

A stylized sun with rays and a central black circle containing text. The sun is composed of a central black circle and several grey, triangular rays of varying lengths extending outwards. The text "Dai Fujikura" is centered within the black circle in a white, monospace font. Below the circle, the word "FLARE" is written in a white, sans-serif font. At the bottom center, there is a small grey circle containing a white symbol resembling a stylized 'S' or a similar character.

Dai Fujikura

FLARE



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# FLARE

Flare (2010)

for string quartet  
*performed by Arditti Quartet*

But, I fly (2005)

for 12 voices  
*performed by Vox Humana*

SAKANA (2007)

version for tenor saxophone  
*performed by Masanori Oishi*

Dolphins (2010)

version for 2 celli  
*performed by Mari Endo + Kenji Nakagi*

Halcyon (2011)

for clarinet and string trio  
*performed by Goldfield Ensemble*

FLUX (2007)

for viola  
*performed by Johanna Persson*

Scion Stems (2011)

for string trio  
*performed by Zilliacus / Persson / Raitinen Trio*

## Creating Utopias

Dai Fujikura is the only person I know who doesn't like Venice – *"because there are no straight lines in this place."* We all construct our own worlds in our heads, whether they are such stuff as dreams are made on, or just a sense of who we are which is slightly out of synch with those around us or with the objects of the natural world. *"If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer."* (**Henry David Thoreau**). If we ordinary mortals feel uncomfortable in a particular situation, our best option is to leave and go to where we do feel at home. A creative writer, a film maker or a composer can escape through the medium of his art, creating a vision of his own idealised, perfect world.

*The Observer* review of "**Secret Forest**", released in June 2012 on the **NMC label**, refers to *"a riot of imaginative bird and insect noise."* **Swarming essence (2007)** marvels at the constantly changing patterns of fragmentation and reintegration created by a flock of birds in wheeling flight or a glittering shoal of tropical fish. **Dolphins (2010)** on the first **Minabel** album explores the action and reaction of a pair of dolphins, reflecting each other's gestures as they travel at speed through the water, as attuned to each other as identical twins who finish each other's sentences.

Despite these references to the environment, you won't see Dai Fujikura broadcasting a nature programme from the Brazilian rain forest any time soon. Whilst he is fascinated by forms he observes in the natural world, patterns of synchronised movement and the geometric precision of Nature's design, paradoxically he can't walk through a forest and connect with the flora and fauna because he suffers from allergies. He is no Messiaen either when it comes to birdsong. The birds in his music sing from a different song sheet; they sing melodies he wants us to hear, not the patterns familiar from your local hedgerow. When you listen to **I dreamed on singing flowers (2012,)** commissioned by the **BBC Promenade Concerts** for its "**Cage Walk**", you will soon realise that the ambient soundscape comprises the hum of traffic, the sound of an emergency siren, the murmurings of a somnolent city on a midsummer afternoon in the vicinity of the **Royal Albert Hall**, not some pastoral idyll in amongst the leafy thickets of Kensington Gardens. This short atmospheric piece is not merely the aural equivalent of the conceptualist's "*found art*." It was designed to be listened to using headphones and a portable music player as you walk a prescribed route in Kensington Gardens. It is not only an exploration of how pre-recorded sounds and real-time sounds mix with each other, but is also a poetic commentary on city life, observing as it does how one feels at the moment when the traffic noise intrudes on the arcadian idyll as you walk reluctantly towards the park gates.

In **Scion stems** (2011) the trio of strings sound initially like a swarm of bees who congregate at the hive and dance before they go their separate ways to harvest pollen. In fact this composition doesn't document an apiarian ritual, but is modelled on the process of splitting the sound spectrum into its constituent parts in an electronics studio. The composer says simply:

*"I wanted to start with one texture and transform the music into all sorts of different textures."*

In his many works for solo instrument and orchestra, such as the **Double Bass Concerto** (2010,) written for **Enno Senft** and the **London Sinfonietta** and most recently the **Bassoon Concerto** (2012,) which was commissioned by the **Suntory Foundation** for **Pascal Gallois**, Fujikura starts with a germ of an idea which he sculpts into a solo piece. From this acorn come roots, stems and racemes which form the skeleton of the large-scale composition. During this development and expansion process Fujikura explores both the extremes of the instrument's capability as well as reflecting the character of the soloist.

**SAKANA (2007)** is a solo piece which the composer states is tailor-made for the saxophonist, **Masanori Oishi**. In this case, the process of the composer learning about the extremities of what you can do on a saxophone and the specific personality of Oishi's playing was conducted largely via internet conferencing, but such is the modern world of the international musician. Fujikura admits he plays with the softest sounds of the saxophone deliberately to challenge the common preconception that it is a loud instrument.

Sakana is not the only piece by Fujikura in which we should expect the unexpected: in **Phantom Pulse** the percussion ensemble bow their instruments as if they were a string section and in **Time unlocked** the normally bowed strings are transmuted into percussion instruments by the use of plectra. Despite a preference for the plucked string sound, Fujikura resisted the temptation to pepper **Flux (2007)** with pizzicati; instead he experimented with how both the direction and speed of bowing have a bearing on the way the solo violist phrases a line. In fact he took the unusual step of writing the rhythm played by the bow before organising the pitches. Again this short piece is a map of movement in the natural world: The composer has in mind the way a tiny silver fish darts with a sudden spurt across the floor of a rockpool.

The title of **Halcyon (2011)** literally means kingfisher, recognizable from the flash of colour as it enters the water in the twinkling of an eye. Since ancient Greek times it has become synonymous with being free of care and at peace – another dimension of Utopia. This composition too is an illustration of how real sound in real time can be manipulated, as if the composer were using electronics. He employs the two extremes of clarinet sound, from its fierce spiky energy to the subtlest breath which can barely be heard as a separate entity from strings, muted with practice mutes. I liken it to a member of the wind quintet, full of character and individuality, finding a way to integrate with the homogenous blend of a string ensemble. The composer writes,

*“Sometimes the clarinet leads and the strings respond, just like the ripples produced as a pebble breaks the surface of the water,”*

or maybe in the way a fast flowing crystal stream re-aligns itself as it swallows the diving kingfisher.

**In Flare (2010)** the composer was inspired by memories of sitting by a campfire as a child, mesmerised by the process of burning, watching sparks fly and tiny pieces of burning bark flare up into the night sky like shooting stars. Again a process of transformation occurs: the explosive percussive bursts of the opening are gradually transmuted into the softest of articulations, like a gentle breeze which ebbs and flows. From here the string quartet find unity in a single pitch with varied articulation, before progressing to a jubilant sequence of chordal intervals in a driving rhythm. There is one last stutter of pizzicato, followed by a coda of arching sostenuto.



**But I fly (2005)** represents not only a process of metamorphosis, but also a musical integration of elements which might have initially appeared to oppose each other. English is of course Fujikura's second language; a setting of Japanese would have offered him more of a tabula rasa as the Japanese language lends equal stress to each syllable. With this commission from **Vox Humana**, a Japanese choir, began the collaborative process of working which Fujikura and his librettist, **Harry Ross**, have enjoyed ever since. The result of this organic creative process is that Ross' text about a butterfly silhouetted against a June sky could almost have been written by a Japanese poet in English. Fujikura was largely immune to the influences of Japanese traditional music in childhood; as an established composer he admits to deleting and reworking any material in a new work he perceives to be "*too Japanese.*" The opening of **But I fly** again makes me think of the sound patterns made in the heady June air by insects, this time perhaps cicadas. As the piece progresses what I hear is a depiction in sound of the visual image of a butterfly's flight, rising and dipping like a morning skylark. Where Fujikura does stand comparison with the sensibilities of Takemitsu, elder statesman of westernised Japanese composers, is in his ability to depict elements of the natural world through his musical language. However I reiterate that this is not programme music, or a faithful recreation of the energy and movement of the natural world. Rather Fujikura is able to take a visual image or a flight sequence from nature and idealise it in musical form. Somehow I know that this butterfly is fresh out of the chrysalis; its colours are pristine and its wings perfectly symmetrical.

## CREDITS

### Flare

*was recorded LIVE*

*in Ishibashi Memorial Hall, Ueno Gakuen,  
Japan on September 16th 2012*



### Dolphins

*version for 2 celli*

*was recorded LIVE from Tokyo Opera City  
recital series "B to C" – "From Bach to  
Contemporary", at Tokyo Opera  
City Recital Hall on December 6th 2011.*

### Halcyon

*With thanks to the Research department  
of the Guildhall School of Music & Drama  
for their generous support for this disc.  
recording engineer: Tim Pennells  
assistant recording engineer: Rosanna Fish*



*ALL tracks composed, produced, edited and mixed by Dai Fujikura*

*Flare for string quartet performed by Arditti Quartet (LIVE recording)*

*But, I fly for 12 voices (text by Harry Ross) performed by Vox Humana,  
conducted by Ryuta Nishikawa (LIVE recording)*

*SAKANA version for tenor saxophone performed by Masanori Oishi*

*Dolphins version for 2 celli performed by Mari Endo + Kenji Nakagi (LIVE recording)*

*Halcyon for clarinet and string trio performed by Goldfield Ensemble*

*Flux for viola performed by Johanna Persson (Live at Punkt Festival 2011)*

*Scion Stems for string trio performed by*

*Zilliacus/Persson/Raitinen Trio (Live at Punkt Festival 2011)*

Dai Fujikura

# FLARE

1. Flare
2. But, I fly
3. SAKANA
4. Dolphins
5. Halcyon
6. Flux
7. Scion Stems



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