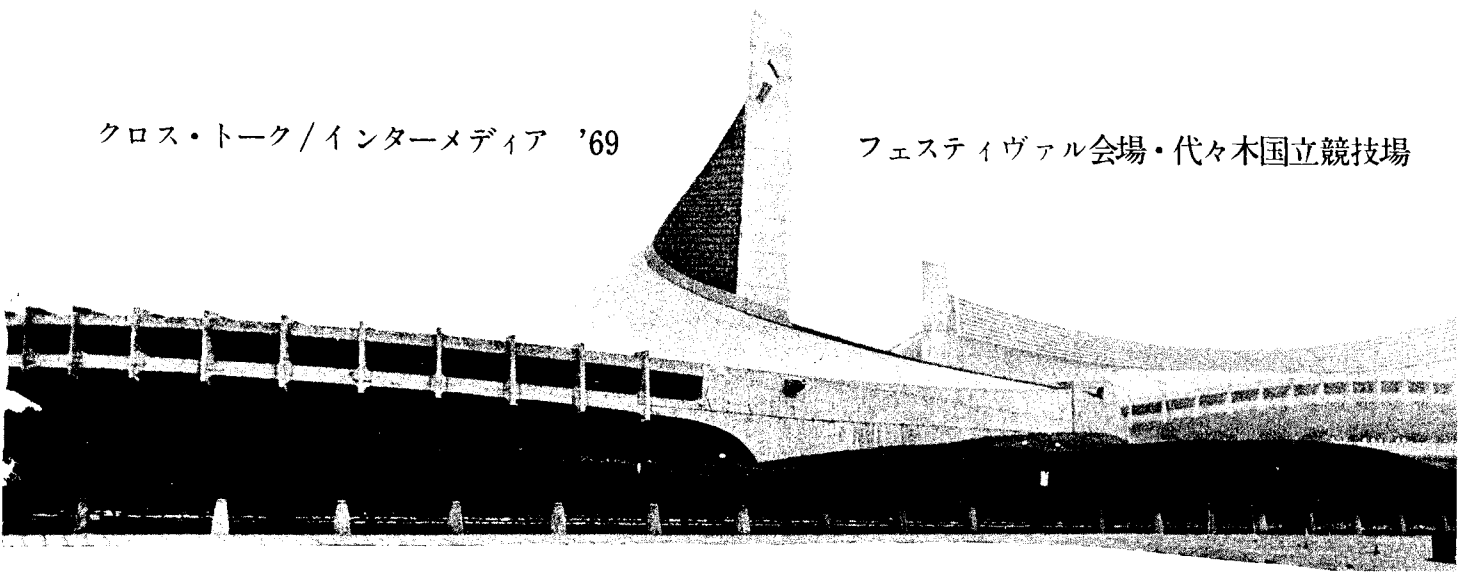


INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

クロス・トーク/インターメディア '69

フェスティバル会場・代々木国立競技場



RR-20

Cross Talk Intermedia I

10 May 1969

28 Uguisudani-machi
Shibuya-ku, Tokyo

Mr. Richard Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
535 Fifth Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10017

Dear Dick:

When he learned that we were going to live in Japan, Yuji Takahashi was blunt. "If you want to hear interesting concerts," he said, "You'll have to give them yourselves." This seemed uncharitable, considering what we had heard about the avant garde arts in Japan, but we had learned to respect his views. Our first winter in Tokyo more than bore out Takahashi's gloomy prediction. While concert activity is intense, its repetitious and restrictive repertoire is intolerable. Almost no orchestral program appears without including at least one (and frequently more) works from a list of wearying requisites: Brahms' Symphony No. 1, Beethoven's Symphonies 5 and 7, Moussorgsky's Pictures At an Exhibition, the Dvorak "New World" Symphony, and, strangely, The Rite (in Japan, seemingly, "right") of Spring, by Stravinsky. During December of each year, there is another rite: Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is treated to between 15 and 20 reverent renderings. Akeo Watanabe, in his ten years with the Japan Philharmonic, gave consistently varied programs. Hiroshi Wakasugi has done some admirable single-shot projects, but these two examples are as atypical as they are welcome. Watanabe has apparently paid the price of his quiet and individual approach, and is now living in Switzerland.

Though Japanese orchestras, under native conductors and some of the frequent foreign guests, occasionally achieve a truly satisfying level of performance, the individual musicians - particularly wind players - are not, generally speaking, of the calibre that produces rewarding chamber music playing. This inadequacy is even more crippling in the case of contemporary works than with classics. Time is another factor. There is no musician's union in Japan, though the monolithic NHK does have a ranking system that determines pay scale for work it requires. The professional is forced into an extremely tight and active schedule to make an adequate living. Rehearsal for new music invariably finds itself relegated to the few breaks in overburdened schedules, and not infrequently begins at 11:00 pm or after. It is true almost everywhere that contemporary music suffers from poorly planned and underrehearsed presentations, but this is particularly so in Japan. In addition, there seemed to us no sense of style in contemporary productions here (with the single very significant exception of the two "Orchestral Space" festivals organized on alternate years by composers Toru Takemitsu and Toshi Ichihyanagi). What was appropriate, we thought, would be a modest series of events in which the quality of programming, performance, and presentation (programs, lighting, etc.) was uniformly high.

As these thoughts were forming, we happened to meet Donald Albright, the director of the American Cultural Center in Tokyo. Having heard that Karen was a flutist, he asked if she were interested in giving some solo recitals at the Center. She replied that she enjoyed playing ensemble music, particularly contemporary, and would be glad to do something of that sort. Joining the conversation at that point, I brought up the suggestion of a series of concerts devoted to contemporary American and Japanese music. Albright, very knowledgeable in contemporary art, was responsive and set about trying to raise a modest budget. The basic agreement was that Karen and I would have control over the content of programs and presentation, and apparently the USIS personnel involved were willing to gamble a small amount of money on the chance that something lively might happen. This all took place during the summer of 1967, when we had already made a few friends among the Japanese musicians whose work we respected. Takemitsu and Ichihyanagi were involved in "Orchestral Space," so we turned to composer Joji Yuasa, and critic Kuniharu Akiyama. Both had been members of an important Japanese group which began in the '50s ("The Experimental Workshop") and both had strong personal motivation. Karen christened the project CROSS TALK, and we all got to work.

The USIS set aside for the first season (1967-68) the luxurious sum of \$1500. As a result, everything was done on the basis of what I euphemistically called "cooperation." The results of impassioned bilingual pleas was an astonishing and bracing amount of hard work on the part of performers who believed that the aims described were indeed important. Three formal concerts were presented and each was preceded by an open rehearsal where young performers and composers could come, listen, ask questions, and then hear a work played again.

Attendance at these sessions was, as one might imagine in a country with so slight a tradition of public dissent, small; but it was by no means discouraging. Before the season ended, there had been some remarkably candid exchanges at open rehearsals, and the phenomenon itself was widely written up. All events, including extra activities such as the 18-hour marathon piano piece of Erik Satie, Vexations, were free to the public. All were well attended.

In planning the series and defending the proposal to the Embassy, our attitude was always that the series should be rigorously progressive. We did not want to give a series of concerts in the normal mode, but to change the format and content for each event, exploring some new facet of contemporary experimentalism each time. At the same time we had to behave just well enough to retain Embassy support. Beginning with the first performances of Charles Ives' instrumental music done in Japan, CROSS TALK ended its season with a concert that involved musicians placed in the audience, film, projections, and a touch of theater. The effort exhausted everyone and severely strained relations between the Americans and Japanese who worked on the project. This was primarily because insufficient funds forced us all to do for ourselves a great deal more than we ought to have, but also because of the different approach to problems and goals in Japan.

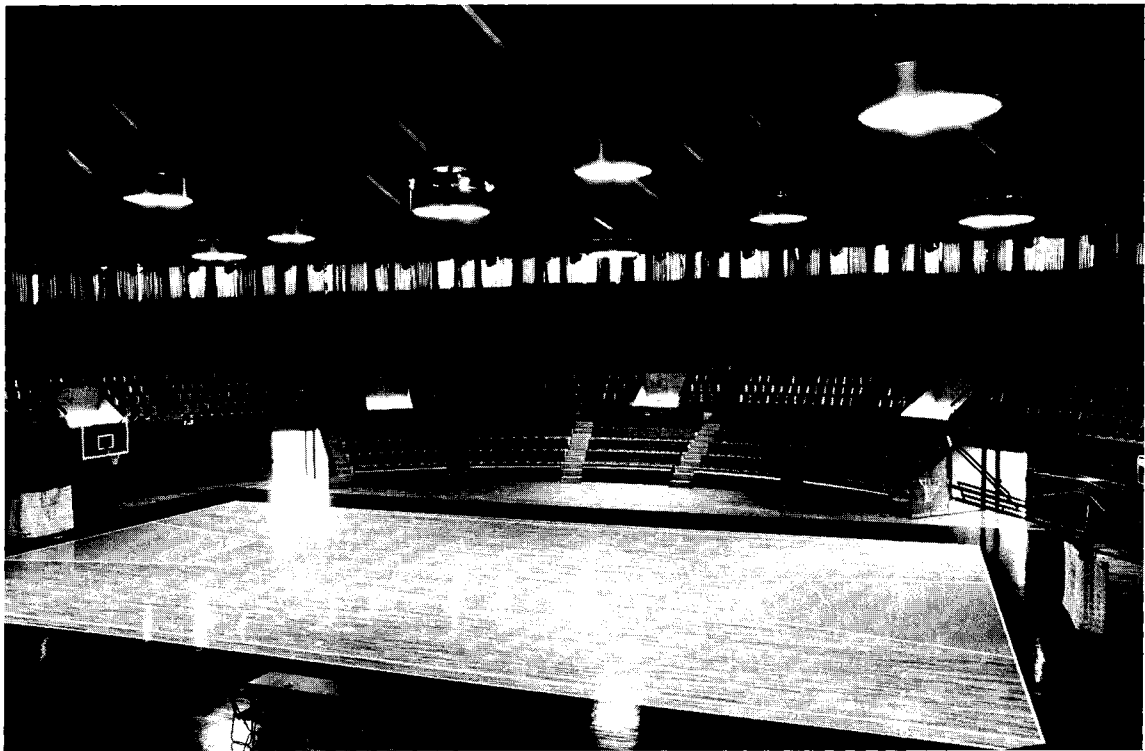
If an American is making plans, he will probably decide at the outset what his goal is. Methods and efforts will then be directed toward realizing the goal - the value of which has already been determined. Generalization is shabby but necessary sometimes as a substitute for the gradual somewhat diffuse realization that comes with extensive experience. With that qualification, I'll venture the opinion that the Japanese see goals as far less specific, more "wishful" than we do. Once a process is in motion, it is allowed to go in the direction that seems most natural. By "allowed" I mean to say that the idiosyncracies of the processes themselves are easily tolerated. There is less concern with the ultimate result, a slighter sense of fidelity to the original goal than we are accustomed to. There seems to be an unfamiliarity with, or an aversion to the idea that one takes the materials at hand, invents, patches, compromises, and squeezes out of them what is necessary to realize one's aim. The Japanese approach is, more or less, get everything required, a total structure of equipment and labor with ample funding or give up.

The situation we found ourselves in as organizers of the CROSS TALK series, pledged to realize a high standard without funds, necessitated an earthy pragmatic approach which from the Japanese viewpoint was crude, even boorish. Language and cultural differences forced us into Merriweatherian exertions. Karen performed as well as designed the poster and programs (which were deliberately, elaborately informative) while I performed, conducted, and wrote program notes. In a way, it was all preposterous, but then, as things returned to normal, we began to talk about the possibility of another undertaking the next year. From our standpoint, interest was rekindled by the gradual realization that we had achieved much of what we set out to. Our Japanese collaborators were excited about the level of accomplishment, the international flavor,

and the volume of praise generated in the musical press. (Japan, second only to Russian in number of books published per year, with a higher literacy rate than the United States, is intensely print-oriented. The number of musical magazines, weekly musical newspapers, and critics in other newspapers is staggering.) A good deal of enthusiastic - though not always informed - attention was lavished on CROSS TALK, and this worked on everyone as a restorative.

Late in the Spring of 1968, the USIS interest was also revived. Partly through the efforts of Center Director Albright, who had become increasingly interested and involved as the first year progressed, and partly because Embassy officials became aware of the potential such activity had in reaching young Japanese intellectuals, an agreement was reached. A more realistic amount, \$5000, was proposed by Cultural Attache Walter Nichols for a festival the following season. We, in turn, asked for the same total control over content, and made it clear that we intended to continue in an explorative vein. This was to lead out of the concert-hall entirely.

Yuasa and I spent several days driving around Tokyo and environs looking over planetariums, convention halls, meeting rooms, gymnasiums, and banquet halls in search of a suitable space. We finally settled on the smaller of architect Kenzo Tange's Olympic Gymnasiums.



It has a capacity of 3300, superb acoustics, and ample space for almost any sort of presentation. In the round, it is an elegant but not overbearing space. The gym had never been used for anything other than athletic events, and the management was more than a little suspicious of our unprecedented intentions. At this point, a seemingly endless parade of meetings and negotiations, of name-card exchanges and tea drinking, of translation and misunderstanding, began. The prestige of the US Embassy and the indefatigable patience which Don Albright managed to generate for these sessions were indispensable. With his introductions we managed to meet with the director of the Gymnasium, discovering in the meantime that it was actually an appendage of the Tokyo Municipal Government. They agreed to rent us the space at half price because of the cultural and educational nature of the event.

Having found a space for the festival, the next step was gaining the support of Japanese avantgardists. In the first season, we had included, with historical or semipedagogic justification, several American works that were not, strictly speaking, contemporary. In the festival no such allowances were to be made. We settled on a small list of the most innovative creators in Japan, several of whom were outside the officially recognized sphere of contemporary activity. They included composers Toru Takemitsu, Yuji Takahashi, Toshi Ichianagi, and the members of the GROUP ONGAKU (Takehisa Kosugi, Shuko Mizuno, Mieko Shiomi, and Yasunao Tone); filmmakers Toshio Matsumoto and Takahiko Iimura; and - against all reasonable council - dancer Tatsumi Hijikata. Meetings and negotiations with all of these people followed, and each expressed considerable enthusiasm. Our approach was to offer an opportunity of unprecedented size, and to assure them all access to a wide array of sophisticated audio and visual equipment that we proposed to secure through the cooperation of Japanese industry. I suspect that there was more than a little doubt on some of their parts that such a process would work, but, nevertheless, all agreed to create new works for the occasion, and we were delighted. No compromise of any sort had been made.

On the advice of Japanese friends and Embassy personnel, Albright and I settled on several likely firms, foremost of which was the SONY corporation. While on an earlier assignment in Japan, the Albrights had taught English to the wife of the Sony Vice President, Akio Morita. As I explained the nature of our project, the useful results which had come from a similar artist-engineer collaboration in New York's "Nine Evenings of Theater and Engineering" several years ago, and the degree of interest the CROSS TALK series had already generated, Morita was obviously interested and impressed. "We would be glad to help," he said, "what sort of thing would you like from us?" I explained that we were asking for two forms of cooperation, the use of equipment and the participation of Sony engineers. At this point, the festival idea still seemed quite manageable to us all, and we intended to surround the concert performances with open workshops in which composers and artists could meet with visiting American artist-engineers and skilled persons from Japanese industry. We hoped to sponsor seminars in the principles and application of basic equipment such as the photocell, lasers, transistors, epoxys, and so on. Morita listened carefully and then stunned us by saying, "I am sure my engineers would be very excited

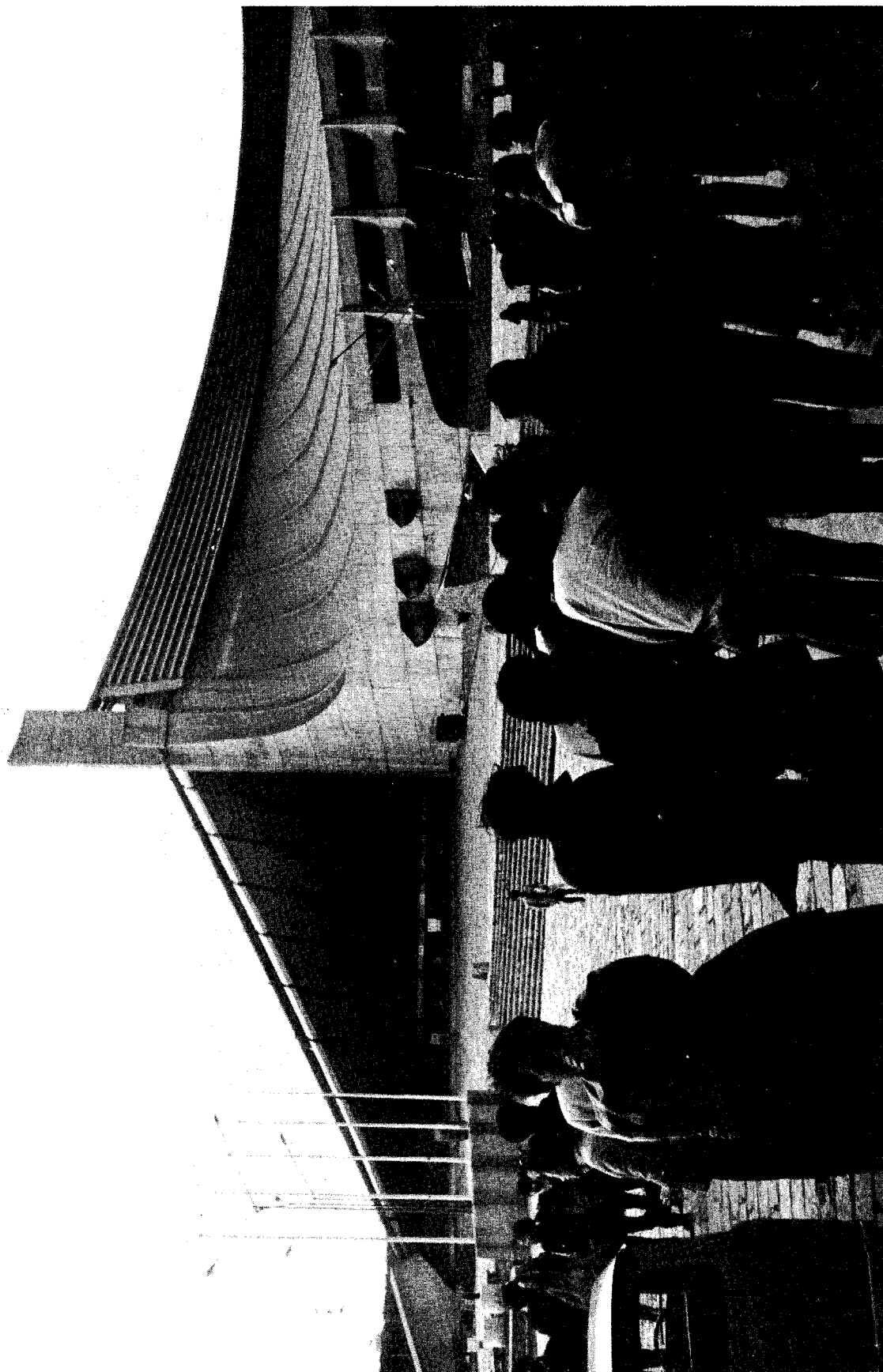
about such activity, but I couldn't possibly allow them to participate." He went on to explain that Sony was not actually a large company (In relative terms this is true. In 1966, it still did not rank in the top 100 Japanese firms), and that it retained its strong position through careful restriction of its research programs. Each engineer or team has a specific development problem to be solved by a certain date, and the intrusion of any other interest, they apparently feel, could upset the firm's balance.

We could borrow equipment, but not skills. In compensation, Morita invoked an honored Japanese strategem by calling the presidents of several associated electronics firms, Pioneer and Teac, and supplying us with prestigious introductions. In this country, introductions - the rank of your guarantor - are decisive. We went immediately to Pioneer, were conducted to their vice-president, explained the project again, and found him as receptive and eager as Sony had been guarded and reserved. They agreed almost on-the-spot to supply the gymnasium with a complete multi-channel sound system and, further, asked rather hesitantly whether their engineers might be allowed to observe rehearsals and set-up procedures involving the visiting Americans.

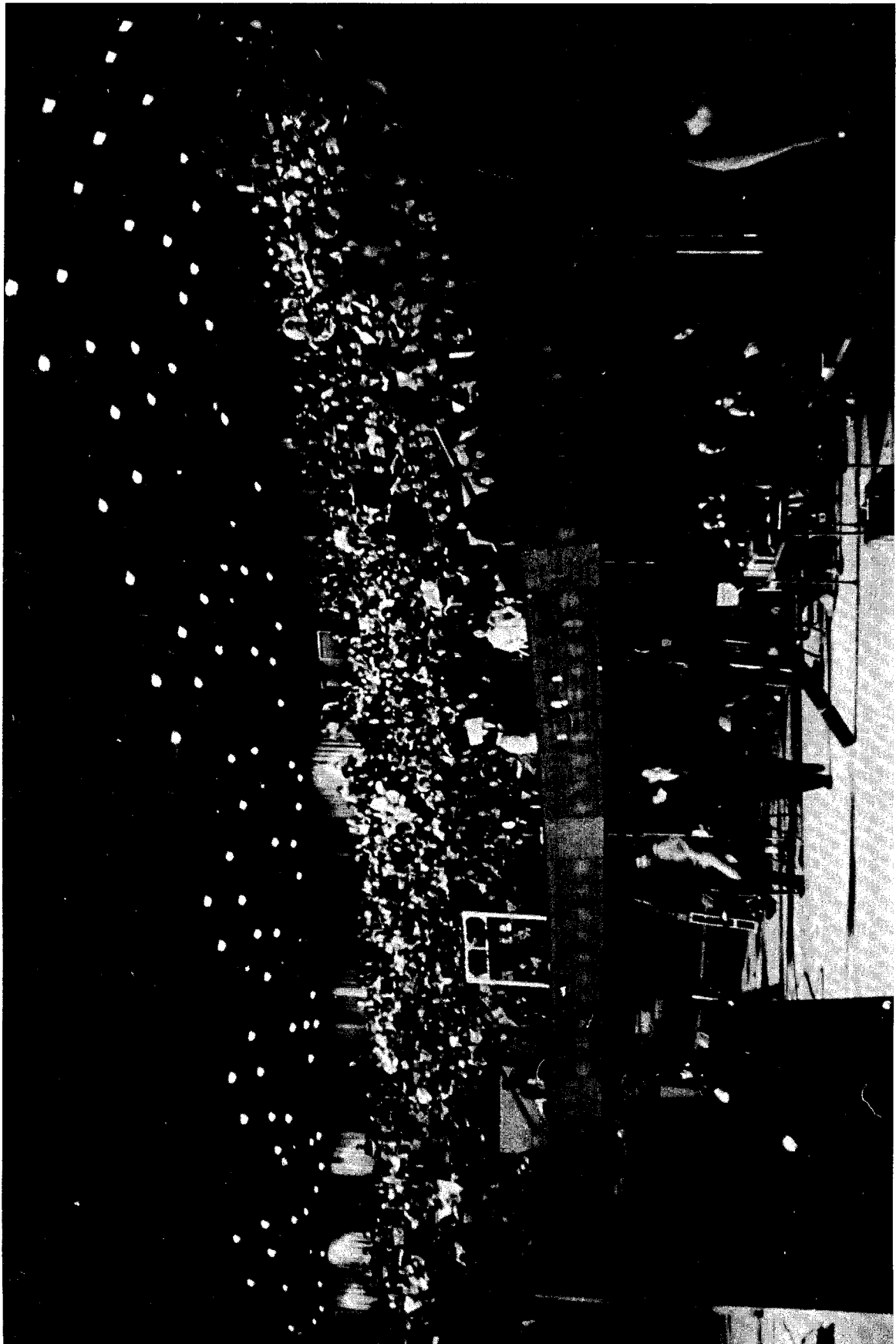
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At the same time that the general effort to obtain equipment was underway, Karen and I were preparing to leave for four months in the United States. Only one definite decision about the American participation had been made at that point: to invite composer-performer-engineer Gordon Mumma as one of two primary guests. Mumma, a musical associate of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, has educated himself in electronics and audio systems over the past ten years to the point where he is capable of designing and building rather sophisticated circuitry. His works during the past few years have increasingly grown up around potentials for sound programming and alteration that were suggested by circuit design. One of the co-founders of the Ann Arbor based ONCE GROUP (along with Robert Ashley, George Cacioppo, Donald Scavarda, and myself), and a member of the more recent Sonic Arts Group (including also Robert Ashley, David Bherman, and Alvin Lucier), he has accumulated an invaluable body of experience. Not only is Mumma able to construct complex equipment which is integral to the realization of his musical ideas, but, perhaps more rare, he is able to make it work dependably. Contacted in the Spring of 1968, he had agreed to come for the first week in February of 1969. Now, on our visit to the United States, we intended to settle on a filmmaker to complement Mumma.

Recommendations from all quarters centered around Stan VanDerBeek, now active in "computer graphics" and "non-verbal communication." VanDerBeek had a good deal of experience in academic situations (unlike Mumma), and was, I was assured, eager and able to discuss his ideas. The difficult point was how VanDerBeek, if willing, could be brought to Japan. The Embassy had only been able to guarantee the transportation of one guest, the already invited composer. In New York, I approached Porter McCray, director of the John D. Rockefeller III Fund, who has a record of extraordinary acuteness in supporting contemporary Japanese artists. It happened that those musicians and artists we had selected for participation in CROSS TALK INTERMEDIA had, almost to a man, already received JDR III



Early on the bitterly cold, windy afternoon of the first concert, a long line of the curious had already formed.



The Friday evening crowd - the pleasure of the sound of a full house before the show.

Fund aid or were under consideration for it. McCray was receptive to the idea of the festival as well as to VanDerBeek's name, and agreed to "take the matter under advisement." This was a particularly welcome assurance in view of the fact that other foundations I had approached for more general support had been unable to offer any hope of cooperation. Most felt that such a project, taking place in a foreign country, fell outside their proper range of operations. VanDerBeek, contacted by phone, was enthusiastic about the prospect.

While we were in the United States, it also happened that both Yuasa and Akiyama, along with their families, were also travelling there. We were all on the lookout for interesting music and meeting in New York during early October, we agreed on the Americans to be represented: Mumma, composers Salvatore Martirano, Robert Ashley, George Cacioppo, Alvin Lucier, David Rosenboom, John Cage, and myself; filmmakers VanDerBeek and Ronald Nameth (whose films are a part of Martirano's conception, "L's G.A."). Mumma, Lucier, and Rosenboom planned new works for CTI, and Cage offered us the premiere of one of his earlier compositions. When Karen and I returned to Japan in mid-November, a good deal of basic momentum had been gained. On the other hand, the real work had not begun.

"Orchestral Space '68," the Takemitsu and Ichihyanagi organized festival that had taken place the preceding June in Tokyo, amazed everyone by emerging as a financial success. This was due not only to the wisdom of its planners but to the excellence of manager Saburo Egawa of Million Concerts, Ltd. We had specified the preceding summer that a professional manager would be essential if a large-scale festival were attempted, and now Egawa confirmed his interest in the project. Armed with his estimate of costs, Albright approached Cultural Attache Walter Nichols to definitely fix the amount which the USIS was prepared to devote to the festival. I was asked to make a formal presentation of the background idea of art and technology as well as a detailed outline of what CROSS TALK INTERMEDIA was to include, and by late November the government men had, as they said, "bought it." They guaranteed to underwrite costs up to a maximum of \$7000. Foremost on their scale of values was not the furtherance of avant garde "art" - needless to say - nor the transmission of American values and ingenuity, but capitalizing on an unusual opportunity for reaching a generally antagonistic segment of the Japanese public: the same young students and intellectuals who, as a matter of habit, demonstrate against American bases, visiting Nuclear Ships, and take part in "Struggle '70" (a term to be paired with "Expo '70" and referring to the Japan-American Security Treaty continuation due to come about in 1970). Our interest was different, of course, though the audience did turn out to be one of the most significant aspects of the Festival. Such curious relationships were a striking aspect of CROSS TALK INTERMEDIA. Interests of very divergent sorts were served to the ample satisfaction of all concerned - the US Government, avant garde experimentalists, competing electronics firms, foundations, soft-drink manufacturers, and air lines. Curiously, a related theme came up frequently in discussions with the American participants during the festival. Everyone seems increasingly alert to ways in which individuals can turn the establishment to their own ends (whether governments, corporations, or the communications industry). The lesson was not lost on our Japanese colleagues.

The sequence of crises, impasses, barriers, misunderstandings, and so on that arose during December and January was numbing. At the same time, however, outside interest in the festival was growing, helping to keep everything in balance. Manager Egawa, who fortunately has also been both an audio critic and the manager of a ballet company, worked an almost debilitating schedule, seven days a week. We had also secured the services of Junosuke Okuyama as engineering director. He is unique in Japan, an enterprising engineer with a history of involvement in avant garde undertakings and a strong practical bent. It has become almost tautological that if Okuyama engineers a concert, everything works, if he doesn't the reverse may well occur. Together Egawa and Okuyama set out guide-lines for the festival's audio engineering requirements based on meetings with the Japanese composers involved and with me as general representative for all American compositions.

Pioneer engineers proved even more cooperative than we had anticipated. Tests were conducted in the gymnasium, and they set a team of engineers to work designing and building speaker systems especially for the February concerts. This array (eventually costing Pioneer more than \$41,000) amounted to 32 separate high wattage speaker enclosures, some of which contained upwards of a dozen speakers. Enormous 24-inch woofers were included in four central enclosures each of which was powered by 100 watt transistorized amplifiers. Around the gymnasium perimeter, behind the audience, ten pairs of speaker enclosures completed an awesome 14-channel system, for which Pioneer engineers also built a special mixer. They were also to supply, before the festival was over literally dozens of auxiliary amplifiers and portable tape decks. Meetings with the president of the TEAC Corporation had secured the loan of 6 professional tape decks and associated amplification equipment, also without charge.

There were numerous disappointments in our dealings with the Sony Corporation which seems to have already lost the explorative spirit which launched it just over twenty years ago. But it was, in its eagerness to evade responsibility for itself, superbly successful in stimulating the cooperation of rival electronics firms, as described above. For the most part, perseverance and the "bandwagon effect" eventually prevailed. Egawa proved increasingly adept at arranging for "cooperation" (i.e., the donation of equipment and services) for everything from specially built dynamic contact microphones to plastic paper intended for use in constructing projection surfaces. Cultural Attache Nichols was not idle either, and through his high-level contacts in Pan American and Pepsi-Cola, the inevitable mass meetings garnered, respectively, free air transportation for Mumma, Ashley, and Martirano from New York to Tokyo, and the underwriting of the estimated cost of the printed program.

The details of the Pan Am arrangement were consummately oriental. In abbreviated form: Pan Am agreed to pay for the air fare of three persons on the condition that several prominent Japanese magazines (including the Japanese equivalent of "Playboy") would print specific mention of the airline's "continuing support of cultural affairs." The festival manager arranged for the tickets to be bought on credit through a local travel bureau, and guaranteed the designated magazines certain exclusive privileges in return for their cooperation. After

the required articles had all appeared, Pan Am paid Egawa who in turn paid the travel agent. All this was extraordinarily complicated by the intricacies of currency conversion regulations dictated by the Bank of Japan, the visitors' visa status and so on. The process took over three months to consummate and consumed untold man-hours, yet it did work. Negotiations with Pepsi-Cola over the printed program were similarly circuitous, as were those with the management of the Tange Gymnasium.

Sincerely,



Roger Reynolds

Received in New York May 19, 1969.