

NAXOS

Takashi  
YOSHIMATSU

Piano Works for the Left Hand

Tapiola Visions • Ainola Lyrical Ballads • Gauche Dances



Yumiko Oshima-Ryan, Piano

## Takashi Yoshimatsu (b. 1953)

### Piano Works for the Left Hand

Solo piano works by Takashi Yoshimatsu serve as great examples of the most recent musical trends in Japan: a revival of lyricism using tonal melody and harmony, and a rejection of the atonal music that dominated mainstream modern Japanese composition throughout the 1970s.

Takashi Yoshimatsu was born in Tokyo in 1953, and studied at Keio University, Department of Technology. He taught himself composition while playing in a jazz and rock group. Strongly influenced by the eclectic ideas of progressive rock, Yoshimatsu often combines elements of jazz, classical, folk and world music with rock formats. Since 1998, Yoshimatsu has been composer-in-residence of Chandos Records and has published several albums under this label.

Some of Yoshimatsu's most notable compositions centre on piano works for the left hand, which he wrote for pianist Izumi Tateno, who Yoshimatsu describes as a 'sworn friend'. In January 2002, Tateno collapsed on stage after playing the last note of a performance in Finland. He was 65 years old and had suffered a cerebral haemorrhage. He survived the stroke, but even after months of intensive rehabilitation, he did not regain the use of his right hand.

This album includes three sets of solo piano compositions for the left hand that Yoshimatsu dedicated to Tateno: *Tapiola Visions, Op. 92, Ainola Lyrical Ballads, Op. 95* and *Gauche Dances, Op. 96*.

### Tapiola Visions, Op. 92 (2004)

Of *Tapiola Visions* Yoshimatsu says, 'I want to dedicate the whole piece to Mr Tateno, who has become a left hand pianist, wishing that someday he will be able to play it with both hands. So I should call the music the piano music that can be played with either the left hand or both hands.'

Yoshimatsu offers the following brief description of each movement:

*I. Vignette in Twilight.* An introduction with the glimmer of the faintest light. A small vignette of the god of Tapio.

*II. Gigue of Forest.* A dry gigue, woven musical twigs and leaves. An allegro movement in which the rhythm changes rapidly.

*III. Pavane for Water.* A pavane depicting quiet and gentle water. A song in praise of the current swaying through the middle of the piece.

*IV. Commas of Birds.* Fragments of songs like commas by unseen birds. A short interlude.

*V. Toccata in the Wind.* A toccata depicting the wild wind blowing through the forest freely. The light again at the end.

### Ainola Lyrical Ballads, Op. 95 (2006)

Yoshimatsu reflected on *Ainola Lyrical Ballads*:

*Ainola* is the name of the villa in Järvenpää where the great Finnish composer Jean Sibelius spent the latter half of his life. The villa was named after his wife Aino. After his death, Sibelius was buried in the yard of it. I composed these little ballads inspired by the scenery of *Ainola*. The pieces are like seven small bouquets dedicated to Sibelius and a revered pianist, Izumi Tateno. The motifs of this work came from images such as gentle piano sounds melting in the air, beautiful flowers in the garden, the forest around the house and a distant view of the lake, faint echoes of Sibelius's symphonic poem *The Swan of Tuonela*, and the distant ring of the church bells which sounds like a blessing on every new life.

### **Gauche Dances, Op. 96 (2006)**

Yoshimatsu's pieces offer listeners the chance to learn about left-hand classical piano repertoire. His works also expose listeners to the current musical trends in Japan, such as the music genre J-Pop. Over time, listeners have put a letter in front of musical styles from foreign countries. These trends started when the Japanese Railways Group named themselves JR Group. We now have the words J-Rap, J-Soul and J-Pop, among others. Although these names designate a musical style, artists within the genres have a variety of mixed musical styles. For instance, J-Pop artists play pop, rock and even rap music. Yoshimatsu's pieces allow listeners to learn about J-Pop and hear how it does not fit neatly into one category.

For example, Yoshimatsu describes *Gauche Dances* as follows:

*Gauche Dances* is a work filled with pop and rhythmical idioms. The work consists of four styles of music. *Rock* creates heavy and low beats. *Blues* sounds like luscious jazz music. *Tango* is the musical style which Mr Tateno is privately fond of. *Boogie Woogie* brings frenzied rhythms of joy. Anything can happen in these hot dances!

Yoshimatsu's 'anything and everything could be possible in music' approach contrasts greatly with traditional Japanese music. His works break the boundaries of traditional Japanese music, such as Gagaku, classical Japanese court music, which is serious and traditionally authentic. It also expands the notion that J-Pop is not just pop music but a wide range of styles and influences that cannot fit under one specific label.

These works are inspired by nature, such as wind, water, light, birds, and God of the forest, Tapio. But since they were written for the injured Tateno, they also inspire the strength to overcome obstacles. Through the music, I want the audience to hear this powerful message of hope, and to encourage those who are injured to find a way forward. Every time I perform these pieces, I find the great potential for music to reach a person's soul.

**Yumiko Oshima-Ryan**

## Yumiko Oshima-Ryan



Photo: Dave Ryan

Yumiko Oshima-Ryan is a professor of music at Gustavus Adolphus College in St Peter, Minnesota. She is an active performer of both solo and collaborative works, and awards include first place in the Wurlitzer Collegiate Artist Competition and second place in the International Beethoven Piano Sonata Competition. Since 1995 she has incorporated contemporary Japanese piano works into her repertoire, and has performed these pieces internationally (Tokyo, Toronto and San Juan), including world premieres of new works by Japanese composers. Her first recording *From Afar – Contemporary Japanese Piano Music* was released by Naxos in 2014 (9.70197). She is a 2017 recipient of an Artist Initiative grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board. A native of Japan, Oshima-Ryan graduated from Toho Gakuen School of Music in Tokyo and earned a Doctor of Musical Arts degree at the College-Conservatory of Music, University of Cincinnati. Her piano teachers have included Eunice Norton (a pupil of Artur Schnabel), Eugene Pridonoff, Richard Syracuse, Menahem Pressler, Jerome Rose and Satoko Tokumaru.

Takashi Yoshimatsu's wide-ranging musical influences often combine jazz and rock elements with classical, folk and world music. This album focuses on a unique series of three solo piano works for the left hand, inspired by his great friend Izumi Tateno. These lyric and beautiful miniatures are saturated in nature and birdsong, as can be heard in the evocative *Tapiola Visions* and in the seven bouquets that form *Ainola Lyrical Ballads* which are dedicated to Sibelius. In *Gauche Dances*, we hear a sequence that includes the tango and boogie woogie, displaying how eagerly and ebulliently Yoshimatsu breaks boundaries.

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<b>Tapiola Visions,</b>		<b>8 III. Ballad</b>	<b>3:06</b>
<b>Op. 92 (2004)</b>	<b>20:01</b>	<b>9 IV. Pavane</b>	<b>3:28</b>
<b>1 I. Vignette in Twilight</b>	<b>2:53</b>	<b>10 V. Mozartino</b>	<b>2:49</b>
<b>2 II. Gigue of Forest</b>	<b>3:05</b>	<b>11 VI. Pastoral</b>	<b>1:36</b>
<b>3 III. Pavane for Water</b>	<b>5:15</b>	<b>12 VII. Carillon</b>	<b>2:59</b>
<b>4 IV. Commas of Birds</b>	<b>2:59</b>	<b>Gauche Dances,</b>	
<b>5 V. Toccata in the Wind</b>	<b>5:36</b>	<b>Op. 96 (2006)</b>	<b>11:03</b>
<b>Ainola Lyrical Ballads,</b>		<b>13 I. Rock</b>	<b>2:46</b>
<b>Op. 95 (2006)</b>	<b>20:20</b>	<b>14 II. Blues</b>	<b>3:36</b>
<b>6 I. Romance</b>	<b>2:32</b>	<b>15 III. Tango</b>	<b>1:48</b>
<b>7 II. Arabesque</b>	<b>3:32</b>	<b>16 IV. Boogie Woogie</b>	<b>2:40</b>

**Yumiko Oshima-Ryan, Piano**

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