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# Sōgetsu Art Center's Invitation Letters to International Composers

## Mednarodna korespondenca umetniškega centra Sōgetsu v 60ih

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## IZVLEČEK

## ABSTRACT

Članek nudi prvi vpogled v korespondenco Umetniškega Centra Sōgetsu (1958-1971) z umetnikom Henryjem Jacobsom iz skupine Vortex in skladateljem Edgardjem Varèsejem ter vpogled v pisma, ki se nanašajo na omenjeno korespondenco. Prav tako članek razodeva mednarodno prepoznavnost Centra in identificira odgovorne figure pri mednarodnih stikih, kot so Toshirō Mazuyumi, Hiroshi Teshigahara in Tōru Takemitsu.

The article gives first insights into the correspondence of the Sōgetsu Art Center with the artist Henry Jacobs and the composer Edgard Varèse, as well as – for the first time – into letters referring to the above-mentioned correspondence. At the same time, it reveals the Center's responsible figures for the international exposure, notably Toshirō Mazuyumi, Hiroshi Teshigahara and Tōru Takemitsu.

## 1. Introduction

One of the distinctive points, which separated the Sōgetsu art movement (with the Sōgetsu Art Center as its shared venue) from the previous avant-garde movements in pre- and post-war Japan was its international openness in inviting and collaborating

with Western artists. In particular, the first part of the Sōgetsu movement in the 1959–1965 period, when music played the main role and concerned a variety of musical events, the Center invited musician from different musical fields.

The *Sōgetsu contemporary series*, which welcomed new contemporary pieces from Japan, as well as from abroad, had three stages or series of contemporary music involvement in its four-year activities, with the most significant 1961–1962 series of indeterminate music held by John Cage and Toshi Ichihanagi. These contributed to the formation of the so-called *John Cage shock* in Japan, a new dimension which incorporated an accidental feature into the compositional process. *Sōgetsu Music Inn* was an earlier activity, significant by its experimental jazz concerts which showed the Center's inclination to jazz music, the history of jazz and its performing techniques, and often involved lecture-concerts. The music also took part in the earlier, minor *Modern Jazz Circle* (later renamed *Etcetera* and *Jazz Circle*) activities, which besides jazz referred to various media incorporating jazz. In relation to jazz, jazz clarinetist and vocalist Raymond Conte, American jazz singer Billy Banks, and others, held their stage performances at Sōgetsu.

The movement contributed greatly to the musical scene in Japan at that time. It had an intention (which was actually fulfilled) to enrich the Japanese contemporary musical scene. Compared to its previous avant-garde *Jikken Kōbō* group (Experimental Workshop), which was the first among the avant-garde groups that brought music to its forefronts, it was still mostly influenced by serialism and *musique concrète* and while it tried to explore new media, it was still holding on to the more conventionally staged performances of new music. The Sōgetsu movement, on the other hand, opened a broad new horizon, bringing “multimedia events, Happenings, Events, conceptual art, and group improvisation”<sup>1</sup> to its stage. Looking for new compositional methods, the visits and the recognition of Cage's music was a godsend to several Japanese composers, who were searching for something less constructed or for a relief from using a twelve-tone technique, serialism, and *musique concrète*. What they were also longing for, was to be equivalent to its foreign counterparts.

Looking at the overall musical scene earlier at that time, Japan was going through a difficult period. Toshi Ichihanagi claims that in 1952 the Japanese contemporary musical scene was “close to 50 years behind the West in composing contemporary music”.<sup>2</sup> The Japanese musicians, too, faced a difficult situation at the time, given that only one artist could get permission to study in Europe per year.<sup>3</sup> Yet another representative avant-garde composer, Yūji Takahashi, recalls the time just before the Sōgetsu Art Center as a period when they could receive only a few news about new kinds of music. All the news they could get on music from abroad were introductory articles written by Kuniharu Akiyama in the *Tokyo Symphony Orchestra* magazine. Also, they could not get an insight into musical scores as they were not published at the time either.<sup>4</sup> “Because we had no copy machine, all we could do in the case of Schoenberg's *Pierrot*

1 Yayoi Uno Everett, “Scream against the Sky: Japanese Avant-garde Music in the Sixties”, in *Sound Commitments*, ed. Robert Adlington (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 189.

2 Thomas R. H. Havens, *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 43.

3 Ibid.

4 *Kagayake 60-nendai Sogetsu A-to Senta-no Zenkiroku*, ed. Noriko Nomura et al. (Tokyo: Filmart-Sha, 2002), 156.

*Lunaire* score and Boulez's *Le Marteau sans maître*, was to hand copy the original from somebody who owned it.”<sup>5</sup>

Because of the activities and efforts of Sōfu Teshigahara, ikebana master, sculptor and calligrapher and the founder of Sōgetsu Art Center, often called “the first real patron of contemporary music in Japan,”<sup>6</sup> the movement had previously strong artistic backgrounds and connections to different fields of art, while the field of music was not getting very far yet.<sup>7</sup> In this regard, Sōfu Teshigahara formed a group of three contemporary music plan members, who were in charge of promoting and bringing the musical fields to the core of the movement: composer and conductor Akutagawa Yasushi, composers Toshirō Mayuzumi and Makoto Moroi, the first two Japanese to study composition in Europe after the war (Mayuzumi in Paris and Moroi in Darmstadt). Later, the latter suggested inviting the composer Tōru Takemitsu as well.<sup>8</sup> We may assume that the invitation letters could have been sent by those above-mentioned figures, who were already internationally active or recognized at that time.

Besides the personal relations, such as in the case of the relation between Sōfu Teshigahara and curator Michel Tapié, the key factor that brought the musicians together was their correspondence through letters. If we think of two distinctive avant-garde musicians, Toshi Ichiyagani and Yūji Takahashi, both of whom were also members of the Sōgetsu movement, we can imagine of what importance the letters were at that time for their eagerness to learn new things and to search for new ways in their own musical development.

## 2. Correspondence: letters and telegrams

A distinct effort by the Center to change and enrich the Japanese contemporary musical scene at the time were the Center's frequent invitations of foreign artists. In the archives of the Sōgetsu Foundation we can find a file entitled *The invitation letters to international composers* (*Kokusaisakkyokuka Shōtai*, 国際作曲家招待), which includes all the letters that had been sent or received by the artists at the beginning of the movement.

### 2.1. *The invitation letters to international composers*

Inside the file entitled *The invitation letters to international composers*, we found the following correspondence, mostly in the form of letters or memos (to be sent by

5 Ibid.

6 Havens, *Radicals and Realists*, 104.

7 The foreign artist visits were not limited to music. Previous to the musical scene, which evolved in the time of the movement, Sōfu Teshigahara, the main initiator of the Sōgetsu art Center, took an active role in introducing and working with artist such as Georges Mathieu, Francis Sam, internationally active curator Michel Tapié and others. Throughout the movement, the Center also hosted the painter and sculptor Robert Rauschenberg, French writer, essayist, poet and actor Théo Lésoualch, the choreographer Merce Cunningham, while the activities which received the greatest acclaim, as we already mentioned, was, besides the visits of John Cage and David Tudor, the visit of the Jean Erdman Dance Company with its theatrical play *The Coach with the Six Insides* in 1964.

8 *Purodakushon nōto: Teshigahara Hiroshi, Eiga kotohajime*, ed. Nomura Noriko (Tokyo: studio 240, 2007).

cable), all dating mostly from the early 1960's, the time when the Sōgetsu Art Center did not yet officially start with its musical activities on a large scale.

	Form of correspondence	Sender	Receiver	Date
1.	Letter	Henry Jacobs	Tōru Takemitsu	7/22/1958
2.	Letter	Henry Jacobs	Tōru Takemitsu	? 1959
3.	Letter	Hiroshi Teshigahara	Henry Jacobs	? (before 2/5/1961)
4.	Letter	Hiroshi Teshigahara	Henry Jacobs	2/5/1961
5.	Letter	Henry Jacobs	Hiroshi Teshigahara	8/23/1963
6.	Letter	Edgard Varèse	Hiroshi Teshigahara	4/2/1960
7.	Letter	Hiroshi Teshigahara	Edgard Varèse	7/7/1960
8.	Letter	Edgard Varèse	Hiroshi Teshigahara	11/5/1961
9.	Letter	Hiroshi Teshigahara	Edgard Varèse	11/17/1961
10.	short memos (drafts for telegrams on telegram paper)	Hiroshi Teshigahara	?	? (3/1959)
11.	short memos (drafts for telegrams on white paper, 3x)	Hiroshi Teshigahara	?	? (no specific dates)

*Figure 1: Sōgetsu Art Center's invitation letters to international composers: An outline (including the information on the form of correspondence, senders, receivers, and exact or assumed dates of the correspondence).*

### 3. Main correspondences evident from the Invitation letters and its contents

#### 3.1 Correspondence with the Vortex group (Henry Jacobs)

Especially interesting is the earliest Sōgetsu attempt to invite Henry Jacobs (1924–2015), a radio station executive and composer of musique concrète, and Jordan Belson (1920–2011), a well-known painter, designer and film maker. From 1957 to 1959 they collaborated in a series of over 35 performances; Jacobs would commission new pieces of electronic music, while Belson would prepare visual imagery, which was to be projected on the dome of the Morrison Planetarium at the California Academy in San Francisco. They would use forty stereophonic surround sound speakers playing music from a four-track surround system, along with a planetarium starscape projector, as well as conventional film and slide projectors. Those performances were called Vortex concerts. They would perform Jacobs own compositions, and contemporary

electronic music by Pierre Schaeffer, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Luciano Berio, Henk Badings, Gordon Longfellow, and others.

“During its short history Electronic Music has found its way into nearly all forms of public entertainment including Radio, TV, Motion Pictures, Ballet, and Concerts. But only in *Vortex*, produced by the Audio-Visual Research Foundation of San Francisco and conducted at Morrison Planetarium, did Electronic Music have its finest presentation. It was here, in this singularly beautiful setting, that the possibilities of rotational, directional, and stereophonic sound were investigated. And of great importance was Morrison’s unique and elaborated optical equipment that permitted experiments with vivid Non-Objective imagery created to accompany the electronic compositions. It was a period of research which proved to be so entirely effective and provocative that it won, almost immediately, international recognition, and resulted in an invitation to appear at the Brussels World’s Fair.”<sup>9</sup>

Of the two international correspondents, the main role in the exchange with Hiroshi Teshigahara had Jacobs, who also, took the role of the composer-engineer for *Vortex*. Sound designers commonly regard his activities as the origins of the currently standard concept of “surround sound”. From the invitation letters, we can see that the Sōgetsu group of artists was aware of the *Vortex* activities. Below (see Figure 2) is probably one of the first invitation letters to *Vortex* sent by the Sōgetsu Art Center.<sup>10</sup> It shows that Takemitsu and Mayuzumi had already contacted *Vortex*. The letter includes an introduction and description of the SAC as well as the proposed purpose of the *Vortex* visit to Japan.

*Dear Mr. Vortex,*

*Pardon me for writing you now; I would like to invite you to Japan, which may surprise you & perplex you a little. I'll write you about the circumstances which make me say out this plan to you. I am one of your fans, on hearing your great talent for music & fame through newspapers & magazines. In person, I was introduced to you by Mr. Takemitsu & Mayuzumi (dear friends of mine), who are now engaged in such modern music as you; the two of them also agreed with my plan for inviting you to Japan.*

*Here, I'll explain some details about the auditorium (called “Sogetsu Art Center”) in the Sogetsu-Kaikan, which is a beautiful, artistic building for the Sogetsu-school of flower-arrangement (Ikebana in Japanese), built in 1958. The auditorium is in the basement & usually lent out for music concerts, lectures, or some modern documentary projections, because the sound & light are very effective, though the capacity is rather small (400 seats). To have this auditorium used as a modern music hall all through the world is one of the main aims for us.*

*Two famous mural paintings – one is George Mathews’, the other, Sam Francis’ – are on both sides of the hall. There are thirteen speakers on the ceiling*

9 Vortex Presents program notes, October 31, 1959 (San Francisco: Audio-Visual Research Foundation).

10 Hiroshi Teshigahara (?) to Vortex, (?), probably before February 5, 1961).

*& wall. Recording rooms & instruments are separately arranged to record the music of 50 members and suitable for any kind of projection – 35m/m, 16 m/m. Some music concerts of Mr. Moroi's, Mr. Mayuzumi's and Mr. Takemitsu's have been already held. This year, modern music concerts or projections are going to be held every month.*

*Now, let's talk about the proposed plan at this art center – if we would be able to have a chance to invite you here.*

*(1) Vortex's lecture course on music ... 5 ~ 10 days long*

*(2) Vortex's music concert ... 2 ~ 4 days long*

*Next, it would be possible to have a grand concert of Vortex's at the great public theater with planetarium, which at once would be broadcast all through Japan. Of course, management would ours. Needless to say, these are only vague plans. If we were able to hear from you soon whether our invitation will be accepted, we would make a plan according to your wishes, Mr. Vortex, and consult about the arrangement throughout this year; also about the date & how many members you have and how many would come to Japan.*

*Looking forward to hearing from you soon,*

*Yours truly,*

*P.S. This letter has been already shown to Mr. Takemitsu & Mr. Mayuzumi! Maybe they will write you soon.*

*Figure 2: An unsigned and undated 5 pages long letter on a white sheet pattern used by the Sōgetsu Hall (patterned with letters Sōgetsu Hall Head Office (草月会本部 Sōgetsukai honbu)). In the collection of letters, we can find an authentic letter written in Japanese, which was later probably translated into English.*

The letter (Hiroshi Teshigahara to Vortex, (?) before February 5<sup>th</sup> 1961) is undated and unsigned, but considering the following correspondence between Henry Jacobs and Hiroshi Teshigahara, which is dated February 5<sup>th</sup> 1961 (Figure 3), we can assume that it was written before that date. It proposes that *Vortex* could come to Japan in May if the negotiation with Toshiba Electric Co. was to bring appropriate sponsorship. It also clearly states what the Center could provide for the visiting group – all the expenses but travelling costs.

In the aforementioned letter sent to Henry Jacobs it is written that the person who wrote the letter “was introduced” to *Vortex* by Takemitsu (and Mayuzumi) and that the letter was “already shown” to Takemitsu (and Mayuzumi) before being sent, which shows the personal relation of the group with the composers, while the main invitations of the composers were sent by Hiroshi Teshigahara, but probably suggested by Takemitsu and Mayuzumi.

Mr. Henry Jacobs  
 AVRF, Box 303, Sausalito, February 5<sup>th</sup> 1961  
 California, USA

*Dear Mr. Jacobs;*

*I hope you will forgive me for the sluggishness. We have been discussing the project to bring you here and have been negotiating with various organizations concerned regarding the financial problems.*

*A talk is now under way with Toshiba Electric Co., one of the leading electric goods makers in this country about the possibility of obtaining their financial support. We are expecting their final answer by the middle of this month. All our further planning depends upon how this negotiation turns out. If their answer is affirmative, we can proceed with our original plan to have you here in late May. Contra wise, we must ask you to postpone your trip until this fall, any time convenient for you between September and November.*

*Regarding the guarantee problem, we have checked it from various angles, hall accommodation, rental cost, living and transportation expenses, etc. We have concluded that we can guarantee the following points, whether the performances be held in spring or fall:*

- 1. The period of guarantee will be two weeks. We feel this period will cover the performances at Tokyo and Osaka Planetariums and at the Sogetsu Art Center.*
- 2. We shall guarantee the living expenses and other contingencies during this period, the estimate amounting to \$12 - \$14. per capita.*
- 3. We shall guarantee all the cost of transport of the equipment and the cost for mounting the performances.*
- 4. We shall guarantee transportation expenses required and the cost for mounting the performances (a return trip to Osaka)*

*Of course, the abovementioned conditions are the minimum, and if we succeed in getting more financial support, we shall be able to improve the conditions.*

*You will hear from us again about the results of the negotiations with Toshiba. Then, we hope to be able to give you a more detailed program proposal.*

*yours sincerely,*

*Hiroshi Teshigahara*

*Figure 3: A letter to Henry Jacobs (Hiroshi Teshigahara, 2/5/1961).*

One of the earliest letters corresponding with Henry Jacobs in the data-file *Invitation letters to international composers* is a letter addressed to Takemitsu (written (translated into Japanese) by Henry's spouse).<sup>11</sup> It is four pages long, written crosswise, and signed

<sup>11</sup> Tōru Takemitsu to Henry Jacobs, July 22<sup>nd</sup> 1958.

by Henry Jacobs. Regarding the envelopes, there were two letters sent to Takemitsu by Vortex, one letter was sent on July 22<sup>nd</sup> 1958, as indicated by the *Vortex* spiral sign on the envelope and date on the stamp from Mill Valley, a town 23 km north of San Francisco. The envelope of a second letter does not have the *Vortex* spiral sign, nor can the date be clearly seen. However, it can be discerned that this letter was sent from San Francisco.

The content of the earliest letter (see Figure 4 for short insert) shows it is likely from 1959 or late 1958, as Henry Jacobs mentions the success of the *Vortex 4* concert and proves that there had been previous correspondences with Takemitsu. The letter can be summarized as follows:

Henry Jacobs announced he was very pleased with the prospect of coming to Japan and that he would like to bring his wife with him. He then required all the necessary things to conduct a concert, including a planetarium or round theatre, lighting equipment, number of loud speakers, and tape playback system, and inquired on the venues like the Tokyo Planetarium, its staff and sound engineering. He planned to come to Japan in the middle of October or November, the most proper time for his visit Japan,<sup>12</sup> and required two months preparation before the performance, but not necessarily.

Apart from travel expenses and the arrangements around his performance, the letter shows correspondence with Takemitsu about musical matters such as loop technique which, according to Takemitsu's interest, Henry Jacobs promised to discuss with him when they meet. He gives him an update on the success of the fourth *Vortex* concert including 13 performances that were attended by a total of 5,000 people and that a tape of the performance would be sent to him additionally. Besides, he talks about a pamphlet including a new technique that uses a portable dome made of light plastic material (weight around 35 pounds) filled with air, which could be successfully used instead of concrete and real Planetariums<sup>13</sup>. Finally, he praises Takemitsu's composition *Otoko no shi*.

These letters also show Takemitsu's interest in *musique concrète* at the time and the *Vortex's* experimentation of sound and picture. Takemitsu contributed to *Vortex presents* the composition *Tori*, nowadays known as *Tree-Sky-Bird*, built from vocalization of Japanese words "ki (tree)", "sora (sky)" and "tori (bird)". The contribution to the *Vortex 5* concert with a composition titled *Untitled* is also evident from the *Vortex's* program notes from the data-file.<sup>14</sup> Especially the compositions of the fifth *Vortex* concert were considered the best compositions in the field of electronic music, and some of them were premiered at the Experimental Music Festival during the Brussels World Fair.

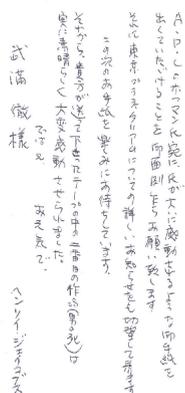
12 Letter also points out the issue of travel expenses. Henry Jacobs wanted to travel with APL (American President Lines), which was quite expensive. He requested Mayuzumi, Takemitsu and N.H.K. authorities to write an additional recommendation letter to Mr. Hoffmann (probably at that time the vice president of APL) for a discount. Later in the letter he put down all possible methods of travel and their corresponding cost (by ship: APL 1476 ~ 1872\$, AML (American Mail Line) 1000\$; by plane: Ito airline 1070\$ first class, 870.40\$ economy (at that time tourist class)).

13 It seems Henry Jacobs sent the pamphlet of the "portable dorm" to Takemitsu, but it could not be found together with the letter.

14 From the title it is hard to guess which composition this is. It was probably one of Takemitsu's compositions from that time such as *Tori* (another name for the composition entitled *Tree-Sky-Bird* from 1956). The concert had a subtitle *A concert of electronic music non-objective film: sponsored by the audio-visual research foundation in cooperation with the San Francisco Museum of Art*, and some of other composers such as Pierre Schaeffer with *Etude aux Allures*, Pierre Henry's *Hault Voltage* also appear on the main part of the program, while Takemitsu, as well as ethno-musicologist Robert Garfias, and others, follow the second part of the program - intermission.

From the previous Vortex concerts' programs, we can see that Takemitsu took part already in *Vortex 3* (Jan 6<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup> 1958) with the composition *A, I*,<sup>15</sup> as well as in *Vortex 4* (May 12, 13, 19 & 20, 1958) with the composition *Static Relief*;<sup>16</sup> both of which he completed a couple of years before they would take part in the Vortex concerts. Those compositions in the previous programs of Vortex prove that Takemitsu had already had contacts with Vortex to those we can find in the data-file.<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, Takemitsu's recognition abroad as a concrete music composer came almost along with the attention he gained for the *Requiem for Strings* in 1959.

Besides inviting composers to Japan and his constant contribution of electronic works to *Vortex*, the letters serve Takemitsu's interest in expanding his methods, as indicated by his questions to Henry on the *loop* technique.<sup>18</sup>



*Would you be so kind to write a letter to APL's Hoffman. And please do inform me on the details about Tokyo's planetarium.*

*I am looking forward to your next letter.*

*The second piece (Otoko no Shi) in the tape which you sent me was truly marvellous.*

*Sincerely, Henry Jacobs*

Figure 4: Ending of the letter sent to Takemitsu (James Henry, probably dates to 1959) and its English translation (by author).

But despite Takemitsu's early correspondence (as well as probably Moroi's and Mayuzumi's interventions) and Center's efforts to bring Vortex to Japan, the group finally did not reach the venues of the Sōgetsu Art Center. The last letter from the

15 The name of the composition (*I, A*) was probably shorten from the composition *Vocalism A-I* (1956), which has been primarily collaborated with Shuntarō Tanikawa, but later combined with Yōji Kuri's short animation in the 1963 composition *Love: Vocalism A-I*.

16 The composition originally composed in 1955 (concrete sounds and electronic sounds for its sound materials), re-composition of the music for the radio drama *Honō*.

17 This is as well true for Moroi and Mayuzumi, which names we can also (and only) find in the earlier program notes (Mayuzumi's *Aoi-No-Ue* and Moroi&Mayuzumi's *Four of the Seven Variations*).

18 Loop (tape loop) is a prerecorded magnetic tape used to create repetitive, rhythmic musical patterns. The first musicians to use them were Pierre Schaeffer, Halim El-Dabh, Pierre Henry, Edgard Varèse and Karlheinz Stockhausen.

correspondence with Vortex that we can find in the file-data falls in the year of 1963, when Henry Jacobs announces to Hiroshi Teshigahara that he would visit Japan (in October 28 or 29) with his wife and daughter and that he would certainly attend some of the Sōgetsu Art Center concerts; he also invites Hiroshi Teshigahara to have a discussion on a “future Vortex”,<sup>19</sup> if he would still have interest.<sup>20</sup>

The Center’s correspondence with Vortex falls in the time when Vortex was quite at the peak of its popularity (1957 to 1959), while the last letter from 1963 already marks a period when Vortex concerts did not occur any more, even if there was an announcement of their plans to appear in Japan and Moscow in 1959<sup>21</sup> in the program notes of *Vortex 5* – the final series of the Vortex. Their latest trial, *Vortex present (a concert of electronic music and non-objective film)* for which concert we mentioned Takemitsu also contributed – held in San Francisco Museum of Art (instead of planetarium) – turned out to be a disappointment as it was solely a film screening accompanying music, so they did not continue with their planned series.<sup>22</sup>

### 3.2 Edgard Varèse and Sōgetsu Art Center

Another interesting series of letters were the ones to composer Edgard Varèse (1883–1965) (see Figure 2), the first dating from April 1960 and the last from November 1961. These letters were probably “triggered” by Toshirō Mayuzumi, who after graduating from Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music (*Gendai*) in 1951 headed for the Paris Conservatoire, where he became acquainted with the works of Edgard Varèse, Olivier Messiaen, and Pierre Boulez. Even if, referring the letters to Vortex, it seems that Vortex was investigated first, it was Varèse whom the Center wanted to invite first.<sup>23</sup>

All the letters had Varèse’s address printed on top: 188 Sullivan Street, New York 12. N.Y., for which we know Varèse moved to in 1925 and stayed there until his last days. From the first letter (dated to April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1960) we can gather that the interest in Edgard Varèse was already present when Teshigahara and his father visited the artist while visiting New York in 1959 (see Figure 5); they were introduced to him by Michel Tapié. Varèse indicates the postponement of his visit to Japan in 1961, mentioning his temporary composing of the work commissioned by the Koussevitzky Foundation in the Library of Congress and offering to hold a performance of the work in Tokyo. He was probably talking about the work *Notturmo* for soprano, bass, percussion, chamber orchestra, the commission of which was granted in 1958, while the work was accepted by the Library of Congress in 1961.

Hiroshi Teshigahara (Hiroshi Teshigahara to Edgard Varèse, July 7th 1960) accepted his postponement but because of Varèse’s constant illness, the composer kept

19 Henry Jacobs to Hiroshi Teshigahara, August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1963.

20 Ibid.

21 Vortex 5 program notes, January 12&13, 19&20, 26&27, 1959.

22 See more in Cindy Keefer, “Raumlichtmusik’ - Early 20th Century Abstract Cinema Immersive Environments,” *Leonardo Electronic Almanac (LEA)* 16. 6-7 (2009): 1-5.

23 “He (Mayuzumi) wrote to Hiroshi Teshigahara to invite Varese but it wasn’t realized since Varese had a grave heart problem. Mayuzumi then investigated the Group Vortex but then changed mind to recommend Cage.” Yūji Takahashi, e-mail message to author, February 23, 2012.

postponing his visit to Japan, as noted in his last surviving letter to Hiroshi Teshigahara (Edgard Varèse to Hiroshi Teshigahara, November 5th 1961). Still, they nevertheless managed to include Varèse's "Ionisation" in the fourth concert of the Composers Group,<sup>24</sup> Hiroyuki Iwaki's *Solo Exhibition*, organized by the Sōgetsu Art Center between March 1960 and April 1962, which is evident from the Center's program.<sup>25</sup> That was one of the first compositions for concert halls, which consisted of a sole percussion ensemble and raised a lot of dust. Teshigahara expressed his sorrows not to be able to bring Varèse to Japan and missing "a rare occasion to present real modern music to the Japanese audience".<sup>26</sup>

Edgard Varèse  
188 Sullivan street  
New York 12. N.Y.  
April 2, 1960

*Dear Mr. Teshigahara,*

*Excuse my long delay in answering your kind letter. I waited first to talk with Mr. Tapié whose visit I was expecting at any moment. Then, just after he left I came down with a severe attack of flu. By this time Mr. Tapié has explained to you why I cannot leave New York this year, and how sorry I am not to be able to participate in your modern music festival in October. It was hard to have to deny myself such a pleasure. I have long wished to visit your beautiful country and to meet your many gifted artists in every field of art. Through tapes and scores (especially of Mayuzumi), through films, sculpture, paintings, articles and a few literary works, I am aware of the intense intellectual and artistic activity in Japan today.*

*However, Mr. Tapié held out hope that my visit could be postponed till 1961. He said he would consult with you and let me know. By that time I shall have finished the composition I am working on at present which was commissioned by the Koussevitsky Foundation in the Library of Congress and which you might like to have performed in Tokyo.*

*My wife and I enjoyed the little visit very much you and your father paid us in New York last year and we too look forward to our next meeting with both of you. Please send him our best wishes, best regards to you and my thanks for your invitation, and for your kind words of esteem.*

*Sincerely,  
Edgard Varèse*

*Figure 5: A letter to Hiroshi Teshigahara (Edgar Varèse, 4/2/1960) excluding P.S. note.*

24 The composers group consisted of 8 composers: Hikaru Hayashi, Tōru Takemitsu, Yoriaki Matsudaira, Moroi Makoto, Yasushi Akutagawa, Michio Mamiya, Toshirō Mayuzumi and Akira Miyoshi; and one conductor: Hiroyuki Iwaki. The group functioned in a form of solo exhibitions, but as the members originally had different styles of composition, they finally broke apart after Miyoshi Akira's separate *Solo exhibition*.

25 For the detailed program see Klara Hrvatin, "Ko bom velik, bom umetnik," *Eksplozivni peskovnik japonske avantgarde* ("When I Grow Up, I Will be an Artist," Japanese Avant-garde's Experimental Sandpit), *Azijske študije* 5.1 (2007): 243–269; *Sōgetsu to Sono Jidai (1945-1970)*, edited by Ashiya Municipal Art Museum, Tchiba City Art Museum, 1998.

26 Hiroshi Teshigahara to Edgard Varèse, November 17<sup>th</sup> 1961.

Hiroshi Teshigahara  
 Sogetsu Art Center  
 3-7, Omote-cho,  
 Akasaka, Minato-ku, Tokyo  
 July 7<sup>th</sup> 1960

*Dear Mr. Varese:*

*I was extremely sorry to learn of your illness. However, I am glad to know that you have completely recovered now and that you are writing a new masterpiece.*

*As already mentioned in my previous letter, a series of recitals by the members of the »New Composers« Group (composed of 8 composers and 1 conductor), which we, the Sogetsu Art Center, are sponsoring every month, have been a great success since its opening.*

*This month's program will feature Mr. Hiroyuki Iwaki, a promising young conductor. In the program your music »Ionisation« will be introduced for the first time here in Japan under the baton of Mr. Iwaki. Other pieces to be played are the works of Oliver Messiaen and Igor Stravinsky. The »Ionisation« will surely create a sensation here, particularly among many people who are very much interested in your work.*

*Knowing that you will visit Japan next year, I am looking forward with great pleasure to meeting you as soon as possible.*

*Please take good care of yourself and send my sincere best wishes to Mrs. Varese.*

*Yours very sincerely,*

*Hiroshi Teshigahara*

*Figure 6: The earliest letter sent to Varèse by Hiroshi Teshigahara from the folder.*

#### **4. Other specific material from the folder**

Specific materials from *Kokusaisakkyokuka Shōtai* worth noting are also translations of the *Vortex* activities from English into Japanese evident from High Fidelity Magazine's article *The music of the Hemispheres* (by Alfred Frankenstein, 5/9/1959) and *Time*'s article *Vortexmen Belson & Jacobs* (2/2/1959). We can as well find the *Vortex* concert programs in English (*Vortex: Folkways Records* (1959), *Vortex 5* (January 1959), *Vortex Presents: a concert of electronic music and non-objective film* (1959)). Among this collected data on *Vortex*, which gives us an insight how the Center was thoroughly studying and collecting information on the group (probably sent to the Center by *Vortex*), are sketches of planning for inviting the *Vortex* group to Japan in Japanese (including guests such as abstract

cinema filmmaker James Whitney, American astronomer Louisa Jenkins<sup>27</sup> and *Vortex*'s visual coordinator Jordan Belson (the sketch also includes the name Marcel Grilli,<sup>28</sup> who was to be asked for assistance in the project).

What might attract attention are as well letters or short messages (telegrams, notes, etc.) written for foreign visiting artists, usually a handwritten note on a white paper or a telegram sheet, undated specifically, signed by Hiroshi Teshigahara. In most cases four to six lines long messages explaining that Sōgetsu Art Center would provide everything for the guests except the transportation costs, and that they would like for the performance to be postponed, while details would be send in the following letter.

Other materials from the folder might not be so important, but they show telegrams as another means of communication with Western artists, specifically in the case of short notices. They also show detailed planning of *Vortex* visits through study of the history and actual activities of the group at that time.

## 5. Conclusions

Interestingly, the *Invitation letters to international composers* give us an insight into the correspondence with the composers and/or musicians who eventually did not pay a visit to the Sōgetsu Art Center despite their intention to do so. In this way they are good indicators of what kind of musicians the Center tended to invite to Japan and give us another clue in the pallet of the muscians who visited the Center. They also tell us that the Center was interested in all kinds of new sound exploitation, technological developments in auditory and visual music and had the tendency to bring all the novelties to the Center. We can assume that in the case of *Vortex* and Edgard Varèse, they probably heard about them already at the Brussels World Fair. In particular, they should have heard about Varèse's *Poem électronique* which echoed in the world of music in 1958.

The actors playing the major role in the international correspondence were the director of the Center, Hiroshi Teshigahara, and the so-called contemporary music plan members of the Center, Toshirō Mayuzumi, Makoto Moroi and Tōru Takemitsu. All of them oversaw the promotion of music at the Center and took care of the international prominence of the Center itself. And we should not forget Sōfu Teshigahara himself, as well as his friendship with curator Michel Tapié, which triggered new acquaintance in the field of music, as we could also read in the letters.

To our surprise, the correspondence in the data-folder was limited only to the above-mentioned composers. It is evident that the data-folder is not complete, or that probably some parts of it were lost. As far as its content is concerned, it is sparse considering the dynamic international activities in inviting artist that the Center was undertaking during the years from 1960 to 1965. Another matter the data-folder makes us think about is that the invitation letters were not the only channels through which the

27 Louisa Jenkins (1888–1970) also taught English in Japan at the Women Christian College and Himeji High School (Hinomoto Gakuen girl's high school).

28 Marcel Grilli (1907–1990) was a music critic in Japan, crucial for cultural exchange between America and Japan.

musical acquaintances spread and made visits of foreign artists possible. As in the case of the Takemitsu letters received from Vortex, they indicated that Takemitsu was undertaking his own search to get in closer contacts with Western musicians, as it was the case of many other composers at the time. Those personal correspondences should be considered and well researched as well, when discussing the Center's invitation-letters correspondence.

The most important figure from the contemporary music plan members of the Center, who was to decide who to invite to the Center, was surely Toshirō Mayuzumi. In the 1960s, he was staying in New York for the New York City Ballet commission. As he was also studying in Paris earlier and was particularly enthusiastic about avant-garde Western music, especially that of Varèse, it was he who wrote to Hiroshi Teshigahara to invite Varèse, but this was not implemented due to Varèse's illness. Mayuzumi would later recommend the Vortex Group, but eventually recommend Cage instead.<sup>29</sup>

The correspondence in relation to John Cage, about whom we expected to find more data from the folder, was also in the hands of Toshi Iciyanagi,<sup>30</sup> who at the time studied with Cage and was the one to introduce his music to Japan. And just to show how the invitations were personal and hard to track, let's mention, for example, the case of Hiroshi Teshigahara's invitation of Jean Erdman Dance Company in 1964; Erdman's husband was the mythologist John Campbell, they both lived in the same building with Cage in the 1940s and collaborated in their work – Cage would write music for Erdman's dance numbers, and learn about Joyce from him.<sup>31</sup>

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29 Yūji Takahashi, e-mail message to author, February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2012.

30 "Latest from Toshi (4 weeks ago) is that you and I are 'almost surely' invited to Japan next spring, 'perhaps in May' (David Tudor to John Cage, October 30<sup>th</sup> 1961)." Martin Iddon, *John Cage and David Tudor: Correspondence on Interpretation and Performance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 134–135.

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## POVZETEK

Poleg japonskih umetnikov so imeli pomemben vpliv na umetniško gibanje Sōgetsu tudi številni tuji umetniki. Najodmevnejši je bil obisk skladatelja Johna Cagea in pianista Davida Tudorja leta 1962 ter gostovanje plesne skupine Jean Erdman s predstavo *The Coach with the Six Insides* leta 1964. Nič manj pomembni niso bili obisk glasbenega teoretika in skladatelja Iannisa Xenakisa, skladatelja Aarona Coplanda, armensko-ameriškega skladatelja Alana Hovhanessa, etnomuzikologa Roberta Garfiasa in drugih. Vzpostavljane neposrednega umetniškega sodelovanja z zahodnimi umetniki, ki je prepleteno z izrazitim namenom Centra po spodbujanju inovativnih japonskih glasbenih del, je postala ena od prepoznavnih lastnosti gibanja. Iz pisem umetnikom, ki so ohranjena v arhivu centra Sōgetsu, v poslopju stavbe Sōgetsu, in oprede-

ljena kot Kokusaisakkyokuka Shōtai (国際作曲家招待, vabila mednarodnim skladateljem) je razvidno, da je Center začel z izvajanjem takšnih aktivnosti že na samem začetku svojega delovanja, v zgodnjih 60-ih letih 20. stoletja. Prek natančnega pregleda in analize teh vabil, ki so jih prejeli tuji umetniki, predvsem glasbeniki in skladatelji, članek nudi prvi vpogled v korespondenco Centra z umetnikom Henryjem Jacobsom iz skupine Vortex in skladateljem Edgarjem Varèsejem ter vpogled v pisma, ki se nanašajo na prej omenjeno korespondenco. Ker njihovi obiski niso bili dokončno izpeljani in tako niso bili vključeni v program Centra, je ta korespondenca posebnega pomena. Nudi nam dodaten delček v mozaiku značilnosti glasbe, ki je gostovala v Centru. Prav tako članek razodeva mednarodno prepoznavnost Centra in identificira odgovorne figure pri mednarodnih stikih, kot so Toshirō Mazuyumi, Hiroshi Teshigahara in Tōru Takemitsu.