditation and silence, and silence is the home of spirituality. Ma connects us to both the universe of the five senses and the unseen world beyond them.

For Takemitsu, Ma permeated the natural world, and nature was his great teacher. Ma touches the heart of nature, a sense of nature almost lost to modern society. As a result, many of Takemitsu’s pieces evoke themes of the natural world.

*Takemitsu believed that spirits exist everywhere in nature, and each of his works was an expression of his love of nature.*

## **Musical Vocabulary** (from the California Standards for the Arts)

**ALEATORIC MUSIC** is when a certain number of compositional/performance decisions are left up to the performer, either before or during the actual performance. [Learn more...](#)

**DYNAMICS** are various degrees of volume in the performance of music, such as loud and soft.

**EXTENDED TECHNIQUES** are unconventional, unorthodox or “improper” techniques of playing musical instruments, in order to expand and explore the possibilities of different instruments. [Learn more...](#)

**GAGAKU ENSEMBLE** is a type of Japanese classical music that has been performed at the Imperial court for centuries. Wind, string, and percussion instruments form the ensemble. [Learn more...](#)

**IMPROVISATION** is the spontaneous creation of music.

An **INTERVAL** is the distance in pitch between two tones.

The Japanese word **MA** is often defined as an open space, a breath, a pause, or a silence defined by sound and found between sounds.

**MUSIQUE CONCRÈTE** is a pioneering type of electronic music that utilizes only prerecorded, natural sounds. These sounds are modified and varied electronically and structured into a coherent piece. [Learn more...](#)

**POLYTONALITY** is when a piece of music has more than two pitch centers simultaneously.

**POLYRHYTHM** is when two distinct rhythmic figures, such as a set of triplets and a set of sixteenth notes, are played simultaneously.

**PONTICELLO** is a string instrument technique where one plays on the bridge of the instrument for a special effect.

A **SCORE** is the written form of the entire composition. All players have a part of the score for their instrument, unless they have memorized the notes.

The **STRING FAMILY** (also called **Chordophones**) is the group of instruments that use strings to produce sound. The strings are made of gut, steel, or nylon. Stringed instruments can be played with a bow, or they can be played by plucking or strumming the strings with the fingers. [Learn more...](#)

The **TIMBRE** is the tone color or character of sound heard.

The **TONALITY (KEY)** is the tonal center of a composition.

**TONE CLUSTERS** are chords comprised of three or more consecutive notes of a scale, e.g. C-C#-D#

**TRADITIONAL JAPANESE MUSIC** encompasses a range of styles and instruments. Most of Takemitsu’s compositions are western in style, but he did write several pieces for traditional Japanese instruments, and he wrote a whole piece for **gagaku orchestra**. [Learn more...](#)

**TREMOLO** is a shaking sound which is achieved by repeating the same note extremely quickly or by playing two notes very quickly, one after the other.

## Continue Learning:

For more information on *Toru Takemitsu*, read this book:

[The Music of Toru Takemitsu](#) by Peter Burt

Watch this movie:

[Music for The Movies: Toru Takemitsu](#)

Visit these websites:

<http://www.soundintermedia.co.uk/treeline-online/biog.html>

[Naxos biography of Toru Takemitsu](#)

Watch a short video from BBC World Visionaries about *Toru Takemitsu*:

[BBC World Visionaries: Toru Takemitsu](#)

To learn more about *Japanese Performing Arts*:

[The Performing Arts Network Japan](#)

[Japan Folk Performing Arts Association](#)

To learn more about *Japanese Cinema*:

[Wikipedia: Cinema of Japan](#)

To keep up to date with events at the *Shumei Arts Council*:

[Shumei Arts Council](#)

For more information about the *Contemporary Classical Music Community*:

[Sequenza 21/ The Contemporary Classical Music Community](#)

[Art and Culture: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Music](#)

Try to create your own composition at

[Creating Music](#)

Another excellent interactive website for kids with information about instruments is

[Play Music](#)

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**[Music Unwrapped: The Music of Toru Takemitsu](#)**



**Saturday, May 2**

@ 2 p.m. at the [Japanese American National Museum](#)

369 E. 1<sup>st</sup> St., Los Angeles 90012

@ 4 p.m. at the [Pacific Asia Museum](#)

46 N. Los Robles Ave., Pasadena 91101

**FREE ADMISSION!!**

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Southwest Chamber Music's educational programs are funded in part by the B.C. McCabe Foundation, California Arts Council, The Capital Group Companies Charitable Foundation, D'Addario Foundation for the Performing Arts, Dwight Stuart Youth Foundation, Frieda C. Fox Family Foundation, Green Foundation, James Irvine Foundation, Lluella Morey Murphey Foundation, The Mari and Edmund D. Edelman Foundation for Music and the Performing Arts, Metropolitan Associates, Pasadena Arts & Culture Commission and the City of Pasadena Cultural Affairs Division, Pasadena Educational Foundation, Rose Hills Foundation, Rotary Club of Pasadena, Sidney Stern Memorial Trust, Supervisor Michael Antonovich, Weingart Foundation, Wells Fargo Foundation.