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2015 KYOTO LECTURES

Tuesday, July 16th, 18:00h

Philip Flavin

SPEAKER

The Laughter of Japanese Avant-garde in the 60' *Opera – Yokoo Tadanori o utau*

Ichiyanagi Toshi's 1969 avant-garde electronic composition, *Opera – Yokoo Tadanori o utau* (Singing Yokoo Tadanori), is a devastating critique of post-war Japanese culture. At the same time, however, the opera defies all of the listener's expectations. There is nothing resembling the expected narrative. Neither is there anything resembling musical coherence. Instead, the listener is subjected to eighty minutes of unrelated sound samples, some musical, others not. Some of the tracks are unquestionably tragic in their referencing the horrors of modernity. Nevertheless, the critique is comic, and ridicule, and satirise the pre- and post-war construction of Japanese culture.

This talk is a foray into the world of avant-garde musical humour in search of a broader definition of the musical avant-garde as well as of what distinguishes serious from non-serious music. More importantly, the talk will kindle a reinterest in and awareness of a quality in much avant-garde music: laughter. And while the humour behind the laughter is genuine, this is not to suggest the humour is meaningless. In seeking to account for the comic vision of this opera, it will be argued that the work is nonetheless profoundly moving, and a serious if oblique critique of late 60s Japan.

Philip Flavin is a lecturer at the Osaka University of Economics and Law and an Adjunct Senior Research Associate of Monash University. Graduating with a degree in International Relations and Japanese, he attended the Seiha Conservatory of Music in Tokyo to pursue his interest in *sōkyoku-jiuta*, chamber music for *koto* and *shamisen*, and performed professionally with appearances at the National Theatre in Tokyo and the Japanese National Radio and Television. After completing a Ph.D. in Music at the University of California, Berkeley, in 2006 he was invited to participate in an Australian Research Council funded project on the impact of modernity on Japanese music. His recent publications focus on the newly developing aesthetics of *sōkyoku-jiuta* during the pre-war period, music of the Japanese avant-garde, and contemporary theatre works written by *zainichi* authors, in particular, Chong Wishing.

This lecture will be held at the Institute for Research in Humanities (IRH), Kyoto University (seminar room 1, 1st floor).

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