

interview

CONTEMPORARY COMPOSURE

Dai Fujikura



Born in Osaka in 1977, Dai Fujikura has lived in the UK since the age of 15. He has studied with leading composers Daryl Runswick, Edwin Roxburgh and George Benjamin. His versatile compositions have won him prizes and been performed throughout Europe and more recently in Japan, where he received 2nd prize in the coveted Toru Takemitsu Award in May 2003.

Why did you come to the UK?

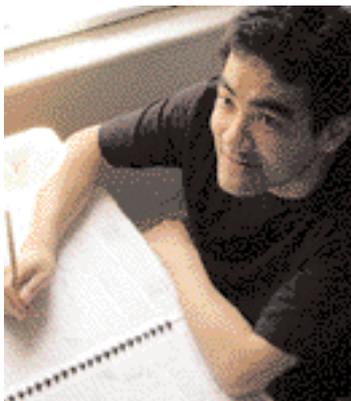
Because of the A' Level system, whereby I could study fewer subjects, but in greater depth. I always wanted to be a composer and staying in Japan meant spending too much time on other subjects, so I went to Dover College as a music scholar.

Why composition?

When I was young my piano teacher insisted that one should play a piece as the composer intended. Now I think she is right, of course, but at the time I rebelled and thought I would compose my own music so I could play it how I liked. My mother read me stories about German and Austrian composers, which inspired me to go to Germany. I was going to move there after Dover College, but at the time I did not really like the German contemporary music scene, so I stayed on in the UK and studied composition at Trinity College. Ironically many of my projects and commissions are from Germany now.

You received recognition in Japan recently with *Calling Timbuktu*?

Yes, I won 2nd prize in the 2003 Toru Takemitsu Awards. The piece was not written for the award. In fact, it was two years old and now I think I could do so much better. I was lucky – it is every composer's dream to actually have their music performed. Its UK premiere will be on March 12, played by the BBC Symphony Orchestra.

**Do you think music is perceived differently in Japan and the UK?**

That would be the subject of an entire thesis. Until last year, I had never worked with a Japanese orchestra and was nervous about using polite forms of Japanese. What struck me most was the rehearsal time: in the UK,

musicians have such limited time, dashing from one end of the city to the next. Working with the Tokyo Philharmonic was fascinating because they spent so much time on my piece, and I felt they understood how to play it and were very committed to it.

What about your UK collaborations?

Over the years my music has been performed in places as varied as Huddersfield, Hoxton Hall and the Queen Elizabeth Hall. I have developed a very good relationship with the London Sinfonietta, which has played my music since 2000, and I am currently working with them on their *Blue Touch Paper*.

What is *Blue Touch Paper*?

It is a commission, but unlike other commissions I have a budget which I can use freely and this has enabled me to experiment with instruments. I am developing my 'spatial work' and currently working on staging music. It is something I feel very strongly about because the quality of recordings is so high nowadays, concert goers need to get more than just the performance of a piece. The music is the most important thing of course, but the lighting and staging of the performance could be so much better. My current project involves 10 players, and I place the cello, which has a significant part, at the front of the stage, the trumpet behind it as a shadow, and the other eight players within the audience. The conductor faces the public, which makes them feel more involved in the actual performance, as though they were in a cinema.

Has film had an important influence on your work?

Yes. I wanted to be a film music composer when I was younger, then realised my direction was more towards contemporary music. But I always have a strong visual image when I compose: it's abstract, to do with colours, camera movement, zooms. Last year, I scored the music for a short film called *Salt Scrubbers*, which was part of the London Film Festival. Despite time pressure, it felt very natural. There are constraints of course, but what I love most about composition is the freedom to do what you like at the pace you like. I am also working with a friend and video artist called Tomoya Yamaguchi. He's actually a painter and only bought a video camera to film his children. We have already done two collaborative pieces, *teki*, performed at the Purcell Room, and *moromoro*, performed in Holland by pianist Tomoko Mukaiyama. Video and music share a time element which painting doesn't have. This is one of my new directions. *Future UK performances include March 12, and April 6 and 8. For information and samples of Fujikura's work, visit his website www.daifujikura.com.*

Interview by Elizabeth Aveling