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‘Sounding’ Japanese – Traditions of Music in Japanese cinema[i]

The cinema of Japan, known as *nihon eiga* [日本映画] is vast and is not easily encapsulated because of the wide range of cultural practices that have informed its identity, including the music it deployed. And yet, it arguably presents a distinctive sound world not merely because of the traditional instruments that are sometimes used but also because of the ways in which the use of music in early Japanese cinema was closely connected to the pre-existing traditions of theatrical music and narration that preceded it and continued alongside it. This brought an already-understood repertoire of musical association and rhetoric that enabled a distinctive aesthetic to emerge and develop. Such a mixture of adherence to traditional practice and a subsequent embracing and adapting of a wider range of musical styles created a musical-cinematic sound which became characteristically Japanese.

The first account of the presentation of cinema in Japan was in 1896 when Thomas Edison’s kinescope was displayed, two years after its US launch. This was followed by the Lumière Brothers’ cinématographe in 1897, which showed scenes of Tokyo’s fashionable districts. Thereafter, a modest number of short, mostly domestic folk-tales were made in the late nineteenth century as well as filmed versions of scenes from kabuki, a form of theater that already had a richly proto-cinematic quality and would heavily influence the ways in which early Japanese cinema and its uses of music were shaped. This early use of theatrical practices and conventions drawn from kabuki led to a slower transition from silent to sound films in the 1930s than was experienced in the West since the former was already much more interactive than its western counterpart.

Needless to say, a chapter of this size cannot deal adequately with the scope of cinematic and musical output of Japan and so, instead, I shall focus on some of the

distinctive ways in which Japanese cinema used music and how it engaged with cinematic and film music practices from elsewhere. To examine this, two key historical stages are used. These can loosely be characterised as traditional (and mostly national)—roughly from the earliest cinema to the emergence of sound films—and 'modern', which embraces international musical traditions in the period of sound film though still acknowledges its theatrical heritage. This historical division is important here because it both accounts for ways in which musical-cinematic practices emerged from the theatrical stage, but also explains how these approaches developed. The first of these stages will examine the deployment of musical traditions from kabuki in silent films of the Taishō period (1912-26). The period of silent film, with its particular traditions of narration in Japan lasted longer than the equivalent in western practices but leads to the second stage: the juxtaposition and intermixing of traditional Japanese music and western musical styles (especially jazz) in sound films. This predominated in cinema after the second world war; the period leading up to the war was complicated by the rise of nationalism and a policing of the use of non-Japanese music. Director Ichikawa Kon's *An Actor's Revenge* (1963) will serve to exemplify the subsequent embracing of traditional and western musical approaches and the associations each brought with it as well as thematising the role of kabuki from which it emerged.

Japanese cinema distinguishes itself not only in its breadth of interest and subject but also in the ways that it, firstly, embeds broader Japanese cultural practices into the medium of production (such as the theatrical contexts of kabuki, noh, and bunraku puppet theater) and secondly, appropriates and mobilizes western musical genres within Japanese cultural contexts. From the outset, this practice was evident when silent films in Japan, rather than only employing the cinema theater organ or

cinema auditorium orchestras, would more usually also use a narrator figure known as *katsuben* [活弁] or *benshi* [弁士]. This was a convention drawn directly from the contexts of theater in Japan. In this form, which would usually also incorporate live music, the 'silent' film comprises a narrator to one side who elaborates on what is seen on screen. He provides both a kind of voice over of the characters' dialogue as well as a commentary (known as *setsumei*) on what was seen, especially after 1910. The function of the latter, in particular, became influential on the way in which the visual was framed and how the supplemental meaning was shaped, as film director Akira Kurosawa has noted:

> The narrators not only recounted the plot of the films, they enhanced the emotional content by performing the voices and sound effects and providing evocative descriptions of events and images on the screen - much like the narrators of the bunraku puppet theatre. The most popular narrators were stars in their own right, solely responsible for the patronage of a particular theatre. (Kurosawa 1982: 74)

The influence of kabuki theater on the music of Taishō-period cinema

The Taishō-period (1912-26) marked in Japan a period of cultural flowering before the rise of nationalism that characterized the earlier part of the following extended Shōwa period (1926-88).[ii] Often referred to as the period of *ero guro nansensu* (eroticism, the grotesque and nonsense), the Taishō-period was marked by a vicarious desire for western culture that was subsequently reinterpreted within Japanese traditional contexts; the cinema and musical production were no exceptions. Some of the characteristics of this idea were articulated in Yasunari Kawabata's important 1930 novel *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa* (浅草紅團 *Asakusa Kurenaidan*).[iii] In this, as Miriam Silverberg has noted, Kawabata identifies the period as one of "*Eroticism*, and

Nonsense, and *Speed,* and *Humor* like social commentary cartoons, and *Jazz Song* and Women's legs" (Silverberg 2007: 28). As such, experimentation and montage, often drawing heavily on perceived ideas of what constituted western culture, were key features of the period—and the idea of montage can serve as a useful lens through which to examine how music in Taishō-period cinema might be understood not least because of the association of cinema in its early years with all things western and also with the era's broader fascination with modernity. In his famous essay on cinema and the cultural nature of Japan, Sergei Eisenstein commented that this period of Japanese cinema was marked in particular by its use of montage and especially with reference to the mixture of kabuki theatrical practice (signs of the old) with the 'modern' politically dynamic ideas of the 1920s (Eisenstein 1949: 28-44). Although, as Silverberg has also noted, some of Eisenstein's broader comments present an orientalized view of Japanese culture, the notion of the mixing of traditions remains germane. There were also emergent practices in the mixing of musical styles that routinely accompanied Japanese silent films. Thus, in spite of Donald Ritchie's claim that Japanese cinema did not owe very much to kabuki and nothing to nō theater (see Ritchie 1971: xx-xxi), in terms of its cinematic (*vis* visual) manifestation, the process of conveying the narrative through a live commentator and certainly the use of music suggest a strong background influence and should be brought into the discussion of the functions and effects of music in cinema.

Throughout this period, music was used extensively in the silent films made in Japan. However, it was not the same cinema organ or orchestral soundtrack that was commonly encountered in western cinema. Instead, these films utilized the instrumental forces found in kabuki theater. Chief among these was the shamisen, although the full range of instruments in kabuki, most usually hidden from the

audience's view, were certainly encountered in the music accompanying silent films. In kabuki, these are known collectively as *geza-ongaku* and are usually hidden from view behind a black curtain on the stage-right. This group of instruments comprises a wider range than those that can be seen and includes various percussive instruments, each of which conveys a particular symbolic meaning within the theatrical narrative. This principle is carried over in the use of music in silent films and the narrated components of kabuki (called *nagauta* are presented in the form of the *benshi*. The role of the *benshi*, therefore, can be likened to that of the theatrical narrator and accounts for the longevity of this musical practice in Japanese cinema and the slow emergence of sound films that would mark the end of the live *benshi*. In a similar way, the live musical accompaniments of silent films used, drew on the 'narrative' music of the theater. These ensembles, known as *narimono*, comprised, depending on the size and metropolitan significant of the cinema theater, the full range of kabuki theatrical instruments, excluding the narrative *nagauta* components. Furthermore, as the influence of western cinema grew, it was also common to find additional instruments in these ensembles. In particular, piano, violin and clarinet were key, often supplemented with the shamisen and much of the music of early cinema in Japan was characterized by this wide range of musical accompaniments, which often reflected the perceived status of the film as well as the influence and prestige of the theater in which it was being shown, many of which were often makeshift. Furthermore, a loose practice emerged in which the musical forces for Japanese films tended to be those of Japanese theatrical instruments whereas Western films introduced western music and instrumental styles. As Jeffrey Dym has noted, however, "Japanese films with a modern setting were often accompanied by a mixture of foreign and domestic instruments, including the *shamisen*, *taiko*, piano trumpet, violin, and saxophone"

(Dym 2003: 57). Later, the distinctions between these musical traditions would serve as a means of conveying wider, moral, as well as narrative significance (see the example of Ichikawa Kon's *An Actor's Revenge* (1963) below). Contemporary newspaper reports frequently outlined the role that music and sound played in these early silent films particularly in relation to the role of the *benshi*.[iv]

Traditions of narrative mixture and the *etoki*

The practice of mixing media in Japanese artistic endeavors was nothing new and its longevity and ubiquity explain how the intermingling of narrator and image was understood and readily accepted as part of the creative cinematic approach. This can be understood more readily in the practice of the *etoki* (spoken narrators more generally), which foreshadowed the narrative uses of music in Japanese cinema and I propose that the well-established idea of "commingled media" (Anderson 1992: 266) that accounts for the widespread use of a spoken narrator over visuals and, more broadly, of the mixing of text and image, should be extended to account for the ways in which music interacted with the early cinema. This is important, because the practice was very long established indeed in Japan and the justification for deploying music in a way that was within the areas of familiarity was more compelling. Understanding music's role in this context of "commingled media" will help both to shape its subsequent development but in general terms, it will also assist in postulating how its wider identity in cinema might be accounted for.

Firstly, the mixture of text and image is an important early instance of this wider phenomenon and can be evidenced in early narrative *emakimono* [絵巻物] in which detailed literary accounts were combined with a series of painted images or

picture scrolls. This led, in the 1600-1800s, to the wider use in pictorial novels of a narrative elaboration on what was seen or read and, one might argue, in subsequent and contemporary practices in the modern forms of *manga*. Alongside this, was a practice known as *etoki*, in which spoken rather than written commentary and images were combined. The term's coverage is wide and encompasses accounts of early "Buddhist priests who used paintings of hell in their proselytizing sermons" (Anderson 1992: 263) to later practices of formal theatrical performances. The claim's relevance to music can be taken further as Barbara Ruch has noted: "painting, story, chanter, and even the sounding of musical instruments (often pure sound, rather than music) combine to create a total audio-visual experience rare, if not unique, in the pre-modern history of world literature…[T]his combination of the visual aid, the audio accompaniment, and the chanter narrator… represented the mainstream of nonpoetic, non-Chinese literature in Japanese literary history" (Ruch 1977: 289). Thus, music's place as one of the narrative tools in cinema was prefigured in much of Japan's artistic practice and accounts both for the slower transition to sound films as well as the ready acceptance of its presence within the early cinematic text. Although there had been some reflection on the effects of using music in western cinema (including Nakano Jiro's series of contributions to the journal *Kinema Rekōdo* in 1916-17) and how his might be utilized in Japanese cinema, it otherwise remained largely unstudied.

Accepting music's role as a contributor to the production of cinematic narrative and the earlier practices that certain types and genres of music connoted certain dramatic moments, the early cinema of Japan can be divided into two distinctive types of films that emerged during the silent period, each distinguished by different musical characteristics. Perhaps the most significant and with its identity

formed by the historical sensibilities of many kabuki plays, is the genre known as *jidaigeki*. These films were, in effect, period pictures that most usually focused on samurai dramas from the Edo-period of Japan (1603-1868). They drew heavily on the traditions of kabuki, though they were by no means merely filmed versions of these plays. In contrast, *gendaigeki* were films whose narratives centered on historical events in the modernizing Meiji-period (1868-1912) and were thus to be separated from the *jidaigeki* both in narrative and musical terms as a presentation of these films' values. Nonetheless, their musical default sound was largely that of earlier theatrical practices, although the modern character of some films might be reflected in western instruments, as Jeremy Dym observed. The potential that sound film brought with it meant that the *gendaigeki* flourished more prominently after 1931, following the first successful Japanese sound film with Heinosuke Gosho's *Madamu to nyōbō* [マダムと女房] (*The Neighbor's Wife and Mine*). Thereafter, films by Kenji Mizoguchi and Yasujirō Ozu, among others, were the main examples of the increasingly rich and varied *gendaigeki* in a range of films that began in the silent era but reached well into the talkies.

Buntaro Futagawa's *Orochi* [雄呂血] (*The Serpent*, 1925) exemplifies some of the ways in which silent films in the *jidaigeki* genre sought to intermix the *benshi* narrator, text and music. *Orochi* was one of the most successful films of its era and has survived almost intact. In the scene-shots selected below, one of the main characters approaches the entrance and is greeted by a number of people inside. The narrator attempts to impersonate the characters and their assumed introductions and to differentiate their voices, as well as withdrawing to comment on their feelings about the situation and, potentially, their thoughts on other characters.

Figure X.1: Scenes from *The Serpent* (1925)

Similarly, musical distinctions might be inferred as found in some of the surviving cue sheet books designed to supply music for the *jidaigeki*. In *Eiga Banso Kyokushu* [映画伴奏曲集], a four-volume set of primers published in 1929, guidance is offered on the type and use of music in these films. It supplies forty-seven musical entries each with details on its use and function:

> Many of the pieces selected were regarded as fitting for the squash back (*chanbara*) scenes. For instance, "Dojoji" (the temple famous for its tragiromantic legend; a *nagauta* piece) is described as being good for "scenes in which the fight is gradually escalated and finally becomes a war-like situation." "Ukina" (flirting gossip), by contrast, is appropriate for "scenes of fighting at night" and should be played "with [a sense of] terror." Other pieces for the sword fight include "Hayazen Zukushi" (warning bells; which was good for "scenes of fighting with a comical touch") and "Hitotsugane" (one bell; for "scenes of a big fight by a very small number of people"). Because the fight scenes are usually the climax of *jidaigeki* films and the

> music was expected to intensify the tension, they are classified more minutely than other types of scene. (Hosokawa 2014: 299)

Although Hosokawa is not referring to *Orochi* specifically, many of these generic set pieces allude strongly to the *chanbara* (sword play) style found in *Orochi* and, in particular, in its final sword-fighting sequence. Of course, these films varied according to the nature of the auditorium band playing and the particular narrator in residence. And the *chanbara* genre especially used narration to supplement the fighting scenes as well as music to support the sense of the mounting tension. These were often played out slowly, just as in the manner of a kabuki play, with a rhetorical pause (called *mie* [見得]) emphasizing the actor's climactic moment.

These moments would also have been marked by a musical climax as well as the narrator's explanation. Indeed, at the moment of climax (once again, just as in the kabuki theater), the audience would shout at the screen and both the *benshi* and the music would provide increasing intensity, often combining Japanese and western musical instruments. In broader terms, therefore, although there remains a strong connection between the theatrical premise of uses of music in kabuki and its use in cinema, there is also a shift away from the ways in which music had been deployed in kabuki because in kabuki theater, the use of music to signify specific narrative events in a symbolic way is key. In cinema more generally, however, and in *Orochi* more specifically, the use of music is much less symbolic and associated in a far more mimetic way with the actions or characters on stage. Furthermore, cinema was the only site in which *both* Japanese traditional music and western music and instruments might be combined and, as such, the blend of these styles had a particular significance on the ways in which the music developed and should be read.

Musical mixture and *Yukinojō Henge* [雪之丞変化] (*An Actor's Revenge*, 1963)

Japan's fascination with jazz began in the early 1920s when it was introduced by recently-arrived Filipino immigrants in the late Taishō-period and took hold shortly after that. Although it was banned during the war years as music of the enemy, it was, by that time, sufficiently embedded to become a preeminent form after 1945. Indeed, in spite of its origins in the US, during the years that immediately followed the end of the war, jazz in Japan served, in part, as a protest genre against the US occupation as well as the shortages of food and supplies. Thereafter, a flourishing avant-garde and free jazz scene developed and although this was often derivative of US jazz, it nonetheless established the genre as an important and desirable style. It also stood for all things modern and outward-looking. Thus its use in cinema also brought with it a sense of the modern but also something that was transgressive of early Japanese practices. This contrast is particularly striking when it stands against traditional Japanese music. Ichikawa Kon's 1963 remake of the 1935 film *Yukinojō Henge* [雪之丞変化] (*An Actor's Revenge*) of the same name and starring the same lead actor Kazuo Hasegawa presents a use of music that both draws on the earlier traditions of Japanese cinematic practice as well as on the ways in which western music provides a narrative and moral or comedic contrast.

As a film made at the start of the dramatic economic expansion that Japan experienced after the Second World War, *An Actor's Revenge*, epitomizes the kind of cinema that would emerge during the long post-war development. Musically it represents on varying levels, some of the ways in which Japanese cinema's soundtracks were also cultural canvases that easily absorbed and (re-)presented the approaches found elsewhere in cinema. Chief among these (as was earlier the case) is the mixture of music that clearly references theatrical (kabuki) traditions. However,

the film also deploys a folk (*minyō*) [民謡] style that is re-orchestrated using the musical forces of western orchestral textures, some of which are blended with traditional Japanese instruments. As a contrast to all of these, there are also characters and stages of the film that contain a type of 'bluesy-jazz' musical texture for comedic reasons and to distinguish clearly different areas of the characters' narratives and the subplot. In addition to this, the film (a remake, as noted), foregrounds the very theatrical practices of the music it deploys. The film is about an *onnagata* (a male kabuki actor would specializes in female roles),[v] and who seeks to avenge the murder of his parents by three merchants from Edo (now Tokyo) after he witnesses them attending one of his performances. The remainder of the film focuses on the ways in which each of the guilty merchants succumbs to Yukinojō's revenge. Against this is a type of counter-narrative in which the events that unfold are commented on in an ironic way by a different friendly rogue figure (known as Yamitarō) but played by the same actor (Kazuo Hasegawa) who plays Yukinojō. It is this that allows for clear musical differentiation between the two narrative streams. This gives the film a modern identity and locates it firmly in the emerging traditions of musically 'observant' cinema globally. This is exemplified immediately at the film's opening. The first scene consists of the studio's signature mark and explanatory text that sets out the film's name and indicates that this film marks the actor Hasegawa's 300th film. The music heard during this is an orchestrally-rendered version of the song "Murasaki Kouta" [むらさき小唄], which means "Purple Little Song" after which the main scene opens.

Figure X.2: The opening scene of *An Actor's Revenge*

The use of folk-derived musical material that is heavy with rhetorical associations suggests a drama (perhaps a period one) whose focus is one of pathos or even melodrama. This is because it would have been well-known and understood, not only for its connotations of sadness and loss, but also because it highlights the lineage of films and remakes within which Ichikawa Kon's version sits. The song, whose text is by the poet Sōnosuke Satō [佐藤惣之助] with music composed in 1935 by Takeo Abe [阿部武雄] was also that used in the earlier versions of *An Actor's Revenge* and thus provides an historical link. Furthermore, it speaks specifically of the loneliness and misery of *onnagata* and of the revenge they seek. The first stanza runs:

> 流す涙がお芝居ならば
>
> 何の苦労もあるまいに
>
> 濡れて燕泣く声は あわれ浮名の女形
>
> If the streaming tears are merely a facade, you will not struggle at all.
>
> The crying voice of the wet swallow[vi]
>
> belongs to the *onnagata* whose love is tinged with loneliness and misery.

The opening image and song do not last long and quickly both the visuals and the music change. All the text disappears and the screen is blank. In the middle of this blank screen, a small hole opens through which we are channeled into the scene whose music (presumably diegetic) we already hear. The scene reveals the stage of the kabuki theater replete with deep and falling snow and a single symbolic tree and in the middle of which is the character of Yukinojō dressed in a lavish kimono. The music we hear is that of the kabuki theater musicians (*hayashi*) and principally of the shamisen and of the chanting narrator. The scene, which is almost four minutes long, is 'musical' throughout in that the theatrical music foregrounds the diegesis and concludes with the *hyoshigi* [拍子木]—the wooden clappers struck repeatedly to mark the opening or closing of a play.

The use of traditional music at the outset is interesting because, for the purposes of film music study, it illustrates some of the ways both of theorizing music's fluid narrative location but also of delineating the two alter-ego characters (Yukinojō and Yamitarō) within the narrative as well as the comedic 'tone' of the subplot section. During this opening, using the aperture technique with which the film commenced, Yukinojō singles out three members of the audience all of whom are responsible in one way or another for the death of his parents. And, in a private confessional voice-over vows to seek revenge. Immediately after the curtain falls, however, we continue to hear the music of the theater and assume that it is playing for the audience's distraction, though this would be very unusual in a real play at this moment. Its volume remains otherwise unchanged from the previous scene and we hear it alongside the various characters to whom we are introduced, including those of the comedic subplot. However, in the middle of the scene where the *edokko* (roughly the townspeople of 'old' Tokyo) characters are bickering, the *hayashi* music suddenly

gains a rich and telling harp glissando. This becomes the point around which our realization of its narrative status as more than theatrical is marked. And yet, to state that it is has moved from the diegetic to the non-diegetic (although heuristically useful) seems either to underplay its previous identity or to overstate its subsequent one. Indeed, as Ben Winters has separately claimed (Winters 2010), the slippage between these purported narrative realms although significant, is intimately connected to the way in which the narrative unfolds and thus each is enveloped and complicit in it. Furthermore, as this scene proceeds and the petty criminal and mischievous characters reveal their dislike of the kabuki actors' social pretensions, the music morphs between that of the *hayashi* ensemble to an orchestral texture that is reminiscent of Debussy and early Schoenberg in its use of woodwind and percussion.

The hybridity of the music here and its shift are significant because they highlight a set of conceptual issues with which the film more broadly is dealing, that is: the theater as the site of the main character and the interplay between that space and the 'real life' of the main character. Moreover, Yukinojō's mischievous alter ego (Yamitarō) and the comical subplot further blur the distinction between these narrative and character spaces. Similarly, therefore, the musical-generic hybridity enriches the way in which the cinematic text here is engaged with blurring.

The sequence that follows the opening extended set of introductions in the kabuki theater pushes the assignment of musical genre further and suggests that the use of generic type is a central feature of the ways in which narrative ideology is routed. The background is black and only the rich costumes of the characters are set against this as they walk in the night. The music contrasts strongly with what sounded directly before this. It is what Ian Breakwell has referred to as "an utterly incongruous score of cocktail jazz saxophone in a haunting minor key" (Breakwell 1995: 21). It is

later in this scene that Yukinojō is introduced to his alter ego (Yamitarō) and this is cut as a type of mirror scene in which the comic character, much like the comedic subplot more generally, provides a kind of commentary on Yukinojō's progress. In that sense, we might understand this as a tacit reference to the earlier ways in which *etoki* and *benshi* provided such interpretations. But it also feeds into a wider practice of cultural absorption in Japan in which styles, arts, or cultural practices are borrowed from western culture and then re-imagined in ways that also embed or even foreground Japanese culture. Examples of this are too numerous to cite here but include: food, fashion, electronic network systems, mobile phone systems, language, and certainly music. Cinema and its musical components are no exceptions and the strong interest in jazz and western music more generally is framed in *The Actor's Revenge* in a way that also seems to promote these interpretations and to encourage hermeneutic responses to their foregrounded differences.

Also of great musical interest is the scene in which Yukinojō conspires to meet Lord Dobé's daughter Lady Namiji in her rooms. This is important because she was also present in the opening scene of the film when we see Yukinojō, in an internal monologue, addressing those who killed his parents. Her father is part of the criminal group though she knows nothing of their previous deeds. Yukinojō seeks to manipulate her infatuation with him in order to gain access to Lord Dobé but also to enact revenge; a scene of unrequited love (as Satō's lyrics at the opening suggest). Lady Namiji's affections are clear but we know that Yukinojō's are constructed so as to lure her. The scene begins musically with rich sonorous strings, reminiscent of Franz Waxman's music for *Rebecca* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1940) but with the addition of vibraphone which lends the music some of the cocktail jazz and sentimental kitsch that so often marks the comical subplot characters' scenes. Just as

the affections are not mutual, the music also lacks a clear subject position focus and it does not invoke or respond to what we see. Instead, it seems to set the tone of the overall sequence. Perhaps the vibraphone adds the sense of incongruous farce to the scene whilst remaining noncommittal in terms of character focus though we are well aware of Yukinojō's deception. Ian Breakwell has noted that "[l]ush romantic strings play in the background but do not cue or react to the action or dialogue, creating the curious impression that though the couple are in a nineteenth-century traditional Japanese house, they could equally well be in a theme motel with piped-in Muzak" (Breakwell 1995: 23). It is the sense of overt contradiction that seeks legitimation in narrative terms by highlighting the binaries of traditional/modern, male/female, moral virtue/criminal intent only then to blur these. In fact, as Linda Ehrlich has observed, "the entire film is a study of incongruous juxtaposition – in its striking visual compositions, in the mixture of traditional Japanese music and nondiegetic contemporary jazz and 'lounge music', in the movement from old-fashioned full-body 'proscenium' shots to zoomed-in close-ups, and in the nature of characters like the 'masculine' aggressive female thief Ohatsu and the 'feminine' actor Yukinojō" (Ehrlich 1994: 281).

The final sequence of *An Actor's Revenge* returns to the kabuki theater where it started (though a different play) and the two actors discuss Yukinojō's retirement, the reasons for which are now understood. He sought revenge, including taking the life of the innocent Lady Namiji, and he must leave the theater and reconcile himself to a life alone. This moment of commentary from one actor to another is marked musically by light orchestral music that supplements the sentimentality and moral transgression that have been revealed. It further underlines the song's commentary at the start of the film and as the curtain closes, drawn from the right to left side with the audience clapping

and the sounds of the *hyoshigi*, the film closes with a return to the music of the kabuki theater itself. Just as in the opening when there was a move from the music of the theater to a blend of *hayashi* and western orchestral textures, so at the end, the music yields to the sounds of Japanese traditional music as a kind of narrative rounding. Whether this is diegetic or not seems to appear less relevant here because the status of commentary that was such an important aspect of early film and of wider cultural practice in Japan comes to the fore. The film was about a kabuki actor—one of revenge—and was itself the stuff of kabuki narratives. We can see, therefore, that even long after the demise of silent cinema, the traditions of the theater were still strong and, almost as a kind of reference to the past, the film ends with the commentary of the famous *benshi* Musei Tokugawa. He concludes by announcing the subsequent disappearance of Yukinojō and imagining a range of outcomes—perhaps theatrical perhaps as a priest—and thus keeps alive the traditions of commentary.

The importance of narration more widely within Japanese culture, therefore, would seem to be a plausible way of understanding the mixture and interaction of musical styles in much Japanese cinema since 1945 because, just like Tokugawa's speculation on a range of conclusions to *An Actor's Revenge*, the obvious use of music drawn from different national traditions engendered different (but expected) responses. The music, therefore, participates in the production of a particular form of narration, the characteristics of which changed but whose principle and practice were long established in Japan. I am not arguing for special ways in which the music should be read here. Instead, the traditions into which the music was embedded provide a rich context for understanding its deployment. And by understanding some of the ways in which music embraced and supplemented the theatrical traditions on which much of Japanese cinema was founded, as well as its later reception of western music and

especially jazz, a framework emerges in which to read the function and effect of this music appropriately. 'Sounding' Japanese in cinematic terms, therefore, is about understanding Japanese cultural practices more broadly and understanding their relentless historical reinterpretations of which film music interactions are no exception.

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[i] I wish to record my gratitude to the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation for a research grant that enabled the completion of this article.

[ii] The Shōwa period witnessed some of the most dramatic events in modern Japanese history and filmmaking. Japan underwent rapid and extensive militarisation during the 1930s and 40s culminating in its involvements in the second-world war and ending with the use of atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. The surging economic development after the Second World War nourished a thriving film and musical culture.

[iii] This began as a serialised newspaper story, drawn from life in late 1920s Tokyo and was subsequently published as a novel in 1930. It sought to characterize the decadence of life in the area known as 'Asakusa' in eastern Tokyo.

[iv] Among the many sources see: Gerow (2010), Mumei (1924), Yamato (1921).

[v] The same practice was also used in early Japanese cinema, where they were often known as *oyama* [女形]. This gradually died out during the early years of cinema in Japan.

[vi] The idea of the swallow here also suggests a younger man who has an older girlfriend.