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Teiji Ito: Meshes (What Next?, Box 344, Albuquerque, NM 87103) Airy, spare compositions that avoid minimalism by covering multicultural influences. "Meshes in the Afternoon" and "The Very Eye of Night" are soundtracks to the Maya Deren films of those names. The spaces, mysteries and quiet evocative energy of the sounds are clearly meant to add meaning to visual imagery. "Axis Mundi" accompanied a theater work, has shifting segments of sound that build to violent climaxes--like invasions of Japanese ghosts, intense and alien--before settling into the unquiet sounds of a starless night.

the state of music

reviews by chris rice except as noted

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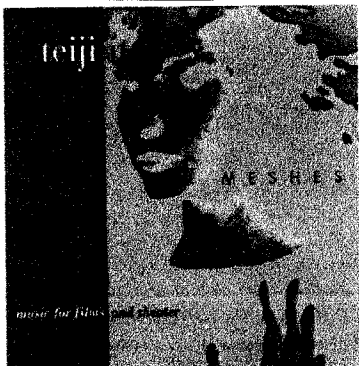
What Next/Nonsequitur has been a major player in experimental/art music for some time now, with a trio of recent releases helping to emphasize that position. Teiji Ito is best known for his soundtracks to films by pioneering filmmaker Maya Deren, chiefly her most famous film "Meshes of the Afternoon," but until this CD no recordings of his music have been available. Ito's music, as displayed in the three compositions included on *Meshes*, is inspired chiefly by the music of cultures from around the world, most notably music that is created to accompany theatre and dance, which, along with film, is also Ito's favorite way to compose. The compositions found on *Meshes* are primarily self-performed, which helps to add a deeply personal air to the proceedings. The soundtrack to "Meshes of the Afternoon," composed and recorded in 1959, is reminiscent of Japanese music, particularly gagaku, and evokes a similar wistful, disembodied mood with its quivering flute, meditative, droning vocals, cello & mouth organ and insistent percussion. Another soundtrack, this time to Deren's "The Very Eye of Night," was the first collaborative effort between Ito and Deren, a pairing which eventually led to their marriage, and works as a perfect companion to "Meshes of the Afternoon." But rather than gagaku, the inspiration this time is Indonesian gamelan and as a result the composition is more deeply rooted in rhythm, though the emphasis still falls equally on flute and clarinet as melodic elements to compliment the cadence of the metallophones and drums. The final piece on the CD, "Axis Mundi," which was composed to accompany a theatre piece by Christopher Hampton called "Savages," was recorded in 1982, the same year as Ito's death. This is the only track that features performers in addition to Ito, with the trio employing a whole host of percussive and wind instruments and once again drawing from his background in and admiration for traditional music to present a beautifully absorbing 30-minute tour of Ito's own take on musics of the world.

Annea Lockwood's *The Glass World* is a fairly exhaustive study of the sounds that are possible from one source—glass. The CD itself is organized almost like a volume in a library of sound effects, each of the 23 tracks named for the type of object used—glass rod, gong, bulb, jars, etc.—and often the action being done to the glass—shaken, vibrating, spinning, etc.—but the results are much more than a dry cataloguing of Lockwood's experiments. As can be imagined, the wealth of sound here is quite diverse and offers a fascinating glimpse into Lockwood's obsession with "the complexity of the single sound."

The final release of the trio is *AC-DC-VC* from Jeffrey Krieger, who uses electronic cello, along with a handful of effects such as an Alesis Quadraverb and a Digitech Harmonizer, to bring out some of the harder to hear qualities of sound, such as the subtleties of overtones and microtonalities. Krieger performs pieces from five different composers, showing off five different approaches to difficult music for solo cello. The highlights of the CD include Sarah Hopkins' "Cello Chi," which begins the program and presents a beautiful study of the overtones possible from the combination of cello and voice in a thickly reverberant space. With "Indian Summer" Alvin Lucier is up to his old tricks, namely his long-standing concern with the physical nature of sound. The piece is a study of the beating patterns and other aural craziness that arise from the bowing of two closely tuned strings, the resulting tones swirl around your listening space like so many wonderfully maddening insects. And finally, N. Sean William's "Come Window God Coming" provides a glimpse into a tranquil world of floating, sustained tones that emerge from silence to completely envelope the listener.

DREAM MAGAZINE

words and pictures. Reviews and interviews. Comics, photographs, found art, music, a distinct lack of self-conscious irony (Isn't that ironic?).



Teiji Ito **Meshes/ music for films and theater** (¿What Next? Recordings c/o Non-sequitur, P.O. Box 344, Albuquerque, NM 87103) Ito began composing when he was asked by experimental filmmaker/ author Maya Deren to do the soundtrack to her film **The Very Eye of Night** in 1952 (he was 17 years old at the time, they lived together for awhile and were later married) which is included here as well as the music for Maya's film **Meshes of the Afternoon**, which Ito did in 1959. Besides the two Deren soundtracks this includes the piece Teiji composed for Christopher Hampton's **Savages** entitled: **Axis Mundi** from 1982 (the year Ito died during a trip to Haiti), this over 30 minute piece is an eerie ghost dance trance evocation that's not too far in spirit from Japanese folk/ psych band Ghost. Of the two Deren soundtracks **Meshes of the Afternoon** is my favorite and it works better sans imagery than **The Very Eye...** (which is a bit more soundtracky). Again it's a witchy almost Kabuki feeling hauntingly spare acoustic chill. If you've never seen Maya Deren's films, you owe it to yourself to write Mystic Fire Video, 200 Madison Ave., NY, NY 10016 (800) 999-1319.

When I first saw Maya Deren's film *Meshes of the Afternoon* a few years ago, it was as part of a program organized by the Knitting Factory in which they had musicians write or improvise music to classic silent movies. I don't remember much of the film, only that it was ritualistic and nightmarish in the way that often repeated scenes and shots built up an ever more intense feeling of threat. It turns out that this was not the first time music had been composed to go with this film. In 1959 the Japanese/American composer Teiji Ito, husband to Deren, recorded a soundtrack for it. The What Next label has taken the recording (on which Ito very probably plays all the instruments himself) from the archives where it was resting and put it out on CD, together with two other pieces of his. One must be the first composition he ever did, in 1952 at the age of seventeen, for *The Very Eye of Night* – another film by Deren. Most of the CD is taken up by a piece for a theater work, composed and performed in 1982, the year in which Ito died.

In other words, *Meshes* provides a view of the very beginning

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and the very end of Ito's career as a composer and musician. According to the liner notes he "became interested in the music of other cultures, especially the percussion music of Asia, Africa and the Caribbean; in 1955 he studied with a master drummer in Haiti. His keen awareness of jazz, blues and flamenco infused his later music with a spontaneous, improvisational quality, and his knowledge of Buddhism, Voudoun and Native American beliefs added a mystical element. This eclecticism, along with his extended instrumental techniques and a kind of intentional 'neo-primitivism,' anticipated many tendencies which have since become common in much contemporary music."

Listening to the three pieces in chronological order, this becomes apparent as a development in Ito's work. *The Very Eye of Night* is in a sense the most conventional, being based on a cyclical four-note phrase and a four-beat rhythm, and using mostly Western instrumentation. In *Meshes of the Afternoon* itself Ito has drawn from his Japanese background, and not just by playing the *shô* mouth organ, the *koto* and the *hichiriki* (a double reed). The piece has the dynamic range and the sudden, almost violent, shifts in volume that can be characteristic of Japanese music; it has its somewhat indeterminate, elastic sense of rhythm; and, compared with the harmonic nature of the earlier work, the emphasis in *Meshes* is more on melody and an equal treatment of melodic and percussive instruments. Ito sings tones that glide up and down side by side with those that he bows from a cello, making its warm texture burr and buzz as if it were electric by moving minute intervals away from it, pushing himself away only a hair's breath and making it sound as if he has to summon all his strength to accomplish that.

Axis Mundi takes its inspiration in part from ritualistic music of different cultures, most notably North American Indians. It includes a variety of instruments that one would readily associate with ceremonial use, such as rattles, whistles, didjeridus, the *berimbau* (the Brazilian mouthbow, known from *capoeira* music) and conch shells. Although at times he comes close to copying music from other cultures ("eclecticism" as the liner notes have it), he generally manages to remain true to a more personal expression, which is as much musical as it is ritual.

One would perhaps conclude from the above description that Ito was a precursor to world music and new age. On the evidence of these pieces that would not do him justice, in my opinion. Maybe in making his music he used methods that are similar to what is common in those two genres, but the result sounds like it is a translation of what lived inside the man rather than like a formal blend of styles. It seems that this is the first release of Ito's music. That in itself makes *Meshes* a valuable album. What adds to this is Ito's stunning mastery of all the instruments he plays and the surprising sound quality, especially remarkable in the 1952 composition. But then, it was recorded by electronic music pioneers Louis and Bebe Barron.

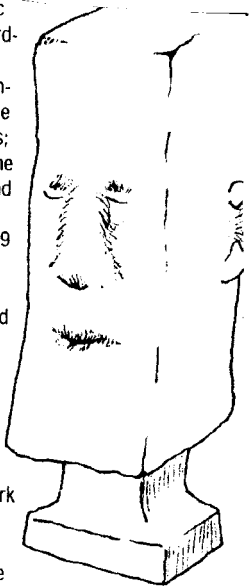
TEIJI ITO Meshes (Music for Films and Theater)
(¿What's Next?)

If you've ever seen Maya Deren's experimental films you've heard the unearthly delicate music of composer Teiji Ito; this CD landmarks the first time that his music is commercially available. Ito was born in Japan into a well-known theater family and moved to the States at the age of six. He began composing at the age of seventeen when Deren, in 1952, invited him to make music for "The Very Eye of the Night." When she asked him she didn't even know that he was a musician, "it was just an intuition she had."

Later the two married. All Deren's early avant films, some of which are silent, are massively important and should be seen by all at least once, but the ones that symbiose Deren's visuals and Ito's music are probably her finest and most memorable. Besides influences from the traditional music of his motherland, Ito's unique droney soundworld incorporates aspects from all kinds of ancient world cultures. He had knowledge of Buddhism, Voudoun, and Native American beliefs, and mixed elements of African percussion music, flamenco, and jazz into his spontaneously improvised exotic cocktail. He



played the array of exotic instruments on the recordings all by himself using the sound-on-sound technique—no mean feat. The CD has two Deren scores; the earlier mentioned "The Very Eye of the Night" and "Meshes of the Afternoon," which in 1959 was added to this 1943 movie. The final piece, "Axis Mundi"—composed for "Savages," a theater work by Christopher Hampton—is the last piece that Ito created before he died in 1982. It's amazing how well the feel of this much later work blends with the older pieces. It makes me wonder what Ito created in the years in between. If it's as beautiful as these recordings **Nonsequitur/¿What's Next?** has some important work at hand. Frank



RESONANCE VOLUME 7 NUMBER 1

Teiji Ito

Music for Films and Theatre

WHAT NEXT? RECORDS WN020

IT'S NOT EASY TO REVIEW THE MUSIC FOR A FILM when you've never seen the work in question. It's even harder when its creator is Teiji Ito, a composer whose aim was to incorporate music into other artforms. "To work with theatre or dance or film in a way makes it possible for me to participate in the creation of something which is more than music, or more than music alone could achieve." The job's made considerably easier by the stand-alone excellence of his compositions.

The three works featured here comprise his first two film collaborations with his wife Maya Deren, *Meshes of the Afternoon* and *The Very Eye of Night*, as well as a later theatre work. So clear, unadorned and unaffected is his style that influences are easily discerned. Foremost among these and most pervasive on the Deren soundtracks is Japanese theatre music (understandably so - Ito's mother was a dancer skilled in traditional repertoire, his father the musician who composed and played her accompaniment). Austere and ritualistic are the standard adjectives used to describe Gagaku and Bugaku, and Ito's music conjures ceremonial images by the dozen. There's a predilection for exotic sounds, decontextualised in a way reminiscent of Hollywood-style exotica, as well as of the later generations of musicians such as Arthur Lyman and Yma Sumac, who made that sound their touchstone. His later work, *Axis Mundi*, shows the influence of shamanic music ritual, conforming with his interest in Native American culture, and if it's less successful than the Deren soundtracks, that's because these influences are too convincingly mimicked, destroying the abstraction which makes the use of Japanese instruments so effective. Ultimately though, Ito's music wins out, references on sleeve, through sheer attention to textural detail and macro-rhythmic awareness.

PETE FLOOD

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A Mesh of Ito

MARK ALBURGER

Teiji Ito. "Meshes: Music for Films and Theater" ["Meshes of the Afternoon" (1959). "The Very Eye of Night" (1952). "Axis Mundi" (1982)]. What Next? Recordings, c/o Nonsequitur, P.O. Box 344, Albuquerque, NM 87103.

There really are those who are ahead of their time. Putting on Teiji Ito's "Meshes: Music for Films and Theater," one could easily imagine the music was recorded this year -- but, no, the dates of "The Very Eye of Night," "Meshes in the Afternoon," and "Axis Mundi" are 1952, 1959, and 1982, respectively. Very few individuals working in the 50's had such an authentic approach to the integration of Eastern and Western musics; very few classically-trained composers were putting sound-on-sound, musique concrète techniques at the service of one-man multiculturalism.

"The Very Eye of Night" finds flute and clarinets in consort with Indonesian bronze metallophone, xylophone, and drums. "Meshes" of the Afternoon" conjures up a kumoiyoshi mode (the gapped Japanese pentatonic scale featuring both minor seconds and major thirds) from acoustic guitar, evocations of Buddhist calls to prayer in drums and bells, gagaku textures with sho and hichiriki, and wild sections of sustained voice and a low string (cello? bass? even the liner notes are unsure) which suddenly ascend a half step and abruptly cut off.

The sole work of the 80's, "Axis Mundi," is equally progressive: for its time, one of the few convincing utilizations of Native American music outside of the reference cultures. That Ito combines his Amerindianisms with didgeridus, whistles, ratchets, flutes, bells, conch shells, berimbau (Brazilian monochord), kazoos, duck calls, and mbira only further impresses.

Teiji Ito died the year of "Axis Mundi," during a trip to Haiti. This is, incredibly, the first available CD of Ito's music -- an important release from What Next? Recordings.

THE

WIRE

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Teiji Ito**Meshes**

¿WHAT NEXT?/NONSEQUITUR WN0020 CD

Meshes is the first available recording of music by Teiji Ito, a Japanese composer resident in the USA until his death in 1982. Ito specialised in music for film, theatre and dance, and the centrepiece here is his 1959 score for Maya Deren's film *Meshes Of The Afternoon*. The film, shot in its silent version in 1943, is a passionate blend of Hollywood romance with French surrealist techniques, anticipating Jean Cocteau's *Orphée* (1949). Ito intended his music to make the film speak more clearly, "to make it not so impressionistic or dreamlike". Indeed, the score is a delicate and sparse work for cello, acoustic guitar and a few traditional Japanese instruments, with a strong influence from the cold-water clarity of Japanese theatre music. Ito played all the instruments himself and has a sure touch, achieving beauty with the simplest of means.

Also here is Ito's very first score, also for a Maya Deren film titled *The Very Eye Of Night*. Ito was 17 when he received this commission and claimed that Deren did not even know he was a musician at the time: "it was just an intuition she had". Clarinet is combined with Indonesian gamelan instruments to create another effective piece of understatement.

Ito and Deren were later to marry, and after her death Ito edited her documentary film about Voodoo, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods Of Haiti*. In 1955 he studied with a drummer in Haiti, and this interest is audible in the CD's final piece, a theatre score for Christopher Hampton's *Savages* (1982). Performed by a trio, this is a gently simmering stew of rattles, didgeridoos, whistles and duck calls, which acknowledges shamanistic traditions of music without hysteria or embarrassment. All in all, a fine piece of archiving for a little-known composer.

CLIVE BELL