

Silver Roots

Japan Meets World

About:

Japan Meets World takes listeners on a musical journey, exploring Japan's most beloved folk songs and anime soundtracks alongside compositions by Maria Kaneko Millar and contemporary classical chamber works that infuse western classical forms with Japanese sounds and scales. Powerhouse virtuosity and soulful lyricism on the flute, violin and cello combine with song, dance and an extended technique that transforms western instruments into a traditional Japanese orchestra! Music from China, Ireland, Germany, Austria, Canada and the US color the evening, highlighting the uniqueness of each while showcasing the universal bond shared by all. *Japan Meets World* leaves audiences with the desire to hear and learn more!

Repertoire Highlights:

Maria Millar	<i>Tsuru</i> (for Solo Dancing Violinist with Fabric)
Toshitsugu Ogihara	<i>Trio</i> - 1970
Katherine Hoover	<i>Kokopeli</i> (for Solo Flute performed with poem, <i>Whip Man</i>) - 1990
Maria Millar	<i>Japanese Folk Medley</i> - <i>Hinamatsuri</i> / <i>Hanayome Ningyo</i> / <i>Tōryanse</i>
Joe Hisaishi	<i>Tonari no Totoro</i>

Cross-Curriculum Topics:

Japanese music, Chinese music, European music, North American music, classical music, ethnomusicology, music appreciation, interdisciplinary arts, dance, Asian studies, European history, North American history, Native-American history, women's studies

What Presenters Say:

"They are a force of epic proportion... it is almost impossible to believe that there are only three musicians on stage. Having produced fourteen seasons, I say without hesitation [that] *Silver Roots* ranks in the top five percent of the over seventy concerts we have included in our programming. *Silver Roots* is in the process of becoming an American Treasure."

- Terry Marshall, Senior Coordinator, Touhill Performing Arts Center (St. Louis, MO)

"I enjoyed today's music very, very much! The presentation by these three great musicians so successfully represents Japan today: not only beautiful, refined, exotic but also dynamic, inclusive, powerful and fresh."

- Ambassador Nishida, Japanese Ambassador to the United Nations (New York, NY)

What Audiences Say:

"It was beyond what I expected. I haven't enjoyed a concert this much before!"

"I loved the originality, creativity and risk-taking."

"Great infusion of East meets West!"

"Excellent, innovative, A-one, repeat please!"

"Very exciting to see the similarity between Japanese and Western music."

"We loved it! It was a ray of sunshine and delight."

"...really nostalgic for me..."

"A fun, friendly blend of cultures and times."

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Links to Videos/Recordings:

Japan Meets World Playlist* (Videos): <http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLC2C02DFDBB15D557>
Japanese Folk Tune Medley by Maria Millar (Audio): www.reverbnation.com/tunepak/song_7705234

*Playlist includes *Tonari no Totoro* by Joe Hisaichi, *Trio* by Toshitsugu Ogihara, *Sakura*, *Japanese Folk Tune Medley* & *Tsuru* by Maria Millar and *Kokopeli* by Katherine Hoover.

Japan Meets World Q & A: An Interview with Maria Kaneko Millar

How were you introduced to Japanese music?

As a child, I remember loving the *natsu matsuri* (summer festivals) in Japan, complete with raucous drumming and flute playing, processions of shrines, street fireworks... unadulterated fun and a chance to get out of practising the violin! I also remember noticing how beautiful and melancholy the children's songs were that we learned at Japanese school. Even when the lyrics were uplifting, the songs sounded sad.

How did you get into performing Japanese music?

It wasn't till I began my studies at Juilliard and discovered the neighboring New York Public Library for the Performing Arts that my true exploration of Japanese music began. I borrowed countless CDs of Japanese music – folk, contemporary, pop, just about anything I could get my hands on. I started emulating the sounds of the koto, shamisen and shakuhachi with my violin and loved the sonic world that unfolded. I noticed that striking the violin's open strings – G, D, A, E – in conjunction with stopped notes could emulate the beautiful dissonances of Japanese music. I also developed a style of accompanying myself with pizzicato while bowing to sound like all 3 instruments combined.

What is *Japan Meets World*?

Japan Meets World is an ode to the beauty of Japanese music. By contrasting Japanese folk and classical music with its Western counterparts, we celebrate the similarities and differences of each. Modes, rhythms and contrapuntal systems shared by East and West lay the framework for the program, but the range of sounds that results is infinite!

What do you want audiences to know about *Japan Meets World*?

As an audience member, I have a short attention span when it comes to sitting through a concert – I love sonic variety, breadth of emotion and knowing the story behind the music (and the group). I want to be blown away by sounds and skills I've never witnessed before and leave full of thoughts, totally inspired! *Japan Meets World* takes everything I want as a listener and lovingly constructs it into an evening of adventure for everyone – young & old, newbie & seasoned listener, Asian & Westerner and all in between!



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Review of *Japan Meets World*:

The Day the Crane Flew (Originally written in Japanese)
By Makiko Ishihara for *Bits Lounge Magazine* (Toronto, ON)

Friday, February 5, 2010

The silhouette of a single crane moves behind the cattails. Then another flies in the opposite direction. Sensing their presence, 5, 6 cranes gather; spreading their broad, white wings, they start to dance on water. As I take in the scene, the leader makes a signal and 1, 2, 3 cranes – powerful and elegant – take off from the water. A crane in Toronto!? No, it was a moving picture unfolding behind my eyes. But there was a crane... at the concert – *Japan Meets World* – that took place last fall at the Japan Foundation, Toronto.

What was so strange about the concert is that, although I can't remember whether or not I've ever seen a real-life crane at a zoo, I was able to see it clear as day. Violinist/composer Maria Kaneko Millar's composition *Tsuru [The Crane]* is of Canadian birth like she. Playing the violin as she dances, she skillfully maneuvers left and right-hand pizzicato to turn her violin into a koto and create a rare musical work.

The mastery of the performance was exquisite, but why did I see such vivid images? It's like I entered a time machine, revisiting memories from infancy through the advent of adulthood. I guess these things really did happen. Japanese fables and folk tales, elaborately-illustrated sliding doors in shrines, temples and castles, hanging scrolls, Japanese art exhibitions, wedding mementos... the list goes on and on. For dozens of years, these images had unconsciously collected inside of me. They hadn't moved till now, though. Moving pictures, unleashed from my subconscious self, now danced forth in Canada. Had I not accepted my friend's invitation, had I not attended the concert, these images would've continued to sleep quietly within. As if struck by magic, I watched the violinist play, transfixed.

I figured the composer had spent long periods of time in Japan studying traditional Japanese music. Upon asking, however, I found out that [Maria] had only attended Japanese school and visited Japan during summer vacation. Though born in Edmonton, I am sure that from an early age, she was exposed to the essence of Japanese music in her home.

Reservations to attend the concert reached capacity immediately, and according to the presenter, looking out at the audience, one could count with 10 fingers the number of people of Japanese descent. The rest of the seats were filled with people of seemingly Western descent. I wonder what sentiment *Tsuru* evoked within them. Were they boggled by the technique that made the violin – a Western instrument – sound like a koto and shamisen? Did they see a crane? [Maria] created a new form of music with her performance style and unique technique. Beyond that, her youthful energy revealed the Japanese spirit and crane that quietly underlay the hustle of my life stretched between Japan and Canada.

Since graduating from Juilliard, [Maria] has actively performed abroad. Along with her fellow alumni, flutist Shawn Wyckoff (who performed at Carnegie Hall), they co-created *Silver Roots* and made New York City their base of operations. They performed a trio by Toshitsugu Ogihara that, according to Shawn, had never been recorded before. They had to have the score shipped from Japan, rushing to learn the work over a period of 3 days in time for their Toronto debut. The cellist, also from Juilliard, was specially invited for the performance; together, they became a single body of energy. The impact was huge.

I expect great things from [Maria], a musician who unites the spirit of Japan with the world. Until my next encounter, I will have to make do with the Canadian geese.