

Sandeep Bhagwati

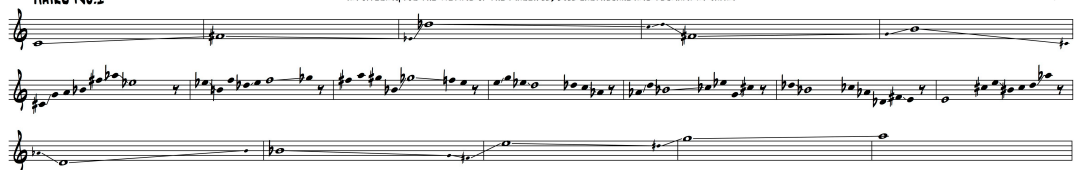
LISTEN

[Miyagi Haikus]


SEVENTEEN MIYAGI HAIKUS
AN OFFERING FOR THE VICTIMS OF THE MARCH 11, 2011 EARTHQUAKE AND TSUNAMI IN JAPAN

SANDEEP BHAGWATI


HAIKU No.1



HAIKU No.2



HAIKU No.3



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1 HEARING DIFFERENCE

The intention of my project is to make the inherent power of coherence and difference, of universal structure and personal/stylistic implementation as an informational and action-guiding cultural technique tangible to the audience as a direct sound experience, as an exercise in conscious, critical, comparative listening.

As an example, I have chosen a improvisation score I wrote in 2011: Seventeen Miyagi Haikus. For several years now, musicians of very different origins have been interested in this score: a trio of New York jazz greats, an ensemble for new music, several soloists of different musical traditions and electronic musicians have presented the Miyagi Haikus in concerts and recorded them in the studio. In autumn 2018, the Berlin label dreier gaido productions will release an unusual publication with 5 of these very different versions on 2 CDs.

The appeal of this score lies in the fact that, on the one hand, it provides very strict and clear specifications, but on the other hand, the score material still leaves a great deal of freedom, which can be realized in a wide variety of musical styles, playing styles and forms of presentation. This shows the generative potential of improvising scores, which on the one hand establish strong and precise specifications (if you listen to the different versions of each of the 17 haikus, you will notice how closely related they are, despite all stylistic differences, they are often quite closely related). Yet, on the other hand they are open to all vernacular and idiosyncratic peculiarities of every musician and every tradition, and let these become the driving force of every version.

In LISTEN, these Miyagi Haikus are analytically and artistically explored in many ways, they are unfolded and made accessible in various ways. The title LISTEN plays with the English and German meanings of this word: Listen (in German) as lists - registers of heterogeneous elements that do not necessarily belong together but are forced together by the list; Listen (in German) as tricks, shortcuts and intelligent solutions that are needed to overcome seemingly insurmountable circumstances (such as the distance between musical languages, for example) - and simply the act of listening that is inscribed to this project in so many ways.

For me, listening is actually one of the central metaphors for understanding the digital world. The eye and its two-dimensional visual culture are overwhelmed by the new ubiquity, networking and depth gradation of its sign systems as well as the linear reading of texts. Our new alphabets must be multi-dimensional alphabets, in whose spaces we move in such an assured way that we can be elegant and attentive, as we so casually do with our sense of hearing. My computer analyses have shown that when it comes to musical sound, we are dealing with 20 or more descriptive dimensions, which our ear/brain reliably and precisely grasps and processes - probably even more in the case of environmental sound.

LISTEN [MIYAGI HAIKUS] examines these different dimensions of a simple poetic idea through a wide variety of listening processes and audible transformations - external, internal, internal, musical, inter-traditional, inter-modal, processual, social, etc.

2 SCORE

On March 11, 2011, a terrible triple tragedy hit Japan: an earthquake, a tsunami and, as a consequence of both, a nuclear meltdown at Fukushima. Miyagi prefecture was the first and hardest hit by the tsunami. By coincidence, I had been just reading books about Japanese history, aesthetics and poetry, and watched Japanese movies and documentaries, in the kind of ephemeral, but focused attention we sometimes develop for a place or a person. I was shocked and riveted by the images of the Tsunami I saw on TV, their violence and scope – and then by the meltdown of the reactor and the subsequent fallout.

*empty landscape now
houses abandoned in haste
Geiger counters click*

My immediate reaction was to write the Miyagi Haikus, one of the most spontaneous pieces I have ever written. The Haiku is a traditional Japanese form of poetry with 17 syllables, consisting of three short lines: two with 5 syllables and one with 7, the latter often as a second line. The final line of the poem always is a kind of summation of the first two, a synthesis or a surprise, or both.

In my score, the 17 haikus are themselves ordered in Haiku format: the first five are notated without fixed rhythm, the next seven are notated as rhythms, but have no fixed pitches, and the last five combine rhythms and pitches to fully notated compositions. Each of these haikus has the same internal structure: the first 5 bars create a particular musical character, the next seven another, and the final five bars present a combination of both characters.

This strict and rational order, however, must necessarily be disturbed by the performers: for the score does not say how many or which instruments should play. Each soloist or ensemble must find their own arrangement and access to the score and even though there are clear instructions in the score on how to go about co-creating this work, a large share of the end result is still left for the musicians to realize, their preparation and their improvisation.

*beauty is order.
chaos and fear know no grace
yet – there is music...*

3 THE PROJECT

The LISTEN project will take place on two days in several rooms of the HKW and consists of 4 sub-projects, all of which are linked in terms of personnel and methodology.

1) **PLAY LISTEN** three versions of the Haikus (each about 25-30 minutes long) will be performed live in an installative concert lasting about 90 minutes: on three stages in a large room, the respective musicians will surround the audience, placed in the middle on mobile seats. The playlist of the Haiku versions is determined by a random generator or by a digital voting procedure that is still to be defined:

[Haiku 1 - Ensemble 2]
[Haiku 16 - Ensemble 3] [
[Haiku 5 - Ensemble 1]
etc.

This creates a unique version of these haikus, a concert that can never again take place - because the musicians, of course, react to each other in their versions, and influence each other - even if it is only by difference and demarcation. But the audience hears every haiku three times and recognizes them. The haikus also have some family similarities among themselves, so that despite the "random" order and the great freedom and differences in the musicians' traditions, listening to them can create a conclusive, almost symphonic-narrative concert experience in which themes, motifs and sounds recur and a virtual dramaturgy is created.

Musicians:

Ensemble 1: [Peter Evans](#) (trumpets), [Dave Taylor](#) (bass trombone) [Felix Del Tredici](#) (bass trombone) (all New York)

Ensemble 2: [Jieun Kang](#) (haegeum, Seoul), [Gabriel Dharmoo](#) (voice artist, Montréal), [Matthias Bauer](#) (double bass, Berlin)

Ensemble 3: [Open Music Quartet](#) ([Felix Borel](#) (violin), [Scott Roller](#) (cello), [Jürgen Kruse](#) (piano), [Michael Kiedaisch](#) (percussion) (all Stuttgart))

2) **READING LISTEN** In the months before, poets are asked to listen to all recorded versions of the Miyagi Haikus and write short literary reactions to one or more tracks that appeal to them - a bit like descriptions of images in an exhibition. The haiku form and the intentions of the composer of this work may play a role, and the poets can study and comment on the score themselves - but this is not a precondition: their reaction to the sound of the music alone is sufficient.

These short texts, a mediated interpretation of the score, will then be presented in one of various ways - for example, I would like a listening exhibition in which you can listen to the music in a headset on the left and the lyrics on the right, with a mixer that allows you to switch between the two or to combine them into a kind of radio play. This audio exhibition could be experienced every day, and you could also create a small interactive website where you could go online to explore these interpretations.

3) **LISTEN IN** The highlight of the project, however, would be a creative process that would take place coram publico - after the installative concert and on the way to a "normal" concert - the open rehearsals:

IN A Firstly, the musicians from PLAY LISTEN plus some of the musicians of my Berlin ensemble Extracts, who have never met in this constellation, will create a new version of the Haikus in one-and-a-half-day rehearsals with me, into which texts of the **READING LISTEN** will also be incorporated. This entire rehearsal process will be open to the public and be streamed live. The score we are working on will be projected and all my notes and annotations can be followed, as well as the conversations within the ensemble (all musicians are microphoned).

IN B At two points, we plan to include conversations with the audience about the progress of the work. It would also be interesting to have a "neutral" observer who theoretically contextualizes the sample processes. In all the conversations, questions of the various views on musical vernacular languages and their coordination - but not subjugation - through the score, will become just as perceptible as the influence of technical, technical, stylistic and personal boundaries on the entire structure. Special attention will be paid to ad-hoc terminologies and orders resulting from the ensemble process.

IN C On the evening of the concert itself, the work is first played without introduction, but always with projection of the score (approx. 40 min). Then the entire project and its process is presented to the audience in a panel discussion with selected participants and observers before the work is played a second time - on the one hand to enable the ears sharpened by the discussion to hear a new listening, and on the other hand to demonstrate the difference between the score and the live version - the musicians, although following the same text will still come up with a new version the second time around.

Musicians: [Sören Birke](#) (Duduk, Harmonikas) [Hong Yoo](#) (Daegeum) [Cathy Milliken](#) (Oboen), [Wu Wei](#) (Sheng, Erhu) [Klaus Janek](#) (Bass, Elektronik), [Ravi Srinivasan](#) (Tabla, Percussion) (all from Ensemble Extrakte) plus all musicians from PLAYLIST (a total of 16 musicians plus conductor)

This part should be streamed live and filmed in its entirety. I suggest the Berlin filmmaker [Uli Aumüller](#) for this documentary: he has also accompanied and documented other rehearsals of Ensemble Extrakte

4) **LISTEN NOTES** It would be essential for this project to publish a programme booklet in which the complete score would be re-printed, with an introductory analytical text (from me or a musicologist) and a media-theoretical-aesthetic text about the project. (e.g. by [Dieter Mersch](#), Prof. for Art Theory, Züricher Hochschule der Künste,) as well as a guideline for the visitors, detailing the activities of this project. The poems of the poets from the Reading List and my own Haikus (see above) could also appear in it.

Proposed Timeline:

DAY 1

10-14h AUSTER: Setup. Soundcheck. (non public)

12h-23h EINGANGSHALLE **READING LISTEN** (3-4 armchairs & headphones, tables, vitrines, poster walls.)

15 - 17h AUSTER **PLAY LISTEN**

18 - 21h AUDITORIUM **LISTEN IN A (Part I)**

21h - 22h AUDITORIUM **LISTEN IN B (Part I)**

DAY 2

12h-23h EINGANGSHALLE **READING LISTEN**

11-15h AUDITORIUM **LISTEN IN A (Part II)**

15h-16h AUDITORIUM **LISTEN IN B (Part II)**

17h - 19h AUDITORIUM **LISTEN IN A (Part III)**

20h - 22:30h AUDITORIUM **LISTEN IN C (Concert & Panel Discussion)**