

Noh Reimagined New Music

Descants 2: and the trees and *Descants 4*

Programme Notes

Descants is a series of pieces for solo instruments in natural environments. 'Natural', in my meaning, includes human-made environments, eschewing any artificial distinction between humans and the rest of the environment. The composed music is intended to become a part of the natural soundscape, not foregrounded or separated from the natural sounds around it.

These two video works – *Descants 2: and the trees* and *Descants 4* – both share with *nō* the structural idea that a visitor – a treble in *Descants 2* and a violist in *Descants 4* – arrives at a place and, through the power of music and movement (human culture), communicates with the living spirits of the land, represented in these works by sounds and images of the non-human. *Nō* composer Konparu Zenchiku (1405–1468) was particularly influenced by this Japanese Buddhist idea – that non-human, non-sentient beings could have equal or greater spiritual ability or worth than humans – and it was the subject of many of his *nō* plays.

The text of *Descants 2: and the trees* is taken from Paul Kingsnorth's collection *Kidland and other poems* (2011). Filmed in a park in Kita-Kyushu, Japan, the singer, performed by Yuta, listens to and plays with the spirits of the place, degraded and hidden beneath asphalt roads, paving stones, and dirt paths, finally addressing them and inviting them to retake the land that was once theirs.

Descants 4 is performed by violist Tomoko Akasaka. It is in five parts, each filmed in a different location around Iki-no-matsubara in Fukuoka, Japan. This is the location where the original *kamikaze* (divine wind) destroyed the invading Mongol fleet in the late 13th-century, and the island in which can be seen in the distance is location where the recovered bodies of Mongol sailors were buried.

In both pieces, as in most early forms of *nō*, the structure of the works is that a human visitor arrives, communicates with the spirits of the land through the cultural reference points they have (sung poetry in *nō* and in *Descants 2*, and performed music in *Descants 4*). The human presence (portrayed by the visitor, the *waki*, or supporting actor) is less important than the music and dance of the non-human spirit of the place – on the *nō* stage this is represented by the principal actor (the *shite*) who, in the ideal performance, actually embodies – becomes – the spirit which they are portraying. In *Descants*, the non-human place speaks for itself as non-human sounds, sometimes in dialogue with the human presence, sometimes harmonising, and sometimes enveloping them.

—Daryl Jamieson

Profiles

Daryl Jamieson (composer and director)

Daryl Jamieson (b.1980, Halifax NS) is based in Zushi and Fukuoka, Japan. After Wilfrid Laurier University, he studied at London's Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the University of York. He then spent a post-doctoral year in Tokyo studying with Jo Kondo. He is currently assistant professor of composition and aesthetics at Kyushu University of Music and is published by Da Vinci Edition and the Canadian Music Centre.

In 2018, he received the Toshi Ichiyanagi Contemporary Prize for the third of his *Vanitas* trilogy of music theatre pieces. Jamieson's music, written for both western classical and Japanese traditional instruments, is influenced by his study of *nō* theatre and Japanese philosophy. It has been performed across Europe, Japan, and North America by many soloists and ensembles.

In addition to composing, he also co-founded the intercultural music theatre company 'atelier jaku', and is active as a researcher, writing on Japanese aesthetics, and contemporary music and spirituality.
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Yuta (treble, *Descants 2: and the trees*)

Yuta (treble) was born in Japan in 2012, sharing a birthday with Brahms and Tchaikovsky. The child of two opera-singer parents, he became familiar with music and musicians from an early age. On his fifth birthday, he was given an instrument by a master classical guitar player, and he has enjoyed learning how to play the guitar since then. Currently, he is also taking piano lessons once a week. Despite having no choral or stage experience, he enthusiastically tackled this new work written in English on his own initiative and natural talent, his efforts achieving great results.

His hobbies are reading manga and researching cocktails.

Tomoko Akasaka (viola, *Descants 4*)

During and after winning numerous prizes, including the 1st prize at the 12th Japan classical music competition and the 3rd prize at the 53th ARD International music competition, Akasaka has performed as a soloist and chamber musician worldwide.

As a soloist she has appeared with the Orchester included the Bayerischen Rundfunks, the Muenchener Kammerorchester, the Orchestre de chambre de Genève, the Kremerata Baltica, the Venezuela Symphony Orchestra, Slovenian Philharmonic Orchestra the Japan Symphony orchestra under the baton of conductors like Seiji Ozawa, Johannes Kalitzke, Raman Kofman, Kazuki Yamada, Douglas Boyd amongst others.

The series of Recitals in Geneva and Tokyo has been broadcasted by Swiss Romande, and NHK-TV. Her artistic partnerships as a chamber musician include work with include Mstislav Rostropovich, Daniel Hope, Gidon Kremer, Philippe Jarousky, Micha Meisky, Patricia Kopatcinskaja, Ebéne Quartet, Jerusalem Quartet, Kuss Quartet, at international music festivals such as Salzburg Festival, Lockenhaus Festival, Bad-Kissingen sommer, Mecklenburg Vorpommern, BBC Proms, Saito-Kinen Festival, Luzern and Verbier Festival, Kronberg Festival, Rio de Janeiro Festival, Schubertiade, etc.

Tomoko Akasaka has performed at concert venues include the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Konzerthaus and Philharmonie Berlin, Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg, Royal Albert Hall and Wigmore Hall in London, Vienna Konzerthaus, Zurich Tonhalle, Suntory Hall in Tokyo, Schloss Nymphenburg Munich, Shanghai Grand Theater, and National Centre for the performing arts in Beijing, Geneva Victoria Hall.

Tomoko Akasaka studied with Nobuko Imai for whom she worked as an assistant professor at the Geneva Conservatory of Music. In addition, Ms. Akasaka worked as a guest professor at the conservatory of Neuchâtel. She currently holds the position of Viola professor at the Münster Musikhochschule and Substitute Professor at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Leipzig.