

Designing Nature, Designing Japan

The Rinpa aesthetic in Japanese art

Tango at the End of Winter

Shimizu Kunio's melancholy masterpiece on stage

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New Reviews

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An Interview with Ueda Lisa

Interview by Mike Sullivan

Ueda Lisa is the kind of person who lights up rooms and who immediately makes you feel at ease, within a few minutes of speaking with her you feel as if she is an old friend; it is a talent which surely has been honed by the busy lifestyle of being a musician. She has benefited from an international education which included study at the prestigious Royal Academy of Music and has also performed internationally. In addition as part of the Ueda/Rinaldo Duo with Daniele Rinaldo she has an upcoming concert at Wigmore Hall which will be followed soon after with a tour in Japan.

Despite a busy schedule this charming and talented young lady sat down with us for a little chat.

Please introduce yourself and your education in both Japan and the UK.

My name is Lisa Ueda; I work regularly in Europe and Asia as a solo violinist and recitalist. I was born in northern Osaka, my education started at Kyoto International School, and this was followed soon after at Osaka International School, where I obtained the IB Bilingual Diploma.

I came to the UK to study at the Royal Academy of Music as an ABRSM International Scholar, and completed both my BMus and MA there.

I believe my upbringing has helped me both feel at home in a diverse, multicultural city as London, and also feel comfortable travelling anywhere due to the nature of my profession.

Can you tell us about your upcoming concert at Wigmore Hall?

The Wigmore Hall is a leading international recital venue and is an essential platform for the world's most sought-after soloists and chamber musicians. Soon after I arrived in the UK, my next goal was to one day perform at the Wigmore. Again, at that time, I thought this could be an impossible aspiration, and on one of my first visits, I took a picture in front of it! As I will be



performing there on Sunday 12 April, I am wondering where I should take my next picture...

What will you play at this concert?

We have an exciting programme ready – the outer pieces of the recital, sonatas by Janacek and Respighi, are absolute masterpieces written in the same period 1914-1916. Janacek's work is about the First World War, where you will experience gripping tension, sad nostalgia of the past, mixed with sounds imitating flying bombshells; and the Respighi is energetic, and quite possibly one of the most passionate pieces I have played! The recital culminates in a striking passacaglia in which the themes and motives of the entire work, constantly exchanged between violin and piano, are masterfully interwoven.

Sandwiched between these two late-Romantic pieces is the world première of Robert Matthew-Walker's second Sonata, and Mozart's gloriously lyrical B-flat Major Sonata, whose operatic character acts as a moment of rest from the excitement and intensity of the outer parts of the evening.

What was the trigger to study music?

At age 4, I said to my mum that I would like to learn the violin, flute, and the harp – to which she answered "Hmmm... Shall we start with one, Lisa?" and I immediately decided on the violin. To this day, I have not yet had my flute and harp lessons...!

Why did you choose to study at the Royal Academy of Music in London?

At age 16 on an International Honour Orchestra trip, we visited London and we convinced our teacher

to visit the RAM. At the time, I felt the RAM was 'up in the clouds' for me, and that I would never make it here again. So I asked my friend to take a photo of me on the front steps! The RAM has so much history and profile, so I thought the world had gone upside down when I heard I was accepted with a full scholarship!

How did the Ueda/Rinaldo Duo start?

We are most grateful to Michael Dussek, a renowned pianist and professor at the RAM, who suggested we play together. Daniele and I are complete polar opposites; and he knew that we would create a musical equilibrium between ourselves. I am convinced that if he hadn't put us in touch, we most probably would not have met.

I understand that you play on a violin which dates

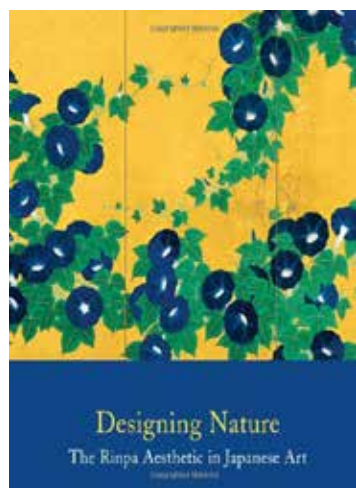


back to 1596, how does it feel to hold such a piece of history in your hands?

I am very fortunate to be able to play on a 1596 Brothers Amati violin which has been kindly loaned to me from Filippo Protani Violins. If I were to put a character to it, I think she is on the feminine spectrum, a wise granny – someone who has seen and lived the world, with a constant twinkle in her eyes. Her voice has a glorious shimmer and eloquence, Although she definitely knows when to ‘put on the trousers.’ Indeed, it is a piece of history – and I believe our duty today is to make sure these instruments get passed on through the many generations, and continue to touch the hearts of many audiences to come.

What is your favourite thing about Japan, and about the UK?

My favourite thing about Japan is first and foremost, my family. It is where I come from, and I adore Japanese traditions. The UK has seen me grow as an adult, and has given me the opportunities to become the artist I am today. §



Designing Nature: The Rinpa Aesthetic in Japanese Art

by John T. Carpenter

The Metropolitan
Museum of Art, New York
2012

ISBN: 978-1-58839-471-2

Review by Hugh Cortazzi

The Rinpa school was a key part of the Edo period revival of interest

in indigenous Japanese artistic interests described by the term *yamato-e*. Paintings, textiles, ceramics, and lacquer-wares were decorated by Rinpa artists with vibrant colours applied in a highly decorative and patterned manner. Their work often contained evocative references to nature and the seasons, and favoured scenes were drawn from Japanese literature, notably *The Tale of Genji*, *The Tales of Ise*, and Heian-period poems composed by courtiers.

This catalogue was published in conjunction with the exhibition ‘Designing Nature: The Rinpa Aesthetic in Japanese Art’ at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York from May 2012 to January 2013. It is, however, much more than a finely produced catalogue, and introduces some of the most colourful paintings and artefacts of Edo Japan.

The book begins with a history of the Rinpa school before and after Ogata Kōrin (尾形 光琳 – 1658–1716).¹ John Carpenter suggests that ‘The highly stylized

representation of landscape in early medieval Japanese paintings [...] can be seen as anticipation of Rinpa’.

Tawaraya Sōtatsu (俵屋 宗達 d. ca. 1640) and his circle ‘drew inspiration from the rich tradition of earlier *yamato-e*’ in paintings of artists in both the Tosa and Kanō traditions.

Sōtatsu’s circle produced *shikishi* (poem cards) based on *The Tale of Genji* and *The Tales of Ise*. The below is a painting by Sōtatsu of a scene from the latter.

Carpenter goes on to discuss the flowering of Rinpa and the masterpieces of Ogata Kōrin as well as the works of his brother Ogata Kenzan (尾形 乾山, 1663–1743) and his circle, who applied the Rinpa style to ceramics. Two screens of irises by Kōrin were in the exhibition and reproductions are included, but readers of this review are likely to have seen many reproductions of these masterpieces and may instead or in addition also enjoy this painting by Kōrin of a ‘tiger’ (overleaf) although it lacks the striking colours for which Kōrin became so famous.

Among the many artists who continued in the styles, which Kōrin had made so famous, the name of Sakai Hōitsu (酒井 抱一, 1761-1828) stands out. I have always admired Japanese paintings of birds and this one overleaf of ducks in flight by him seemed to me both life-like and imaginative.

Carpenter describes and illustrates the various subjects, which Rinpa painters chose. In addition to illustrating traditional Japanese tales, they portrayed poets and sages, but as became Japanese painters, in whose tradition the depiction of nature was a key element,



Tawaraya Sōtatsu, scene from Tales of Ise



Ogata Kōrin, 'Tiger and Bamboo'

they excelled in depicting birds, trees and flowers. The Japanese, as befits an island country, have an affinity with the sea and the Rinpa painters were particularly adept at depicting waves. Their stylized wave designs had a particular and understandable appeal to the makers of Japanese kimono who were based in Kyoto. Many of these designs inspired western artists and seem strikingly modern.

The Rinpa painters inspired the Japanese artists who resisted the pressures of westernization and the development of *yoga* (western style painting) and



Sakai Hōitsu

produced pictures which kept alive Japanese traditional styles in *Nihonga* (Japanese style paintings). As Carpenter points out, the influence of Rinpa can still be seen in many modern designs.

Anyone interested in the history of Japanese art or in Japanese design and depiction of nature should buy a copy of this catalogue while it is still in print and readily available.

Notes

1. Ogata Kōrin (尾形 光琳 – 1658–1716) and his brother Kenzan (尾形 乾山, 1663–1743) were members of a Kyoto family of textile merchants that

serviced samurai, some nobility as well as city dwellers. The family was distantly related to Hon'ami Kōetsu (本阿弥 光悦 1558–1637). The Ogata family owned a number of objects made by Tawaraya Sōtatsu (俵屋 宗達 d. ca. 1640) and Kōetsu, which Kōrin meticulously studied. Working in vivid colours or ink monochrome, often on a gold ground, this prolific and versatile artist developed a painting style which was more abstracted and simplified than the works of his predecessors. Kōrin used decorative and bold designs not just to ornament paintings but also for textiles, lacquer-wares and ceramics. Transmitted by means of pattern books and manuals, the work of the Ogata brothers inspired numerous other craftsmen. §

Masterpieces of Artisanal Japan: Wazuka tea and Ogatsu inkstones

Daiwa Foundation, 11th February 2015

Review by Mike Sullivan

Every year the Daiwa Foundation hosts a number of events on Japan, and recently this included a talk on Wazuka tea and Ogatsu inkstones with contributors Timothy d'Offay, Teruo Kurosaki and Timothy Toomey. For those who couldn't attend the talk, they helpfully stream their events online.

Although the link between Wazuka tea and Ogatsu inkstones might not be obvious, in fact traditional teahouses normally display calligraphy scrolls on their walls. So normally people enjoy both tea and calligraphy at the same time, and the cornerstone to beautiful calligraphy is an inkstone. It is quite interesting how the experience of enjoying tea and writing kanji characters follow on almost parallel lines. One of the event assistants explained how the colour and texture of the ink depends on how long one spends on creating the ink with the inkstone. If one spends twenty minutes on just preparing the ink they can relax, they can smell the ink and they can clear their minds. For tea to be properly enjoyed one must take time to make the tea, to smell it, to see its texture and at the same time clear one's mind.

The first hour of the event encompassed speeches from both Timothy and Teruo on their respective areas. Teruo Kurosaki is the founder of *Idée*, a Tokyo furniture and interior company, but since 2002 he has focused his attention on the support of traditional Japanese craft and culture. He has become involved in a project to revitalise the industry of Ogatsu inkstones. He explained how before the 2011 earthquake and tsunami 90% of all inkstones came from Ogatsu, and over 200 people were working on the production of them. The tsunami destroyed the workshops and dealt a near fatal blow to a traditional craft with over 600 years of history. Today only four people are left who are

still working on inkstones in Ogatsu. Teruo described his project as being pretty much a new start as they have to bring back together craftspeople, and begin a new culture of inkstone production. Alongside this they are trying to revive traditional calligraphy as it is meant to be, not just drawing kanji characters but also creating your own ink with a proper inkstone. With no notes Teruo enthralled us for over twenty minutes with his knowledge of this craft, but despite his passion for Ogatsu inkstones it is clear that there is a long and hard road ahead.

An interesting and laudable achievement that he has achieved is to get young designers and sculptors to reimagine the concept of an inkstone. The results of their work have been on exhibition in Japan and were also exhibited in the Daiwa Foundation Japan House on the same evening.

Timothy d'Offay is the co-author of *The World Atlas of Tea*, which is to be published in English and French in 2016, and has a shop called Postcard Teas. In his talk he took us on a journey into the world of small scale tea farming in Japan, and the challenges it faces. Apart from obvious issues such as the lack of interest of young people in farming, which means that many

tea farmers are quite elderly, there are other serious problems which most people might not even realise. For example, one can find ready-made tea in pretty much every shop or vending machine, but these are made from low quality tea with no consideration for where the tea came from. As these teas are generally made by big companies they have a lot of power in selecting the tea they use, and how much they are willing to pay for it. As consumers it is apparent that to a certain degree we have lost a little respect for tea when we buy these mass produced ready-made versions. Timothy also talked about what some farms are doing to bring back interest to their tea such as starting blogs, which at the moment are mostly in Japanese, including one particular farmer who invites international interns. One suggestion that he had was that local associations of tea makers could try to make their own version of a ready-made tea, but one showing where the tea had come from, and which would be a better tea than the mass produced ones.

After the talks we were invited downstairs to enjoy freshly brewed Wazuka tea, admire the handiwork of the Ogatsu inkstone designers and marvel at the work of a young calligrapher from Japan. §



Tango at the End of Winter at Richmix

Shimizu Kunio, Directed by Annabelle Sami

Cast: Liam Anderson, Bruno Cooke, Anissa Eckhoff, Paulina Musayev, Ari Rice, Annabelle Sami, Peter Walker, Sarah Suzuki, Jasmine Gould-Wilson.

Friday 9 January 2015

Review by Susan Meehan

A seemingly bright young actor on the cusp; squaring up to middle-age dementia, loss and angst he decides to abandon his career. He is reluctant to grow old and is still firmly set in his belief that the beautiful die young, stubbornly withdrawing into memories of his youth.

Sound contradictory? That is what you get when a fresh-faced university drama group bravely take on an unusual challenging play, with mature roles. Shimizu Kunio's 1984 masterpiece, *Tango at the End of Winter* touches on loss and decay but with a light touch, deft accessible dialogue and ample humour.

The play's setting is a decrepit family-run cinema in a small northern town on the Sea of Japan coast, soon to be turned into a supermarket. It is here that we encounter Sei, a middle-aged actor, who like the cinema, is all washed up.

Sei's mental deterioration is palpable. He has to rack his brain before recognising his brother, Shigeo, and thinks his wife, Gin, is his sister, who in fact died years earlier.

The play speedily charts Sei's demise over three years. Gin, his wife, initially optimistic, begins to lose hope that he will ever get better.

Beautiful Mizuo, an actress from Tokyo, who performed in plays with Sei, has been summoned to pay him a visit. He appears not to recognise her and to think she has come to see a film at the cinema.

Mizuo eventually reveals to him that she is an actress and that they have worked together. When they first met, Sei's advice to her was that as an actress she should not to live too long and that she ought to have an all-consuming love affair. Does Sei really not recognise her? Can he be feigning?

Three years ago she did have a love affair with a fellow actor, but is certain that this had been contrived by the actor's wife in order to restore his brilliance and sparkle— it was all an elaborate act that lasted three months. Mizuo is enraged just by remembering this duplicity.

Having been summoned to the cinema Mizuo once again feels she is being used to make Sei better.

The second half of the play, staged by the Queen Mary University Theatre Company at the Rich Mix, unfolded with greater theatricality and at a faster pace than the first, cantering swiftly to its denouement. Sei continues



Photo by Toby Jones, courtesy of QMTC

to be delusional, hears voices and remembers a peacock that he had stolen as a child.

Ironically he considers Mizuo to be batty, but in her 'madness' he perceives a strange sparkle. It is apparent that this sparkle attracts him and an intensity between the two emerges, skilfully and credibly played by the two actors, Liam Anderson and Paulina Musayev.

There is also more humour in the second half. Ren, Mizuo's husband, a nervous wreck threatened and tormented by the evolving affinity between Mizuo and Sei, obsessively gorges on food. It was funny to watch this spectacularly hammed up by Peter Walker.

By the close of the play, Sei is totally deranged, and the ending is both bold and surprising. In the aftermath, Gin surveys the cinema, leaves and says it is beautiful and sad.

What is she referring to? The cinema in particular, youth, or life in general?

The play is replete with the blurring of illusion and reality as all characters, not just Sei, struggle with identity issues. Shigeo has to deal with the unexpected responsibility of having had to take over the family cinema as Sei, the eldest brother, had decided to become an actor and their other elder siblings died. Mizuo has to deal with Sei's unrecognition, Gin is confused by Sei treating her as his sister – is this a convenient tactic of his – and Ren wonders how much Mizuo really loves him. Even the cinema has to face the indignity of extinction in favour of a more commercially viable supermarket.

The theatre critic John K Gillespie talks about Shimizu Kunio being a child of the American Occupation (1945-1952) and grappling with the change in Japan's identity after the war in his book *Alternative Japanese Drama, Ten Plays*, (edited by Robert T Rolf and John K Gillespie, University of Hawaii Press, 1992, p 116). This theme of identity is strongly portrayed in Annabelle Sami's production.

The Queen Mary Theatre Company, directed on this occasion by Annabelle Sami did an excellent job of

staging the play and of giving it a Japanese flavour by using words in Japanese throughout such as 'konnichiwa', 'yamete', 'obasan' and 'otoko'. Sami knew she wasn't going to get an all-Japanese cast but with the mix of accents and nationalities was able to create a sense of 'otherness'.

All credit goes to Liam Anderson as Kiyomura Sei who played this most challenging part with great versatility and nuance. Annabelle Sami as Kiyomura Gin also put in a striking performance as a wife and actress doing all she can to bring her husband back to normality. She also did a fine act of directing. Paulina Musayev was perfectly cast as the beautiful young starlet, Mizuo. The use of Japanese mannerisms and the occasional Japanese words as well as Sami's choice of a range of international actors also gave the play a non-British, almost Japanese quality – a tremendous achievement.

Most striking was that such young actors could play roles designed for much older thespians with considerable aplomb. Lines were fluffed on a couple of occasions and there were a couple of wardrobe malfunctions but nothing that could not have happened to any cast on its first/only performance at the Rich Mix. I look forward to their next performance.

The playwright and director Shimizu Kunio was born in Niigata in 1936 and studied drama at Waseda University. He has won a number of Japanese drama awards and has collaborated with fellow director, Ninagawa Yukio. Tango at the End of Winter was first performed in 1984. Its first performance in London was in 1991, directed by Ninagawa Yukio and featuring Alan Rickman as the main lead, Kiyomura Sei.

Below follows an interview with Annabelle Sami conducted on 12 January 2015:



Who chose to put on this play and why?

I chose to put on the play. I suppose the main reason for choosing *Tango* is that I love Japan and I love theatre, but realised that I had never seen a Japanese play performed in the UK. The theatre company were holding a festival to put on contemporary plays so I thought it a good opportunity to look up some contemporary Japanese theatre. There were two

Shimizu plays that I came across English scripts for but this play really appealed to me with its exciting narrative and interesting characters. I also liked the fact that the women characters in the play were very complex and had interesting storylines.

Has the Queen Mary Theatre Company put on other Japanese plays in the past?

Last term QMTC staged an adaptation of Akira Kurosawa's 'Rashomon'. The stage adaptation of classic Japanese films is something we will continue to explore in the future.

Other than adaptations of classic Japanese films, do you have plans to stage other types Japanese plays?

Personally, I very much want to stage more Japanese plays, the difficulty of course is that not many are translated into English. I am currently learning Japanese but am nowhere near able enough to translate them myself! But I think that plays are a brilliant way to show audiences who may have little experience of Japanese culture, insights (although dramatized) into Japanese life.

Will you perform this play again? It was on for just one day at Rich Mix but has it had a longer run elsewhere?

We performed this play once in November 2014 at Queen Mary University, and then were asked to perform again at Rich Mix. Although we would love to perform it again, I am a student and therefore have very limited funds to try and put it on elsewhere! I'm also very keen to discover new Japanese plays and put them on.

Who helped with the Japanese pronunciation of words such as 'konnichiwa', 'obasan', 'otoko', 'yamete' which were used in the play and with how to bow?

I have long been interested in Japan, hosted Japanese students and got to go on an exchange to Hiroshima in 2010 so I am aware of certain pronunciations and small phrases. As I said I'm also learning Japanese but still very much a beginner!

We also had great help from Anissa, who played Hanna, as she grew up in Japan and so we had mini workshops working on the etiquette of bowing and language.

I thought as we were already performing the play in English, it was important to try and retain some of the 'Japanese' in it, and hopefully show respect to the culture through not entirely westernising the play.

What do you feel is distinctively Japanese about this play?

Aside from the obvious inclusions of Japanese names and allusions to the Sea of Japan and apples from Aomori, what I found distinctively Japanese about the play was the writing. Although of course it has been translated and adapted I found much of the language very light and beautiful, something that I recognise

in other Japanese writers that I have read. Particularly the image of snow and blossom reminded me a lot of *Snow Country* by Yasunari Kawabata. I know this is just my personal interpretation, but I do find this style of writing distinctively Japanese. It's sort of beautifully descriptive but in an economical way – I think Murakami has this quality too.

What do you think the play is trying to say?

I think the play is trying to tell us many things, but the main theme I focused on was the real and the represented. This is why I liked the idea of shadows, because I think they fall somewhere in between, caused by something real but only showing the representation of it. There is so much blurring between reality and fiction in the play that sometimes it is difficult to know whether characters are speaking or quoting. They all seem to be 'pretending' in some way – Sei constantly flits between roles from his past, Gin pretends to be a sister and a wife (while orchestrating fake affairs), Mizuo pretends to love Ren – and of course this is all happening under the incredibly metatheatrical truth that we are all acting in a play. I think Shimizu is trying to tell us that characters and acting are not something restricted to the cinema, or the theatre, but something we all play in real life.

Can you tell me a little about your company? Are you all students? How long do actors tend to stay with Queen Mary Theatre Company?

Queen Mary Theatre Company changes its committee every year, but is always run by students. They hold festivals throughout the term where students can pitch plays to put on which are then voted in or not. I

pitched *Tango* and as it was chosen to be in the festival I could then audition actors etc. who must all be part of the university and society. How long actors stay with the company depends on if they continue to audition for plays and if you stay involved with pitching ideas and such. But in general it is very low pressure and good if you are like me and enjoy directing but also performing!

Have you directed before?

I have always been involved in performance and I study drama but I have never directed before – this is my first show! I really enjoyed directing and will definitely continue. Unfortunately one of my actors had to fly to America and another Hong Kong so I ended up last minute taking the role of Gin and the other role was filled by Anissa.

Name one of your favourite actors, play, and playwright?

I don't know if I could name a favourite actor or play, but a performance that I'll never forget is Apphia Campbell's *Black is the Color of My Voice* which she wrote and performed in. In terms of playwrights I, of course, really like Kunio Shimizu, and also more classic playwrights like Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams.

What will you do next?

I am hoping to create a piece that uses Kabuki theatre in form and history as its inspiration and set it in London. Aside from this I am going to continue seeking out Japanese writing to showcase in London as I believe it's a wonderful way to form cultural links between our countries.

Japan Society Publications: Call for Proposals

The Japan Society has long engaged in the publication of books which further the UK-Japan relationship and / or the understanding of Japan in the UK. These have included works produced or commissioned by the Society, as well as those which have been initiated by others and published under the Japan Society imprint.

As a general rule, the Japan Society aims to issue one publication each year and is now inviting proposals for future projects. We welcome proposals for books of any genre, including, but not limited to, academic works, guides, children's books and translations of works in Japanese. The only criteria are that proposed publications should further the aims of the Japan Society as set out on the 'About' page of our website, should represent quality in their field, and must be of interest to more than specialist scholars.

Further details on how to apply: japansociety.org.uk/38450/call-for-proposals/

All expressions of interest will be considered by the Publications Committee in April each year, and those selected will then be presented to the Board for final approval.

