

Naxos 8.557971

Kósçak Yamada (1886-1965):

**Nagauta Symphony "Tsurukame" • Symphony "Inno Meiji"
Choreographic Symphony "Maria Magdalena"**

In the sixteenth century, when the samurai (the warrior class) were struggling for supremacy (this period is called the Age of Civil Wars), Japan accepted Western civilisation to some extent and traded with Portugal, Spain and Holland. Christian missions were widespread, producing a large number of adherents, from the samurai to peasant classes. In big cities churches equipped with organs were built and choirs were formed, which gave the samurai opportunities of hearing the harpsichord and the lute. But in the early seventeenth century, when the struggles of the samurai were over, Japan fell under the rule of isolationists, not ready to open the country to the world. Taking precautions against colonialism by the Western powers, they broke off relations with them and limited foreign trade only to Holland. Christianity was also prohibited. Japan's isolation lasted a long time. This peaceful state, however, was gradually interrupted in the nineteenth century, as the fleets of the Western powers began to frequent the waters off Japan. In 1953 America and Russia pressed Japan to open its doors to them, which brought confusion to the samurai regime. Conflict began between those who thought it better to open the country and those who wished to remain in isolation. It was accompanied by a movement to destroy the hierarchy established and maintained by the samurai class from the twelfth century. Finally in 1867 the age of the samurai came to an end with a new government by the Emperor, who had ruled over Japan from ancient times, but whose power had been transferred to the samurai class from the twelfth century.

The new government's national policy was to bring Western civilisation to Japan. Many Western people were employed and every field, from the social system to scientific technology, was modernised rapidly and drastically. Music was no exception. The navy band was directed by German musicians and the army band by the French. National music schools were founded and Western music was taught even at primary school. By opening the country and liberalising religion, Christian missions spread and Christian hymns became popular. From the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century Japanese musicians started to compose military songs, nursery rhymes, choral pieces and marches in the Western style, in addition to performing such music. This trend gave birth to pioneering composers like Nobu Koda (1870-1946), who studied in Vienna and wrote two violin sonatas in the 1890s, or Rentaro Taki (1879-1903), who studied in Leipzig and wrote romantic piano pieces.

Kósçak Yamada belongs to the following generation and is considered to be a gigantic figure, who made the most tremendous contribution to the development of Western music in Japan. He was born in Tokyo on 9 June 1886. His father was formerly a samurai of lower grade, but when the new age of westernisation arrived with the disappearance of the samurai class, he embarked on a life that brought a series of successes and failures, as he attempted a variety of enterprises. Yamada inevitably had ups and downs in his life in his younger days.

When Yamada was still young, his family lived for some time in a naval city near Tokyo, Yokosuka, where he was enchanted by military bands and came to long for Western music. He also became familiar with hymns sung in church, as his mother's side of the family was Protestant. So from the very beginning of his life, Yamada was more familiar with Western music than with Japanese traditional music. When Yamada was nine, his father died, which brought hardships to his life. He even had no adequate education in early adolescence and had to make his living as a printer or as an errand-boy in a station in Tokyo. When he was fifteen, however, a ray of hope appeared before him. His thirteen-year-old sister in Okayama (western part of Japan), who had been leading a secure life, decided to take care of him. She was a teacher at a girls' high school and her husband Edward Gauntlet, an Englishman, was teaching English at the Sixth High School of Okayama, one of the leading schools in Japan. This brother-in-law was an amateur musician and an organist for the Anglican Church. Playing instruments and singing hymns with him, Yamada's dream for Western music grew. His brother-in-law advised him to be a musician and helped him financially. Thus in 1904, after studying at Kwansei Gakuin High School (a missionary school), Yamada entered the national Tokyo Music School, which was the centre of Western music in Japan.

While studying the cello and theory under the two German teachers at the school, August Junker, who was a pupil of Joachim, and Heinrich Werkmeister, who was from the Staatliche Akademische

Hochschule für Musik in Berlin, Yamada attempted to create string quartets and piano pieces. He was a promising student. In 1910 Werkmeister recommended Yamada as a future leader of the Japanese musical world to his private cello pupil Koyata Iwasaki, who was among the leaders of the Mitsubishi Foundation. Iwasaki promised Yamada to help him financially with his studies in Berlin. In April of the same year Yamada left for Berlin and entered the Staatliche Akademische Hochschule für Musik, Werkmeister's alma mater, studying with Max Bruch and, among others, Karl Leopold Wolf.

In his student days in Japan, Yamada's models were Schubert and Schumann, while in Berlin he was deeply influenced by the new styles of Richard Strauss, Debussy and then of Scriabin, although he was at the same time studying academic harmony and counterpoint at school. These elements were to determine Yamada's style all his life. He wrote music in which German late Romanticism, French Impressionism, Scriabin's mysticism and Japanese traditional elements were integrated.

During this Berlin period Yamada produced a series of epoch-making achievements in Japanese music history, writing his *Overture in D major*, *Symphony in F major "Triumph and Peace"* and the full-scale opera *Heavenly Maiden fallen to Earth*, all of which were the first-ever attempts by a Japanese composer. He also composed two works for big orchestra: *The Dark Gate* and *Mandarava*, where Strauss's style, Japanese ambiguity and miniaturism are fused together. Some of these works can be heard on Naxos 8.555350 of this series. In 1913 Yamada returned to Japan, interrupting his fruitful studies in Berlin. It seems that he was looking for some patronage that would enable him to continue his studies in Europe and to publish new works, but in 1914 World War I broke out and Europe became a battlefield. Forced to change his course of life, Yamada tried to build a fine orchestra in Tokyo, that could compete with European major orchestras. He had composed opera, symphony and symphonic poems in Berlin, but in Japan there were no ensembles that were able to perform them. Only the Tokyo Music School, the Imperial Court and the Army had orchestras, but they were mainly used for education and for special occasions. There were no professional orchestras even in Tokyo and in Osaka, that could give concerts on a regular basis for people at large. The same was true of the operatic field. Starting from zero, Yamada set up orchestras and opera companies. He worked at the same time as composer, conductor, educator and producer. Running into debt and meeting with failure repeatedly, he nevertheless did not give up challenging and he eventually laid the foundations of the leading orchestra in Japan, known today under the name of the NHK Symphony Orchestra.

Yamada composed a huge number of songs and nursery rhymes appealing to the public especially in the 1920s, and was called the "Japanese Schubert". Operas and symphonies were still too hard for the Japanese in those days, while popular songs and nursery rhymes were easier to understand and sold well. He produced so many hits that are still sung today, such as '*Akatombo*' (Red Dragonflies), '*Kono Michi*' (This Path) and '*Karatachi no Hana*' (Trifoliate Orange Blossoms), in which the style of the German Lieder and the Japanese way of intonation are cleverly combined.

Yamada was also the first Japanese musician to show to Europe and America that Japanese could compose orchestral music or could conduct orchestras. In 1918 and 1919 he conducted the New York Philharmonic in Carnegie Hall and gave two concerts of his own works. On this occasion he met Rachmaninov and Prokofiev. In 1931 he conducted the Leningrad Philharmonic and some other Soviet orchestras in several cities in the Soviet Union, meeting the young Shostakovich. Immediately after returning to Japan, he gave the première of Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 1* in Japan. In 1937 he gave concerts in several cities in Germany, when he recorded his own works, conducting the Berlin Philharmonic. In 1940 he gave the world première of Ibert's *Ouverture de fête*, commissioned by the Japanese Government, in Tokyo.

In addition to these, Yamada made great efforts to promote education. He published many books on music and theory. Among his many pupils are Hidemaro Konoye, the first Japanese conductor to establish his name internationally, the Taiwanese-born Chinese composer Wen-ye Jiang (Bunya Koh), who won an award at the artistic competition of the Olympic Games in Berlin, and Ikuma Dan, who became the leading opera composer in post-war Japan. All this shows that he was active in every field of music, including composition, performance, education and enlightenment. It is not too much to say that Yamada laid the foundations of today's prosperous state of the Japanese Western music scene.

After becoming disabled, owing to a cerebral hemorrhage in 1948, Yamada's activities were limited. He died on 29 December 1965.

The *Nagauta Symphony "Tsurukame"*, written in 1934, is a work in which Japanese traditional vocal music is combined with the Western-style orchestra. The birth of this symphony has two underlying elements. The first is the current state of the Japanese music world at large from the 1920s onwards. Two different trends co-existed when Japan started westernisation, that of Japanese traditional music and that of Western music. In the early stages these two did not mingle, as the traditionalists were eager to keep their place in westernised Japan, while the Western side was busy absorbing Western ways of music. From around the 1920s, however, the two began to compromise with each other. The traditional side feared that they would be out of date unless they stepped forward with new attempts, and the Western side became aware that they should make use of Japanese traditional music and instruments in order to impart a Japanese character to their music. Composers on the traditional side began to use Western forms and harmony in their music, and those on the Western side attempted to arrange traditional music for Western instruments or to write concertos for traditional instruments and Western-style orchestra. In 1967 Toru Takemitsu had a big success by writing *November Steps* for traditional instruments, biwa and shakuhachi, and Western-style orchestra, at the request of the New York Philharmonic. This method of writing music, the origin of which goes back to the 1920s, was also adopted by other composers, such as Michio Miyagi and Kasho Machida from the traditional side, and Nagayo Motoori (Yamada's rival from their student days) and Hidemaro Konoye, one of Yamada's pupils, and Meiro Sugahara. Yamada also attempted this way of composition in his 1921 symphonic work *Inno Meiji*, using traditional instruments combined with Western orchestra. The *Nagauta Symphony* is also written following this trend. The other element concerns Yamada's private goal as a composer. In his Berlin days he tried to create works following the tradition of Beethoven, such as the four-movement symphony, while feeling that such absolute music would not always suit Japanese mentality, as Japanese imaginative power is more fantastic. Brief, poetic, improvisatory and informal instrumental music or vocal music (songs, cantatas and opera), where music goes forward together with text, would be more appropriate for Japanese. Music only played with instruments had never been predominant in Japanese music history, except ancient imperial music Gagaku. Music dramas like Noh or Kabuki, and vocal music accompanied by the Japanese lute (biwa and shamisen) or the Japanese zither (koto), had always been in the centre of Japanese music.

After returning to Japan, Yamada was gradually inclined to vocal music and nearly 90% of his works accompanied Japanese text. His ultimate goal was now set up to create a Japanese-style *Bartered Bride* or a *Boris Godunov*, as he thought that Western music would never take root in the true sense, until the Japanese had their own national opera. Yamada was confident that such operatic works should be written by him, the pioneer of the Japanese music scene. He made a study of how to create melodies suited to the Japanese language, and of how to sound most beautifully when Japanese opera singers, who were trained in the Western pronunciation system, sang Japanese texts. He hoped to produce Japanese opera by integrating the Japanese language, Japanese traditional music and Western music. Yamada, who was much more familiar with Western music than with Japanese traditional music from his early days, had to pay for that, as he was confronted with the task of studying traditional vocal music, after he had established his name as a famous composer. The *Nagauta Symphony* was produced on that process.

Nagauta is one of the major fields of Japanese traditional music and had developed from the seventeenth century, keeping close relationship with Kabuki, which also had developed from the same century, as an amusement for the urban bourgeoisie. In Kabuki, where operatic singing of text, mime and dancing are integrated, *Nagauta* takes charge of dance music, and it can be heard even today in Kabuki theatres, as accompaniment music. *Naga-* of *Nagauta* means "long" and *-uta* means "song". It is literally a "long song" with ballade-like long text, lasting fifteen to thirty minutes. Its standard instrumentation consists of singers, shamisens (Japanese lute with three strings), fues (Japanese flute) and percussion. In *Nagauta*, various elements from Japanese traditional music are integrated: music for *Noh*, *Jiuta* and *Joruri*. *Noh* is an ascetic and solemn music drama perfected in the medieval period, prior to Kabuki, and was loved by the samurai class. Its music is written for vocalist, fue player (flautist) and percussionist. *Jiuta* is a chamber-song created in Kyoto in the seventeenth century. Accompanied by the shamisen, it is music for the bourgeoisie. *Joruri* is a long musical story with songs and narrative, performed by an actor with accompaniment by the shamisen. Originating from street performance in the sixteenth century, it had shown diverse development. In this sense, *Nagauta* is a kind of composite art and has a comprehensive character. Its sound is, as it were, crystallisation of Japanese aesthetic sense towards the Japanese language, before meeting the West. It was natural that Yamada paid attention to *Nagauta*, as he was eager to explore the relations between the Japanese language and music in traditional arts.

Then how is the *Nagauta Symphony "Tsurukame"* made up? The fact is that not the entire work was written by Yamada. In the *Nagauta* part, the classic piece "*Tsurukame*", which was composed by Rokuzaemon Kineya X in 1851 (i.e. just before the confusion caused by pressure from the West to open up the country), is played as it is by traditional musicians of *Nagauta*. Yamada did not make any alteration to this part. *Nagauta "Tsurukame"* is based on a *Noh* number of the same title. *Tsuru* means "crane" and *kame* means "tortoise". These two living things are thought to symbolize long life in Japan. Its text is festive, relating as follows: at the feast of New Year in ancient China, a crane and a tortoise give eternal life to the Emperor. So "*Tsurukame*" is for New Year festivity or a wedding, both in *Noh* and *Nagauta*.

Then what did Yamada do? He added music for symphony orchestra with double winds and harp, to compete contrapuntally with "*Tsurukame*", like a concerto, and he called the work *Nagauta Symphony*. In *Nagauta*, the variety of colours and inflection are often produced by changing tuning of the strings on the way, giving an effect equivalent to the modulation in Western music. In "*Tsurukame*", the tuning shifts from *Hon-Choshi* to *Ni-Agari*, and then returns to *Hon-Choshi*. The piece is thus divided into three parts. *Hon-Choshi* is the tuning made up of B - E - B (one octave raised) from the bottom. *Ni-Agari* is in B - F sharp - B (one octave raised). On these tunings, pentatonic scales characterizing Japanese traditional music, such as the *Miyako-bushi* scale (B - C - E - F sharp - G, on *Hon-Choshi*, and F sharp - G - B - C sharp - D, on *Ni-Agari*) or the *Ritsu* scale (B - C sharp - E - F sharp - G sharp, on *Hon-Choshi*, and F sharp - G sharp - B - C sharp - E, on *Ni-Agari*), are formed.

Yamada makes up the orchestral part mainly of pentatonic scales found in *Nagauta*. The *Hon-Choshi* outer parts are written in B minor and the *Ni-Agari* middle part is in F sharp minor. The orchestra aims at being harmonized with *Nagauta*, not one confronted by the other. Regarding *Nagauta* as polyphony by voice and instruments, Yamada tries to make it into richer modern music, by adding more vocal parts and making the polyphony more complex. He believed that this process would be a contribution to Japanese traditional music by a Western-style Japanese composer. All through this compositional process, Yamada explores Japanese singing melodies and delicate and flexible orchestral writing to support them, while pondering over the future of Japanese operatic singers, by observing Japanese traditional singers, who produce overtones by choking the voice, unlike the Western *bel canto* singing.

The *Nagauta Symphony* had its première in 1934, with Yamada himself conducting the Nippon Broadcast Symphony Orchestra (today's NHK Symphony Orchestra) and *Nagauta* musicians, including Kosanzo Yoshizumi and Bunji Kineya, and in 1940, six years later, Yamada was to publish his most important grand opera *Dawn*.

The *Symphony "Inno Meiji"* had its première in Tokyo on 1 May 1921, with the composer himself conducting a provisionally assembled orchestra. The work was often performed in Japan until World War II, as well as in Berlin, London and Moscow, as one of Yamada's masterpieces. There exist 78 rpm recordings of Yamada conducting the Berlin Philharmonic. This single-movement epic work, which depicts Japanese history from the 1850s, when Japan was in confusion as to whether to open the country or to keep isolation, through the early twentieth century, when Japan was drastically westernised, is virtually a symphonic poem rather than a symphony, although it evokes the first or the last movement of the traditional symphony, in that it is in sonata form, where two themes expressing Japanese civilisation and Western civilisation respectively, conflict and harmonize. "*Meiji*" of the title denotes the Meiji Period (1868-1912), during which Emperor Meiji ruled over Japan. For Yamada, who was one of the most important composers in Japan and who adored Richard Strauss, the great composer of symphonic poems, it was an inevitable task to depict Japanese history in orchestral music.

The instrumentation consists of triple winds with additional percussion, including hichiriki and other Asian instruments. In the opening the muted violin puts chords in a static way. It expresses the "sleeping" Japan in isolation from the seventeenth century. The chords are based on the vertically accumulated *Ritsu* scale (E - F sharp - A - B - C sharp) used mainly in Gagaku. These five notes dominate the whole piece. Then a melody comes up from amidst the static chords, as if some movements were appearing out of calmness. This melody develops into the first theme, which is elegant and is suggested by the unison of the flute and the oboe over the tonic A major chord by the strings. The first three notes (C sharp - E - F sharp) of the melody are the figure found many times in *Kimigayo*, the Japanese national anthem. Yamada thus makes the first theme symbolize Japan. The theme tries to develop powerfully, as it expresses the "quickenning" of Japan making for a new age.

The fanfare-like second theme is presented by the brass in A major. It symbolizes Western civilisation. Then the music depicts confusion as to whether to open the country or to remain in isolation. Japan makes for opening the door and for westernisation, but the music does not clear up immediately. The solo oboe and then the solo violin grieve that Japan cannot accept Western civilisation so easily. This song of grief is followed by the motive of consolation by the oboe in B major. The music becomes excited in E major, when the second theme symbolizing Western civilisation returns in F sharp major. Then the theme of Japan restores its power. Now Japan and the West come closer to each other and the music becomes rapturous in A major, when the mood is interrupted. The music turns to C minor, sinking into sorrow. The C was not contained in the opening five notes. Since this sorrowful music amounts to the funeral music for Emperor Meiji, the noble ruler of Japan, a special different key should be given to this part. The solo *hichiriki*, a kind of ancient oboe used in Gagaku, joins the music, and the funeral march for the Emperor begins. This sorrowful music leads to a song of hope for a new age, when Japan and the West will be in harmony with each other in the true sense. The music shifts to E flat major from C minor, and then concludes powerfully in B major. This work is probably the first example of full-orchestral music where Asian traditional instruments are used in a striking way in the Western-style orchestra.

In his Berlin days from 1910 to 1913, Yamada was absorbed in operas by Wagner and Richard Strauss. In addition to that, he showed interest in Russian ballet performances with music by Debussy and Ravel, and modern dancing by Isadora Duncan. In 1912 he even took lessons himself at the dance school Jacques-Dalcroze founded in Dresden. In addition to composing and performing music, Yamada danced himself. After returning to Japan, he became the leader of ballet and modern dancing in Japan, too. Japanese Noh and Kabuki integrate music, acting and dancing. Yamada was ambitious for such a composite art. In fact his opera *Ayame* (1931) and *Dawn* (1941) both contain important scenes for ballet. The *Choreographic Symphony "Maria Magdalena"*, written in Yamada's early days, is one of such works, where his ambition is manifest in a most pure way.

In 1916 Yamada conceived a half-hour large-scale ballet, based on Maeterlinck's play *Marie-Magdeleine*. The completed piano sketches, which are now lost, are said to have been made up of two acts: *The Sermon on the Mount* and *Joseph's House in Arimathaea*. It was difficult to put such a big work into performance in those days and the sketches were left as they were. The materials were, however, made use of during Yamada's stay in the United States from the end of 1917 to the spring of 1919, as he orchestrated the sketches for Act II in New York and gave the first performance under the title of *Choreographic Symphony "Maria Magdalra"* at the Carnegie Hall on 24 January 1919. The instrumentation consists of a gigantic orchestra with triple to quadruple winds, two harps and percussion. The plot of Act II is as follows:

On the night Jesus Christ was captured, his flock, including Mary Magdalene, assemble at Joseph's house in Arimathaea. They feel uneasy, confused and restless. Then a Roman officer comes up. He is in love with Mary and urges her to accept his love, if she wishes to save Jesus. In anguish, Mary eventually turns down his proposal. The officer begins to threaten her by force, when the procession of the captured Jesus passes by the window. The procession is lit by torches and looks as if it were wrapped in an aura of divinity. Mary continues to reject the officer and tells him to leave. The officer goes, as if persuaded by the nobility of Jesus and Mary. Mary's image shines in the light.

The score carries no annotation, explaining the plot, but it seems the music and the plot coincide in detail.

The music is based on a stately, resolute and bright theme in D major, expressing the religious belief of Mary Magdalene, and on many motives threatening the theme, such as the descending chromatic figure suggested by the woodwind in the opening, or the rhythmic motive of Beethoven's "Fate knocking at the door", appearing repeatedly throughout the work. By alternating such materials, the music sways between stability and instability, but finally faith overcomes. The work ends in D major.

This symphony shows influences by Wagner and Richard Strauss, and affinities with Yamada's works in his Berlin days. In any case, the music is restless, hectic, rich in dynamics and timbres, and silence and pauses are effectively used. This elusive quality reflects Japanese aesthetic sense, where ephemerality and subtle changes of moments are preferred to logical construction.

Morihide Katayama
English Translation: SOREL

Tsurukame (Crane and Tortoise)

New Year has come.

A feast is held at the imperial palace in Tang.

The Emperor comes out to the "Gate of Perennial Youth".

Every one of his subjects and people assembles in front of the Gate.

The number of people is a hundred million and a hundred!

Every one makes for the Gate to see the Emperor.

The noise of the people fills the universe.

In the yard of the palace is sand of gold and silver.

In the palace are hung ten to twenty embroidered curtains in brocade.

The door of the palace is made of blue jewels.

The doorsill of the palace is made of beautiful shells from India.

The bridge of the palace is made of agate.

On the edge of the lake of the palace, a tortoise is playing solemnly and a crane is flying elegantly over it.

The crane has a life of a thousand years!

The tortoise has a life of a thousand years!

The blessing of the Emperor is deep, and the palace is like a paradise.

A minister says to the Emperor.

"Your Majesty the Emperor, please allow the crane and the tortoise to dance in front of you."

The Emperor agrees and the crane and the tortoise dance in delight.

The crane and the tortoise give eternal life to the Emperor.

The Emperor is delighted and starts to dance himself.

The stage for the Emperor is called the "Palace of the Moon".

The Emperor's dancing is brilliant.

The Emperor's costume is brilliant, too.

For the dance of spring, the Emperor is dressed in white, which evokes the moonlight.

For the dance of summer, the Emperor is dressed in multiple colours, which evoke flowers in full bloom.

For the dance of autumn, the Emperor is dressed in the colour of red leaves wet in the rain.

For the dance of winter, the Emperor is dressed in white, which evokes snow.

The orchestra plays the music of the moon in the "Palace of the Moon".

When the Emperor finishes dancing the number symbolizing the changes of the four seasons, mountains, rivers, plants, trees and the land are moved by his Majesty's dance, costume and music.

The voice of blessing the long life of a thousand years and ten thousand years of the Emperor comes up from the depths of the earth and down from the heavens.

The Emperor, who was given eternal life, goes back to his bedroom.

His subjects follow the Emperor in line.

The life of the Emperor is eternal. The name of the Emperor's bedroom is the "Bedroom of Eternity"!

The life of the Emperor is eternal. The name of the Emperor's bed is the "Bedroom of Eternity"!

How auspicious it is!