

ENCORE MET WITH MUSIC ALUMNUS AWARD-WINNING
DAI FUJIKURA TO ASK ABOUT HIS TIME WITH US AND
THE WAY THAT HE WORKS

DAI FUJIKURA

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'I really wanted to be a composer, meaning that, even with how poor I would be, I wanted to write music and to live somehow. When I have to pay British Gas, especially in the winter months, I think – there goes the first few minutes of my string quartet!'

Born in Japan in 1977, Dai moved to UK when he was 15 and later studied with Daryl Runswick at Trinity College of Music, now Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance. Since graduating he has won many awards, including the Royal Philharmonic Composition Prize in 2007. His work has been performed around the globe by some of the world's top orchestra's and he is being honoured this year with a Portrait Concert in Suntory Hall, Japan. Encore caught up with him as his album, Secret Forest, is released as part of the NMC Debut Disc series.

What is your process? How do you start?

I have quite a lot of ideas, some of them developed from the time that I attended Trinity, of the kind of pieces I would write. Sometimes the suitable project or opportunity hasn't arisen to turn those ideas into reality. I have those ideas filed in my mind and when a certain project comes up I think about whether I could marry any of those ideas to that particular project. Sometimes I don't use any of the ideas which I have – and that doesn't matter at all – as sometimes a project generates an idea that I'd never considered.

Sometimes when I start composing I think of a system. For example when writing an orchestral work I often just want to go for big chords, expanding them from one chord to the next, until each chord fragments becoming more abstract – even rhythmic.

When working like that I don't want to write organically, I just want to write something where one rule or method works throughout contrasting sections.

Cuts to funding in the arts have been huge. What do you think the effect has been on the cultural landscape?

There's nothing more to say than that it's awful, because when you are cutting the culture of the future, you are cutting a contribution to future beauty. I'm not only talking about "high-culture" but everyday life. Today we see mass produced design influenced from the high end work of the 50s, 60s and 70s. It has been like this for centuries. If you stop doing this, then not just 'culture' would suffer, but everyday life would suffer.

I have a corner of a room, with a desk, a computer and piano connected to computer. When you write music you are in your world, it is exactly that, a solitary place. It could be of course lonely, but at the same time it doesn't matter how large your room or studio because it could've been on the tube, or in the rush-hour. You are out there.

What are your memories of Trinity?

I met my wife at Trinity at Mandeville Place. It was just so relaxed and free. We could just knock on the office door of important faculty members and see them, even the principal. We rarely had to make appointments. I can tell you proudly that I think I got the most out Trinity! Here is an example:

In the composition department the final exam criteria was that you had to produce 30 minutes of music, arrange the performers and perform in front of the examiner. I wrote a 30 minute chamber opera which needed 20 players. I wanted proper staging and so on.

I asked that if I arrange a staging of a double bill rather than a concert, could they allow this for the exam? The examiners agreed, so some friends and I borrowed money (as we didn't have any) to rent Hoxton Hall. One thing I didn't realise was that we had to rent instruments. I asked Jeffrey Joseph if I could borrow all the instruments in Trinity over Easter Sunday and Monday. We were quite good friends and he agreed as long as they were back by Tuesday morning, 'I'll act as if I don't know!' Linda Hirst said to me as long as all the singers are Trinity students, the college will cover the hire costs of the other piece of music. We were already borrowing money for the cost of the hall, so we needed to sell tickets in order to break even. We went everywhere to sell tickets. The best part is that I told my box office people that there were no complimentary tickets, not even for my examiners! So all three examiners had to pay – they told me they never had to pay to examine before!

What advice would you give to those who want to make a career in composition?

The more music you hear the better - you have no excuse not to engage with as much music as possible in one of the most famous cities in the world, with the most famous orchestras and artists in the world regularly visiting. You shouldn't think of your musical activity as only taking place in one spot of the world – at college. You don't have to change what you like, but you should seek out new experiences. Don't change your music, but try to find the friends of your music.



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