

In a 2007 article in *The New Yorker*, Alex Ross retells an interesting story about Toru Takemitsu's musical awakening at a perilous point in both his own survival as a human being and Japan's survival as a country:

"Near the end of the Second World War, soldiers and civilians on the Japanese home front constructed networks of underground bases in anticipation of an invasion that never came. In one of those dugout fortresses, in the mountains west of Tokyo, the future composer Toru Takemitsu was stationed in 1944; he was all of fourteen years old. Although no music aside from patriotic songs was allowed, one day a kindhearted officer ushered the children-soldiers into a back room and played some records for them, using a windup phonograph with a handmade bamboo needle. One disk had Lucienne Boyer singing *Parlez-Moi d'Amour*. Takemitsu listened, he later said, in a state of 'enormous shock.' After so much sunless, soulless labor, that winsome chanson opened a world of possibility in his mind. Ever after, Takemitsu honored the moment as the birth of his musical consciousness."

Upon the conclusion of the war, Takemitsu began teaching himself music from a potpourri of sources: his father's jazz collection, the French Impressionism of Debussy, Schoenberg, Messiaen, American works that showed up on Armed Forces radio and in the re-education libraries during the occupation. He was an avid fan of American cinema, seeing hundreds of films a year, and absorbing their accompanying musical soundtracks. When Takemitsu began exploring the avant-garde music of John Cage, this musical genre came full circle in that Cage's music had been heavily influenced by Japanese music and Japanese thought. Thus, as Alex Ross points out, "Takemitsu was taking back what his tradition had given to the West."

The music of Takemitsu is full of opulent chords, luminous textures, and hazy melodies that are periodically interjected with harsh timbres, strident dissonances, and engulfing masses of tone. Written in 1981, *Toward the Sea* is written mostly in free time without the bar lines that organize most Western music. The alto flute's melodic lines are based on the musical motif that Takemitsu invents to spell the word, "sea" using the tones, E-flat-E-A, whose German note names are Es-E-A. The movement titles—*The Night*, *Moby-Dick*, and *Cape Cod* are in reference to Melville's novel *Moby Dick, or The Whale*. Takemitsu wanted to emphasize the spiritual dimension of the book, quoting the passage, "meditation and water are wedded together". He is also quoted as saying, "The music is a homage to the sea which creates all things and a sketch for the sea of tonality."

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