11 March 2016
Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge

Sights and Sounds of Japan – Old Traditions in New Contexts

Mini Symposium:

Sound-culture in Early Twentieth Century Japan

Time: 11 March 2016, 10.00-12.00 am
Venue: FAMES, Room 7

This half-day symposium explores how sound – as music and as technology – has influenced and enriched the ‘silent’ arts in Japan.

Iitomi Akihiro (Ohkura School of Noh theatre)

Noh-style Techniques in Natsume Sōseki’s Kusamakura*

Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916) was a novelist, critic and scholar of English literature. A hundred years after his death, many of his works, such as ‘I Am a Cat’ (Wagahai wa neko de aru) and ‘The Young Master’ (Botchan), continue to enjoy great popularity in Japan. His novel ‘Grass Pillow’ (Kusamakura) is based on his experience of teaching at a school in Kumamoto, and the title is a word that frequently appears in Noh plays referring to sleeping out in the open while on a journey. Kusamakura is thought to be an experimental work based on Sōseki’s theories of art that he developed while studying abroad in London. In this work, he compares and contrasts Asian arts, such as haiku, Chinese poetry, Japanese-style painting, Japanese architecture, gardens, Zen and nōgaku (Noh and Kyōgen theatre) with Western arts, such as English poetry and prose, Shakespeare’s plays, opera and the paintings of Turner. This talk will focus on Kusamakura and Sōseki’s use of Noh-style techniques in his writing.

The lecture will be held in Japanese with English translation. Interpreter: Yongsuk Song, University of Cambridge.

(*translated into English and published as The Three-cornered World and Grass Pillow)
Johan Nordström (Meiji Gakuin University)

Aesthetics and Technology: The Japanese Cinema’s Transition to Sound

During the early 1930s, Japanese cinema underwent a gradual transition from silent to sound film. Innovative sound technology gave birth to a new genre of light entertainment, infused with music and song, and sharing traits of musical style, staging and pacing with that of the vaudeville stage. This new genre was spearheaded by Japan’s first all-talkie film studio, the Tokyo-based P.C.L., with their debut work, Horoyoi jinsei (A tipsy life, 1933, Kimura Sotoji). This was the first Japanese musical film, and the genre later gained great popularity with the films of vaudeville performer-turned-movie star Enoken (Enomoto Kenichi).

This presentation will examine the different strategies employed by filmmakers and production companies to utilize the new sound technology to its fullest potential and will explore the relationship between early Japanese musicals and the vaudeville stage. It will also seek to illuminate the aesthetic modes through which Japanese cinema incorporated and utilized the new sound film technology.

Workshops

Experience different aspects of Japanese traditional culture as it is lived today! The workshops are free of charge, but booking is required.

KIMONO
(room 7; 1.15pm)

with litomi Hiroko

The kimono is a symbol of Japanese culture and aesthetic refinement. With designs and weaving techniques that have been transmitted over the centuries, it adopted its current style in the 16th century but traces its history back over 8,000 years. Today, there are not many opportunities in everyday life to wear a kimono, but it remains the garment of choice for rites-of-passage events, such as coming-of-age ceremonies and weddings. It is also often worn by both men and women when they participate in the tea ceremony, visit traditional Japanese theatre, especially Noh, or when they wish to express traditional elegance, refinement and hospitality.

In this workshop, we will discuss various aspects of the kimono, including their use at weddings and the different styles worn by single and married people.
There will also be a demonstration of how to put on a kimono. Please feel free to bring your own, if you have one, to get tips on how to don this garment.

**YANAGAWA GOTENMARI (embroidered balls)**
(room 7; 3pm)

with Iitomi Hiroko

Every year on March 3rd, the Hinamatsuri (Doll’s Festival or Girls’ Festival) is celebrated in Japan to wish for the good health and future happiness of all the girls in the family. Many households set up an elaborate tiered platform covered in red cloth to display ornamental dolls of the emperor and empress with their entourage in the traditional court dress of the Heian period. This custom of displaying dolls is more than a thousand years old and originated in China. It is popular all over Japan, but there are many local variations. In Yanagawa in Kyushu, for example, girls embroider balls with colourful threads, decorating them with patterns of seasonal flowers and cranes (a symbol of longevity). This art of making 'Yanagawa gotenmari' has been transmitted from mother to daughter over many generations.

Participants in the workshop will learn about the cultural background of the customs related to the Hinamatsuri and the gotenmari as well as the significance of the various patterns and colours. They will be invited to embroider their own gotenmari ball to take home. Places are limited and booking is essential.

**NOH KOTSUZUMI (shoulder drum)**
(room 8&9; 1.15 pm)

with Akihiro Iitomi

Registered as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2001, nōgaku is a traditional performing art that developed in Japan between the twelfth and the seventeenth centuries and has been transmitted almost unchanged to the present day. It consists of the more serious Noh plays and the humorous interludes known as Kyōgen. Noh is usually considered a theatre art, but it originates from musical performance. In this workshop, Akihiro Iitomi of the Ohkura School of Noh theatre, will explain about the history of Noh and some of its main elements. In particular, participants will learn about the role of music in Noh and will have the opportunity to try out the shoulder drum (kotsuzumi). Iitomi will also give a performance using the shoulder drum with vocal accompaniment.
RAKUGO
(room 8&9; 3pm)

with Matthew Shores

Matthew Shores, a trained rakugo storyteller and Lecturer in Japanese Studies at the University of Cambridge, will introduce rakugo, Japan’s traditional art of comic storytelling. He will relate some amusing anecdotes from his time as a ‘live-in apprentice’ (uchideshi) with the famous master of rakugo, Hayashiya Somemaru IV, and will present a workshop on how to perform rakugo, including how to slurp noodles from a folded fan and how to make money appear from an everyday hand towel! Finally, to send you laughing on your way, Matthew will perform a full rakugo story in English.

Akihiro Iitomi with Japan Sound Portrait

A lecture and performance of Noh music with digital sound portraits

Akihiro Iitomi (Ohkura School of Noh theatre) will present a lecture and performance of Noh music featuring the kotsuzumi shoulder drum. (In Japanese with English translation by Yongsuk Song.)

Akihiro Iitomi will be joined by Japan Sound Portrait – a new project by Nick Luscombe and Neil Cantwell, the co-director of KanZeOn. Japan Sound Portrait is seeking to create a crowd-sourced portrait of Japan in sound in the run-up to the 2020 Olympics using a variety of different media to create new representations of the country. Nick and Neil will perform an improvisational merging of Iitomi’s performance with new productions by young Japanese artists. They will also play recordings they have made and been sent by the general public of distinctive Japanese sounds, alongside explaining elements of the Japan Sound Portrait project. They will show how the project has an important role to play in preserving Japan’s intangible cultural heritage, and they will outline their plans for an exhibition showcasing the sonic gifts that Japan has given to the world in the form of electronic musical equipment that has influenced music worldwide for the last 30 years.

Venue: Rooms 8&9
Time: 5.00 - 6.30 pm
Sound and Vision: Experience the Virtual Reality of Japan

Japan Sound Portrait is excited to present a prototype of a series of virtual reality experiences of Japanese natural soundscapes that have been developed in collaboration with the creative-design studio Amoeba. Using an Oculus Rift headset, participants will be able to visit a series of Japanese landscapes whilst immersed in ambient sounds. The landscapes include the Okunoin Cemetery on Mount Koya, the entrance to Takeshita Street in Tokyo and a Tokyo alley.

http://creativecommons.org/amoeba

Venue & Time: Rooms 8&9 (12.00 – 1.00pm), Common Room (1.15 - 5.00pm)

Profiles:

Japan Sound Portrait

http://japansoundportrait.tumblr.com/

Neil Cantwell is co-director of the film KanZeOn, recently released on DVD by the International Buddhist Film Foundation. He has previously worked as Programme Officer for Japanese Studies and Intellectual Exchange at the London office of the Japan Foundation, as well as holding the position of Foreign Research Fellow at Shuchiin University in Kyoto. Neil continues to perform, record and write music across a range of instruments.

Nick Luscombe is a London-based radio broadcaster for BBC Radio 3, a music and playlist curator, and a live event and radio producer. He has worked in senior roles at iTunes and Google Play and has held the position of Director of Music at London’s Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA). He is the founder of Musicity, an international digital and live event platform that explores the intersection of music and architecture.

Amoeba is a design, motion and audio-visual installation studio based in Brighton and run by Scott McPherson. His recent work in virtual reality includes The Cube – a transmedia theatre performance created by the internationally renowned company Circa69.
Akihiro Iitomi is a performer and teacher of the kotsuzumi shoulder drum within the Ohkura School of Noh theatre. He performs regularly throughout Japan, and has toured internationally in North America, Europe and Asia. In his teaching, he particularly focuses on the preservation of traditional Japanese culture and teaches at all levels of education, from primary school through to university (including Chikushi Jogakuen University, Fukuoka, and Shokei College, Kumamoto). Iitomi appears as one of the three main characters in the film KanZeOn, a UK-Japan documentary that explores the role of sound within Japanese religion. In addition to discussing the relation of Noh theatre to the Zen school of Buddhism, the film also highlights Iitomi’s enthusiasm for jazz, whereby the spirit of improvisation that infuses jazz is found to be not so different from the aesthetic approach in the traditions of Noh.

Hiroko Iitomi is a graduate of Koran Women’s College in Fukuoka and is currently employed by Okashino Kōbai, a famous Japanese sweets and cake shop in Kumamoto, Kyushu. She is a trained teacher in the art of kimono dressing, the tea ceremony, Yanagawa gottenmari and other cultural pursuits.

Johan Nordström received his doctoral degree from Waseda University and is currently a Japan Society for the Promotion of Science Post Doctoral Fellow at Meiji Gakuin University, Tokyo. He is working on a book about the Tokyo-based early sound film studio P.C.L., as well as co-editing an anthology volume, The Culture of the Sound Image in Prewar Japan, to be published by Amsterdam University Press. He has co-curated many programmes of Japanese cinema for international film festivals, most recently at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Matthew Shores comes from Oregon, USA, and has trained in a number of the Japanese performing arts, specializing in comic storytelling (rakugo). He is a Lecturer in Japanese Studies at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Cambridge and is a Fellow of Peterhouse College. For further information, please see www.mwshores.com

Yongsuk Song was born in Tokyo and is a Japanese language instructor at the University of Cambridge. She studied pedagogy and held teaching positions in America and Japan prior to coming to Cambridge.

Organiser: Brigitte Steger

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