Chapter 15

"Jazz That Eats Rice"
Toshiko Akiyoshi's Roots Music

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> Just two years after the Negro slaves were emancipated in the United States, Emperor Meiji became the Emperor of Japan. So, the Japanese people and Black American people started for the New World, of which they never knew, almost at the same time. . . . And those two peoples had to abandon their old traditions, of which they were ashamed when they compared them to the old European traditions. . . . That is why we Japanese can easily understand everything the American Black people are doing.
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> —Yui Shoichi, quoted in E. Taylor Atkins, *Blue Nippon,* 2001

In 1974, Toshiko Akiyoshi began performing and recording a big band she had formed two years earlier with her husband, Lew Tabackin. After more than twenty years in the business, the pianist felt it was time for her to repay jazz by bringing her Japanese heritage to the music. Based in New York City for most of her career in the United States, Akiyoshi relocated to Los Angeles. Within a few years the band was acclaimed, winning prestigious *Down Beat* readers' and critics' polls. By 1980, when Akiyoshi won the magazine's awards for best big band, arranger, and composer, her group was regarded as best jazz orchestra in the world. Her ascent in the jazz world was remarkable, even in a musical history filled with extraordinary prodigies and rapid climbs.

This decision linked Akiyoshi to an important mythology of American popular music, positioning her in what I call the unstable ethnic triad. Its

best-known example is staged in the 1927 film, *The Jazz Singer,* starring Al Jolson as a Jewish immigrant boy who escapes the clutches of his Orthodox Jewish heritage and assimilates as a Caucasian American through a symbolic identification with African America. Jolson enacts this transformation musically by performing minstrel "jazz" songs and visually by donning blackface and wig.[1] The Mardi Gras Indians of New Orleans—social clubs of young African Americans who adopt Indian names and don Indian costumes—serve as another, more subtle example of the unstable ethnic triad. By constructing an imaginary racial identity that plays on actual historical creolization, they disrupt the dominant American black/white racial binary. These "Indians" are celebrated in Wynton Marsalis's *Blood on the Fields* as agents who serve to mediate between white owners and black slaves and as purveyors of survival skills and the natural world.[2]

I.

In Japan, a comparable ethnic triad has underscored the quest for musical authenticity. Following its forced opening to the West by the U.S. Navy in the 1850s, Japan had fashioned a modern nation with one foot in Asia and one foot in the West. These identifications had shifted back and forth at various times to suit the national interest of the state. Japanese jazz developed within these oscillations. The music had reached Japan quite early, before 1920, transmitted via transpacific ocean liners. The 1920s saw a "Jazz Age" every bit as vigorous as its American counterpart, driven by the popularity of social dance in commercial ballrooms in Tokyo, Osaka, and Kobe. The first jazz coffeehouses were established, and musicians found abundant work in the recording industry, film, and radio. Shanghai provided stimulating offshore stomping grounds for Japanese musicians who rubbed shoulders with musicians from America. But cultural nativism was ascendant during the rise of ultranationalism of the 1930s. In 1937, jazz was suppressed as "enemy music" and dancehalls were shuttered. During the war, jazz was actually pressed into service as propaganda meant to weaken the resolve of American troops tuning in to Japanese broadcasts.[3]

After the war, jazz became an important symbol, along with candy and gum, of U.S. benevolence to its shattered foe. Japanese musicians found many opportunities to hear and play with American military musicians, creating a so-called Jazz Boom in the early 1950s. The quest for Japanese

musical authenticity took on a new urgency during the 1960s, as Japan began to flex its economic muscles. Influenced by currents of cultural nationalism emanating from the United States, young Japanese musicians stressed their racial solidarity with African Americans. Taking to heart W. E. B. Du Bois's 1940 formulation—the "social heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult . . . binds together not simply the children of Africa, but extends through Yellow Asia and into the South Seas"—these musicians emphasized their affinities for American people of color.[4] As Taylor Atkins has shown, Japanese players had long been troubled by their perceived inability to put a distinctive innovative mark on a musical form that above all prides itself on originality. If African American cultural nationalists were correct that the racialized self was the source of musical authenticity, Japanese selves had much to offer. They could provide the elusive ground of authentic music.[5]

Akiyoshi herself was of an earlier generation and had developed her musical reputation prior to the 1960s. Born in 1929, she had grown up in Japanese-occupied Manchuria, where her father owned an import-export business. Her family lost everything in the war and returned to Japan destitute. Relocating to Kyushu, the family faced the universal experience of trying to establish a life in the ruins of war. The teenaged Akiyoshi answered a notice for a pianist at a local dance hall and learned on the job.[6] She developed rapidly as a jazz player. Two years after the dance hall gig, she moved to Tokyo with the goal of playing jazz professionally. Pianist Hampton Hawes, who led an army band in Yokohama during 1953–1954 and exerted a large influence on the Tokyo jazz scene, observed her in Ginza. "That little chick in a kimono sat right down at the piano and started to rip off things I didn't believe, swinging like she'd grown up in Kansas City," he recalled.[7] Akiyoshi established herself as a leading Japanese jazz modernist, influenced by bebop, uninterested in commercial success. Then came her big break. She was noticed by pianist Oscar Peterson and producer Norman Granz, who recorded her with an all-star American combo in Tokyo. The resulting LP was widely praised and won her a scholarship to the Berklee College of Music, in Boston, the most important American institution for jazz musicians.

Akiyoshi began performing and recording in a variety of small groups, some with Charlie Mariano, a sax player she met at Berklee. After her marriage to Mariano broke up, Akiyoshi faced the challenge of surviving as a jazz musician and single mother in the unforgiving milieu of New York City. She scraped by playing gigs at Greenwich Village jazz clubs. There she

struck up a friendship with the prodigious Charles Mingus, who eventually hired her. By the early 1970s, though, like even the most established American jazz artists, Akiyohi's career was floundering. "I came to the point where I started doubting about my meaning of existence as a jazz musician," she later said. "I had the belief that I should try to create something from my heritage, something unique enough that I could maybe . . . return something *into* jazz, in my own way, not just reap the benefits of American jazz."[8] With her second husband, Tabackin, a player of dazzling skill on both tenor sax and flute, she relocated to Los Angeles, where Tabackin had steady work with the *Tonight Show* band. Rehearsal space was cheaper—$3 an hour at the musicians' local rather than $25—an important consideration for a fledgling big band. Two years later, the band would record *Kogun,* an album that marked the beginning of its critical and popular ascent in both Japan and the United States.

The years leading up to the formation of the Akiyoshi-Tabackin band were notable for racial polarization on both sides of the Pacific. In the United States, hard bop and free jazz dovetailed with the civil rights and black power movements, stressing an aesthetic of freedom. Musicians like Charles Mingus, Archie Shepp, and Miles Davis made explicit currents of Black Nationalism that had remained latent in earlier periods. In an important article in *Down Beat* and in his classic *Blues People* (1964), writer LeRoi Jones (later Amiri Baraka) developed an influential argument about the inextricable links between blues, jazz, and working-class African American life. Blues and jazz were a direct outgrowth of the social experience of African Americans, he insisted, and the music could not be properly performed or interpreted without direct access to those forms of experience.[9]

In Japan, a new generation of jazz musicians was making similar claims about the possibilities of a distinctively Japanese jazz. Musicians like Togashi Masahiko were working to articulate a Japanese jazz aesthetic, along with critics like Yui Shoichi. "Right now this is a new global trend that is coming to rule jazz," wrote Yui. "Even in America, blacks are aiming for black jazz, whites for white jazz; and in Europe, as well, in Spain and West Germany different national hues using the diction of jazz are being worked out. It is certainly reasonable that Japanese musicians are in a hurry to 'create Japanese jazz.' "[10] The crucial challenge was to discover a Japanese analogue to the blues, a vernacular musical form rooted in the historical experience of the people, expressive of social and political resistance, with continuing cultural vitality. Japanese musicians had long employed what

Atkins calls "strategies of authentication," such as replicating the exact styles of favorite American artists or sojourning in foreign cities like New York and Shanghai. A new strategy of the 1960s was to incorporate traditional instruments, tone colors, or formal principles that would mark the music as distinctly Japanese.[11]

Akiyoshi was no stranger to these aesthetic currents. In the early 1950s, she had speculated about the links between African American identity and jazz. "How do you play the blues that way," she once queried Hampton Hawes, the first American to discover her talent. "How can I learn to play them so authentically?":

> *Hawes*: I play the blues right because I eat collard greens and black-eyed peas and corn pone and clabber.
> *Akiyoshi* [Sighs]: Where can I find that food? Do I have to go to the United States to get it?

Hawes was kidding; "All you need is the feeling," he admitted.[12] A decade later, in New York, Akiyoshi played with perhaps the most outspoken black nationalist in jazz. Though Mingus frequently intimidated his sidemen, the diminutive Akiyoshi held her own during her ten months in the band. The two remained loyal friends: Mingus was one of the few in the audience of Akiyoshi's Town Hall recital of 1967; the following year she visited him in the hospital during a period of mental collapse.[13]

II.

Whatever she may have learned about music during her stint with Mingus, it was Mingus's own hero, Duke Ellington, whom Akiyoshi credited with inspiring her interest in exploring Japanese music in jazz. She began at roughly the time Ellington died, in 1974. "Spiritually, since I started writing for big band, my main influence is Duke Ellington," she explained in 1976:

> One of the reasons that I truly admire and respect him—aside from his being a great writer—is that his music was deeply rooted in his race and he was proud of his race. That encouraged me to draw some heritage from *my* roots. Jazz in this country comes from European and African music, but there was never anything Oriental.[14]

As a Japanese woman, Akiyoshi occupied a complicated position in 1970s jazz. Her ancestry disrupted the black/white racial binary so dominant in the jazz community. In 1976, just after the release of *Kogun* in the United States, Akiyoshi described the challenge of working in what was considered a quintessentially American idiom:

> Not only I am not an American, I am a minority race. I believe in seeing things the way they are, and for minorities, it's hard in this country. If I were a male American and wrote a hundred tunes, if 30 of those tunes were super and the rest mediocre, I could get by. It's possible for an American male writer. But in my case, I can't afford that. Whenever I write, each one has to be good.[15]

Akiyoshi was not a member of an American minority group, of course; she was a Japanese national, not a Japanese American. Being Japanese rather than Chinese or Korean placed Akiyoshi in an even more complex category. Japan and the United States have experienced deep political and cultural ambivalence since the 1853 appearance of Commodore Perry's "black ships" in Tokyo Bay. Ever since, the United States has represented both Self and Other to Japanese, serving both as a model and a nemesis. At times Japanese have emphasized their Asianness ("Greater Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere" of the 1930s and 1940s, for example), at other times their kinship to Europe and America. Modern Japan had clearly been shaped by U.S. imperialism and Japan's fascination with the West. But Japan's own imperial ambitions had shaped much of the Asian world militarily and economically. In addition, the late 1960s saw a strong anti–Vietnam War movement in Japan. As the Akiyoshi-Tabackin band was drawing increasing attention, Japan was demonstrating its newfound economic might vis-à-vis the United States. The mid-1970s were also the heyday of a Japanese genre called *nihonjinron,* which offered theories for the distinctiveness, and often superiority, of Japanese society, culture, and physiology.[16]

Furthermore, Akiyoshi was distinctive in jazz not just for her nationality: women have long struggled to achieve recognition in jazz. "Masculinity is one of the essences that jazz music has to have, for my taste—you know, hard-driving," Akiyoshi herself acknowledged.[17] She had to work through both of these categories as she pondered her future:

> Jazz is American music. And I thought, here I am, I'm a Japanese and a woman, and the woman part is not that important I think, but here I am

> Japanese and a jazz player and playing in New York. . . . And I look at it and then have to really think about where my position is, what my role will be. And somehow it looks kind of pathetic and comical, the fact that there is a Japanese little girl trying to play jazz . . . and I felt very insignificant.[18]

Akiyoshi's Japanese identity was not the only racial factor affecting the direction of the band; co-leader Tabackin's whiteness also played a part. Like many cultural milieus, the New York jazz community was sharply polarized during the late 1960s and early 1970s. "New York was very strange because there was almost like a Black revolution happening," Tabackin recalls. "Martin Luther King was assassinated earlier and Malcolm X and it was very difficult for white jazz musicians."[19] In response, big bands had emerged as refuges for white jazz musicians, according to Akiyoshi, as "the entry to the starting gate."[20] For Tabackin, this entailed a major reorientation of his style. "Before I came to New York, I had never played in any big bands and had no desire to play in them," he explained. "I came from a small group background. And when I came to New York, all of a sudden—especially since I'm a white player—I found myself in big bands, although I couldn't even read a chart."[21] Because he was in charge of hiring musicians for the band, Tabackin's musical perspectives had a ripple effect beyond his own featured soloing; he effectively shaped much of the musical personality of the ensemble. In choosing a big band as her musical vehicle, Akiyoshi located herself in an older tradition of African American racial pride in jazz stretching back to the 1920s.[22]

Ironically, it was Tabackin's virtuoso abilities on the flute that created one of the band's most conspicuous forms of sonic Japaneseness. Along with the *koto,* the most widely recognized Japanese traditional instrument is the *shakuhachi,* a five-hole bamboo flute held vertically and played from the end. Though Tabackin never played the instrument, his mastery of European flute enabled him to achieve a wide range of musical effects that simulated the sound of the *shakuhachi*: microtone smears, flutter-tongued bursts, glossolalic cries. "Lew has a French model flute (open-holed) that enables him to do this," explained Akiyoshi. "He listened to a lot of shakuhachi music. His abilities are so incredible, he can *sense* the music." "I am forced to come up with different devices to try to perform her music," added Tabackin. "I might have to employ certain techniques, like using the overtone series in a different manner and some quarter-tone effects."[23]

Tabackin's shakuhachi-like stylings, and the band's distinctive use of flute sections more generally, were only one of several ways in which Aki-

yoshi brought Japanese sounds into the music. We can group the Japanese musical traces into four categories: first, the use of actual Japanese voices and instruments; second, the use of Japanese timbres and tone colors, like Tabackin's flute playing, even if produced on Western instruments; third, the use of rhythmic, harmonic, and melodic elements influenced by Japanese techniques or principles; fourth, the inspiration of themes drawn from Japanese history. Following John Corbett, we can distinguish these influences into the categories of decorative Orientalism (or "contemporary chinoiserie") and conceptual Orientalism. Decorative Orientalism refers to the incorporation of Asian or quasi-Asian musical elements; conceptual Orientalism suggests the use of aesthetic principles or compositional procedures derived in some way from Asian precepts. Akiyoshi's repertoire includes elements of both.[24]

Juxtaposition—the assembling of ostensibly unrelated musical ingredients into a musical collage—is one of the most striking of Akiyoshi's techniques. She accomplishes it primarily through the deployment of Japanese instruments or voices. Often it is the preternatural upward sliding howl (to Western ears) of Noh vocals and accompanying drummers' calls, as at the opening of *Kogun* and the last section of *Minamata.* The voices are accompanied by the *otsuzumi* and *kotsuzumi,* the distinctive drums used to punctuate Noh—one with a sharply cracking report, the other with a more resonant tom-tom sound. With its origins in Buddhist chant, Noh singing, known as *yokyoku* or *utai,* retains a deeply solemn, introspective quality. "The special voice quality of noh singing originates in the abdomen," explains ethnomusicologist William Malm; "Graces and vibratos are added to the tone to give it variety. The pronunciation of the words is an abstraction of ancient styles and further removes the plays from the everyday world."[25] *Utai* and the cries of the *tsuzumi* players represent perhaps the most exotic Japanese musical sound for non-Japanese and for many Japanese as well.

In "Kogun" and "Children of the Universe," Akiyoshi juxtaposes *utai* and *tsuzumi* against Tabackin's flute in a counterpoint that melds smoothly into the ensemble theme. Other times Akiyoshi juxtaposes a child's or a woman's voice, as at the beginning of *Minamata,* and the many passages of survivors' diaries read into *Hiroshima—Rising from the Abyss.* Subtler than the juxtaposition of actual Japanese instruments or voices is Akiyoshi's use of Japanese timbres and tone colors. "I have used some Japanese instruments, but that's a very obvious infusion," she says. "If people listen very

closely to my writing, they can hear a lot of more subtle infusion." The inspiration came to her during a period of self-examination in New York, when she was reading widely in Japanese literature:

> Anyhow, one night I was writing a tune called *Sumie,* a simple melody 12 bars long (but not a blues). I lay down on a bed and I began to hear this traditional Japanese *gagaku* [classical music] sound. It's a form of very close harmony; and I heard it with a melody in my mind, repeating and repeating, and this Japanese sound matched it very well, in my head. It sounded very musical and very natural to me.
>
> I had the idea of writing this sound for trumpets. . . . Years ago in Japan, I used to hear trumpet players doing a lot of note-bending, both upward and downward. You have to slide into and out of things, using the valves very carefully.[26]

Also in the trumpet section, Akiyoshi likes to use very close voicings, having the first, second, third, and fourth trumpets playing within a whole tone or minor third of each other.[27] She also uses massed flutes, rare in jazz bands. At times, the band achieves a kind of static, suspended quality reminiscent of the mouth organ, or *sho,* used in traditional Japanese court music to provide a harmonic matrix based on tone clusters. This is especially pronounced in the first section of *Minamata,* where the arco base and unusual combinations of reeds playing long, suspended chords give a sense of stasis, and cymbal rolls wash over the ensemble, evoking the waves of a fishing village.

In his analysis of traditional Japanese music, Malm distinguishes between the vertical conception of Western music that emphasizes harmonic sequences and the horizontal conception of most non-Western music organized through complex scales or rhythmic systems.[28] Likewise, Akiyoshi describes her own approach to ensemble sections in what she calls "layers of sound":

> In other words, I will have one thing, then I will hear another that goes along with it. It's just like a photograph with a double exposure, you know? . . . *Kogun* . . . is a good example. I have one melody that represents almost a 2/2 kind of time feeling. A very timeless kind of feeling, with a lot of glissando. But then I have the brass and rhythm sections doing something in an entire different idiom, a Western idiom, with a very strong rhythmic feel.[29]

This approach to rhythm and phrasing is crucial. Akiyoshi attributes some of her rhythmic approach to her Japanese background:

> Years ago, [drummer] Shelly Manne was talking about dissonance. . . . Originally it would be played like this (snaps fingers in medium four) . . . but then you would feel like (imitates sliding horns, with tempo cut in half) . . . like a spacing. This is very Oriental thinking. Rather than counting the time, you feel the time and you learn it. . . . I feel this is a very natural way in jazz, which would have a swing feeling but would also have this spacing.[30]

"The beat is different," she explains elsewhere. "It's more circular, arched, rather than an up or downbeat."[31] In articulating the notion of a distinctive Japanese sense of rhythm, Akiyoshi aligned herself with Japanese musicians and critics who were keen to identify an authentic Japanese musical aesthetic in terms of culturally specific concepts of space, silence, or interval (referred to in Japanese as *ma* or *kukan*).[32]

Between sonic juxtapositions and distinctive approaches to ensemble arrangement, phrasing, and rhythm, we recognize both decorative and conceptual Orientalism. But how were these formal principles transmitted to Akiyoshi? What is the source of Akiyoshi's grounding in Japanese music? Her musical education was Western:

> When I went to school in Japan, from kindergarten to grammar school, high school, and so on . . . all association I had with musical schooling was Westernized. It happens with all my generation and younger. Western music is not really foreign, and on top of that I was studying piano since I was six, so that added more to it.
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> The only relationship I had with Japanese music was from my sister. She was a student of Japanese traditional dance, and she was quite good at it. I used to hear the music when she was studying, so I was familiar with the music in that relationship. Also, my father was a student of Noh, the Noh play.[33]

During her first years in the United States, Akiyoshi found herself typecast as a stereotypical geisha girl, often donning a kimono in television appearances in shows like *What's My Line?* and with Steve Allen. Producer George Weiner described her in liner notes he wrote for her second album as being "pretty as a lotus flower, as gentle and sweet as [a] cherry blossom."[34] Perhaps it's accurate to say that both jazz and traditional Japanese

music represent borrowed traditions for Akiyoshi: one through immersion in nightlife, the other absorbed in the bosom of the nuclear family.

III.

Beyond the use of Japanese sonorities or musical principles is Akiyoshi's investigation of Japanese history as a compositional thematic. Here I focus on three works representative of Akiyoshi's early, middle, and late periods: *Minamata,* recorded in 1976; *Kourakan Suite,* recorded at Carnegie Hall in 1991; and *Hiroshima—Rising from the Abyss,* a three-part suite recorded live in Hiroshima in 2001.[35] All three are examples of program music, pieces that describe or narrate a story through sound. All are at some level concerned with cultural change, with the impact of modernity, migration, or technology on the lives of Japanese people. And they are responses to particular issues salient in Japan during the years in which they were composed.

Minamata is a three-part suite recorded in the year the band was just beginning to generate enthusiasm and interest among American critics and listeners and during a period of extreme national introspection in Japan, reflected in the popularity of *nihonjinron.* Its title refers to a fishing village in Kyushu, not far from Akiyoshi's ancestral home, whose people were devastated by mercury poisoning. Beginning in the 1950s, residents began to show symptoms of a degenerative disease that began with numbness in the extremities and ended in loss of vision, hearing, bodily control, and ultimately mental incapacity. More than three hundred people died while another twelve hundred developed symptoms. The disaster inspired one of the earliest citizens' movements, resulting in numerous lawsuits against the corporation responsible for discharging the mercury compounds, and ultimately a comprehensive antipollution law was passed in 1967. The Minamata movement provided an influential model for other citizens' groups to push for redress from corporations or the state.[36]

Akiyoshi structures her nearly twenty-two-minute piece in three parts: "Peaceful Village," "Prosperity and Consequences," and "Epilogue." The piece begins with a girl's voice intoning: *mura ari sono nao Minamata to iu* ("There is a village called Minamata"), suggesting a folk tale to come. We hear the peaceful stasis of the first five minutes give way to the frenetic bebop sound of the middle part, which alternates spiky ensemble figures with solos by tenor sax, alto sax, trombone, and again tenor. The use of

pedal points builds tension as each solo comes and goes. In the thirteenth minute we hear the suggestion of Noh *utai* counterposed with sliding brass figures. The *utai* appears again in the twentieth minute with the band, set over spare accompaniment of walking bass and drums, joined by dissonant collective improvisation. Also at that point, the band executes a series of dramatic breaks and rests, followed by even more powerful *utai* vocals (by Hisao Kanze of Tokyo, chief of the Kanze school of Noh). The final minute features the voice again, riding over the suspended chords of the piece's opening, gravely intoning the words spoken at the beginning by the girl. One reading of the narrative seems clear: traditional ways invaded and deranged by technology, followed by a kind of restitution. When the deep, gravelly *utai* voice swells in the final minutes of the suite, the section called "Consequences," it is not difficult to hear it as a rebuke from the ancestors, or perhaps an utterance of judgment from the spirit world.[37]

Akiyoshi's most recent extended work for big band, *Hiroshima—Rising from the Abyss,* shares some of the thematic and structural features of *Minamata.* Also written in three parts, its trajectory narrates a story of manmade devastation ("Futility–Tragedy") followed by shocked witness ("Survivor Tales") and survival and recovery ("Hope"). Unlike *Minamata,* Akiyoshi here eschews *utai,* Japanese instruments, and even tone colors. Though he plays some flute, Tabackin avoids *shakuhachi*-like stylings. Rather, a prominent place is given to a Korean musician, who plays a traditional Korean flute, or *taegum,* which produces a distinctive buzzing tone due to a membrane-covered hole. But the Japanese nature of the piece is unmistakably inscribed, due to the juxtaposition of readings from the "Mother's Diaries" of the Hiroshima Memorial Museum. Read in Japanese by a woman, the entries provide a series of testimonies of the atomic bomb: student factory workers dying, bodies covered with keroid; children sent off by train to safer locations while their parents died; a daughter who never returned from a hiking trip to eat the peach her mother saved for her. The readings occur over a somber C tonic tone sounded by bass and trumpet, evoking an air raid siren, interspersed with fluttering phrases from the *taegum,* sounding vaguely like a struggling bird. Akiyoshi chose the Korean flute both for its unique sound ("It doesn't exist anywhere else," Tabackin explains, "definitely not in Japanese music") and for the fact that a significant proportion of the fatalities from the two atomic bombings—perhaps forty thousand total—were Koreans conscripted to work in war factories.[38]

Hiroshima—Rising from the Abyss premiered at a Hiroshima audito-

rium on 6 August 2001, the first anniversary of the bombing in the new millennium. The impetus came from a Buddhist priest from Hiroshima, a long-time fan of Akiyoshi. The priest sent her some material, including a book of photos taken three days after the bombing. Akiyoshi recalls:

> I have never been shocked that much in my life. The effectiveness of this bomb was indescribable. I thought, "I can't write about something like this." I couldn't see the reason or the meaning. But I was turning the pages, and on one page there was a young woman. She was in the underground, and she wasn't affected. She came out, and she looked so beautiful. She's got a little smile, a fantastic smile. And when I saw that, I said, "I can write that!"[39]

In Part II, after the diary readings, the instruments enter one by one—first trumpet, then flute, then tenor sax, followed by trombone and baritone sax—over a subdued but swinging rhythm section. It is as if survivors are emerging from rubble, voicing their reactions, then joining in an ever-expanding dialogue that crescendoes to a fortissimo collective improvisation and ensemble section at the end. Seven chime notes signal the beginning of Part III, followed by two uttered statements of hope: luxuriant trees and grass returning ahead of schedule, people healthy and strong. "This is our message to the world from Hiroshima, with love and hope," ends the second, "no nuclear and atomic weapons, and peace on earth." A throbbingly eloquent tenor solo by Tabackin comprises the rest of "Hope."[40]

If *Minamata* and *Hiroshima* mourn the impact of technology and war on the daily lives of ordinary people, *Kourakan Suite* is a celebration of Japanese cultural pluralism. As is true for many of Akiyoshi's explicitly Japanese-themed compositions, the piece was written on commission, for the city of Fukuoka, in Kyushu. It marks the discovery in the late 1980s of an ancient guesthouse, known as a *kourokan* (the U.S. title gets the spelling wrong) full of artifacts of travelers from Persia who made their way to Japan. The piece has very few Japanese accents; rather, the prevailing musical tinge is Latin. The opening section offers hints of Arab melody before the piece settles into a vamp in 6/4 time, conga drums accompanying an extended piano solo by Akiyoshi. As the band reenters in the sixth minute, the meter gradually shifts into 4/4, and the band swells to accompany a Tabackin tenor statement. The mood changes abruptly in Part II, "Prayer," ushered in by a gong and Tibetan clattering cymbals (*gsil snyan*) and large earth-shaking trumpets (*dung chen*). Two minutes into the section, a woman's solo voice enters, singing a wordless spiritual. After another two

minutes, the band commences a stately Ellingtonian shuffle beat, supplying lush harmonies upon which Tabackin unleashes one of his more impassioned saxophone orations. The band rides this for more than six minutes, ending in a large collective shout chorus.

Akiyoshi described the piece as a celebration of a Japanese multicultural past. "And so we found out that migrations to Japan had come not only from Korea and China but also from far away, from the Near East, the silk roads," explained Akiyoshi. "This showed we have so many different people." She wrote the opening theme to reflect this: "not really Japanese, not really American, and not really Near Eastern." Judging from the liner notes, Akiyoshi was in effect creating a multicultural Japan in the image of her own adopted country. "These people from the Near East came into a strange country, Japan, looking and hoping for happiness and prosperity," the notes assert. *Kourakan Suite* "was indeed, vividly, graphically multicultural, for Toshiko was trying to visualize and dramatize the experiences of feelings of these people from a far land renewing themselves in Japan."[41] In fact, this account is highly romanticized; though the *kourokan* artifacts did reveal the extent of Nara and Heian Period Japan's involvement in Silk Road trade, the historical building was a facility for receiving foreign embassies and merchants, not a sort of proto-Ellis Island entrepot for immigrants traveling from the Asian mainland.

As with *Minamata* and *Hiroshima—Rising from the Abyss,* however, this theme fit the Japanese zeitgeist. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, debates over multicultural Japan were very much in the air. There was both an internal and an external context for Japanese soul-searching. Externally, there were the well-publicized remarks of Prime Minister Nakasone in 1986 that ethnic minorities bring down the intelligence level of the United States. More significant, though, were efforts by a range of minority groups within Japan to win full rights of citizenship. Along with ethnic Koreans, Chinese, Okinawans, and other resident aliens living in Japan, *burakumin* (members of a vestigial low-caste group) and *Ainu* (Native peoples of Hokkaido) worked diligently during the 1980s to secure redress against social and economic discrimination and win full rights of citizenship. By the 1990s, "the burgeoning and very visible demand for minority rights had laid to rest any notion that Japan was a one-dimensional, ethnically homogeneous society."[42] In this context, then, Akiyoshi's *Kourakan Suite* appears as a sonic usable past, a celebration of differences only recently acknowledged in the Japanese nation. But the language and categories used to describe these differences sounded like the classic image of

the Unites States as a land of liberty and opportunity, beckoning to the downtrodden and persecuted.

Less obviously, *Kourakan*'s theme connects to Akiyoshi's personal history. Visiting Manchuria for the first time in nearly half a century, she first realized that her family was of a "privileged class," on the dominant side of a social system not unlike Jim Crow. "There was a separation between the Japanese and Chinese communities," she recalled in retrospect. "There were Japanese schools, Japanese stores and a Japanese hospital. I can't remember any Chinese students, but in high school, my piano teacher was Chinese."[43] Akiyoshi received some of her formative training in Western music from a colonial subject of Japan. In this context, she experienced both ethnic diversity and racialized discrimination.

As a Japanese woman enmeshed in a male-dominated musical form shot through with nationalist accents, Toshiko Akiyoshi occupies a singularly complex position. Growing up with the privileges of an imperial occupier, she imbibed one form of musical education at school, a radically different one at home. She came of age in a nation devastated and occupied by its imperial nemesis, a nation it had simultaneously admired and resented for nearly a century. As a teenager returning to her ancestral home, Akiyoshi entered yet another musical world, an African American hybrid, whose inspiration and encouragement led her out of her native country. Caught up in the currents of cultural nationalism of the 1960s, she took inspiration from Duke Ellington, both a committed race man and an American patriot, incidentally aligning herself with a quest for Japanese jazz authenticity taking place in her homeland.

Like the Mardi Gras Indians, Al Jolson's jazz singer, and other embodiments of the unstable ethnic triad in American music, Akiyoshi has made cultural in-betweenness a kind of aesthetic signature, juxtaposing music of Europe, African America, and Japan. At one point Akiyoshi thought that her Japanese accents might set a future direction for jazz, like Brazilian music, but eventually realized, "It's more of a special effect."[44] In Akiyoshi's work, though, Japanese musical elements are more than decorative effects; they shape both the music's formal construction and its thematic imperatives. Her composing and bandleading call into question easy assumptions about artists and their respective cultural traditions. Arguments about essentialism in music—if and how ethnic or racial identities are expressed through musical forms—has generated voluminous scholarship in recent years.[45] In Akiyoshi's case, traditional Japanese music was as much a borrowed tradition as jazz. Her native musical tongue was Western art music.

Ultimately, the effort to align her musical styles with her ethnic background collapses, as it usually does, under the weight of its own historical and logical contradictions and in the face of irrepressible creative impulses.

NOTES

My thanks to Taylor Atkins and Shannon Steen for perceptive comments on earlier drafts of this article. The title of this chapter comes from Ono Masaichirô, quoted in E. Taylor Atkins, *Blue Nippon: Authenticating Jazz in Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 245.

1. David W. Stowe, *How Sweet the Sound: Music in the Spiritual Lives of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 170–195; Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 73–120.

2. George Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism and the Politics of Place* (New York: Verso, 1994), 72, 74; Reid Mitchell, *All on a Mardi Gras Day: Episodes in the History of New Orleans Carnival* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 113–130; David W. Stowe, "The Diasporic Imagination of Wynton Marsalis," in *The Black Urban Community: From Dusk Till Dawn,* ed. Gayle Tate and Lewis Randolph (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

3. E. Taylor Atkins, *Blue Nippon: Authenticating Jazz in Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 45–163.

4. Du Bois quoted by Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House,* in *The American Intellectual Tradition,* Vol. II, ed. David A. Hollinger and Charles Capper (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 478.

5. Atkins, *Blue Nippon,* 222–264.

6. Michael Bourne, "Rising Hope: Toshiko Akiyoshi's Deep Reflection on Hiroshima," *Down Beat* (July 2003): 45–46.

7. Hampton Hawes quoted in Atkins, *Blue Nippon,* 182.

8. Leonard Feather, "East Meets West, or Never the Twain Shall Cease: Toshiko Akiyoshi and Lew Tabackin," *Down Beat* (3 June 1976): 16.

9. Scott Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain': Jazz and the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 6; LeRoi Jones, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: Morrow Quill, 1963); LeRoi Jones, "Jazz and the White Critic," in *Keeping Time: Readings in Jazz History,* ed. Robert Walser (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 255–261.

10. Atkins, *Blue Nippon,* 244, 249–250.

11. Ibid., 12.

12. Ibid., 19.

13. Gene Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real: The Life and Music of Charles Min-*

gus (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 192; Atkins, *Blue Nippon,* 208; Fred Jung, "A Fireside Chat with Toshiko Akiyoshi," 20 April 2003, available at www .AllAboutJazz.com (retrieved 15 June 2004).

14. Bourne, "Rising Hope," 46. Akiyoshi vociferously denies that Japanese musicians or critics had anything to do with her turn toward Japanese roots music. E-mail from Toshiko Akiyoshi, 28 September 2004. Ellington had also drawn inspiration from Asia. One of his most admired late pieces, *The Far East Suite* (1966), incorporates some of the same Orientalist musical effects Akiyoshi would later include in her own writing for big band.

15. Feather, "East Meets West," 38.

16. James L. McClain, *Japan: A Modern History* (New York: Norton, 2002), 623–624; Atkins, *Blue Nippon,* 257.

17. Feather, "East Meets West," 18.

18. From an interview in the film *Jazz Is My Native Language: A Portrait of Toshiko Akiyoshi* (Rhapsody Films, 1983). This passage is also quoted in Atkins, *Blue Nippon,* 240.

19. Jung, "Fireside Chat with Lew Tabackin."

20. Leonard Feather, "Toshiko Akiyoshi: Contemporary Sculptress of Sound," *Down Beat* (20 October 1977), 15.

21. Feather, "East Meets West," 16.

22. Asked about the predominately white personnel of her bands, Akiyoshi observed that African American musicians with the necessary skills to play her music were highly in demand and frequently not available or affordable. E-mail from Akiyoshi, 28 September 2004.

23. Peter Rothbart, "Toshiko Akiyoshi," *Down Beat* (August 1980), 15; Feather, "East Meets West," 17.

24. John Corbett, "Experimental Oriental: New Music and Other Others," in *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music,* ed. Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 170–173.

25. William P. Malm, *Traditional Japanese Music and Musical Instruments* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2000), 129. Originally published 1959.

26. Feather, "Toshiko Akiyoshi," 14.

27. Feather, "East Meets West," 17.

28. Malm, *Traditional Japanese Music and Musical Instruments,* 102.

29. Feather, "Toshiko Akiyoshi," 14.

30. Ibid.

31. Rothbart, "Toshiko Akiyoshi," 14.

32. Togashi quoted in Atkins, *Blue Nippon,* 258.

33. Feather, "East Meets West," 17.

34. Atkins, *Blue Nippon,* 208.

35. Toshiko Akiyoshi Jazz Orchestra, *Insights* (BMG, 1976); Toshiko Akiyoshi

Jazz Orchestra, Carnegie Hall Concert (Columbia 48805, 1992); Toshiko Akiyoshi Jazz Orchestra, *Hiroshima—Rising from the Abyss* (True Life, 1000082, 2002).

36. Timothy S. George, *Minamata: Pollution and the Struggle for Democracy in Postwar Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001). First published in 1969, Ishimure Michiko's eloquent expose helped establish the powerful narrative surrounding the Minamata tragedy; see Michiko Ishimure, *Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow: Our Minamata Disease,* trans. Livia Monnett (Kyoto: Yamaguchi, 1990).

37. Other interpretations are possible, of course; the suite could narrate the devastating impact of organic mercury on an individual, the frenzy of neurological breakdown followed by death. *Minamata*'s opening line was recited on the recording by Akiyoshi's eleven-year-old daughter, Michiru.

38. Jung, "Fireside Chat with Lew Tabackin"; McClain, *Japan,* 626.

39. Bourne, "Rising Hope," 46.

40. *Hiroshima—Rising from the Ashes* was released in the United States two years after its recording in Hiroshima, and only because Akiyoshi herself found a label to bring it out. In fact, none of her recordings have been released in the United States since 1994. "Since then, we have three recordings for BMG Japan, but BMG American never picked them up," she says. "Lew always said that I am demographically challenged." Jung, "Fireside Chat with Toshiko Akiyoshi"; Ben Ratliff, "Remembering Hiroshima, in a Farewell Performance," *New York Times,* 21 Oct. 2003, E5.

41. Akiyoshi, Carnegie Hall Concert, liner notes.

42. McClain, *Japan,* 68.

43. Bourne, "Rising Hope," 45.

44. Feather, "Toshiko Akiyoshi," 15.

45. The literature is extensive, but in addition to Atkins' *Blue Nippon,* two recent persuasive interrogations of racial essentialism in music are Ronald Radano, *Lying up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), and Michael D. McNally, *Ojibwe Singers: Hymns, Grief, and a Native Culture in Motion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).