Introduction

1 Edo-period Xylophones
   (1) Boat-shaped xylophones – Interview
   (2) Interview Contents
   (3) After the Interview

2 The Xylophone in Education
   (1) The Meiji Period and the Dawn of Music Education in Japan
   (2) Post-War Instrumental Music Education

3 The Production of Xylophones and Marimbas in Japan
   (1) The Production of Xylophones for Education
   (2) Marimba Production

4 The Impact of Lawrence L. Laqua
   (1) Laqua’s Background
   (2) The Laqua Musical Missionary Group Arrival in Japan
   (3) The Laqua Musical Missionary Group Concert Series Programmes

5 Japanese Xylophone and Marimba Performers
   (1) Early Xylophone Performers in Japan
   (2) Hiraoka Yōichi (1907-1981) – Xylophone
   (3) Asabuki Ei’ichi (1909-1993) – Xylophone and Marimba
   (4) Abe Keiko (1937-) – Marimba
   (5) Takahashi Michiko (1939-) – Marimba

6 The Establishment of the Japan Xylophone Association

7 Music Colleges and Japanese Compositions for the Xylophone and Marimba
   (1) Xylophone and Marimba Compositions by Japanese Composers
   (2) The Senzoku Music College Percussion Research Centre
   (3) The Significance of New Compositions for the Marimba

Afterword

References

Other Sources

Introduction

The progress of the music for the marimba in post-war Japan has been remarkable. The functionality and limitations of the early xylophones and marimbas were such

---

1 All Japanese names are given in the Japanese order of family name first followed by personal name.
2 The marimba has a soft timbre and long resonance, the focus in production being on the four possible overtones. The standard instrument in Japan has four octaves; however, there are many solo instruments with five-octave ranges.
that for many years, these instruments were limited to the realm of ethnic instruments. In 1874, however, Saint-Saëns first used the xylophone in his Symphonic Poem, *Dance Macabre*. Since the first performance of Paul Creston’s *Marimba Concerto* in 1940, the xylophone and the marimba have become established instruments in the world of classical music with numerous new compositions and the continuing modification and development of the instruments these works require; and today, they are a clear sub-genre of classical music.

Particularly in Japan, the marimbist population surpasses that of other countries, and the number of Japanese marimbists participating in international marimba competitions is the largest, and their performances highly evaluated.

Of equal note is that over the last few years, most of the works selected as the set piece for marimba competitions are by Japanese composers. It is also impossible to overlook that marimbas with the best acoustic balance are produced by Japanese companies and exported overseas. Why is it that so many Japanese have come to perform the xylophone, with its simple wood resonance, or the marimba? To pursue the answer to this question requires a historical presentation that begins with the transmission of the xylophone to Japan in the Edo period and the lists aspects of subsequent performance in Japan. This is to be followed with a list of the compositions Japanese composers from 1929 to 2003 and the role of percussion majors at Japanese music colleges to create a bird’s-eye view of the field, which will the serve to promote the future development of the xylophone and marimba in Japan.

1 *Edo-period Xylophones.*

The xylophone was already known in Japan during the Edo period. There is one section in Tsuruya Namboku’s *kabuki* play, *Tenjiku Tokubei kokubanashi*, in which a blind mendicant monk travelling through various regions in Japan sings in Japanese while accompanying himself on a boat-shaped xylophone brought back from overseas. This scene was apparently extremely popular. After this, the xylophone was included in the off-stage music (geza ongaku) for the *kabuki* theatre.

The Furusato Kankokan located in Ibaraki Prefecture Hitachinaka City preserves a xylophone, now designated an important cultural property of the city, that is said to be a copy of an instrument brought back to Mito by a retainer who had been sent to Nagasaki in 1698 by the daimyo. It is listed as *mokkin to hengaku* [xylophone and frame]. This instrument is made from *maackia amurensis* wood with seventeen keys placed in a simple boat-shaped box. Apparently, it was used to accompany boating songs performed by the boatmen, who were also responsible for the management of the boats, when official domain boats set sail. This xylophone conforms to the original shape, and the sound is much simpler and evokes images of the past. Displayed next to the xylophone are two framed plaques with the boat names – the

---

3 The xylophone is characterized by a brighter sharper sound than that of the marimba. The range is also higher. The standard range is 3.5 octaves with a focus on the three possible overtones.


5 Hitachinaka-shi kyōiku i’in-kai. *Ibaragi Hitachi-shi Furusato Kankokan* 茨城県ひたちなか市ふるさと懐古館 p.5.
Kunshinmaru and the Keiyōmaru – which would have been hung from the side of the boat. The presence of the xylophone in the kabuki theatre and its use in boating songs attests to its presence in the Edo imagination.

(1) Boat-shaped xylophones – Interview
During a two-hour interview conducted on 29th May 2004, Etchū Tetsuya, a Nagasaki cultural historian, clarified the process of both the transmission and the spread of the boat-shaped xylophone. The questions prepared for this interview are given below.

1. The transmission of the boat-shaped xylophone from shingaku.
2. The precise date of the boat-shaped xylophone’s transmission.
3. The process by which the boat-shaped xylophone spread.

(2) Interview Contents
The following answer was given for the origins of the boat-shaped xylophone. It is believed that the instrument originated in Viet Nam approximately in 1600 and entered Fujian Province, China around 1620, after which it travelled to Shanghai in 1680. One hundred years later, in 1780, this instrument may have entered Japan with the transmission of other Chinese instruments, but with the transmission of shingaku to Nagasaki in 1800, it appears to be clear that the boat-shaped xylophone arrived as well. Therefore, the only date that can be given with any conviction is approximately 1800. As for the spread of this music, mingaku was a musical genre performed in the Ming court and amongst the aristocracy and upper classes of Ming China. Shingaku, on the other hand, was a music that was popular with the commoners. This music was popular in Nagasaki and performance in the pleasure quarters by the courtesans was famous throughout the country. These performances continued through the mid-Taishō period (1912-1926).

(3) After the Interview
Explanations based on reliable documents serve to deepen one’s appreciation for the understanding of historical processes. In studying a visual representation6 of a performance of shingaku by Chinese performers, the sense of ensemble is somehow still conveyed. This brief encounter with the history of Nagasaki renders the former vitality of this port abundantly clear, as well as the importance of China in the history of this music.

2 The Xylophone in Education

(1) The Meiji Period – the Dawn of Music Education in Japan
In 1879, Izawa Shūji established the Ongaku torishirabe-gakari,7 an organization to investigate the implementation of music education. (The Ongaku torishirabe-gakari is the predecessor to the Tokyo University of Fine Arts.) The Ongaku torishirabe-gakari established the fundamentals of music education with the creation of the Shōgakkō shōka-shū 小学校唱歌集 (Primary School Songbook) and instruction in instrumental

---

7 Monbushō 文部省. Shōgakkō gakushū shidō yōryō dai 6 setsu: ongaku 小学校學習指導要領第6節音楽. No. 3.2 (ア).
music. The following year, an order was placed for shingaku instruments, one of which was a boat-shaped xylophone.

(2) Post-War Instrumental Music Education
In 1947, with the enactment of the Basic Education Laws (教育基本法) and the School Educational Laws (学校教育法), a tentative plan for a National Curriculum Standard was created. With this, for the first time in school music education, the study of singing and instrumental music was adopted.

In 1949, the use of Ministry of Education approved textbooks was implemented, in which simple desktop xylophones (PAS Fujii Database no. 2) were introduced as one instrument central to music education. Table 1 and table 2 show the results of an investigation into the percentage of children owning instruments that was published in the Elementary Education Guidance Precedents 6: Music (初等教育指導事例6 音楽科編) of 1957. As can be seen from this table, there were a large number of individual students that owned desktop xylophones. Of particular note is that all of the students of the Nagano Primary School, affiliated with the Shinshū University Education Department, possessed desktop xylophones.

Thirty-three of sixty-five second-year students at the Higashi Gojō Primary School in Asahikawa City, twenty-seven of forty-nine fourth-year students at the Osaka Municipal Nawashiro Primary School, ninety-four of three hundred forty-four students at the Ichinomiya chōritsu kojō Primary School in the former Kumamoto Prefecture Aso-gun all had xylophones. All of the xylophones at the Nawashiro Primary School were required articles designated by the school. Regardless of the region, there was large percentage of children that owned xylophones.

As can be seen from the above, it can be assumed that the desktop xylophone was a central item in instrumental music education in 1955.

With the subsequent spread of the keyed harmonica and the recorder, the desktop xylophone vanished as a central instrument in music education. Despite this, however, the xylophone is still included as an instrument in all textbook ensembles. In the 1989 textbook, Atarashii ongaku 2-nen 新しい音楽2年 (New Music Year 2, Tokyo shoseki kabushiki kaisha yushki p. 14-15, p. 42.)

3 The Production of Xylophones and Marimbas in Japan

(1) The Production of Xylophones for Education

---

The production of xylophones in Japan is directly connected with the production of xylophones for educational purposes. As discussed above, in the tentative plans for the National Curriculum Standards implemented in 1947, the designation of the xylophone as necessary for music education meant that all Japanese primary schools needed xylophones. The number of privately owned instruments also increased, and the demand was such that production could barely meet demand.

Beginning with music instrument companies, factories and sawmills throughout Japan began to produce large numbers of affordable desktop xylophones, and gradually factories appeared that pursued the production marimbas with superior sound quality.

The first factory to truly pursue marimba production was the Miyakawa Marimba Research Centre at the Japan Wood Enterprise ltd. (Nihon mokuzai kōgyō kabushiki kaisha 日本木材興行株式会社) The founder was Miyakawa Takeshi, the managing director of Bridgestone Tires, who, in 1939, became the representative director of the Japan Wood Enterprise ltd, this company being founded as the wood supplies department for Bridgestone Tires, and the factory was built on company owned property in Kuroiso City (present day Nasushiohara City) Ibaraki Prefecture in the northern Kantō region. With the increasing severity of World War II, a second factory was constructed to meet the government’s demands for wooden airplane propellers and gunstocks. Wood was ordered from throughout the country and the finest wood craftsmen were employed.

With the beginning of military production occurring just as the war was ending, there was a large amount of wood that was never used. Miyakawa then re-opened the second factory for the production of furniture, and the opportunity to produce xylophones also appeared. In 1947, Okabe Nagakage, the Minister of Education under the Tōjō Cabinet, presented Miyakawa with a xylophone produced by the American company Deagan. With the National Curriculum Standards’ recommendation of the xylophone for instrumental education, Okabe clearly saw the need for an increase in the production of desktop xylophones, and thus encouraged Miyakawa to produce these instruments.

(2) Marimba Production

From 1947, the Kuroiso factory began producing high quality desktop marimbas based on the American xylophone. At this time, rosewood from either Guatemala or the Honduras was seen as the most desirable wood for keyed percussion sound boards; however, when importing rosewood became impossible, wood was ordered from each region in Japan, and Miyakawa himself carved the samples, testing the sound quality of each. Miyakawa discovered through the results of his sampling different types of wood that Betula schmidtii Regel, a tree belonging to the birch family, produces the best sound, and in 1949, he produced the first two Japanese marimbas.

The first marimba, named ‘Pansy’, had a three-octave range from F-F, and the second marimba, named ‘Tōneko’ (a word from a Japanese dialect that means “wooden horse”), also had a three-octave range from C-C.

After this, each new instrument was given a name before marketing. The Tokyo Hatchōbori Marimba Service Centre was opened, which then served as a rehearsal...
space for Hiraoka Yōichi and Asabuki Ei’ichi. This studio is where many of the following generation of marimbists trained.

In 1961, after Miyakawa’s retirement, marimbas were sold as ‘Columbia Marimbas’; however, they were unsuccessful, and today, the three world-leading Japanese manufacturers of marimbas are Yamaha, Korogi and Saitō gakkki. Each of these companies pursues the development of new ranges, sound colours and functionality, and continues to conduct research with composers and performers in the creation of new instruments for new works.

4 The Impact of Lawrence L. Lacour

(1) Lacour’s Background.
Lawrence L. Lacour⁹ was born in 1914, in Iowa, U.S.A. As his father was a pastor, he grew up in a deeply religious household. His mother encouraged him to study piano and voice, but when he encountered the marimba, he finally became seriously interested in music. While he had no intention of becoming a musician, he nonetheless won first prize in a statewide competition. In university, he met his wife, Mildred Ellen Sullivan. She also was a marimbist, and they began their missionary activities during university. After their marriage, the two toured Europe as part of the Imperial Marimba Symphony Orchestra. Upon their return from the European tour, they performed at Carnegie Hall as part of a one-hundred member marimba orchestra.

The representative figure of this orchestra, Clair Omar Musser, is a seminal figure in the history of contemporary marimba. Another well-known member of this orchestra is Jack Connor, who, in 1947, first performed Darius Milhaud’s Concerto for Xylophone and Vibraphone, and became a life-long friend of the Lacours.

After graduating university, Lacour entered a seminary, and upon completion of his studies in 1940, became a clergyman. His first chance to visit Japan occurred during World War II. Clergymen were exempt from military service, and he hoped to become a chaplain for the navy. As the USS supply vessel was crossing the Pacific, Japan surrendered, and immediately upon their arrival in Yokosuka, they made the navy ship the centre from which they conducted their activities. After this, Lacour experienced firsthand the results of the scorched-earth policy in Tokyo.

At a gathering of all the chaplains in Japan at the Tokyo Red Cross building, Lacour made the acquaintance of Takefuji Tomio, the head of the Nichibei Language School. Takefuji came to understand his missionary activities in the United States, and convinced Lacour of the need for a Christian church in Japan. Lacour sympathised with his enthusiasm, and decided to pursue missionary work in Japan.

Lacour returned to the United States in 1946, and began a four-year preparation for his next trip to Japan. The members included the Lacours and two other members, Louise Seashaw and Leontyne Ostrand.¹⁰ These last two were vocalists, but also

---


¹⁰ The original spelling of these two names is presently impossible to confirm, and both are the translator’s assumption.
performed marimba, trombone and numerous other instruments. Mildred Lacour performed the harp, and formed a trio with the other two. That greatest difficulty they expected to encounter in Japan was how to transport the instruments. They managed to obtain a large trailer that accommodated the four four-octave marimbas and other instruments, but was also equipped with a kitchen and places for the members to sleep. They purchased an automobile to pull the trailer, and gradually their preparations were completed.

In Japan, Takefuji arranged for performances at one hundred thirty different locations throughout the country. He also energetically assisted with the production of pamphlets and the translation of hymns into Japanese, and in 1950, their fervent desire was granted.

(2) The Lacour Musical Missionary Group Arrival in Japan

With Lacour as the central figure, the four-member Lacour Musical Missionary Group went to Japan to spread Christianity in post-war Japan. Arriving on 21st June 1950, their first performance was held at the Aoyama University Auditorium on 28th July, a day on which there was a torrential rain. Despite this weather, the auditorium was filled, and continued to be so for each of the three days. For the final performance, approximately 12,800 people gathered in the audience. During their five-month stay, they gave 128 performances from Hokkaido to Kyushu, to approximately 430,000 people, and collected more than 1,400,000 yen in contributions. With the strong support of the Christian newspapers, they converted over 45,000 people, an unheard of success in missionary activities.

The focal instruments in these musical gatherings assemblies were the four marimbas, which were extravagant instruments with double-arched frontal pipes. Along with the harp and the trombone, these instruments were placed in the trailer, and the group travelled on the poorly paved roads of the time to every imaginable place in their missionary activities.

On 11th December 1950, their long missionary project came to an end, and they sold most of the instruments to Japanese. The Lacour Musical Missionary Group flew back to the United States. After this, they returned to Japan six times between 1954 and 1960. Their missionary activities are a remarkable accomplishment in the history of Christianity in Japan. At the same time, however, their activities had a profound influence on the history of the marimba in Japan. Many of the representative Japanese marimbists of the time and those who were to later become well-known performers heard their performances, which then inspired the Japanese to shift from the xylophone to the marimba.

I will now introduce the contents of the musical assemblies.

(3) The Lacour Musical Missionary Group Concert Series Programmes

Here, I will introduce the contents of the concert at Aoyama University. These performances were a joint production by different Protestant sects, and held twice a day on the 31st October, and the 7th and 8th November. The first concert began at

---

5:30 P.M. and the second started at 7:30 P.M. The two concerts both began with musical performance followed by a sermon by Lacour. The programme from the first day is given below:

**Part One**

**Performance**
- Rasbach, Oscar – Spanish Carnival
- Gounod, Charles François – O, Divine Redeemer
- Grieg, Edvard – Solveig’s Song

**Sermon – The Process of Entering the Faith**

**Part Two**

- Saint-Saëns, Camille – My Heart at Thy Sweet Voice
- Bassett, Leslie – Yorokobi o idakite ie ni kaere
- Mascagni, Pietro – Cavalleria Rusticana (Interlude)
- Poldini, Ede – Poupée Valsante

**Sermon – The Discovery of the Miraculous Mark**

I have provided a table below that lists those works for solo marimba and ensemble works that include the marimba.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Instrumentation</th>
<th>Composition</th>
<th>Composer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 2</td>
<td>Marimba solo</td>
<td>Tanhäuser – March</td>
<td>Wagner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marimba solo</td>
<td>Pizicatti - Sylvia</td>
<td>Delibes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marimba solo</td>
<td>Polonaise</td>
<td>Chopin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 3</td>
<td>Marimba</td>
<td>Bara no yō ni subarashii</td>
<td>Nevin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marimba solo</td>
<td>Bolero</td>
<td>Moszkowski</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>trio</td>
<td>Swing Low, Sweet Chariot</td>
<td>Spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 4</td>
<td>Marimba solo</td>
<td>The Flight of the Bumblebee</td>
<td>Rimsky-Korsakov</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marimba solo</td>
<td>Waltz in E flat major</td>
<td>Durand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marimba solo</td>
<td>In a Monastery Garden</td>
<td>Ketèlbey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 5</td>
<td>Marimba solo</td>
<td>Mattaki hi wa owarinu</td>
<td>Bond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marimba solo</td>
<td>Interlude</td>
<td>Franck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trio</td>
<td>Lullaby</td>
<td>Kreisler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 6</td>
<td>Marimba solo</td>
<td>The Swan</td>
<td>Saint-Saëns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marimba solo</td>
<td>March</td>
<td>Schubert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marimba</td>
<td>Andante Cantabile</td>
<td>Tchaikovsky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 7</td>
<td>Marimba</td>
<td>Anitra’s Dance</td>
<td>Grieg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marimba solo</td>
<td>Two Guitars</td>
<td>Gypsy folk song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trio</td>
<td>Osanago nado no inoru toki</td>
<td>Fenner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 8</td>
<td>Marimba and harp</td>
<td>Moonlight Sonata</td>
<td>Beethoven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>duet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5 Xylophone and Marimba Performers in Japan

(1) Early Xylophone Performers
The representative Japanese performers in the post-war period were Hiraoka Yōichi and Asabuki Ei’ichi. Hiraoka was known throughout his life as a performer who preferred xylophones with “a clear sound that carried”. Asabuki, however, preferred marimbas with a deeper and fuller resonance, and had shifted from the xylophone to the marimba.

These two figures made immense contributions to the world of music for the xylophone and the marimba. Before these two performers, however, there were a number of well-known xylophone performers that should be mentioned.

Hoshide Yoshio (1890-?) performed solo xylophone as a member of the Konoe Military Band Percussion.
Yoshikawa Suihō (?-?) was primarily centred in Gifu and established the Midori Music Group in 1904. He published an instruction manual entitled, Shirofon no manabikata シロフォンの学び方 (How to Learn the Xylophone).
Itō Kameyoshi (1913-?) Itō’s first performance was broadcast by Fukuoka Hōsō. He was also an instructor for the Nihon Gakki Yamaha Music School in Kobe.
Iwai Sadao (?-?) was counted with Hiraoka and Asabuki as one of the three great performers, but died prematurely.

Hiraoka Seiji is the nephew of Hiraoka Yōichi and performs both the xylophone and the vibraphone.
Fukurai Minoru (1927-) still actively performs as a soloist and was a member of the first marimba ensemble to be broadcast on NHK.
Mizuno Yoshihisa (1936-) was Hiraoka Yōichi’s prized student. He still performs throughout the country as a soloist, and with his wife, Nobuko, a pianist.

(2) Hiraoka Yōichi12 (1907-1981) – Xylophone
Hiraoka was born in Hyogo Prefecture to an extremely prestigious family, the Hiraokas having been distantly related to the Tokugawa family. After graduating the Tokyo Commercial School (present day Hitotsubashi University), his father, Toranosuke, became the president of Nihon seisō, and frequently went overseas for business. With his father’s understanding of the value of overseas experience and his encouragement, Yōichi was able to study in the United States.

In 1919, Yōichi first encountered the xylophone when he went to the Konparu-kan, a movie theatre formerly located in Ginza. During the intermission between the two films, the xylophone played a notable role in the music, marches and other pieces, performed in the orchestra pit, and he was deeply impressed by its sound. He immediately purchased a 2.5 octave xylophone from Kyōeki shōsha, the present day

Nihon Gakki in Ginza. (The price at the time was 5 yen, which is equivalent to 100,000 yen today.) He later purchased a second instrument with resonating tubes, and within the period of one year, he had made xylophone arrangements for more than thirty pieces. He performed a wide range of genres including classical music, American folk songs, marches and Japanese works. In May 1927, while still a student at Keiō University, he held his first recital at the Imperial Hotel Theatre, and performed the following pieces – Mocking Bird Fantasy, The Golden Wedding Jubilee, Ziguenerweisen – and the recital was very well received. He held his fourth recital at the Nihon Seinenkan, and released twelve records through Polydor. With the income derived from this, in 1930, he was able to take the luxury liner, the Chichibumaru, to the United States.

The months after arriving in the United States, he passed the NBC public broadcasting company’s audition, and had the opportunity to perform on different programmes. With the support of the Japanese students in the United States for his performances of Japanese works, he had even greater opportunities to perform. In 1936, he held a concert at the New York Town Hall and made his formal debut in the New York music world.

One of the people to recommend Hiraoka included the director of the New York Philharmonic, Arturo Toscanini. The day after his recital, the music columns for the New York Times and other newspapers had rave reviews of his performance, and the following summer, he held a recital at Carnegie Hall, in which the New York Philharmonic appeared, and Hiraoka came to be known as the “King of the Xylophone”. He married Yamaguichi Shizuko. Hiraoko also performed for an NBC morning programme, and performed nearly every morning until June 1942, which when combined with his afternoon and evening performances made for 4,000 broadcasts and the creation of a large xylophone fan base in the United States. With the explosive beginning of the World War II, he returned to Japan. With the death of his son (also named Yōichi, but with a different character) from sepsis, he only refused one performance; however, outside of this one example, he continued to perform throughout the country.

In 1961, when the New York Philharmonic came to Japan, the members encouraged his return to the United States; and the following year, when he went to New York, the members of the New York Philharmonic prepared a welcome concert at Carnegie Hall. Even after an absence of twenty years, the audience still had not forgotten the sound of Hiraoka’s xylophone. With the New York Times music critic again writing a rave review of his performances of O-Edo Nihonbashi, Sakura and Ziguenerweisen, Hiraoka decided to return to the United States.

In 1963, he moved with his family to New York, and recommenced performing in the United States. In 1981, he passed away in Los Angeles at the age of seventy-three. Hiraoka was the first to perform Kami Kyōsuke’s Concerto for Xylophone and Orchestra, Op. 56, with the Tokyo Broadcasting Orchestra. He often said “the xylophone shouldn’t be performed with your hands, but with your entire body,” and despite his small stature, filled the stage with an animated physicality in his performances. He devoted his life as a goodwill ambassador through sound. In 1979, the Japanese government recognised his accomplishment and presented him with The Order of the Sacred Treasure.
Asabuki was born in Tokyo. The family was well known in Oiwake and his
grandfather, Eiji, had been a student of Fukuzawa Yūkichi, a seminal figure in Meiji
period politics. He later moved to Tokyo where he figured prominently in the
financial world during the Meiji, Taishō and Shōwa periods.

Asabuki’s first encountered the xylophone at the age of thirteen, in 1923, when he
heard a recording of the William Tell Fantasy performed by the American xylophone
performer William H. Leitz. Enthralled with the sound, he immediately purchased a
desktop xylophone with a complete 2.5 octave range, and threw himself into practice.
After this, to begin serious studies, he studied under Hoshide Yoshio, the earlier
mentioned musician of the Konoe Military Band. He purchased various scores, and
during his second year at Keiō University, he appeared on a programme by Chōō
Broadcasting, the present day NHK. He later purchased a four-octave Deagan
xylophone. The price at the time was 500 yen or 250 dollars. To understand the cost
of this instrument, the average income for a recent university graduate was fifty yen.
In 1929, he composed his first work, Karuizawa no bijin op. 1 軽井沢の美人 op. 1
(The Beauty from Karuizawa, op. 1), and continued to compose over one hundred
works over the following sixty-three years.

The impetus behind his beginning to compose lies in his search for original works for
the marimba. He pursued formal education in composition and studied under Heinrich
Werkmeister at the Kunitachi School of Music. With the outbreak of the war, the
police suppressed many forms of stage entertainment.

After the war, despite his freedom to perform music from any country, the joy he
experienced as a performer was finally surpassed with his marriage Ozaki Tamako.
He passed the Occupation Forces’ performer audition, and was assessed to be payed
four hundred yen for each performance, a remarkable amount of money in those days.
He performed at dinner shows in the American camps, and his instrument travelled to
and fro in American Army trucks.

In 1951, Asahi Broadcasting asked him to perform “Penguin Time” for the Sunstar
Toothpaste commercial, the toothpaste produced by the Shionogi Corporation. He
performed a fifteen-minute xylophone solo every morning beginning at 7:15. He even
performed on Sundays, holidays and New Years without fail, and while this broadcast
originated in Osaka, it gradually spread throughout the country, and continued for five
years until 1957.

As his name came to be known throughout the country, the number of requests for
performances increased. In 1953, with his performance at the Kobe Workers Musical
Convention regular meeting, his fame spread even further, and he received over one
hundred requests for performances throughout the country. In the following era of
television shows, Asabuki regularly appeared on programmes such as NHK’s Asa no
shirabe, Gakusō to tomo ni, Hana no seiza and Konsa-to ho-ru, NTV’s Seinen konsa-
to, Doyōbi konsa-to and others.

13 Shimada Hiroshi 島田博. “Ro-uzu’uddo 60-nen” Nihon mokkin kyōkai, p. 1, pp. 4-7, p. 17, pp. 29-31,
In 1955, however, Asabuki’s father, Tsunekichi, passed away, after which he decided to end his career as a professional musician, become a businessman and succeed his father’s position in the family business. In 1958, he held a farewell concert at the Ginza Yamaha Hall and performed Selections from Carmen, Hungarian Rhapsody and other works. He also performed the vibraphone to create a novel and interesting programme for his final performance. He continued composing and arranging in his free time as well as instruction. The theme song for the NHK programme, Shumi no engei, continued for nearly thirty years after its composition.

(4) Abe Keiko (1937-) – Marimba
Abe Keiko has continued promoting original works for the marimba throughout the world, and is a figure impossible to ignore in the history of this instrument. She has performed in over fifty countries, and with her pioneering numerous new performance techniques, she has greatly expanded the musical expression of the marimba. She has commissioned numerous works from composers, and has also produced a large corpus of her own compositions. She has established the marimba as a solo instrument with a unique performance career as a soloist in chamber ensembles and orchestras, as a member of percussion ensembles, and even appearing with jazz performers. She has created a unique world for the marimba with her intense focus and a technical facility that allows for the unfettered musical expression of her remarkable musicality. Abe has secured a place in music history as a performer with her superb evaluations at the international level. She has performed in over fifty international music festivals and has been invited to conduct master classes at over ninety music colleges and conservatories throughout the world. She has also premiered over one hundred seventy works by Japanese and other composers. She has been awarded six Superior Awards in the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs Cultural Festival. In 1993, she was the first female performer to be inducted into the Percussion Hall of Fame, an honour commonly referred to as the Nobel Prize in percussion, by the Percussion Arts Society headquarters in the United States. Representative titles of some of the works she has premiered include Torusu III, Marimba no toki, Rauda Koncheruto. Representative works that she has composed include Sakura no genkei, Chikurin, Warabeuta ni yoru tanshō. She has released over thirty CDs, videos and DVDs. She presently is a specially appointed professor of Tōhō Gakuen, a guest professor at the Nagoya Music College, and visiting professor at the Stuttgart Music College.

Below is a list of Abe Keiko’s compositions (For further information on these works, consult the PAS website database vol. 1.

Abe Keiko’s total number of compositions: 82

Solo works: 32
Duets: 11
Ensemble works: 22
Concertos: 8
Joint compositions: 9

(5) Takahashi Michiko (1939-) – Marimba
In 1973, the marimbist, Takahashi Michiko took first place in the International Gaudeamus Competition held in Rotterdam with her well-received premiere performance Ton de Leeuw’s composition *Midare for Marimba Solo*, a work she commissioned and now considered one of the classic modern works for the marimba.

Finding the existing marimbas unsatisfactory and in seeking a new ground, she experimented with reforming the instrument and designed a contrabass marimba with a register twice as low as the original of 32.7 hertz. (This instrument was built by Mizuno Saburō.) Takahashi commissioned and premiered numerous works from Japanese and non-Japanese composers for this instrument. Her CD, *Takahashi Michiko: The Wonder of the Contrabass Marimba* released through CBS Sony was a bestseller. She is also known for her performances of a unique marimba, the “crystal marimba”, which makes use of glass keys.

Below is a list of concertos Takahashi Michiko commissioned for the marimba. (Other premiered works are listed on the PAS website Fujii Mustuko database vol. 1.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Orchestra for First Performance</th>
<th>Date of First Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yamauchi Tadashi</td>
<td><em>Kotiru</em> for marimba and orchestra</td>
<td>Tokyo University of Fine Arts Music Department: Gunma Philharmonic</td>
<td>1969: 1972 revision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ton de Leeuw</td>
<td><em>Special Music</em>: solo percussion and orchestra</td>
<td>Holland Broadcasting Orchestra: Holland Chamber Orchestra</td>
<td>1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matsudaira Yoriaki</td>
<td><em>Oscillation</em>: for marimba and three orchestras</td>
<td>Tokyo Philharmonic</td>
<td>1979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mizuno Shūkō</td>
<td>Marimba Concerto</td>
<td>New Japan Philharmonic</td>
<td>1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doi Katsuyuki</td>
<td>Concerto for Marimba and Orchestra</td>
<td>Tokyo Philharmonic</td>
<td>1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moroi Makoto</td>
<td>Concerto Symphony no. 3</td>
<td>Tokyo Philharmonic</td>
<td>1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miki Minoru</td>
<td><em>Z Concerto</em>: for marimba, percussion and orchestra</td>
<td>Tokyo University of Fine Arts Music Department Orchestra</td>
<td>1996 Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ishii Maki</td>
<td>Concerto M-2000: for marimba and orchestra</td>
<td>Tokyo Philharmonic</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6 *The Establishment of the Japan Xylophone Association*

From approximately 1948, when Asabuki Ei’ichi was still performing actively, Keiō University’s Fukuurai Minoru, Tamura Bunji (employed by Nihonsei tetsusho), Abe Keiko (part of the well-known instrumental ensemble, the Midori Band, directed by Hamadate Kikuo), Ōguri Takako and Hamadate Shōko all came to have lessons with Asabuki. Later, figures such as the conductor, Iwaki Hiroyuki, and Oyake Yūsuke, the percussionist for the NHK orchestra, also studied with Asabuki. In 1950, Asabuki established the Tokyo Xylophone Club (TXC), and was its first president, with Hiraoka Yōichi as adviser. They produced a concert with their most gifted students,
which with the combination of publicity and the students’ promotional efforts, took place with eight performers at the Nagata Primary School in Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo. The hall was filled and the performance enthusiastically received, and since then, with each yearly performance, the number of members increased, and in 1957, the name was changed to the Japan Xylophone Association (JXA), a nation-wide association.

In 2005, there are now twenty chapters located throughout the country with more than 9,179 members. The present president of the organisation Asabuki Hideyo (Asabuki Ei’ichi’s third son), the executive director, Fukurai Minoru, Tamura Bunji and other officers now manage the association. For an association devoted to the performance of the xylophone and the marimba to have continued for more than sixty years is truly an astonishing accomplishment. Mizuno Yoshihisa, Takahashi Michiko and Abe Keiko and many other Japanese marimba performers belong to this organisation, including this author.

7 Music Colleges and Japanese Compositions for the Xylophone and Marimba

(1) Xylophone and Marimba Compositions by Japanese Composers (Please see the PAS website Fujii Mutsuko database vol.1.)

It is impossible to ignore the cooperation between the composer and the performer for premiere performances. In order to investigate the Japanese compositions and their premiere performance up to 2003 required the cooperation of four different composers groups, three performance groups as well as twenty-four individual marimbists, all of whom participated in a survey that included posthumous works.

The different composer and performance groups are given below, the figure in parentheses representing the number of respondents.

Composer groups:
Nihon sakkyokuka kyōgi-kai 日本作曲家協議会 [Japanese Federation of Composers] (260)
Sakkyokuka “Kan” 作曲家 環 [Composers Kan] (28)
Oto no kai 音の会 [Sound Group] (26)

Performance groups:
Nihon dagakki-kyōkai 日本打楽器協会 [Japan Percussion Association] (1306)
Japan Percussion Center (5000)
Nihon mokkin- kyōkai 日本木琴協会 [Japan Xylophone Association] (82)

With 7,252 responses, it was possible to obtain and confirm the results of the information for the premiere performances of 724 compositions. Due to length restrictions, detailed information regarding the composers and the titles will be provided elsewhere, and only information regarding the instrumentation will be provided here.

Instrumentation No.
Marimba solo 176
Marimba duet 67
Marimba trio 39
Marimba, woodwinds and percussion 218
Marimba concerto 70
Marimba and piano 48
Xylophone concertos 2
Marimba and percussion 30
Marimba and other instruments 9

(2) The Senzoku Music College Percussion Research Centre
The Senzoku Music College Percussion Research Centre was established in 2008, collects information and data on percussion instruments both in Japan and internationally, which it then provides to worldwide percussion organisations. It also analyses scores for percussion compositions, and attempts to spread the importance and significance of percussion as the origin of human music through research.

As a place for students from Senzoku Music College to present their research, the centre sponsors live information, conferences, and also lends and reproduces research materials. The centre presently holds the scores for approximately 1,159 compositions, and actively promotes and supports student research.

Senzoku Music College also boasts the unique phenomenon of a marimba orchestra of approximately one hundred performers that performs regularly. The compositions performed by the orchestra have been provided below.

The centre also actively collects instruments and is now possesses the largest collection in Japan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Composition</th>
<th>Arranger</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1984/12/7</td>
<td>Suite bergamasque/Clauude Achille Debussy (Arr. Nobuhara Masao)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1985/12/3</td>
<td>West Side Story/Leonard Bernstein (Arr. Nobuhara Masao)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1986/10/18</td>
<td>Espaňa, rapsodie pour orchestre/Alexis Emmanuel Chabrier (Arr. Teruya Masaki)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1987/12/15</td>
<td>Opera “Prince/Polovetsian Dances”/Alexander Porfirevich Borodin (Arr. Nobuhara Masao)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kobikiuta for Percussion Orchestra/Koyama Kiyoshige (Arr. Nobuhara Masao)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dance Suite “Spartacus”/Aramil’ich Khachaturian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>1990/12/1</td>
<td>Der Feuervogel Suite / Igor Nyodorovich Stravinsky (Arr. Shinohara Makoto)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>1992/12/3</td>
<td>Suite PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITON / Modest Petrovich Mussorgsky (Arr. Takahashi Yasuo)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>1993/12/7</td>
<td>WEST SIDE STORY/Leonald Bernstein (Arr. Takahashi Yasuo)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>1994/12/15</td>
<td>Overture 1812 Op.49 /Peter Iiyich Tschaikowsky (Arr. Takahashi Yasuo)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>1995/12/13</td>
<td>Poema sinfonico ‘Feste romane/Ottorino Respighi (Arr. Takahashi Yasuo)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>1996/12/19</td>
<td>Suite from the Ballet “Gayaneh”/Aram Ilich Khachaturian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>1997/12/22</td>
<td>L’Arlesienne Suites No. 1 &amp; No. 2/Georges Bizet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>1998/12/22</td>
<td>&quot;Swan Lake&quot;Op.20/ Peter Ilyich Tschaikovsky</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>1999/12/22</td>
<td>Daphnis et Chloe 2e SERIE/Joseph Maurice Ravel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>UKOZNES'99/Nishihara Taiki</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(3) The Significance of New Compositions for the Marimba

Graduating from the Tokyo University of Fine Arts in 1971, I had hoped to have a recital of works by Japanese composers. At the time, however, none of the works had been published and only a few of the pieces could be performed. I discovered it was impossible to have a programme completely devoted to works by Japanese composers. Because of this, I have continued to commission works by Japanese composers, and at this point, have commissioned over sixty new compositions. Some of these were completed four days before the concert, and I have memories of sleepless nights rehearsing. Of the more experimental works, some were such that I experienced losing the original intention of the piece. Nonetheless, all of these works were joint works between the composers and the performer. More than anything else, I feel that the significance of these compositions is that the quality of some is such that they will be performed again and remain in the repertoire.

The decade of the 1970s should be called the dawn of Japanese compositions for the marimba, which Abe Keiko initiated with her impact on the hitherto lacking solo marimba repertoire. With the modification and development of the instrument, the expressive capabilities of the instrument have been further improved. After this period, the passion with which Takahashi Michiko, Fujii Mutsuko of the Marimba Duo, Kusakari Tomoko, Sugawara Atsushi of the Group 3 Marimba, Okada Mariko,
Taneya Mustuko, Yoshihara Sumire, Arase Junko, Takada Midori, Yoshioka Takayoshi and others have approached the improvement of the instrument with new composition for the marimba have greatly expanded the activities of many composers.

Presently, the number of music colleges has grown and there are many more marimbists. Naturally, the number of compositions for the marimba has also grown and performers are now in the position of being able to select pieces for recitals clearly reflecting a shift in eras. Nevertheless, the sense of anticipation with each new composition, the sensitivity towards sound colour comes into play as each new piece differs from earlier works. More than anything else, each work embodies the breath of an historical moment, the expression or articulation of which then becomes the ineffable mystery and wonder of the first performance. This, I believe, accounts for the presence of Japanese compositions for the marimba as the designated works for marimba competitions.

Miyoshi Akira: Suite Kaiwa, premiered by Abe Keiko
Ishii Maki: Hiten seido III for marimba solo Op. 75, premiered by Fujii Mutsuko

(4) The Growth of the Marimbist Population
Beginning with the boat-shaped xylophone that entered Japan during the Edo period and spread into the masses, the decision to include the desktop xylophone as part of music education in Japan created a nation-wide awareness of the instrument. The appearance of superb xylophone and marimba performers also heavily influenced the popular perception of these instruments. When combined with the advances in instrument production and the passage of time, it is no surprise that the Japanese marimba with its rich sound and functionality has spread throughout the world. With the continuing output of challenging works by composers, there is a continuing growth of younger performers that stems from their attraction to the appealing sounds produced by the wooden keys. The xylophone’s long and unique history and the development of music for the marimba are surely connected with the increase of Japanese marimbists.

Afterword

I often am asked overseas why there are so many marimbists in Japan. With the wide awareness of the xylophone from its use in public education, there was a greater appreciation of the xylophone and the marimba. The connection between the instrument’s development and new music for the marimba cannot be divorced as these commissioned works pushed the instrument in new directions; the two are inextricably linked. Nevertheless, to claim this is the only reason for the development of the marimba in Japan is perhaps simplistic and requires further research. Performance technique and gripping techniques have also evolved, now established as international standards, and performers are now capable of things unimaginable sixty-five years ago. Understanding the present state of the continuously evolving marimba music is the most significant thing for future performers and their education.

References


Other Sources

Composers group “Oto no kai” 音の会 members Fukuda Keiko 福田恵子 and others.

Composers group “Kan” 環 members.

Ensemble Nipponia 日本音楽集団 Representative: Tamura Takuo 田村拓男.

Ibaragi Prefecture Hitachinaka City Furusato Kaikokan 茨城県ひたちなか市ふるさと懐古館. Hitachinaka City Educational Committee Executive Office Cultural Section Manager: Saitō Arata 斉藤拓.

Ibaragi Prefecture Hitachinaka City: Saitō Mieko 斉藤美恵子

Japanese Federation of Composers Nihon sakkyokuka kyōgikai 日本作曲家協議会.

Japan Modern Music Organisation: Vice President, Matsuo Masataka and members日本現代音楽協会副會長: 松尾祐孝及び同會員.

Japan Xylophone Association 日本木琴協会: President, Asabuki Hideyo 朝吹英世; Managing Director Tamura Bunji 田村文治; Director, Kudō Shōji 工藤昭二; Yoshikawa Masao 吉川雅夫; Special Member, Tokiniwa Tadahisa 時庭忠久.
(Former) Japan Wood Industries limited Nihon mokuzai kōgyō kabushiki kaisha 元日本木材興業株式会社. Miyakawa Marimba Research Centre Section Chief ミヤカワマリンバ研究所 講長: Tsukui Fukuzō 津久井福蔵, Inspector 監査役.

Japan Wood ltd., Kabushiki kaishi Nihon uddo 株式会社日本ウッド: President, Sōma Yoshinari 相馬良成; Department Chair 部長, Hanatsuka Yasuaki 花塚靖明.

Japan Percussion Association 日本打楽器協会: President 会長: Yamaguchi Kōichi et al.

Japan Percussion Center members

Japan Xylophone Association Nihon mokkin kyōkai 日本木琴協会: members.

Komaki Instrumnets Komaki gakki コマキ楽器.

Kōrogi-sha Representative Director Kōrogi-sha daihyō torishimariyaku こおろぎ社 代表取締役: Saitō Osamu 斉藤幸.

Marimbists: Fukurai Minoru 福来実, Mizuno Yoshihisa 水野與旨久, Abe Keiko 安倍圭子.

Mizuno Marimba Workshop Mizuno marimba kōbō みずのマリンバ工房: Mizuno Mitsuo 水野三郎.

Nagasak Cultural History Association Nagasaki rekishi bunka kyōkai 長崎歴史文化協会: Director 理事, Etchū Tetsuya 越中哲也 [Minshingaku scholar 明清楽者]

Percussionist: Okada Tomoyuki 岡田知之 Professor Emeritus Senzoku Gakuen Conservatory 洗足学園音楽大学名誉教授.

Saitō Instrumnets Representative Directing President Saitō gakki daihyō torishimariyaku kaichō 斉藤楽器代表取締役会長: Saitō Mitsui 斉藤光次; Representative Director daihyō torishimariyaku 代表取締役: Saitō Tadashi 斉藤正.

Yamaha ltd., Wind and Percussion Operations Division Percussion Design Division Yamaha kabushiki kaisha kandagakki jigyōbu dagakki sekkeika kachō ヤマハ株式会社管打楽器事業部打楽器設計課: Director 講長, Ōmura Hiroaki 大室裕昭; Production Planning Division 生産企画課, Suzuki Shūhei 鈴木周平.

Senzoku Gakuen Conservatory Percussion Research Centre Staff Senzoku gakuen ongaku daigaku fuzoku dagakki kenkyūkai sutaffu 洗足学園音楽大学附属打楽器研究所マリンバ研究会スタッフ.

Senzoku Gakuen Conservatory 洗足学園音楽大学: Prof. Sawada Akiko 澤田篤子.