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ciously, intertwine, transform or fade back into the thick nothingness. Gibbs and Koenigsberg are both Bay Area transplants now, while Opie hangs out in Pittsburgh, sustaining involvement with the mightily hip radio station WRCT. Said station has compiled a 7" single

including Ben's Sun Ra tribute, and he also has a nifty 45 r.p.m. spinner of his band Watershed that will delight Improvcore fiends. Write Ben at 1619 Beechwood Blvd., Pittsburgh, PA. 15217 for a copy of this cassette - truly one of the most enjoyable of its type. *

-Myles Boisen

Tamio Shiraishi

For the past year, Bay Area and New York audiences were treated to the occasional performances of Japanese improviser Tamio Shiraishi. Tamio was sent to the United States by the software company he works for, but he did bring his favorite saxophone mouthpiece. Later he picked up the rest of a saxophone in New York. Tamio is best known in Tokyo for his solo performances which are stark; extremely dynamic, from silence to a saxophone tone that can only be fully appreciated when it is distorting the inner ear; and carefully paced. With the exception of one solo show in New York, during this visit to the United States he mostly

in these days I am very interested in Japanese traditions.

We Japanese have sometimes a kind of extremes, you know, a kind of...for example kamikaze suicide...a kind of crazy. Perhaps it is just opposite sides of Japanese tradition; as a farmer, as a peasant. Very difficult to explain in English.... Also I like a kind of *zazen*. Of course...I have no experience through *zazen*, but in that time, when I do *zazen*, very static mind and very high tension is both together at the same time. I think that is main theme of *zazen*.

It may not be good things, but I easy to use oriental words, oriental legacy, for example *zazen*; very easy to explain to especially to Americans people. But it may be little bit different, actually. But I feel, I worry: it is true or not?

Interview by Michael Gendreau

MG: Because it is too simple? Reductionist?

TS: Yes, too simple. We Japanese nowadays are very industrialized, almost the same as European, same as American people, I think. But I wonder: I really recognize those kind of things compared to you? I am Japanese so I can use that words [*zazen*] very easily. But anyway, these several years I very interested in those kind of ideologies.

MG: What criteria do you use to make a judgement on whether or not you like an improvisation (or any music) or not—either your or someone else's?

TS: I think not the style of the playing, but the player's mind: If I can feel his

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mind or her mind, it's good. I like many variety of music, for example...yes...I like, for example, punk rock also and a kind of folk music, a kind of very old folk music, very quiet sound. I don't like the recording to listen, recordings or CD. I prefer live. Of course I can not hear every people so sometimes I listen with record or CD. But it is a...next...second way...the best is to see direct, feel his or her mind. So, it is my criteria.

MG: To me, your methods are very distinct and very stylistic, especially marked by a very large dynamic range and few materials. Do you have theories or reasons for choosing these methods?

TS: At first reason is, over 10 years ago I played with, not a punk rock group, but a kind of rock group, and they played very noisy, very very noisy. So when I start on saxophone it's very difficult...to play loud enough. Usually without a microphone, I can not listen to the audience my own sounds [the audience can not hear me]. I gradually select only that high tone. It is very useful, however other guys play loud, I can send my sound to audience, *however* loud they play.

MG: But now even when you play solo you use that sound.

TS: 3 days ago I said to you and I went to that...Black's Beach [in San Diego with Crash Worship], and I played there; when I played outside, I think it's kind of quiet and clear, I think. But when I play in a room or in a concert hall, it may sound very noisy, but when I play that

song outside, I think it's not noisy.

MG: And now you also use piano and voice.

TS: Yes, yes. I think I...when I use new instruments, for example guitar or xylophone, or Japanese koto, or...anyway, if I use new instrument, I have one pattern to those instrument, one method to play. That is, when I sing a song, I use one pattern: I use a very low voice. When I play piano, I play a kind of very quietly. Also I play koto, I may be quiet, I'm not sure.

MG: When did you learn those songs that you sing?

TS: ...very cheap cassette tape, 10-pack, \$15, or something very cheap, of Japanese old traditional folk music. Actually, I listen those kind of tapes and imitate. It is in case of old folk songs. Actually, in Shinjuku [an area in Tokyo that Tamio compares to the Tenderloin in San Francisco], very many pubs there, perhaps most in Tokyo, and mainly a kind of casual pub. So, one

area in Shinjuku I always went there, there a kind of guitar player, background guitar player. And he played...that is original of karaoke. And the drinking persons sing a song with back music of his. He called nagashi; nagashi is a kind of wandering, crawling around the pub-bars area. Anyway, I sing.. often I sing song with guitar player, a kind of Japanese enka. That is my practice. But I sing a kind of extreme, more low voice.

MG: Can you comment on the psychological state you have just before performing?

TS: Yes, actually, yes. To mind, a kind of...I think, for example, short distance runner, not long-distance runner...for

example 100 meters olympic player, 100 meter runner, maybe the most important is concentration. 10 seconds means a gold medal or lost everything. And I heard a story one Japanese woman short-distance runner...concentrates her mind one or two days before; she cannot speak very well...It's a kind of extreme but I like those kind of mind states. But in the United States it's a kind of more casual. For me it's a very good experience. That's because, in Japan: just only concentration. It means also...it has its pros and cons. As a concept it's kind of conservative. No flexibility.

MG: Dan Plonsey gave me some questions that I would like to ask you. What is your reaction when people put their fingers in their ears when you play?

TS: Actually, I asked those similar kind of questions in New York and I answered, "My tone can reach the audience if he shuts his ears." My sound is kind of very special; so if you close your ears, I think you still hear my song, my sound. At that time I answered, "I will deliver whether he close ear or not." Deliver music.

MG: Dan also wanted me to ask you about the different mouth-pieces and reeds you use.

TS: O.K. O.K. Different type mouth piece I can play a little bit. Other reasons, the reed: I like dry reed. Usually after playing the reed get wet.

MG: Oh, that is why you change them so often.

TS: Yes, yes. The third reason is, I bite, so I sometimes break the reed.

MG: And you use very high number reeds?

TS: Oh yes, high number. And, actually, last week, no, ten days ago, I found #5 reed, in New York. But perhaps I cannot find in Tokyo.

MG: Is there anything else that you want to talk about; something I didn't ask you?

TS: ...For me in United States, very many people do play avant garde, its very nice. In Japan we have very few. And they are far more younger than me so when I play reed then...almost every people, just following me. But here, the people who play with me, never follow me. That's a great thing for me. I think it's better...for example: I and you play, it's a kind of conversation. My sound may be louder than you, but, anyway, it's a kind of conversation. *

Tamio Shiraishi can be contacted in Tokyo at: Dai-2-Akebono-So #25, Asagaya-kita 2-8-17, Suginami Tokyo, Japan. Video tape of his performances are distributed by: Denshi-Hoshigumi, 1-10-23 Takada-No-Baba, Shinjuku-Ku, Tokyo, Japan.

But here, the people who play with me, never follow me. That's a great thing...



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