

LEO BROUWER'S NEW GUITAR CONCERTO

An interview with LEO BROUWER and SHIN-ICHI FUKUDA
by THÉRÈSE WASSILY SABA

ON FRIDAY 9 May 2008 Shin-ichi Fukuda, performing with the Staatsorchester Rheinische Philharmonie conducted by Rasmus Baumann, will premiere Leo Brouwer's *Concerto da Requiem* in homage to Toru Takemitsu at the Koblenz International Guitar Festival, Germany. I spoke to Leo Brouwer and Japanese guitarist Shin-ichi Fukuda about this exciting new work and the inspiration behind it, Japanese composer Toru Takemitsu.

I asked Leo Brouwer if there was a particular reason that he chose this performer to dedicate the work to. 'Mr Fukuda is a great guitarist and he plays a lot of my pieces so well that I presumed he likes them. He plays them with full comprehension,' was his reply. Leo Brouwer's admiration for Shin-ichi Fukuda's playing, particularly for the interpretation of *Hika*, which Shin-ichi Fukuda proudly quotes on his website, states Brouwer's view even more plainly: 'Every time we hear Shin-ichi Fukuda, the pleasure of music emerges with new dimensions. His artistic culture exceeds all standards. I'll never forget his world premiere of my piece *Hika*: that became a reference performance even for great maestros.'

The importance of Takemitsu's compositions and philosophy for Brouwer is reflected in the compositions. The *Concerto da Requiem* is the second work in homage to Toru Takemitsu – the first was *Hika: In Memoriam Takemitsu*, which he wrote for Shin-ichi Fukuda.

Shin-ichi Fukuda told me about *Hika*. 'It's quite a long story,' Shin-ichi Fukuda began. 'My first meeting with Leo Brouwer was in 1991; I played his *Sonata* (giving its Japanese premiere just a few months after Julian Bream had given the world premiere at the Spanish Music Festival in the Casals Hall in Tokyo. Leo came to my recital with Mr Takemitsu, (because I played Takemitsu's *Folios* too). I was very nervous playing that in front of two great composers. Fortunately, the concert was very successful, and we went to a party together. It was a wonderful night, and Leo also looked very happy. After that, he decided to write something for me. Finally he wrote something five years later, *Hika*, but ironically, the composition was triggered by the death of Mr Takemitsu.'

Shin-ichi Fukuda continued, 'It was on 20 February 1996, after the death of Toru



Leo Brouwer and Shin-ichi Fukuda.

Takemitsu, that I called Leo, and we decided to play Takemitsu's *Vers l'arc-en-ciel*, *Palma* second guitar concerto in May 1996, during the Havana Festival as a memory to my friend Mr Takemitsu. I played it with Leo Brouwer conducting the Cuba National Orchestra. Then, suddenly one month later, Leo sent me a fax from Córdoba saying, 'I've just finished your piece which I promised many years ago.' It was *Hika*. After making the recording, *In Memoriam Toru Takemitsu* (Denon), I gave the world premiere of the piece on 31 January 1997 at the Kioi Hall in Tokyo.'

Takemitsu also wrote a work called *Hika* in 1966. His work was for violin and piano but, as Shin-ichi Fukuda explained in his introduction to the published score, there was no link between that and Brouwer's work: 'The title *Hika* is the same as Takemitsu's 1966 composition for violin. However, there is no connection aside from the use of the title to denote a dirge. In the subtitle "In Memoriam" one can find much in common with Takemitsu's last work for piano solo, *Rain Tree Sketch II – In Memoriam Olivier Messiaen*, written in 1992 upon the death of the man he admired so much. There is also an association between the term "sketch" and Brouwer's own early work *Tres Apuntes* in that he uses a bar from the last movement in the middle of *Hika*. This comes from a Bulgarian folk song and is

extremely effective in its dramatic use, as if it were a Dies Irae in a requiem. One point about this work that I should mention specifically is its advancement on the tuning concept in Takemitsu's 1993 composition for guitar, *Equinox*. Through its mixture of a Takemitsu favourite Lydian scale and the darkest minor key, G minor, a wondrous sonority is achieved. The concepts Takemitsu expressed during his life of "Dream and Number" and "Sea of Tonality" have been wonderfully re-expressed on the guitar in this new work by Brouwer, who both respected Takemitsu and saw him as his life's teacher.¹

Leo Brouwer has always had close ties with other composers of the 20th century. Brouwer met Henze when the German composer came to Cuba in 1969; Henze spent a year in Cuba teaching. It was after hearing Leo Brouwer play that he decided to add a guitar part to the ensemble for *El Cimarrón*. Henze said that: 'Leo helped with the composition by coming up with new ideas on ways of extending the range of sounds that the guitar can produce.'² Henze then invited Brouwer to perform in the première of *El Cimarrón* at the Aldeburgh Festival, in Britain, a festival established in 1948 by Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears. Although he speaks of Hans Werner Henze and Luigi Nono as good friends, Brouwer says that his music was never influenced by theirs.

Leo Brouwer and Toru Takemitsu were also friends for many years. I asked Leo Brouwer about their first meeting. Could he remember which was the first Takemitsu piece that he ever heard? Of course he could! 'At the beginning of the 1970s I heard Ozawa in *Green* and *November Steps*. I recognised his writing as being the only continuity of Debussy's. No French composer had taken that heritage, because they were afraid to imitate. This is something which is not considered so terrible with German culture in terms of post-serial trends; even now you can hear dozens of post-Webernians and no one trembles, but to transcend Debussy is almost impossible in French culture. It was only possible with a genius like Takemitsu.'

The Japanese composer Toru Takemitsu was born in 1930, nine years before Brouwer, so they have been almost contemporaries. Did Brouwer think they had influenced each other as composers? 'I didn't have any influence on him, but I remember him sitting for nearly two hours in the Tokyo recording studio where I was working in the early 1980s, just to meet me personally. Then he told me that when he was young he had studied the guitar, with my *Etudes Simples*.'

Born in Cuba in 1939, the guitarist, composer and conductor Leo Brouwer has been a driving force in modern guitar, introducing guitarists to the world of contemporary music through a prolific number of works. Until he published his series of *Etudes Simples* (easy studies), there was little in the way of repertoire that could bridge the gap between the accessible student level and



Brouwer composing the *Concerto da Requiem*.

professional-level contemporary repertoire; these studies forced guitarists to think in different ways, both musically and technically.

Would the new concerto, the *Concerto da Requiem*, use material from Brouwer's solo guitar piece *Hika*, which was also dedicated to Takemitsu? Brouwer explained 'it had nothing to do with *Hika* – but maybe more to do with another piece which I wrote for Mr Fukuda called *El Arpa y la Sombra*, which was based on a novel by the Cuban-universal writer Alejo Carpentier.'

Shin-ichi Fukuda explained further: 'Before talking about the concerto, I must talk about Leo's new piece *El Arpa y La Sombra* (The Harp and Shadow). This piece was composed on 23 December 2005 (two days before my birthday), and I gave the world première on 10 May 2006 in Kyoto. The piece is about nine minutes long and it is like a digest version of the *Concerto da Requiem*. It's not only a shorter version but also a completely new composition based on the same material. Leo used and reconstituted elements from the 2nd and 3rd movements, and a part of *Hika*. At the end of the 3rd movement he used a very short theme from Takemitsu's *Green*, for orchestra (1967). It reminds us of the way that Manuel de Falla used Debussy's *La Soirée dans Grenade* at the end of his Homage to Debussy. It is very interesting that Takemitsu himself said "Green's orchestration is my personal experimental imitation of Debussy's. The imitation that the young (green) painter does – why not for composer?" I have recorded it already as a CD called 'In Memoriam Takemitsu' Vol. 2, which will be released in July 2008 by Denon. (Japan Columbia).'

Back to Brouwer: I wanted to know about his overall concept of the new concerto. Did he want to recreate the musical personality of Takemitsu or is it a Brouweresque view of Takemitsu's aesthetic? 'A Requiem isn't a Lachrimae', Brouwer made clear. 'It has sadness, meditation and also anger – let's say it's a protest against unnecessary death. Takemitsu's – and why not? – innocent death too. At the end of the third movement I quoted a phrase from *Green*, Takemitsu's early



Leo Brouwer at the piano.

piece for orchestra.' Takemitsu died from cancer on 20 February 1996.

I asked Leo Brouwer as a guitarist what it was that excited him about Takemitsu's style. Brouwer said: 'He wrote for guitar like he composed for orchestra. That's what I did with my music, and that's why I love him.'

Leo Brouwer has an internationally solid reputation as a conductor. From its establishment in 1992, he was the founder and conductor of the Orquesta de Córdoba in Spain. I wondered what it was like for him to conduct works by Takemitsu. I asked him if it required a different approach to other composers in terms of directing the instrument of the orchestra. Brouwer clearly has strong views about the way Takemitsu is conducted: 'European and North American conductors think that he needs accurate precision. Every composer needs precision! What I found in his orchestral works is a natural resonance and a sensorial attitude towards sound. Can you imagine Bernstein conducting Takemitsu? It would be fantastic!'

There are many parallels in the compositional lives of these two composers, Brouwer and Takemitsu, despite the apparent differences of nationality. Both composers were self-taught. Takemitsu was not a concert guitarist like Brouwer, but he did play guitar and was deeply attracted to the instrument. In an interview with David Marriott published in the early 1980s, Takemitsu spoke of the importance of the guitar in his composing: 'I almost always use the guitar when composing chamber music (not the amplified guitar). A very good reason I have used the guitar so often is that the sound is soft and intimate. Sometimes composers are afraid to use the guitar because of its "small sound". People are not so concerned with loud sounds, but they will listen carefully to soft sounds. The

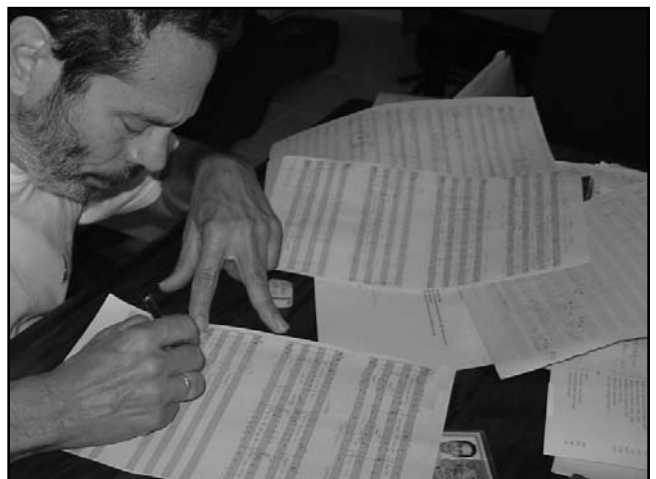
guitar is actually a small orchestra of colours.'³

Another parallel between Brouwer and Takemitsu is their interest in arranging pop music such as Beatles tunes: Takemitsu, for example arranged the Beatles' hits *Yesterday*, *Here, There and Everywhere* and *Michelle* for a recording of Kiyoshi Shomura. Leo Brouwer's Beatles' arrangements are *From Yesterday to Penny Lane*, *Seven Songs after the Beatles*, for guitar and orchestra.

Both Brouwer and Takemitsu have written film scores. One of Leo Brouwer's most well known was the music for Alfonso Arau's film *Like Water for Chocolate*. His list of film scores is very, very long. Takemitsu's list is over 100 films long also; one of his most well known must be the music for the film *Bad Boy*.

Shin-ichi Fukuda's links with Takemitsu are equally strong as he explained to me: 'Our first meeting was 1974, when I was 19 years old, in Osaka. Then I met him again in 1978 in Paris; Mr Takemitsu came as a guest of the Autumn Festival. But at that time, I was so young and very modest, that I could not talk to the great composer. Then, eight years later in 1983, I gave a concert with my dearest friend the flautist Shigenori Kudo, who is now the first flute in the Saito-Kinen Orchestra under Seiji Ozawa. We played Takemitsu's *Toward the Sea* in Tokyo. Suddenly, two weeks before concert, Mr Takemitsu telephoned me. I had never spoken with him before, and so my heart throbbed. He said "You must know about some misprints in the score".⁴ Finally, when the concert was over, he gave me praise of the highest grade, and talked to the music journalists about me – that was a great help for a young guitarist. Since then we had a good relationship.'

Takemitsu's *All in Twilight* was premiered by Shin-ichi Fukuda, so I asked him whether he



Leo Brouwer composing.



Shin-ichi Fukuda with caricature of Brouwer.

worked with Takemitsu on the piece. 'Yes, I learned a lot of things directly from Mr Takemitsu. He was not able to play the guitar (well, he could play a little, maybe he could just confirm the notes on his 1965 Kohno guitar). However, he knew the way of instrument better than anyone, and about how to bring out splendid harmony from it. I think that he had a talent, near to that of Villa-Lobos or Brouwer in this sense.

'In the first version of *All in Twilight*, I discovered, and told him, about some contradictions in the tempo indications on the score, and then he changed tempo. Of course, I was the first Japanese guitarist who played it, But *All in Twilight* was commissioned by Maestro Julian Bream, so I had to wait until Bream had given the première performance before I could play it in concert. In 1989 I went to Bream's recital at the Suntory Hall in Tokyo with Mr Takemitsu. Then a few months later, I played it also in same concert hall. Mr Takemitsu came to the rehearsal, and started to teach me. I remember that he said so many times, "Sing, sing, sing, more freely! You should play like as Tárrega's piece – it's not so far from the Romantic school."

Had Shin-ichi Fukuda worked with Takemitsu on other projects? 'I gave him some technical advice about *Equinox*, and also gave a first performance of *Bad Boy*, which was arranged for two guitars by Norio Satoh.'

Brouwer's writing has moved through different periods during his long career as a composer, starting with the use of Afro-Cuban rhythms in earliest works such as *Tres Apuntes* (1959) to the

period of employing aleatoric ideas and chromaticism in music in keeping with the avant-garde of the time, with pieces such as *Canticum* (1968) and then to his use of minimalist ideas in pieces, which in Brouwer's case have been referred to as being in a 'national hyper-romantic' style, such as *El Decamerón Negro* (1981) and *Paisaje Cubano con Campanas* (1986). Putting labels on a composer's style is deeply upsetting to most composers, and to ease himself out of being put in the wrong slot, Leo Brouwer has offered some labels, which he found more acceptable. He once described his later period of compositional style as his period of 'New Simplicity'. Was he still in this period or had he evolved into a further period? Despite the abhorrent question, Leo Brouwer answered kindly: 'Evolution always continues, but I find elements of all my music since the early pieces "up-to-date". I think that "intelligent music", "sensible music", cannot copy the past. Pop music can do it because of commercial reasons but not us. When I come back to the past, I quote.'

Leo Brouwer's guitar concertos are now of an impressive number and cover a substantial period of his compositional career; they have been a continuous feature of his writing. Have there been radical changes in his guitar concerto writing over the years? Leo Brouwer answered quite simply, 'I didn't pay attention to the guitar concertos specifically. Probably the *Concerto da Requiem* has something to do with my 2nd and 4th String Quartets but in general they're a kind of portrait of the performers who have asked for or commissioned them'.

In which year did he write his first guitar concerto? 'I wrote it in 1970 to 1971, as part of the trilogy *La Espiral Eterna*, *Per Suonare a Tre* and the *Concerto No.1*'.

The *Concierto Elegiaco* (1986) was dedicated to Julian Bream, who will celebrate his 75th birthday this year; that was number three. Would this new guitar concerto be guitar concerto number 11 or number 12 or...? Leo Brouwer started counting: 'Let's see...Helsinki (No.5); Volos (No.6); La Habana (No.7); Concerto-Cantata de Perugia (No.8); Concerto de

Benicassim (No.9); Concerto Italico for guitar quartet (No. 10), The Book of Signs for two guitars (No.11), and now this one (No.12)'

Finally, I asked Brouwer what it meant to him to premiere his latest concerto in Germany at the Koblenz International Guitar Festival. He replied: 'The premiere in Germany, together with its historic significance, will have the beautiful company of a public that respect and love music.'

www.koblenzguitarfestival.de

**"Intelligent music",
"sensible music",
cannot copy the
past. Pop music
can do it because
of commercial
reasons but not us.
When I come back
to the past,
I quote'."**

- Leo Brouwer



Fukuda
Tribute to
Brouwer
CD cover.

After the première on 9 May 2008 in Koblenz, Shin-ichi Fukuda will be performing the *Concerto da Requiem* again on 12 July 2008 together with Albéniz's *Iberia* arranged for guitar and orchestra by Leo Brouwer. That second performance will be with the Cordoba Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Leo Brouwer.

Shin-ichi Fukuda's Discography, related to Brouwer and Takemitsu

In *Memoriam: Takemitsu - Guitar Works (1997)* Shin-ichi Fukuda (guitar) with: *Folios, Songs (12), All in Twilight*, and *Equinox* by Toru Takemitsu, and *Hika* "In

Memoriam Toru Takemitsu" by Leo Brouwer. (1997) (Denon COCO-80936).

Notes

1. Shin-ichi Fukuda, *Introduction to Hika* score. January 1997 (English translation by Robert Coldwell).
2. Stefan Lerche quoting Hans Werner Henze in *Liner Notes of Rara* solo recording by Leo Brouwer (1970-73) of 20th-century guitar repertoire including *Memories aus dem 'Cimarrón'* by Hans Werner Henze. Deutsche Grammophon (2002).
3. David Marriot, 'Interview: Toru Takemitsu'. *Soundboard*, Vol. VIII No. 3, August 1981.
4. In the published score by Schott Japan (now Schott Music Co. Ltd.) all of those misprints have been corrected.

Just Arrived...



Fernando Sor (1778-1839)

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| 1 • Étude n° 5 | 2:42 |
| 2 • Étude n° 6 • Quasi adagio | 2:11 |
| 3 • Grand Solo, OP. 14 (MEISSONNIER) • Introduction (Andante) — Allegro | 10:00 |
| 4 • Étude n° 13 • Andante | 3:49 |
| 5 • Étude n° 17 • Andante | 4:33 |
| 6 • Étude n° 19 • Allegretto | 3:16 |
| 7 • Étude n° 1 • Maestoso | 1:17 |
| 8 • Étude n° 20 • Marciale | 3:25 |

Mauro Giuseppe Sergio Pantaleo Giuliani (1781-1829)

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| 9 • Variazioni su un tema di Händel PER CHITARRA, OP. 107 | 9:26 |
| 10 • Rossiniana n° 1, OP. 119 | 17:56 |

«SUR DES THÈMES D'OPÉRA DE GIOACHINO ROSSINI»

SOR & GIULIANI

Arrangements: Roland Dyens

ROLAND DYENS GUITARE | GUITAR
Quatuor Arthur-LeBlanc
 Hibiki Kobayashi, Brett Molzan VIOLONS | VIOLINS
 Jean-Luc Plourde ALTO | VIOLA
 Ryan Molzan VIOLONCELLE | CELLO

ATMA Classique

www.atmaclassique.com 7 22056 23972 ©&®2007 Made in Canada

CD £12.99 plus: Post & packing 10% UK, 15% EUROPE, INTERNATIONAL £11.05 plus: 20% Post & packing

Available now from

ASHLEY MARK PUBLISHING COMPANY

1 & 2 Vance Court, Trans Britannia Enterprise Park,
Blaydon on Tyne NE21 5NH, United Kingdom.



TEL: +44 (0) 191 414 9000 FAX: +44 (0) 191 414 9001 e-mail: mail@ashleymark.co.uk Web: www.FretsOnly.com