

## **Alternative Perspective towards Japanese History of Electronic Music – Live Electronics in Early vs Latest Days**

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### **Abstract**

The term "live-electronics" is to be defined in several phases of Japanese context of 1960's. In the general history, Japanese 1960's is defined as highly developing society and preparatory stage for World Fair OSAKA70. The electronic music featured two trends: sounds like tone-cluster and combined sound, and live-electronic performance. After preliminary thinking about the term, I will refer to Group Ongaku, Takehisa Kosugi, Toshi Ichityanagi and Maki Ishii グループ音楽、小杉武久、一柳慧、石井真木. The concept of "live-electronics" is different in each composer in the point of relation between man and machine. To compare with the recent understanding of "live-electronics", some younger composers devoted to interactive music or sound art will be mentioned.

### **Introduction "Live-electronic"**

In the 1960's, the term *live* was often used in the phrase like "a sort of live electronic music" by some music critics and musicologists. This indicated electronic music in which electronic sounds were produced or modulated by human action in front of the audience. Minao Shibata and his pupil, Koji Sano, 佐野光司 used the phrase "a sort of", and they did not define decisively the word live electronic music. Sano used the term for the pieces, like Toshi Ichityanagi 一柳慧 *Appearance* (1967) for three instruments and two oscillators, and he explained the term "live electronics" simply as "performing the electronic machine". Minao Shibata also prescribed Mayuzumi's *Campanology for multi-piano* as "a sort of" live-electronics. People had no definition of "live-electronic" music, but they admitted various type of performance.

The term used by musicologists or composers were sometimes indicated the technological phase, other time indicated conceptual/aesthetic phase.

Though the dichotomy of the aesthetic concept of *musique concrète* and *Elektronische Musik* was conceptually strong, Mayuzumi had created both type of piece and Jikkenkobo 実験工房 presented both type of pieces in the concert of 1956 "Audition of *musique concrète* and *elektronische Musik*". After this antinomy the aesthetic theme for Japanese composers was to select live-electronic or tape-music. The dichotomy of 1950's had based on the difference of the way of producing sounds, while the aesthetic selection between "live-electronic" or tape-music was concerning mainly the style of performance.

At the time of Expo'70 Minao Shibata wrote in an article that several years had already passed since Japanese music people made no distinction between *musique concrète* and *Elektronische Musik* and that people called the whole as "tape music". As Shibata's comment in 1974 indicated, during 1960's, that is, in the time when Japanese electronic music had several creative experiences and created Japanese original technology, the difference on the point how to create the sound has shifted to the distinction how to play the music in front of the audience.

## **Live-electronic music in Group Ongaku グループ音楽**

The term "live-electronics" in Japanese began with *Group Ongaku* and the acceptance of John Cage. Group Ongaku is said to be the first experimental music performance group in the world. This was the time when Japanese contemporary music had been combining with the Euro-American avant-garde scene. Though Mayuzumi had written a short article about Cage in 1950's, most Japanese found directly Cage's indeterminacy in 1961 in the concert of Ichiyanagi and Yoko Ono.

Group Ongaku was a compound of several non-genre members ; a visual artist Yasunao Tone 刀根康尚, Takehisa Kosugi 小杉武, composer Mieko Shiomi 塩見允枝子, Mikio Tojika, Syuko Mizuno 水野修孝, Tuge , and an architect, Yoshio Tsukio. They had repeated improvisational performances in Tokyo University of arts and Tokyo University, before they knew Cage. The name "Group Ongaku" began in September 1961, and the following year they performed in the concert named "Improvisation and *objets sonores*" in Sogetsu Kaikan.

This concert was important for two reasons.

One is that their main concept is improvisation, which appeared independently of the influence of Cage.

The other is that they had accepted the concept of *objets sonores* of Pierre Schaeffer but their way of performance was different from making-live or spatialization by Schaeffer and GRM. Syuko Mizuno 水野修孝 had strongly denied they had been influenced by the foreign musicians like John Cage. They preferred rather surrealism of André Breton, especially his automatism. Takehisa Kosugi disliked *musique concrète* because concrete sounds of Schaeffer were separated from the context or the space in which the sound had been made and the recorded sound were to be abstract/*acousmatique* and because *musique concrète* was finally fixed on tape.

<Improvisation and <i>objets sonores</i> > 「即興演奏と音響オブジェのコンサート」	Sep.15, 1961 Sogetsu Kaikan Hall
Group • ONGAKU : Metaplasm 9-15	
Takehisa KOSUGI 小杉武久 : O-S-3	
Gennichi TSUGE 榎植元一 : music for tape	
Yasunao TONE 刀根康尚 : Piano Sound with Magnetic Tape # 1 for a pianist with head phone	
Yasunao TONE 刀根康尚 : Piano Sound with Magnetic Tape # 2 for 5 pianists	
Yasunao TONE 刀根康尚 : Piano Sound with Magnetic Tape # 3 , Days	

## Kosugi Takehisa 小杉武久: Live-electronic music/electroacoustic music

Group Ongaku used electronic machines for their performance, and for Kosugi for himself electronic machines or electronic materials have been essential after the "dissolution of Group Ongaku for the sake of reform". Though Shuko Mizuno thought he had been changing in the trend Cage-chock in Japan, Kosugi has gradually found his way to keep up with the aesthetics of Cage.

Kosugi had made a team *Collective Music* with Ichiyanagi and Takemitsu during the activities of Groupe Ongaku, and, as well known in US, he collaborated with Cage, David Tudor and Merce Cunningham and performed as a member of Fluxus. In these experiences with the contemporary art activities, Kosugi has sought out his unique style of live-electronic performance.

First of all his live-electronic performance was carefully planned with electronic machines though his actions were improvisation, and the settings were fixed as an installation of machines. The way to use the machines is modulated from the usual usage and the modulation is Kosugi's creation. Radio is representative. For Kosugi, radio is an apparatus in order to catch the wave both in audio level and in visual level. By radio, we get information, usually audio information, through space. And Kosugi wants to see the situation of getting wave information through space. Radio is an audio-visual machine, so he made several (4 to 5) oscillators and transmitters pendulate from the ceiling and between those machines he set small radios as apparatus. Several radios made some beats, which

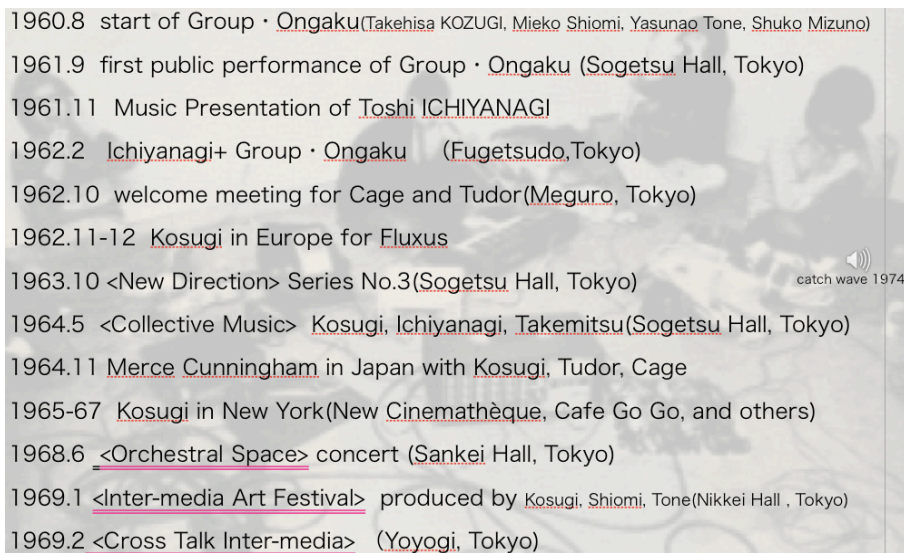
make sounds. This was Kosugi's famous series of *catch wave*, *Mano-Dharma*, *electronic*. The music critic Kuniharu Akiyama said "logic of human body creating electronic art". From that time Kosugi continues mixed media performance pursuing connection between **electronic circuits** and human body. In his live-electronic performance, electronic sound machines are parallel with ordinary goods like umbrella, electric-fan.

Second feature of Kosugi's live-electronics is that the works are basically an inter-media art as testified by his own words. Kosugi said,

My works of live-electronics are mainly audio-visual and focus on the connection with some objects. I am not concentrated on sounds and the material for my art is not limited to sound waves.

The way, which decomposes the sound instrument into trembling body and the resonator, resembles to that of Schaeffer but Kosugi got his original visual effect rather than sounds. And this concept led him to his catch-wave series. *Mano-Dharma* featured also slide with the picture of dinosaurs, which was moved by the wind in the auditorium space.

Kosugi made by himself the list of works, and he made two categories to the works after 1980: live-electronic music and electro-acoustic music. But these two categories are not taken from that of Cage and Schaeffer. Kosugi's electro-acoustic music concerns the acoustic material and his live-electronics concerns oscillators. Both of the two were performed in live with microphones and effectors.



1960.8 start of Group • Ongaku(Takehisa KOZUGI, Mieko Shiomi, Yasunao Tone, Shuko Mizuno)  
1961.9 first public performance of Group • Ongaku (Sogetsu Hall, Tokyo)  
1961.11 Music Presentation of Toshi ICHIYANAGI  
1962.2 Ichiyonagi+ Group • Ongaku (Fugetsudo, Tokyo)  
1962.10 welcome meeting for Cage and Tudor(Meguro, Tokyo)  
1962.11-12 Kosugi in Europe for Fluxus  
1963.10 <New Direction> Series No.3(Sogetsu Hall, Tokyo)  
1964.5 <Collective Music> Kosugi, Ichiyonagi, Takemitsu(Sogetsu Hall, Tokyo)  
1964.11 Merce Cunningham in Japan with Kosugi, Tudor, Cage  
1965-67 Kosugi in New York(New Cinemathèque, Cafe Go Go, and others)  
1968.6 <Orchestral Space> concert (Sankei Hall, Tokyo)  
1969.1 <Inter-media Art Festival> produced by Kosugi, Shiomi, Tone(Nikkei Hall , Tokyo)  
1969.2 <Cross Talk Inter-media> (Yoyogi, Tokyo)

## Toshi Ichiyanagi 一柳慧 live-electronic music *as* and *with* musical instruments

Toshi Ichiyanagi has been much musical contrary to Kosugi's anti-music concept. The action on the stage should not be some simple operation like "push the button", "too simple keyboard playing" nor "unseen relation between action and sounds as the results".

Ichiyanagi, who came from US in 1961 as a star musician into sudden prominence to Japan, said the live-electronic music had been actual only until the mid 60's.

In 1960's, Sogetsu Kaikan was a melting pot for Japanese contemporary art, and the producer/artist Soufu Teshigawara 勅使河原蒼風 was himself an artist.

For Ichiyanagi, Sogetsu was more important than for others and "live electronics" equaled to the realization of indeterminacy. By the performance in "Sogetsu contemporary" series and leadership of Sogetsu "New Direction" series, the activity of Ichiyanagi's indeterminacy (happening, event) gave "Cage Shock" to Japan.

As an excellent pianist, Ichiyanagi thought the action of manipulating electronic machines are to be like the performing of musical instruments. "Live-electronic" is not only-one style for Ichiyanagi's musical concept. His main aesthetic point at that time was indeterminacy in performance as that of John Cage. And improvisation was to be started with careful hearing of the space. He preferred hearing to expressing, as he said in 2000.

**Toshi ICHIYANAGI 一柳慧**  
live-electronic music *as* and *with* musical instruments  
indeterminacy/ space/ environment

<Music for Environmental Situation> (1966) : for an exhibition <From Space to Environment> held in Matsuya Ginza in November, 1966.

<Life Music > (1966) : premiered by the conductors Seiji Ozawa and Hiroshi Wakasugi and Yomiuri Symphony Orchestra together with tape and electronic sound breaker. After ten years, the breaker part was revised for synthesizer. premiered in <Orchestral Space>

<Space for 2 pianos>, electric version (1966) : performed with two pianos, two oscillators and modulators.

<For strings #2> (1966) : for the animation by Yoji KURI , *Tragedy on G-string*

<Appearance> (1967) : for 3 instrument players, 2 oscillators and 2 ring modulators. representative of Ichiyanagi's idea of <live-electronic music> premiered in Freeborn Hall NYC with Tudor, Larry Austin and Réne Block,

## Maki ISHII 石井真木: "Kyo-o", which means Sound Correspondence

Maki Ishii, who had studied in Berlin with Josef Rufer and Boris Blacher from 1958-1961, was moderate against American indeterminacy. The Multi-Piano had been developed in NHK studio for electronic music in 1967. As the second composer after the first one Mayuzumi who created music for this new component, Ishii used Multi-Piano as an instrument, not as a machine of anti-tape style.

Multi-piano was called "electronic prepared piano". Ishii explained in the score of *Kyo-o*: the strings of a grand piano are picked up by 88 special microphones. The vibrations of the strings rather than sound waves are caught. With the help of electric modulation, each tone can be changed into various kinds of timbre. Furthermore, the modulation can be made by filter machine at the same time as the performance, *i.e.* in real-time.

*Kyo-o*, which means "sound correspondence", is written for multi-piano, orchestra without wood winds, modulated piano sound which are recorded on tape, and "live-electronics" as modulation of brass instruments and percussion. This is a piece of "live-electronic" music in multiple meaning; using original electric machine (multi-piano), using oscillators ensuing real-time modulation (like effect in today's sense). Here is no opposition between tape-style and live manipulation of oscillators/modulation. In the point of performance system, the tape part can be thought as the opened sound file in today's sense, and the live manipulation functions as real-time signal processing.

**<Kyo-o>      sound correspondence**  
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<live-electronics > as modulation of brass instruments and percussions  
  
<live electronic> music in multiple meaning;  
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## Conclusion

1967 and 1969 time has come to the final stage of Japanese avant-garde music before Expo70. The Japanese important electronic music were created in 1967 and 1968; Joji

Yuasa's *Icon*, Ichiyanagi's *Appearance*, Kosugi's first *Catch Wave* performance and Maki Ishii's *Kyo-o*. These four are symbolic about the style of electronic music.

1. Tape;
2. improvisation with electronic sound machines like automatism;
3. improvisation with electronic sound machines as realization of indeterminacy;
4. performance with live sound control machine as an instrument.

And the composers proceeded into different directions afterwards.

Just before Expo70, it was singular in the point that electronic music both in the sense of *musique concrète* and synthesizer based electronic music was deeply concerned with the special concept of performing. It was not the sound itself but the human action concerning sound that was to be essential. And the aesthetic meaning of the performance was discussed in an event called "Cross Talk Intermedia" held in 1969 at Yoyogi Olympic Stadium. Ten thousand people came to this three day symposium, where the keywords were intermedia, improvisation and ordinary life (or environment).

As indicated by Mieko Shiomi, a Japanese Fluxus, the live-electronic music was a style of boundary art as well as event, concrete poem, film event. At that time, "live" did not mean the opposite of tape media but making the special performer as an element for intermedia.

The term "live-electronic" once disappeared along with the change of aesthetic concept, from improvisation, indeterminacy to environment or new instruments. When the term appeared again in Japanese music scene with the real-time sound processing, *i.e.* real-time DSP like MAX, "live-electronic" was indicating technical style rather than combining with aesthetical concept.

Today we know several live performance with electronic system; sound art, sound performance, interactive music, voice performance, human body as realization of algorism, etc. Some of them have the theme where to use or not to use electronics. For example, live performance of Masahiro Miwa's *reverse simulation* music, in which human body realizes systematic algorism, which was calculated by computer. Tomomi Adachi, a voice performer, is using sometimes electronics and mainly improvising.

Are their performances or pieces live-electronic? Answer is yes and no.

They use the electronic machines for the sake of live-performance, so they are live-electronic. But their points are not making the electronic materials live. They did their live-performances in order to find new human bodiliness as anti-mechanism.

## from 1995 to new millenium New Awareness of Human Body

Conclusion

- Masahiro MIWA 三輪真宏  
<Reverse-Simulation Music>



- Takumi IKEDA 池田拓美  
<table music>



sounds are not the materials but the results of the algorithm

main theme = communication, body design

main technology = interactive live-performance

- Tomomi ADACHI, performance  
with *Tomomin*



- Craftwife, with i-phone



Real-time signal processing style was introduced in Japan only after MAX for Macintosh had appeared.

In addition, especially in the new millennium, "live" has been replaced performance, which does not necessarily include electronic devices. Performance should be an answer to the question of the meaning of presence of the performer on stage. Live-electronics and body design, I hope such rough survey may lead to an alternative perspective towards the history of Japanese electronic music.