

MUSIC BEYOND SIGHT
(Music of the Unseen)

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on « Gaku-no-Michi » (« Ways of music »),
for electronic and concrete sounds

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« Gaku-no-Michi » was produced in 1977-78 at the invitation of the Electronic Music Studio of the NHK Radio (Nippon Hoso Kyokai) in Tokyo. Due to its monumental proportions, this work has often been called an « electroacoustic epic ». It is dedicated to Wataru Uenami : former director of the music program and Electronic Music Studio at NHK-Tokyo. Thanks to him, I was able to freely create this poem of sound and matter, whose development required three stays of several months each. More than 1.200 hours of work in the studio were necessary to carry the project to its final form.

It is indeed one of the many paradoxes of contemporary music practice which led me to work in Japan several times in my life, not so much with a view to undertake a sometimes illusory spiritual quest, but rather because some institution's leaders (who were culturally open to the directions implied by my choices) offered me production means and projects in a spirit of significant freedom as to my approach and conception of the work, especially where the inter-cultural aspect of the work was concerned. At that time, this sharing between cultures was somewhat disputed by a significant part of the established contemporary music community, here, in France.

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The title « Gaku-no-Michi » means : « the Ways of Music ». It could be understood, in a broader sense, as « The Way of Sounds ». It is very naturally that to create this work I let me inspired by the environment in which I lived and worked : Tokyo and, in a larger sense, Japan.

The driving force behind the formal construction of « Gaku-no-Michi » is the concept of the eternal *wandering*, the unlimited quest towards something or through things. In the present case, *things* represented by sounds making up the acoustic material whose intertwined meanings were transformed or even completely reversed by the magic of the unlimited processes of the electronic studio.

The ideogram « Michi » implies this direction even more specifically. The second pronunciation of this ideogram (in Japanese from Chinese origine) is « Dô » : which is the famous Chinese ideogram « Tao » (Chineses, for translating the ideograms of « Gaku-no-Michi », are saying ; « The Tao of Music »).

One should thus be able to settle inside of the work and live its length, its evolution, its contradictions and contrasts : to be open to absorb it in order to genuinely understand it.

It is the complete opposite of what is called « meditative music » and is often mistakenly associated with practices such as Zen and Yoga. Such music should be discreet and neutral enough to provide a simple background to a personal meditative process. Here, on the contrary, it is the musical work itself that suggests its own dimension, its own development in time and its meditative-reflective process to the listener. This should happen through and by the power of sounds. The audience is invited to take part only in this development of the music within time and in nothing else.

But this is also a Music Beyond Sight, or Music of the Unseen. During the seventies, I was often confronted with the unfocused and destructive behaviour of some symphonic orchestras. Several times, my works « Kâmakalâ » and « Fluctuante-Immuable » were completely altered by the vision of performers confronted with difficulties that they could not master or who were hostile to the work.

On the contrary, with works entirely created in studios - like « Shânti » or « Gaku-no-Michi » -, I could offer the audience a broad architecture to listen to while being invited to watch nothing. In my opinion and for those who would accept being outside a standardised concept of concert, this strengthened the listening experience by widening auditory perception.

When giving to « Gaku-no-Michi » the following subtitle : « film without images for electronic and concrete sounds », I wanted to express the idea that a *narrative* (as a sub-text) is present in the work. It implies the existence of undercurrents, dramatic forces, an exercise in contrasts, a dialectic relationship of forces and opposing characters expressed in sounds and textures. But this (virtual) *story* is not explicitly demonstrated. There is absolutely nothing to see... and probably nothing to *understand* on a primary level, apart from sensing and living. Everything lies in the strength of the sounds, in the play between them, in their transformations and associations that operate in a constructive, even emotional, psychological and imaginary mode. It all lies in the power of the auditory perception confronted with its own self.

This is therefore music that is unseen. By its structure, function and mode of performance, it resists the stardom factor wherein music has occupied a favourite place. There is no leader-conductor to watch and no conducting ensembles or orchestras offered up to eyesight. I consider those performances as being too often bound by a formalism which is completely lacking in freedom.

The Beyond Sight music is conceived in such a way that it strikes directly at the listener's consciousness, just as poetry directly addresses the imagination of the reader.

It purposely breaks away from the phenomenon of applause by using sounds and textures that precede, suspend and extend the work outside of the boundaries and time frame of a concert. When the audience enters the concert hall in order to listen to « Gaku-no-Michi », restrained sounds of activity, used as foreword to the concert are already audible. At the end of the piece, when the last cadenza-gesture is performed (a slowed down and modulated version of the Japanese National Anthem), it is followed by an extended sound that settles down in the concert hall, smoothly, calm and contemplative, serving to transcend the now achieved dramatic forces. It extends endlessly. Everyone can listen to it as much as one desires. It ends only when the hall is totally emptied.

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Even though the aesthetic aspect of « Gaku-no-Michi » offers obvious links to Japan, it should not be considered as the only emphasis of the work. The world of surrealism or the world of « art brut » are also present here on a musical level. We could even say that certain comments concerning my works « Shânti » could be applied to « Gaku-no-Michi ». « Shânti » was compared to Tibetan music (the sound as the *only object* outside of the dialectic relationships of a musical *language* in the usual sense of the term). It was also compared to techniques belonging to painters from abstract lyricism (New York School : Pollock, Tobey and others).

Of course, the specifically *Japanese* sound-sources do occupy an important place. They were customarily recorded directly from the streets, public places, etc. Some of them were discovered in specialised sound libraries :

- « Pachinko » : electric and manual billiards. They are very popular in Japan, and grouped by large amount in specific public places.
- « Shishiyodoshi » : hollow bamboo articulated in the middle. It receives a tiny water stream and rocks with a slow and regular rhythm on a stone that it hits, thus emptying the water it was filled with. These « Shishiyodoshi » do not have a clearly defined usage. Some would say that their presence in gardens gives a breathing rhythm to silence. The recording took place in a garden in Kyôto.
- Bells, doors and vocal announcements in the Tokyo underground.
- Young women announcing each floor with a softened, inflected and ritualised voice in department stores lifts (Ginza, Tokyo).
- Children playing on the roofs of a department store in Ginza (Tokyo).
- Vocal announcements in Shinjuku commercial streets (Tokyo).
- Crowd and fight leader shouting during Sumo fights.
- Sounds of a crowd during the « Sakura » celebrations in Ueno park (Tokyo).
- Fishmongers shouting near the Ueno railway station (Tokyo).
- Crowd footsteps at rush hour in the Shibuya railway station (Tokyo).
- Sounds belonging to television adverts.
- Political harangues in public squares in front of Shibuya (Tokyo) and Kyôto railway stations.
- Song of fighter pilots (« Kamikaze » song).
- Japanese National Anthem.
- Radio broadcast commentary of the annual Hiroshima commemoration.
- Gagaku « Etenraku ».
- Rhythm of the monks' footsteps during a specific moment of the « Omizutori » ceremony in Nara.
- etc.

Jean-Claude Eloy, Paris, 12th of November 2001
Translated from the French by Olia Lumelsky



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