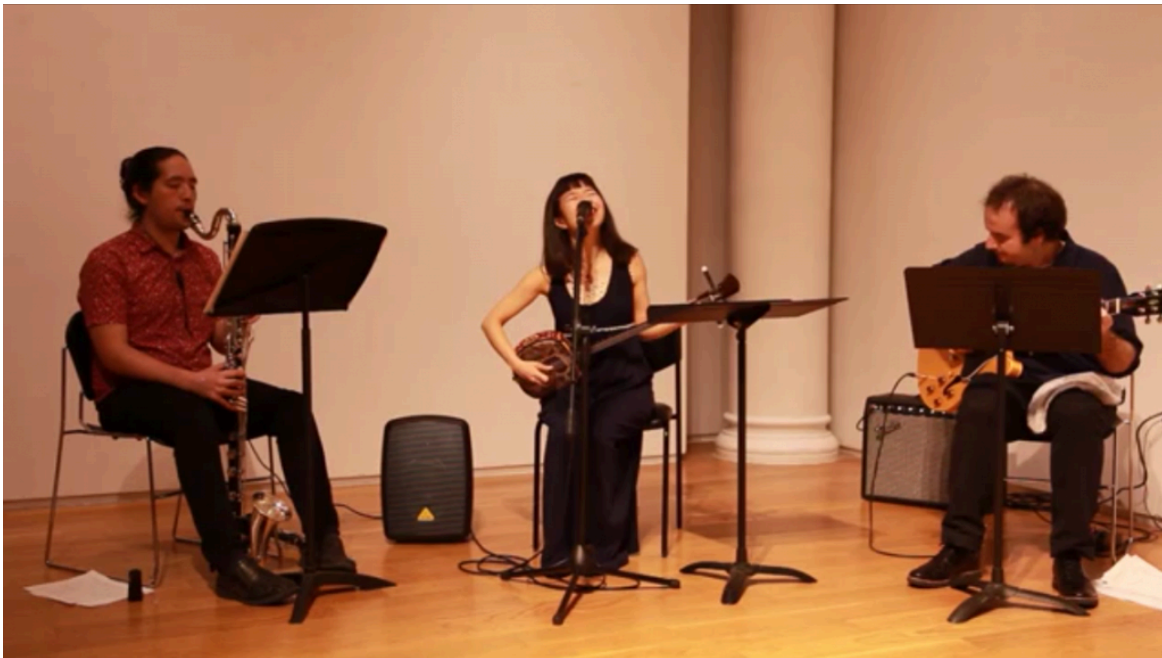




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Nature in Music and Storytelling



By Aine Nakamura, BFA Jazz and
Contemporary Music

After my Independent Study, writing
of “Shima no Uta: SONGS OF
ISLANDS -Okinawa and Yaeyama-“
under the guidance of Dr. Chris

Stover, I concluded my last semester with the event [Listening to Nature as described in my previous article](#) held on June 24 2017. Listening to Nature was a collaborative project of music and storytelling (movie and poem) on the theme, nature. I aimed not only for musical fusion but conceptual fusion between Yaeyama*ⁱ music and traditional culture, and contemporary art and music. I wanted to bring the value of nature veneration to NY city for the purpose of making a proposal of a sustainable society. People in Yaeyama and surrounding Ryukyu islands*ⁱⁱ have lived with the nature and worshiped it through festivals, rituals, dance and music. Folk traditional music and even *shin-minyo**ⁱⁱⁱ are based on this value in the area.

*i. Yaeyama islands are located south of Okinawa main island and east of Taiwan and they are currently parts of Okinawa prefecture, Japan.

*ii. The four archipelagos of Amami, Okinawa, Miyako and Yaeyama, located southwest of the main island of Japan, used to be under the dominance of Ryukyu Kingdom and the islands are sometimes called Ryukyu islands.

*iii. It is written as 'contemporary-traditional music' in Chinese characters. It means contemporary sonas written in traditional stule.



In the event, each artist brought music and art on the theme. Nature included not to mention the mother nature but also ourselves as parts of nature in the urban city. Johanna Tysk (MFA Transdisciplinary Design, [Parsons School of Design](#)) brought her idea from mountain and lake area of Sweden in addition to her thinking, movement and painting processes in NY in her character created for CoPA's Dimitri Krymov Project. Jonghoon Han (2017 MFA, [The New School for Drama](#)) filmed video clips in Peru and made them into magnificent and yet simple story. Sahar Sepahdari (2017 Parsons School of Design) read three poems for us. Her thoughts and art on nature were related with her background from Iran, her father, and the current global political situation. Asia Sztencel shared her paintings of

pastoral sceneries of Poland which were presentation of her immigration experience. I performed music with Jasper Dütz (2016 BFA, [Jazz and Contemporary Music](#)) on clarinets and Christophe Assier (Jazz and Contemporary Music) on guitar about the ocean and flowers of Yaeyama and Ainu storytelling, the moon, and my imagination in NY. We gathered each of our stories and journey and made them into a one and a half hour show. When Han's storytelling from Peru was projected, I sang 60 no Yurikago (60 cradles), Ainu traditional song. Ainu people and culture are from the current Hokkaido, northern part of Japan. While I had a chance to study Okinawan (southern part of Japan) music under Isamu Goya *sensei* (teacher) in 2006 and 2007 and have visited the Southern islands several times, I started to feel some things have in common between the southern islands' music and Ainu music. This became more evident after I started working on my Independent Study last semester especially when it comes to music at festivals and rituals including *Shichi* festival in Iriomote Island. Not to mention that both music is based on animism and coexistence with the nature and other creatures, the simplicity of repetition of a short phrase, and vocal-only or vocal and clap style are also the same features.

60 no Yurikago is a colorfully described story told in repetition of a short musical vocal phrase. During the summer break, I visited Hokkaido. It was my sixth or seventh visit. This time, I was reminding myself to open up myself to see the glimpse of the story, nature or culture behind Ainu music. I went to Kushiro moorland, Kusharo lake, Akan lake and Mashu lake area (east side of Hokkaido) for the first time. I was surprised to learn that there is no word meaning “nature” or 自然 (nature in Japanese) in Ainu language. If there is a closer word, that would be *Kamui* meaning god(s) or spirit(s) of god(s). *Kamui* exists not only in each mountain or animal but also, for example, in each thing like utensil and phenomenon including earthquake or illness. Ainu people had lived with and received the gifts and learnings from mountains, rivers, lakes, bears, salmon...



I am currently in Japan, waiting to fly to NY tomorrow and thinking what I can do and what I can sing, hearing the sad stories of hatred all around the world. Summer is the season when the World War II ended. Okinawa lost one fourth of the civilians through the ground battle during the war. We learned that we cannot bring a third world war in any way. However, the world is shifting toward militarism again and a chain of hatred is expanding. I want to propose to revive and live with the nature at this time of divided societies and political and global situation. What about reviving the nature in NY today instead of increasing arm forces? Even though it seems like there is no psychological and physical space to think about it, come to think of it, every person regardless of

background, nationality, religion, position, opinion... every single person cannot live without the air and without receiving the gifts of other creatures and plants. Outstanding sunset and red leaves of trees are beautiful in any person's eyes. We all stand in awe in front of magnificent wild nature and we are all same human beings in front of it. If we choose to coexist with the nature and see the beauty in it like our ancestors did or as if Okinawan people have kept on holding the festivals even in the devastated situation after the war, will the idea of compassion, love, coexistence, peace and non-arm not born? The idea is very fragile and it can break if we do not protect it. But if we choose to cherish it, would it not change the current situation of the United States and the world?

At any situation, even when human beings are battling, there is always the cycle of nature. Next semester, I would like to look deeply into music at rituals and festivals in Yaeyama, and in the near future, I wish to study the music and storytelling of Ainu. I am interested in how music was born and what its role was even before it started to be related with men-dominant idea, non-animism, alphabets or sheet music. I hope to develop more of my own intention and voice through the study. To conclude, I would like to end this

article with parts of my translation
of 60 no Yurikago that I sang at the
event, Listening to Nature.



from 60 no Yurikago

Ainu traditional music

translated by the author

*Going through the sky of
clouds
Going through the sky of
stars
And you go through the real
sky
There you see the landscape
of
Beautiful long stream
On one side
you will see
Silver cypress forests
On
the other side you will see
Golden oak
forests
Everywhere you see
It's
twinkling
If you go further up the
river
You will find a gold big
house
One side of the house*

*isPainted with a stormy skyAnd the
other side of the house isPainted
with a clear skyInside the house
there isA god who creates lifeAt the
door side of the houseShe holds sixty
cradlesAt the back of the houseShe
holds sixty cradlesAnd she swings
sixty cradlesShe swings sixty
cradlesThen the babies' cry come
down toThe sky of this worldFrom
there what is born isSleep, sleep is
bornYou're crying becauseYou want
to hear this storyThat's why I'm
telling this storyI was told to sing
this way*



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