



TISHMAN CENTER · MARCH 2, 2018

Self Reflection on Identity, Nature and Music Making

by Aine Nakamura

While I worked on developing my writing for Shima no Uta: SONGS OF ISLANDS, Okinawa and Yaeyama, which led to the event, [Listening to Nature](#) supported by Tishman Environment and Design Center, I needed to question myself why I was inclined towards the area and the songs in the first place. The research made me feel a need to understand my own quest for identity, as well as the relationship it has with my art

and the contributions it makes to society. I needed to find my purpose behind my quest of making music about nature. Recently, I read a book *Ryukyu-ko no Shiten kara* (from the viewpoint of Ryukyu arch) (1992) by Toshio Shimao. There, I encountered a word, *Yaponesia*. Shimao proposed to call Japan as *Yaponesia* instead of *Nihon* (Japan in Japanese). He invented the word inspired by some island areas, such as Indonesia or Micronesia. The area of Japan is not the center of the sun as *Nihon* is written but rather several islands in the globe that originally had many dialects/languages, villages and cultures. Although *Nihon* is covered with the image of uniformity, it is actually full of diversity if we uncover the veil. He says that he feels his heart open when he goes to Ryukyu arch islands*1. Although he wouldn't be able to escape from the box of Japan even when he travels away from Japan, he mentions that the Ryukyu islands are not limited to the islands but they connect to a wider world of the ocean and the sky that do not have any boundary. The word, *Yaponesia*, disclosed the thing I was not clear about and I wondered if the proposal of the word brings about acceptance of diversity in the area.*1 The Ryukyu islands stand for the four archipelagos of Amami, Okinawa, Miyako and Yaeyama in the present

Kagoshima and Okinawa prefectures, Japan. I was born in Bellevue WA and moved to Yokohama, Japan with my family when I was a child. In Japan, I was someone from "America", and, at the same time, was desired to be uniformly Japanese. While some people called my sister and me as *America-gaeri* (Japanese who came back from the US), the closed society and people around me said my early childhood does not matter any more and I am a "normal" Japanese. But, in fact, the very first childhood experience is a crucial matter, and I could not and did not deny my different cultural identity from others (which I now feel to be just natural for each person is unique). This conflict with the Japanese cultural identity and expectations led me to a quest of my own identity. When I was in Sophia University in Japan, I conducted fieldwork in the Philippines and Thailand. Not only did I want to study under late Prof. Yoshinori Murai whom I respected, but I was also looking for my role in the universe. I was introduced to Okinawa music and a teacher of the Noborikawa school*2 in Tokyo. While playing soul and jazz music, I started studying Okinawa music. The experience of learning to sing about the nature of the island was both comforting and healing. Since I moved to Japan, it took me many

years to accept that the trees, the animals, the moon and innocence that I remember from my very first childhood are important to me. I gradually chose to be an earth person. I feel at ease belonging to the earth and not a certain nation.*² There are several schools or styles of traditional music, such as Noborikawa-*ryu* (school). Noborikawa school means that the teacher of a disciple or a teacher of the teacher had learned under and was given permission to teach by Seijin Noborikawa.* * *After coming back to the US, I found myself using the word "America". Before, I did not use the word intentionally. This was because my friend and researcher of South America told me that America is not the USA but North, Central and South America... the US is not the center of the world. When I say "America" here, I think I am differentiating myself from the "big" nation US although I am a part of the human beings on the land. I want to get out of the "box" of race or nationalities. Now that I am in NY, my cultural and musical backgrounds from Japan go front naturally. Also, in the streets and trains in NY, I face racial discrimination. However, I try to see myself as a global person, as I have to admit I have a spirit of defiance against the closed "Nihon" and any kind of national identities in Japan

and "America". I am saying to myself, I do not need the word "America" anymore. The conversations should be made between you and me. It's time we should think out of the national boxes. And, "I" should start it, freeing myself from my mindset. We are people with different languages/thoughts/backgrounds and yet with common humanity in the same natural environment as people in *Yaponesia*. I ask myself... How can I only seek for my peace and not for peace of the world? I see issues in the societies... I see the darkness too, and I'm making art in this society... But, peace in the society can only be achieved from peace within... When I have a voice to speak and play music, what is my contribution? Last semester, I worked on composing and performing: On the Night of the New Moon (The lyrics will be published in Eleven and a Half Spring Edition.); Doa-no-sotogawa (outside the door); Kusharo-ko (lake in Hokkaido); Island of Hills (meaning of Manhattan/Manahatta in Native American language); and six stories (electronics with Japanese speech) These have all been possible through Words and Music, directed by Diane Moser, The Creating Music Workshop, by Dave Douglas and Story, and Song and Stage, by La Tanya Hall at the College of Performing Arts (CoPA) of the New

School. The CoPA's interdisciplinary Dmitry Krymov Project is also continuing since 2016. In Fall 2017, I worked on vocal performance on creatures of the sea in the theatrical project with the actors and musicians from the Drama School and the Mannes School of Music. The compositions and performances were inspired by the nature, the moon, love, humanity, families, what I experienced in several places around the world, and the old and present Manhattan. I see myself opening my stories and idea out to the society, and wanting to get to the point. My point is about the vulnerability that will be taken away from the conflicts, wars and arm forces. My point is political and opinionated. Through the process of facing my own quest, the thing that was camouflaged is revealing to myself. This semester, I am working on compositions through Composers' Forum directed by Kirk Nurock and Shelf Life - New York Public Library Performance Project- directed by Prof. Jane Ira Bloom.

These compositions will be concept/research based. I am starting on my research at the New York Public Library. My research is beginning from two topics, Isamu Noguchi and Native American culture in Manhattan. My interest in the Nisei Writers and Artists Mobilization for Democracy formed

by Isamu Noguchi led me to the words by Noguchi: "my close embrace of the earth...a seeking after identity with some primal matter beyond personalities and possessions." (Isamu Noguchi and Modern Japanese Ceramics: a close embrace of the earth, 2003) My other research on Native American culture in Manhattan/Manahatta is beginning by finding out that the change in Manhattan started from the beaver fur trade between the Lenape in Manhattan and Europeans. Texts for a music composition, *Doa-no-sotogawa* (*Outside the Door*) by Aine Nakamura:

Outside the door,

Children are playing quietly and
freely...

small children

A child is asking a question to
another child

fluffs in the air

paper plane

wooden blocks

They are playing, air inclusive

I'm looking outside the door

Now I can see the blue sky

Feel the gentle wind

Greens are shining

Water is sparkling

Dolphins swim around

Manhattan

Everything, every creature flies
kindly

human beings... by coexisting

find peace within

They are in the truly quiet
universe

Can't we

connect with that age?



HUDSON RIVER

FROM FORT TYRON PARK, PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR (2017)

* * *Shelf Life-Performance at New
York Public Library-May 14,
6pmNYPL Bruno Walter
Auditorium *Students will perform
the compositions worked on during
the semester based on their research
at the New York Public Library. [Link
to the Japanese translation of this
article](#)Links to other projects by Aine
Nakamura:[Nature in MusicListening
to Nature](#)



Comments (0)

Newest First