

Concert Review of TEKE:TEKE

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MUSC 225: Intro to World Music

October 10, 2021

Formed in 2018 to honor Takeshi Terauchi, a famous Japanese guitarist, TEKE::TEKE is a seven-piece Montreal-based Japanese psychedelic and surf rock fusion band. This band combines elements of Japanese psychedelic and surf rock from the 1960s and 1970s with elements of traditional Japanese instrumentation and music. This unique fusion creates a sound that is, at times, reminiscent of traditional Japanese music, while at others, is distinctly modern; despite occasionally having distinct sections, elements of traditional Japanese music and Japanese rock forms are present at all times. TEKE::TEKE melds these different eras and times into a creative and ingenious new style of music. Despite what could be seen as an odd fusion, TEKE::TEKE is extremely effective at combining these contrasting musical forms creating a unique listening experience.

The name TEKE::TEKE is an abbreviation for the Japanese guitarist Takeshi Terauchi, who heavily influenced the band's members. The band is a seven-piece band with members including Serge Nakauchi Pelletier, Hidetaka Yoneyama, Mishka Stein, Ian Lettre, Yuki Isami, Etienne Lebel, and Maya Kuroki. The musicians of TEKE::TEKE are a diverse group, with the ethnic makeup of the band including members with backgrounds of Japanese, Canadian, and Ukrainian origin. The diverse makeup of the band's members is reflected in the diverse nature of their music. Along with the diverse ethnic makeup of the musicians, the instrumentation of this ensemble is unique. The main bulk of the band's instrumentation is based on rock music and includes a drum set, auxiliary percussion, a synthesizer, two electric guitars, and a bass guitar; there is also a trombone which is reminiscent of big-band music. TEKE::TEKE also features Japanese folk instruments such as the flute, *ryuteki*, and *koto*. Accompanying these instruments is a single female vocalist.¹

¹ "About," Teke::Teke, accessed October 7, 2021, <https://www.teketekeband.com/about>.

The narrow scope of traditional Japanese music reflects the small-scale nature of Japan's past; as such, there are only a few significant forms of historical Japanese music. While few in number, they are some of the longest continually performed musical art forms in the world. One of these musical forms is *Gagaku* Court Music, which is a traditional form of music once performed for the Japanese Court.² Along with *Gagaku* Court Music, other forms of historical Japanese music can be found in Japanese theater. There are three primary forms of Japanese theater called *noh*, *kabuki*, and *bunraku*. *Kabuki* theater is the younger of the theatrical forms and consists of a small ensemble of plucked lutes, a flute, and drums combined with an all-male cast.³ These forms of music and theater all employ a wide variety of historical Japanese instruments, with the most significant among them being the *koto*, a plucked zither, the *shakuhachi*, a flute, and the *shamisen*, a plucked lute.⁴ These instruments, and many others, create a unique and distinctly Japanese sound and are emulated in TEKE::TEKE's music.

The music of TEKE::TEKE relies heavily on traditional Japanese instrumentation and musical practices to achieve its innovative sound. Many of the traditional elements used in their music can be found in *Gagaku* Court Music, which translates to "elegant music." *Gagaku* Court Music originated in China and was eventually adopted as a preferred form of art music by the Japanese Court in the sixth century.⁵ A typical *Gagaku* ensemble consists of traditional Japanese instruments, including the *ryuteki*, *kakko*, *taiko*, *sho*, *hichiriki*, *biwa*, and the *koto*.⁶ TEKE::TEKE uses the *ryuteki*, a bamboo flute, and the *koto*, a plucked zither, in their music. Along with the traditional *ryuteki*, certain songs feature a modern western metal flute. The *koto* used by the band is not a traditional acoustic *koto*, but rather is an electric variant. These instruments allow

² Terry E. Miller, and Andrew Shahriari, *World Music: A Global Journey*, 5th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2021) 204.

³ *Ibid.*, 214-215.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 204

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 208

for the band to punctuate the modern sounds of rock music with moments that echo that of calm and peaceful traditional Japanese music. However, traditional instruments are used regularly throughout each song, creating a unique texture with their distinctive timbres.

The vocal style of TEKE:TEKE is a fusion of psychedelic and surf rock styles accompanied by traditional Japanese elements. While the vocal style is distinctly rock-based, the vocalist Maya Kuroki sings poetic Japanese lyrics. The lyrics used in each of TEKE:TEKE's songs are all very unique; the correlation between the style of music being made intertwined with lyrical Japanese poetry being sung is an intriguing musical choice by the band. The lyric's author is primarily Maya Kuroki, with other band members occasionally contributing as well. Almost every song includes elements of poetry and Japanese folk legend.⁷ An example of a Japanese folk legend being included in their music is found in the lyrics of the song "Barbara," where Maya Kuroki sings about *Zashikiwarashi*, who is the "spirit of the house . . . [and] represents purity."⁸ The use of Japanese poetry and folk legend creates an intriguing dichotomy between what is being heard and what is being read when one reads the translation of any given song. Japanese poetry and the addition of Japanese folk legend in their lyrics is the second major facet of historical Japanese music and culture found in their music.

The musical selections performed by TEKE:TEKE for their interview by KEXP at home included "Kala Kala," "Yoru Ni," "Barbara," "Jikaku," and "Meikyu." TEKE:TEKE opened their performance with "Kala Kala," which began with a peaceful traditional-sounding section featuring the flute backed by the trombonist and guitarists. The song then moved into a rock section while retaining the traditional sounds of the flute. The lyrics of this song talk about how no matter who one may try to be, life will happen and be full of regrets. The second selection

⁷ "Lyrics," TEKE:TEKE, accessed October 7, 2021, <https://www.teketekeband.com/about>.

⁸ *Ibid.*

performed was “Yoro Ni.” This song combines a surf rock style with the traditional sounds of the flute. The lyrics of this song talk about finding a lover and leaving them behind. The next song, titled “Barbara,” is in more of the psychedelic rock style and heavily features the trombone. The lyrics of this song are somewhat cryptic but references the house spirit *Zashikiwarshi*. Following this, the band performed “Jikaku.” This song leaned towards a surf rock style and is the first song that utilized the *ryuteki*; the band provided no lyrical translation for this song. The final song the band performed was titled “Meikyu.” This song also heavily pulled on a surf rock style and incorporated both the electric *koto* and the *ryuteki*. The lyrics of this song talk about finding what is fulfilling for one in life.⁹

The use of traditional facets of Japanese music and culture combined with psychedelic and surf rock music from the 1960s and 1970s demonstrates a mastery of all aforementioned musical styles by the band. No single style overtly dominates the texture of the ensemble; each style is represented in some capacity throughout all of their music at all times. The most obvious and frequently used aspect of historical Japanese music is the presence of the flute and the *ryuteki*, which both help facilitate peaceful moments in the music and serve as a constant backdrop of Japanese influence; the more subtle aspect of traditional Japanese influence is the lyrical Japanese poetry and incorporation of folk legends. When fused with Japanese psychedelic and surf rock of the 1960s and 1970s, TEKE::TEKE creates an eclectic mosaic of styles and sounds in their unique musical niche.

⁹ “Lyrics,” TEKE:TEKE.

Bibliography

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