



Ryuko Mizutani, koto

Pia Liptak, violin



Music by:

*Thomas Osborne
Michaela Eremiášová
Elizabeth A. Kelly
Jung Sun Kang
David Liptak
Vera Ivanova
Winnie Cheung*

Duo Via-LINK-ota: Taking the Scarlet

NOTES ON THE MUSIC

The compositions on this recording were written for **Duo vio-LINK-oto**. The composers and performers all currently live and work in the USA, representing an international array of cultures and countries. The first five pieces are written for the traditional 13-string koto, and the last two feature the 17-string bass koto.

Thomas Osborne *Tumbling from the Ninth Height of Heaven* (2007) “takes its title from a poem by Li Bai (c. 700-762), a Chinese poet from the Tang dynasty. The poem, ‘Viewing the Waterfall at Mount Lu,’ describes an enormous waterfall in the Kiangsi province. The poem inspired the famous Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai to design a woodcut depicting Li Bai at the edge of a cliff gazing upon the immense falls while his two young attendants try to keep the inebriated poet from tumbling over the edge. The music is filled with descending lines and rippling, cascading textures. Though there is plenty of activity on the surface, the materials on which the piece is based are quite simple. I took this decorative minimal approach as an homage to Hokusai, whose works are often both ornate and simple at once.”

The music of Thomas Osborne draws inspiration from a wide variety of sources, places and eras, and he has composed works inspired by African polyphony, Indonesian gamelan, Japanese court music, ancient Persian music and Kentucky country fiddle playing. Osborne lives in Honolulu, where he teaches at the University of Hawaii-Manoa. www.thomas-osborne.com

Michaela Eremiášová *Shade* (2007) was written for violin and Japanese koto but also exists in a version for violin, clarinet, and piano. “The music resembles the image of falling leaves and drops of water.”

Michaela Eremiášová, born in the Czech Republic, is recognized as a composer of concert music, music for abstract visuals, and modern dance. She is the recipient of numerous recognitions and awards. Michaela Eremiášová is currently (2009) finishing her PhD in Composition at the Eastman School of Music. www.michaela-eremiasova.com

Elizabeth A. Kelly “In *Taut* (2007), the 12-bar blues form serves as a framework in which intersections between the classically bowed violin and classically plucked Japanese koto emerge. *Taut* employs a range of unconventional techniques that evoke even the seemingly distant distorted electric guitar.”

Elizabeth A. Kelly's works fearlessly transgress stylistic boundaries. They have been performed and commissioned by orchestras, wind ensembles and new music groups throughout the U.S. and Europe. With an impressive record of prestigious awards, prizes, and fellowships, Ms. Kelly is currently (2009) finishing her Ph.D. at the Eastman School of Music. She also holds degrees from Yale and the University of Michigan. www.elizabethakelly.com

Jung Sun Kang *Duologue* (2007) is a dialogue between East and West, koto and violin, in five sections. The piece depicts how two contrasting cultures, represented by two individuals and two instruments, meet and are influenced by each other. The piece has

five sections: 1. West – 2. East – 3. Encounter – 4. Conflict – 5. Contract.

Jung Sun Kang's music boldly draws on many different genres and styles, including Baroque, jazz, rock, and Asian traditional music. Ms. Kang studied composition and piano at the Ewha University in her native country South Korea. She is currently (2009) pursuing her DMA at the Eastman School of Music, studying composition and harpsichord performance. As an active pianist and harpsichordist she has premiered several new works.

David Liptak “The imagery that suggested the music and the title, *Ice Flowers* (2004), came from a series of photographs of frost patterns on the windows of my home. The rhythm is varied, as I imagine the pacing as it relates to “breathing,” rather than the regularity of “walking.” Some sections feature “extended” koto techniques; in one section, for example, the koto player scrapes the strings, and, in another, the sound is modified by placing a glass tumbler on the vibrating strings. *Ice Flowers* appears here in its revised version from 2008.

David Liptak's music has been performed by soloists and ensembles worldwide. A teacher of composers for over 30 years, David Liptak has been Professor of Composition at the Eastman School of Music since 1987. Many of his pieces contain images of “cold” and “white,” which are also metaphors for “clarity” and “focus”. www.dliptak.com

Vera Ivanova *Surface Tension* (2005) suggests an elastic quality of water that allows light objects to float on

its surface. Waves on the water are produced, in part due to this quality as well. The title – *Surface Tension* – was inspired by the visual similarity of the motion of water, being disturbed by an object, and a vibrating string, being plucked or bowed. Both the water and the string produce vibrations which we see on the surface of water, and which we hear as sound waves. The result that we see is a water mass in motion, and what we hear is a complex field of sounds, which, through our ears, touches our emotions.

Vera Ivanova holds degrees from the Moscow Conservatory, Guildhall School of Music and Drama and Eastman School of Music and currently teaches at Chapman University. Ms. Ivanova is a recipient of numerous scholarships and awards. Her works have been performed worldwide and been described as humanistic and deeply felt music. www.veraivanova.com.

Winnie Cheung “In *Taking the Scarlet* (2005), I take my soundscape from the Haiku of Yosa Buson (1715-1783):

The mountain grows darker
Taking the scarlet
From the autumn leaves

The notation used in this piece requires the performers to shape their musical lines as a direct and immediate response to the previous musical event. For the performers, breathing, body gestures, and many ‘intuitions’ about one another become just as important as playing the correct notes on the page.”

Winnie Cheung, born in Hong Kong, holds degrees from the University of Chicago and the Eastman School of Music. Besides composing, Winnie Cheung teaches and performs as a pianist, and she is particularly active in chamber ensembles performing contemporary music.

NOTES ON THE KOTO

The koto is one of the oldest Japanese instruments and was originally introduced to Japan from China through the Korean peninsula in the 7th century. According to legend, the shape of the koto originated from that of a crouching dragon, and parts of the instrument are named after the dragon. The instrument is roughly six feet long and usually has 13 strings arched over independently moveable bridges, called “ji”, that sit on a hollow body of wood. By adjusting these bridges, any thirteen-note scale can be produced, even one with microtonal intervals. In addition to the notes available through the adjustment of the bridges, each pitch can be altered by pushing down the string with the hand. Such a movement stretches the string to produce up to a whole step difference in pitch. This technique is typical of the traditional koto style. A 17-stringed bass koto was developed early in the 20th century and now there is a wide variety of koto sizes, including a 20-string, 21-string, 23-string and a 30-string instrument.

The koto has traditionally been part of an ensemble, often having an accompanying role. In more recent times, the instrument has also gained status as a solo instrument. Today, there is a varied repertoire of compositions for koto including traditional Japanese

pieces as well as works blending Eastern and Western musical styles and instruments. It’s versatility creates an unlimited range of possibilities for adapting music from many genres and time periods. Along with the wide range of the koto’s playing techniques, providing a wonderful palette of sound textures, this exciting variety of repertoire makes the koto appealing to audiences all over the world.

NOTES ON THE PERFORMERS

The name **Duo vio-LINK-oto** is formed by letters of the ensemble’s two instruments: violin and koto. In addition, “oto” means “sound” in Japanese. LINK refers to the joining of instruments and music of different cultures. The duo has previously recorded for Centaur Records (CD 2882), in part sponsored by the Institute for American Music. Pia and Ryuko also appear together on the CD “Vista, contemporary Koto.”

Pairing Japanese koto with violin in duo combination is relatively recent, and the repertoire of original compositions is still small. Ryuko Mizutani and Pia Liptak established their duo in 2002 and have increased the repertoire for the ensemble with about 15 new works. The duo also arranged and performed many preexisting works, both traditional Japanese pieces and Western music. Pia and Ryuko’s pioneering and promoting efforts include concert performances, recordings, radio broadcasts, presentations and lectures about their work, music, and instruments. They performed together intensively throughout the United States and abroad.

Violinist Pia Liptak performs as a soloist and chamber musician in Europe and the United States. She is the concertmaster of the University of Rochester Symphony Orchestra and is on the faculty of the Hochstein School of Music and Dance. Pia Liptak holds diplomas in piano and violin from the Carl Nielsen Academy in Odense, Denmark - her native country - and a doctor of musical arts degree in violin performance and literature from the Eastman School of Music. Prior to her relocation in the USA, Pia served as the concertmaster of the Danish string ensemble Den Fynske Sinfonietta and was a member of the Odense Symphony Orchestra. For several years, Pia taught violin at the Odense Music School and was the manager of concerts and public relations at the Carl Nielsen Academy of Music. Among numerous grants and honors, Pia has received support from the Danish Cultural Ministry, the State Music Council, Knud Højgaards Fond, the Augustinus Fond, the Chapin Grant, and the Arts and Cultural Council in Rochester/the New York Foundation for the Arts. At three occasions she was granted month-long stays for research projects at San Cataldo in Southern Italy, a center for Danish scientists and artists.

Japanese koto-player **Ryuko Mizutani** graduated from the Japanese national Broadcasting Company's School for Performers of Traditional Japanese Instruments in 1987. She then studied both classical and modern koto music under the koto masters Tadao and Kazue Sawai. In 1999, she received a fellowship from the Japanese Government overseas Study Program for Artists, studying at the Wesleyan University in Connecticut. Ryuko continuously explored new musical possibilities for the

koto by collaborating with western musicians and artists of other genres including improvisational and experimental music. Ryuko premiered an impressive number of new works dedicated to her by composers from around the world. She regularly taught in Japan and the US and performed worldwide. She toured with the Sawai Koto Ensemble and the Tesu Saito Improvisation Group, was a member of the international group IIIZ+, an ensemble featuring three zithers (Korean, Japanese, and Chinese) and Korean Percussion. Ryuko joined the koto quartet, Koto Vortex, in 2005, and the contemporary music group, Koto Phase, in 2002. Throughout the illness that she endured during the final years of her life, Ryuko maintained her active schedule of performing and teaching. Ryuko Mizutani died in 2008 at the age of 44.

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Duo vio-LINK-oto

Taking the Scarlet

Pia Liptak, violin • Ryuko Mizutani, koto



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- 1 Thomas Osborne (b. 1978):
Tumbling from the Ninth Height of Heaven (2007) 8:56
- 2 Michaela Eremiášová (b. 1974): *Shade* (2007) 6:38
- 3 Elizabeth A. Kelly (b. 1982): *Taut* (2007) 4:07
- 4 Jung Sun Kang (b. 1983): *Duologue* (2007) 7:48
- 5 David Liptak (b. 1949): *Ice Flowers* (2004) 14:39
- 6 Vera Ivanova (b. 1977): *Surface Tension* (2005) 7:09
- 7 Winnie Cheung (b. 1975): *Taking the Scarlet* (2005) 10:00

Total Duration: 59:16

Tumbling from the Ninth Height of Heaven, *Shade*, *Taut* and *Duologue* Recorded February and March, 2008 at Dynamic Recording Studios, Rochester, New York. *Ice Flowers* Recorded Spring 2005 at East End Recording Studios, Rochester, New York. Engineered by Malcolm Kirby. *Surface Tension* and *Taking the Scarlet* Recorded Live February 2007 at Orvis Auditorium, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, Hawaii. Engineered by Aaron Ripley. Produced by Pia Liptak and Ryuko Mizutani. Photo of Ryuko Mizutani by photographer: Michael Bloch. Photo of Pia Liptak by photographer: Gary Lee Heard.

