

Performance Matters

JMA[– The Space between the Interval

Dylan Bolles, Keith Evans, Suki O'Kane et Edward Schocker

Volume 10, numéro 1, 2024

(Re)sounding Bodies East and West: Embodied Engagements with Japanese Traditions

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1110553ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1110553ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Institute for Performance Studies, Simon Fraser University

ISSN

2369-2537 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce document

Bolles, D., Evans, K., O'Kane, S. & Schocker, E. (2024). JMA[– The Space between the Interval. *Performance Matters*, 10(1), 72–80.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1110553ar>

Résumé de l'article

“JMA[– The Space between the Interval” is the fourth movement of JMA[, a multidisciplinary performance created in 2013 by Thingamajigs Performance Group (TPG) and performed at the UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. In 2019, group member Dylan Bolles conducted and recomposed a series of interviews in which TPG reflected on the process of making and performing JMA[. We asked questions such as: How does embodiment create particular amalgamations of influence and technique that trouble distinctions between thoughts of East and West? How do cultural artifacts change when passed through different bodies and contexts? What are the underlying principles which allow for sometimes effortless musical communication between seemingly distant cultural representatives? Our conversations, disjointed as they are, intermingle both shared and previously unshared experiences from many years working together and apart on intercultural performance projects. What emerges is a glimpse into a process of intercultural integration in motion.

© Dylan Bolles, Keith Evans, Suki O'Kane et Edward Schocker, 2024



Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

érudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

ARTICLES

JMA[– The Space between the Interval

Dylan Bolles, Keith Evans, Suki O’Kane, and Edward Schocker

Thingamajigs Performance Group (TPG) is a sound-based ensemble working co-creatively in a variety of mediums and with a wide array of local and international artists. Formed in 2008, TPG focuses on durational performance, alternate tuning, group and open compositional formats, interdisciplinary and intercultural collaboration, and site-specific work. Their fields of institutional study, performance practice, and instrumentation are directly informed by Japanese *noh* and *gagaku*, Korean *pansori*, *sijo*, and *sinawi*, formal training in both Western and Eastern art practices, and a commitment to experimental art. Their proximity to issues of intercultural performance is acute. They navigate relationships with traditional artists and idioms as an integrated part of their work.

Commissioned in 2013 to create a performance in response to *Silence*, an exhibition co-organized by the Menil Collection in Houston and the UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, TPG embraced the exhibition’s intent to “consider the absence of sound as a subject and a medium in contemporary art” (Menil Collection, n.d.). The performance premiered the TPG score JMA[, which is a direct use of the Japanese word 間, which describes a gap, space, or pause and is aesthetically understood as the critical space between elements that itself propels meaning in a work of art. JMA[privileges this space between the notes, and uses the *noh* compositional structure of *jo-ha-kyū* (introduction, break, conclusion) to guide performers through a three-movement improvisation. The performance featured TPG’s non-Western sources and instrumentation; it unfolded with live cinema, large-ensemble movement (by guest artists from Dandelion Dancetheater and the California State University East Bay’s Inclusive Interdisciplinary Ensemble) and the sonic quintet of TPG’s Dylan Bolles (handmade flutes, voice), Keith Evans (film, video, turntable and electronics), Suki O’Kane (percussion, accordion, electronics), Edward Schocker (*shō*, *piri*, *hichiriki*, glass, electric guitar) and Zachary James Watkins (electric guitar, electronics).

This essay is what we consider to be JMA[’s fourth movement, a documenting of our 2019 interrogation of JMA[’s composition, setting, and context through a series of interviews conducted and recomposed by Dylan Bolles with TPG members Keith Evans, Suki O’Kane, and Edward Schocker. At no point in the process of documentation were all of the members present at the same interview. As a composers’ collective, we tend to work independently and then come together to share our practices, often through structured improvisations and collaborations with “nonmembers.” Our working methodology itself is one of cross-pollination, which has necessarily included transcultural elements due to the various professional and personal experiences of our members. This document can be seen as an extension of that process and dynamic onto the written page.

The interview format is useful in practice-as-research methodology for dislocating the observer relationship and recentring the conversation within the temporal body of the practitioner and their particular experiences. It allows the reader to glimpse a process of intercultural integration in motion: how we were, how we are now, how we got here. This requires a level of intimacy, vulnerability, and bravery often largely absent from mainstream academic writing on the subject,

Dylan Bolles, Keith Evans, Suki O’Kane, and Edward Schocker are core members of Thingamajigs Performance Group.

yet critical for doing embodied research in our field. We are more in the business of making things *with* people than *about* them. Our conversations, disjointed as they are, intermingle both shared and previously unshared experiences from many years working together and apart on intercultural performance projects. The stories overlap, surface briefly, and then resubmerge into our collective being.

Dylan: That we were playing in-between. And certainly my instruments, the flutes that I can bend and half hole also allow for finding those places in-between. **Keith:** I think that’s a great spot. That edge that you can learn, and it’s very difficult to even say what you’ve learned. And that’s kind of what you’re saying about the speed at which these things happen. It’s part of practice. I mean, maybe in forty years I’ll have the versatility and I can talk about this. **Edward:** I guess there’s a point where you get to this exhaustion and then that’s kind of when it gets interesting, because then you don’t sound like a hichiriki.¹ All of a sudden, these notes, or these tones, will come out that you just could never do otherwise and it’s like reaching this . . . it’s almost like a wounded, dying animal. **Suki:** You don’t even know how beautiful it is to hear that unfold. “Walked up, it had this really giant bell on it, started playing it.”

Dylan: I was playing gagaku music with the drummer from Hiroshima, in San Luis Obispo, halfway between here and LA on the coast. And just in terms of musicians communicating. Here’s a Japanese American guy playing jazz/rock/fusion, pretty popular, on a drum set, and then I’m coming from where I’m coming from, and then we’re meeting in the middle of CA in order to play this thousands of years old Japanese court music that neither one of us . . . it’s not in either one of our vocabularies. I guess what I’m getting at is just. . . Well, and then this Korean piri² player shows up and we’re all having an outdoor full-moon jam session, basically. I’m playing a flute I can’t play, the gagaku flute, and this guy is playing some kind of hand drums, and then she comes out with a piri with a bell on it,³ like an outdoor, like those Turkish double reeds with the bell, and man she lets loose, and the thing just takes off. You know what I mean? There is no. . . What were we playing? **Suki:** It was human music. **Dylan:** We were doing what happens when musicians communicate with each other using sound and there aren’t any rules in that except the ones that we carry, what we bring to it. **Suki:** I think what you’re talking about is the most desired experience. And then what happens, and it does happen, there is a marketplace that eventually intervenes. So, if it’s a former Grateful Dead drummer and all of his friends. . . **Dylan:** We can go up there right now (to Mickey Hart’s place, right up the road). **Suki:** I know, and check the phases of the moon. It did happen for those guys, and they will be on tour, and they’re coming to a performing arts centre near you, and it costs forty-five dollars to sit and listen to them, and you will be transported, but not as transported as they were when they first were overheard by someone from the marketplace. I have to believe that the marketplace distorts what we’re doing and that’s the thing that’s hard to accept in these conversations about where musical influences come from and the false dichotomy of a Western musician playing Eastern forms. The marketplace has created that problem because it hasn’t valued all of the sources and all of the people using those resources in the same way. That’s it and that is wrong. It should have valued them in the same way. But that would be another economic system. **Dylan:** Yes, exactly. Whoo, that’s clear.

Edward: I can’t remember which piece we did in Berkeley Art Museum, but Tomoko [Schocker]⁴ was in the audience, and somebody came in and, you know, had no idea what was going on, probably didn’t, was just in the museum, and she sat down next to Tomoko. Tomoko said it was another Asian lady. And she said, “What is this?” And Tomoko didn’t know what to say so she said, “Well, it’s Thingamajigs.” And the woman said, “Is Thingamajigs some kind of a religion?” **Suki:** “Is it some kind of religion?” **Dylan:** I love that. **Keith:** Maybe that’s what we are. I mean we are not, as beings, not capable of figuring this phenomenon out. And in some ways Acid Mother’s Temple, and a lot of that Japanese rock and psych stuff, is very, it’s head culture. It’s basically shamanistic culture, right? And they are like “wall of sound.” They start, and then there’s an inculcation, this sort of magical thing that is happening. And/but then suddenly when there’s nothing, or there’s just one little thing, it’s still ringing. You don’t need the wall of sound to actually have just activated that kind of full-body thing. There’s the dynamism of opening to be an instrument of listening. **Dylan:** I’m thinking of the ways that Japanese rock musicians have taken this Euro-American thing, and the ways that it affects our bodies in concert, and made it hyper intense and hyper focused on just that aspect. So, the vocalist is just going to do only the screaming, and the band is going to only do that part of the music that is going to pull your body. And I feel like, aesthetically, that’s another kind of resonance that we have. In our music, a lot of times what we are going for is that visceral state, that state of mind and body that’s not telling another story. It’s only about this feeling of these frequencies in this space, and how they are acting on our body, in the body of the audience right now, which is a kind of distillation. If you think about classical music, like a Beethoven symphony, part of what’s amazing about the symphony are those moments when it hits you in that way. But then there’s all this other stuff going on; the developments, the themes, the melodies, the journey of it and everything, and we kind of cut that out. We just want that moment where everything is holding you in your body and we want to extend it. **Keith:** At that limit.

Suki: Was it Keith who was talking about how our performance practice has different goals? Like body change or meditation? Was that a Keith thing? What were his thoughts on that? **Dylan:** We were talking about frequencies: the high frequencies, the low frequencies, volume, the nohkan, the taiko, and the intensity of frequency that we share with some kinds of Japanese music that are uncomfortable for Western audiences. That piercing sound. Why do you make that sound? And how these modern bands are really testing sound pressure, pitch-noise boundaries, the wideness of the vibrato, how much “out of tune.” **Keith:** You open up and then you’re . . . there’s the mystical practice of accepting and opening to maximum stimulation without throwing up the defence, right? **Edward:** What is the defence? **Keith:** Our general sense to preserve our subject-hood. You. Who you are. There’s an assault on you as just a person in the world with certainly volume and whatever else. I mean most, maybe 95 percent of people on the planet if the volume gets up to (high), they’re just like, “Wait a minute, this is just dangerous to my sensibilities.” But then there’s head culture and it’s like, “No, I’ve got to get in there. I’ve got to get inside that thing and let that, all that fear of being hurt or something go away and then I can just get into the field. To me that’s what’s super interesting about how conscious intention and the inculcation of particular states of consciousness can be in this reception. And how do you encourage that intention in the ceremonial aspect of the work when it begins and you can try to set the tone or the setting such that the observers, the listeners, the participants suddenly, on a body level, understand those assumptions? That we’re just going to go for a ride here.

Suki: It’s happening and happening and happening and happening and we have no idea how it got that loud. I talked to people who were just like, “It just kept happening.” They don’t have a sense of it like, “Oh, here’s the ‘one’ chord, and pretty soon there’s going to be a ‘five,’ and then I’ll bet there will be a ‘four.’” So they follow along. But in a Thingamajigs performance, you’re like, “Where do I? What?” It’s just now and now and now. And initially my take is, there’s no classical musician who’s going to play what I’m playing. Who’s going to recognize it as part of their canon? “You said *that* was jo-ha-kyū? You with the toy accordion and the guitar on the floor?” It would be unrecognizable. **Dylan:** Sometimes Edward will play snippets of traditional Japanese melodies inside of these big, meterless, textures where they exist in a much different space, a much different setting, and are operating differently than they would in the context in which they were made, or how they were used. **Edward:** It’s like taking a little bit of knowledge and offering it into a different situation or context. And the way we understand or embody it is different from the way it was given to us. **Keith:** It also reflects on me a certain kind of Japanese pop-cultural cybernetic application with the ways in which the body and the post-body are articulated through all these anime and postwar trauma. The body creating new bodies, and this sort of *Akira* world of the monstrosity or the augmented body and all that, that can kind of have two pathways. There are really dangerous and terrifying vortices, but then there is also, just like what you’re saying, this sort of simple addition of your own inflection into some traditional form of thinking, form of embodiment.

Edward: When I was growing up, I fell in love with *Giant Robo*. I think in English it was *Johnny Sako and His Giant Robot*. And the idea of this hugeness, these *kaiju* (giant monsters) who, from what I understand, represent Nature, the struggle that humans, and the Japanese specifically, have with Nature. Because it keeps destroying their cities. **Keith:** Emrys, my son, is obsessed with the whole kaiju phenomenon, the monster expression from Godzilla to now. And the funny thing about them, speaking of bodies, is that they’re giant suits that all these people get inside of. **Dylan:** The extension of the body reminds me of *bunraku* and also this cyborg thread you are talking about as well. **Keith:** Getting back to the art thing and JMA[. . . For me, it’s a way of being in the moment and trying to express the body relationship to the image. That’s the object of the instruments: the projectors and the players, and these things that actually take this energy, this magnetic energy or this chemical energy, and then just shoot it around. There’s something about just light, and the spectrum of light within the patterning, I guess, and the natural patterns, and patterns that are made by lenses, that are made by the diffusion, diffraction, refraction phenomenon of that, that is always around us. But it can be focused. And so, I put something in the way of the projector when people are expecting it to project an image, and then suddenly it’s just doing this thing that looks broken. But after twenty minutes, you realize, “Well, no. It’s broken, but it’s doing something.” And there’s a framing around it, that it was carefully made to do this. I try to make this object like a body in space that people can relate to as the corpus of technology. I’m tending it as a dancer.

Edward: I remember Bob Marsh was doing movement, chi gong or some kind of thing, during *Whatchamacallit* I think, the piece with Pauline [Oliveros], and it looked good. He, he looked comfortable. And I think it made the other audience members feel like they could get up and move. Maybe the audience didn’t feel they could move just because we were in an inside space, whereas we were talking about being outside and outside is for movement, inside is for sitting. Maybe in Western culture you’re there to see something? But, yeah, I don’t know. **Keith:** And this is something that I’m constantly interested in in my own artwork, is this inside/outside

dichotomy of like, where? And that gets into that. . . We’re talking about the movement of breath. Where is that moment where it’s discreetly inside or outside and how do you bring attention to that? And just reading the temperature, the atmosphere. And what is that? The ineffable sense that people can cultivate. How can one read the emotional atmosphere? The dancers, the people, the storytelling, and all these things that have been incorporated in the Thingamajigs context at times. It’s like a totalizing performance thing that can just happen in these multifaceted ways. **Dylan:** It does, I mean, there is a thread of animist, in general, a tendency for us to be attracted to and incorporate more animist place, spirit-in-place, spirit-in-this-time type of relationships that we definitely get out of especially traditional musics of other places that still retain some of those aspects. Where we, rather than creating the church and moving that architecture around, we’re interacting with the environment that we find ourselves in as a church. **Edward:** No churches started inside either. Show me a church, a way, that was created indoors. **Keith:** Where we can find that mystery and try to just explore that somehow. Stay humble there. Like, “I’m feeling it today, it’s just further down in the body.” **Edward:** Yeah, and maybe that’s how we’re like kids again. We don’t completely understand but we just love it, and it comes out eventually because you’re so interested. And you, like that TV show when you’re younger, you just can’t stop. You want to figure this out, but you don’t have the tools, the knowledge to completely figure it out. And it could be better that way.

Dylan: I remember Karas, from our Pacific Exchange concert in Tokyo, and his mask and drum stuff. He was doing god embodiment and the mask was very large, like kaiju. I also remember playing with him and this is something. . . We’ve all had this experience, I think, of playing with somebody from a totally different culture and just playing. There was no barrier. He was drumming and I was playing the flute. Nothing. I think one of the things that is so terrifying to the academy about music is that. You just can’t explain that. Why does it move so fast? How does it move so fast? Because it just moves so fast. **Edward:** Do you mean, are you referencing, just like two people playing? **Dylan:** Just the understanding, the musical understanding actually at the level of the body, at the level of what it takes for two musicians to play together, moves so much faster than what it would take for us to talk to each other if he didn’t understand English, or what it would take for us to explain a million things about our different cultural locations. But the fact that we can play music together. One of the things that is so intense about music is the speed at which it gets into a body and does its work. **Edward:** And I think it’s important that it’s not one collaboration, but it’s this evolution where you’re learning as a whole through all the different ones. And some really click right away, some don’t, but that it attaches to us somehow. **Suki:** I was hoping you would mention that, Dylan, because you mentioned it a couple of years ago when I was having this ambivalence because of the corner that we turned, which is like all of these sounds and all these traditions are instantly available to us because of our media society now. And it’s never been cheaper, never been faster, but to make something of it is where the hesitation begins with me. I want to do it. That’s how I’m made. And when you said, “Musicians seem to understand this and seem untroubled by it.” Economically, totally troubled. In terms of the moment, of making a song, no problem. My anxiety is not about, oh my god you just copped a riff off a six-hundred-year-old *kotsuzumi*⁵ player. They would never see that connection.

Dylan: I went to a bunraku performance in Tokyo and the woman next to me said, “Oh, you know there’s this audio thing you can put in your ear and it will translate the story as they’re telling it.” I was like, “No! I don’t want that. I do not want that.” And then I’m trying to explain, “I’m a composer. I want. . .” “Crazy American, you want to watch this and not understand a word they’re saying?” And I’m like “Yes, that’s what I want to do.” **Edward:** I think it’s our

desire to learn as a child would, right? A child doesn’t have that luxury. And maybe this is part of the modernization of cultures. That they can’t imagine, they don’t even understand, that that would even be something valuable. That you would want to. . . You can just as easily read the story before the performance and get the gist, same with opera. Even with noh, they are speaking a language Japanese people don’t understand anymore. I mean there might be a few words so they get a little sense, but it’s somewhat similar to us listening to old Shakespeare plays.

Keith: From my perspective, these things aren’t really translatable except through the phenomenon. You can speak about kids and language, and music is its own language, maybe more subtle, but there’s this aspect that when things are translated suddenly you’ve turned over a huge amount of meaning and of relationship to a chain of other people who have intentions and limitations and everything in order to make this mean this for you. Whereas when you are learning a language, you just are saying these things out of order, and there’s this kind of holographic aspect of, “Oh, there’s all these other meanings that are possible that aren’t necessarily linear.”

Suki: The original commission was to respond to the *Silence* exhibit at Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive. **Dylan:** Yes, it was. That’s interesting because of John Cage’s relationship to Japanese culture and philosophy. He studied with D. T. Suzuki, but then he was getting at this lack of ego idea through chance operations and the arbitrary divisions of time, not so much meditation practice. He used clock time a lot, actually, to try to effect that kind of change in audience, or in performers really. **Suki:** I’m not a Cage scholar, but I found when I walked through that exhibit and did a series of field recordings that were all 4’33”. . . I realized that it is false. It was acquisitive. And that maybe it was a legitimate criticism. So I veered away from it at the time because I thought, “Well, maybe everything I am doing is false as well.” But I can understand that he had a real attraction to it. I mean, I do too.

Dylan: The way that I thought about that later on was, because the performers were so far away from being able to do what he [Cage] was imagining, this randomness had to be composed in. Whereas I think what we, as later people in that same kind of trajectory of working in American experimental music, we came at it from a process/practice place. Because we actually trained our bodies in various ways to handle those kinds of discontinuities in composition, we didn’t need the stopwatches anymore to get that kind of sound.

Suki: I think we were up here⁶ when we were first imagining it. It did start here, we spent a day here, and there was real resistance to marking time and I understood it completely, but I didn’t know. I do know that programming an intervention to break your habit is an excellent technique no matter what, whether it’s food or, or awareness, or a verbal tic. People who are wearing these rubber bands to stop them from doing something they always do. You could see a whole bunch of Cage stuff as being just one big rubber band that keeps snapping at you. There was complacency inside the Western canon, but who’s to say there wasn’t complacency inside the noh canon? We just don’t know how to see it. So I fell back on the jo-ha-kyū structure because I felt it so powerfully, and in the end, to execute it intentionally was a real struggle.

Dylan: So, for me one of the things that definitely affected my body in that performance was the long *ha* section, having to build for that long. Definitely in the last five minutes or so I’m not struggling for air, and I’m not struggling to physically play the instrument, but I’m struggling to keep the energy high, keep it moving, just trying to get more and more out of the instrument and

there’s almost less and less coming actually out of the instrument and more breath. So, I’m curious for you, because I know you’re playing hichiriki, and it being a double reed it’s definitely also a physical as well as an energetic struggle. **Edward:** Yeah, it was certainly the most difficult part of the piece. To hold that energy through the *ha* part before that kind of release goes through. I remember just kind of feeling helpless at some parts because it was just . . . and it was in this huge space right so it felt like we had to really fill it up in some way. And we have these kinds of small instruments and just how to do that. I know that usually when I play these double-reed instruments like hichiriki it’s just more about the physicality of it than actually what’s coming out of it. **Suki:** I was happy to learn about the *ha* exhaustion. And I think it relates to forcing the piece into earthly time. Sean had asked us to do a performance that started at one moment and ended at another moment, and inside of that we put a 4’33”, which is an even more rigorous homage to time. **Dylan:** We’re improvising, and I would say even when we perform just as a band, without this *jo-ha-kyū* structure, we don’t have to stay in those intense spaces. There’s nothing keeping us there. Something about the imposition of the time, the time and the imperative to keep the energy building during that time, was pushing on us. I don’t know. I can’t answer whether that time imposition is particularly coming from an engagement with Japanese cultural arts or if it’s coming from a more Western idea of arranging these kind of movements by the clock. I’ve never heard of that actually in Japanese traditional music. **Edward:** No, I mean, I know *gagaku* well and usually you would have *jo-ha-kyū* movements within a piece. Or one piece will actually be a movement of this. And *gagaku*, it’s kind of cyclic, you know. You might be playing something and repeat it twice, and so within the cycle you’re able to grow, and the percussion will kind of indicate to build it up. Or there’s one person who’s helping move that kind of concept of what’s happening. Where I think with Western music, we kind of set it in the score.

Dylan: Something that was very attractive to us about *gagaku* was the pace. That slow, glacial unfolding. And Edward said that according to scholarship he’s read they think that it used to be played much faster. **Suki:** Yeah, it was like a jig. **Dylan:** A thousand years ago. **Suki:** It was definitely mosh-pit music.⁷ And then everybody is like, man, drinking too much. It’s the cosmic photocopier that just over and over and over again is losing information. Every time they played it, they forgot one tiny element and over five hundred years by degrees all of a sudden it’s quarter note equals thirty. It just happened that day. You know, “Dylan’s not feeling very well. Let’s slow it down a little bit.”

Dylan: So you’ve studied with a hichiriki teacher in Japan. **Edward:** Right, Hitomi Nakamura. **Dylan:** And you’ve also played hichiriki in *gagaku* music. **Edward:** Right. **Dylan:** And you were talking earlier about these kind of unusual notes coming out. Is there space for that in traditional hichiriki playing or does it tend to be more controlled as far as which specific notes you are playing? **Edward:** Traditionally it’s played with specific notes. There is what’s called *embai*, which is really the characteristic trait of hichiriki. Which is to bend into the notes and create. . . it’s kind of natural because with the hichiriki you can’t just play a note like a clarinet, where you have this certain fingering and that note is actually there. There’s a lot of sliding into it. But you don’t do any kind of multiphonics. You stay within this kind of octave and a half range. So yeah, traditionally it is more limited. **Dylan:** I imagine the bending, though, does lend itself well to the kind of tonal experimentation that Thingamajigs does. It allows you a lot of flexibility. **Edward:** Yeah, our concept of paratuning. That instrument is great. Where *shō*, on the other hand, is just a free-reed mouth organ and whatever notes you play those are going to be the notes that come

out. That’s why, in gagaku, sho is the instrument that keeps the tuning. **Dylan:** Now, that tuning is not an equal tuning. **Edward:** Right, it’s a Pythagorean kind of tuning. **Dylan:** So, when you play that instrument, we’re reacting to that tuning ourselves. **Edward:** Right, that would probably be the base, because that instrument can’t bend or change. It’s the stubborn one. **Dylan:** In that performance we also had Suki’s accordion. Which is an equal, Western-tuned free reed. So we had two free-reed instruments in two different tunings. **Edward:** Two different tunings shimmering off each other.

Suki: You know the *nohgakudo*⁸ is so quiet, it’s whisper quiet. The way they take their fans, the chorus takes their fans out of their belts and puts them in front of them you’re like, “When did *that* happen?” Or they take it away and you know, “Wait, I missed it.” When do they pick up the flute? When do they put the drum on the shoulder? You can’t. You think you saw it but. . . When I was travelling with Theatre of Yugen and we were at some studio, and they just pulled out a piece of fabric that wasn’t even made into a costume yet. But the way they pulled it out and displayed it in that light I just got a very powerful sensation, like, “Oh my god, these people are through and through living artists. Every move they make, every perception, every consideration, the way they prepare the tea, the way they serve it to someone.” I thought, “Wow, I’m not there yet.” But I certainly felt the power of it and then later, years later, there’s something about the way I moved an instrument aside or brought it in front of me that absolutely had to echo that intention that I saw that day back in 2005. The interiority thing. People would see me very ceremoniously move something in front of me and what was it? It was a flower pot. And they’re like, “What? You’re clowning around.” And I’m like, “Just wait till you hear that flower pot.” **Dylan:** Well, there’s a certain kind of equality. I think that’s part of this tension between the idea of colonialism and then the idea of a kind of maybe freedom where we have the sho, we have the hichiriki, we have the flower pot, we have the bamboo instrument that’s not a *shakuhachi*,⁹ and the electric guitar, and the concert bass drum, and they are all being alternately disrespected, like placed in a Ross baby towel warmer off to the side (the sho) or intertwined (the Korean piri and the Japanese hichiriki) or played with chopsticks (the guitar). **Suki:** Or the big bass drum is just spun, and I walk away from it. **Dylan:** Spun and just crashing, but the flower pot has to be moved very carefully from here to here. It’s a little bit of the performative.

Edward: I mean, I think we use Japanese cultural forms just the same way we used made and found materials and alternate tuning systems. It’s a way for us to find a language to compose. It’s not, “This is what we are.” It’s just one of the ways we embody that resonance. Just as we embody beautiful tunings and how that resonates, and how we use glass, or bamboo, or projected images as a way to express something, to create an instrument, or to be an instrument for some kind of . . . yeah. **Keith:** So it’s about the travel of the body and the spirit. To me, that last part, there’s something about intention in the aspect of the durational spiritual reality of having played together (a long time). And then there’s this idea of like, sound is thrown around as spirit, and that is a big part of it. The whole phenomenon is thrown around. It’s not just the sound. **Dylan:** Creating a state in the body. **Suki:** To create an instant for the audience. And there is no way in a Thingamajigs performance you can get out of the now. It’s really hard to remember even the note that just expired.

Original Live Performance: Thingamajigs Performance Group, Dandelion Dancetheater, California State University East Bay Inclusive Interdisciplinary Ensemble, May 2013 at Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive

Original Score: Suki O’Kane

Words: Thingamajigs Performance Group

Transcription and Re-Composition: Dylan Bolles

Notes

1. Japanese double-reed instrument.
2. Korean double-reed instrument.
3. The Korean *taepyeongso*.
4. Professional singer and spouse of Edward Schocker.
5. Small, hourglass-shaped drum used in noh theater.
6. On the same Sonoma County farm where we did this interview.
7. A mosh pit is a space, usually directly in front of certain high-energy rock bands, where fans can dance in a style that basically amounts to slamming themselves into each other. A generational term for sure. We’ll see if it lasts!
8. Traditional noh theatre building
9. Japanese end-blown flute.

References

Menil Collection. n.d. “Silences.” Accessed January 17, 2024.
<https://www.menil.org/exhibitions/24-silence>.