

## **Founding a New Field for the Study of Sonic Arts: The Inauguration of the Japanese Society for Sonic Arts**

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### **Abstract**

No organizations concerning the creation of music and related topics are known to exist in Japan, and there has been a need for such an organization. This article first introduces the history behind the founding of such an organization, and then states the organization's mission: to issue original papers. It is a natural mission, though it can be difficult for creators of music. Some strategies to support the organization in achieving its mission are also introduced. We also discuss a new framework for free-of-charge musical performances, which are linked to research presentations. Moreover, a strategy for internationalizing the organization is introduced; such a strategy will allow the organization's members to incorporate well-balanced information from all over the world into their compositions and research.

### **1. Introduction**

It is a pleasure for me to announce that the [Japanese Society for Sonic Arts](#) has been newly founded and that a new electronic journal is being published. In the following text, I want to introduce the history of the society and want to describe the administration policy. Recently, in the area of engineering, a variety of music-relevant research has been encouraged and developed both inside and outside of Japan. Moreover, the number of newcomers in this field has been increasing. The computer music field, which is a subfield of art and engineering, is more precisely broken into sub-classifications such as algorithmic composition, sound synthesis, user interface, etc. The number of relevant international conferences corresponding to such fields is increasing as well, such as NIME for new interfaces, MCM for mathematic representation of music, and ISMIR for music retrieval.

This field is also positioned as multimedia art, and the border between fine art and this area has become unclear by forming a link to visual art such as sound art, which has developed from a stream different from traditional music, and establishing not only stage performances but sound installations, one type of advanced art installation.

Against such a background, corresponding new national or regional music-relevant societies have been founded and the chances to present music-related study are increasing.

On the other hand, although music-related societies have become more active, I have felt an insufficiency at the domestic meetings of such societies which does not happen at international conferences.

The most serious reasons are:

- 1) Composers are not present at such meetings.
- 2) There is little research whose application is electro-acoustic music creation.

These two become cause and effect for each other and form a negative spiral. The fundamental reason is that very few composers do research. I participated in ICMC 2007, and there met young Japanese researchers and musicians. There I had a thought that although members of the same taste can meet, there are no appropriate venues in Japan.

After two months, Prof. Kia Ng from the University of Leeds, UK, visited my laboratory. I organized an open lecture meeting in order to change the situation, and this became a good start for founding a new society. The event was known to Prof. Yoshinao Shiraki, who served as an

editorial board member of the journal of the Information Processing Society of Japan, and he encouraged me to write an article in the journal to introduce a new society for both music-creation-related research and composers. However, I did not have the confidence to raise a formal society from the beginning. As a result, I organized a rather private society named ON-Juku centering on my university laboratory. In the name, ON means sound in general, and Juku is a type of private institute. After the second meeting it continued to the 6th meeting. These activities have been introduced in an article [Osaka 08].

In the end, I started to think that the society should be formalized. Since November 2006, a concert series “Media Project” has been conducted. Many members of ON-Juku have joined the concerts. I have thought that the concert and the research activities should be linked together since then.

A free group which holds research meetings leads a very weak existence in the eyes of the general public, and the author recognised that the general public would not view it as reliable or trustworthy. In order to apply for music or research grants under the name of the society, it is desirable that the society should be a reliable one. This thought lead me to found the new society, which

has a strong mission, and has a link with ON-Juku and concerts under the new name. In the next section, I would like to state the direction of the activities in the first phase.

## **2. Management policy of the society**

Why do few composers do research in Japan? Many composers might think that composition is a private activity and far from a research activities. However, this does not explain the fact that far fewer composers do research compared with the situation in Europe and the US. We are not sure whether this is because we imported music from Europe selectively in the Meiji era or because our education system is different from that in Europe. Some other reasons might also exist. Although a careful analysis has been done in Ref. [Osaka 08], decisive reasons were not drawn out.

I believe that there are objective aspects and subjective aspects in the creation of music, and the objective aspect should be open to the public. Creation is not an indispensable item of high priority which allows us to survive, such as food, energy, and the environment. It does, however, serve a function to enrich our mental lives and play a role in the birth of culture. Therefore even if the explanation of activities is not enough, no one cares and the community will survive as long as those who are involved in it exist.

However, the social aspect of the creation of music will decrease, and the musical community as a whole will be isolated from society in general. This idea comes from my background in engineering. In the engineering field, technologies are always expected to be open if they are to be seen as basic study.

### **2.1 Mission of our society**

Then, what the mission of our society is and how the society should be managed will be discussed in this session.

In consideration of these above, firstly, the mission of the society, as the title suggests, is research centering on advanced art music. How the target music should be called has long been a topic of discussion among board members; computer music, electro-acoustic music, etc. After spending more than a month discussing it, the Japanese name is advanced music creation, if directly translated into English, and sonic arts in English, which do not perfectly correspond to each other.

It is self-evident so far, but research in the field is not only one of specific fields such as musicology, aesthetics, music perception, cognitive science, information science, and acoustic engineering, but widely includes all of these fields. Moreover, in addition to these, some new research views should be added. Here we call the field *Sosakugaku*, which in Japanese

means the study of the creation of music.

Moreover, one of the topics which is not often discussed is music theory. The other topics might be dealt with in other societies. However, it is discussed from the point of view of other societies, rather than from the perspective of creating music, since composers and musicians are largely not present. In my own case, there are some societies where I can present my own research output. However, its application to composition is not discussed. I believe these two aspects, engineering research and its application to composition, are necessary for research presentations.

In the sense stated above, this society will be a primary place for fundamental music theory research. I also expect that the society will serve as a meeting place for the scientific field of the application of research to the creation of music, and by being informed by such a mission, those who are involved in music creation will gather. Communication will be promoted, and through the sharing of common information, a community will be formed. Moreover, the new field of *Sosakugaku* is not a mere collection of already-established relevant fields of study. However, whether or not a coherent synthesis is achieved by incorporating these fields is a key standard for its recognition as a new academic field.

## **2.2 Strategies for pursuing our mission**

Specific strategies are listed below to execute the ideas stated in the previous section.

1. periodic publication of original papers
2. organization of periodic research meetings
3. acquisition of both formal and real recognition in public as an academic society
4. clear formation of a social organization
5. execution of concerts
6. proposal of our own events in a style to be defined by our society
7. invitation of non-Japanese speaking members
8. invitation of members abroad
9. forming a consortium with other organizations

I will explain these in detail in the next section.

## **3. Publication of original papers and a consortium**

Item 1 is the embodiment of the mission itself, and the basic function of an academic society. Although the discussion starts from this exact point in our society, there are few composers who do research in Japan. Young composers are not well trained to write papers at school, either.

However, in composition there is a process of observing subjects of interest objectively, and, I believe, composers can become researchers at any time.

On the other hand, because of the fact that many composers do not have the skills necessary for writing papers and there are hardly any chances to do so, there are opinions saying that forcing members to write papers in the first place will make them leave the society.

As long as it is an academic society, it is necessary to publish papers even if the frequency is low, and we need to have a strategy for it. We should make a clear plan: a numerical goal of the number of papers per year, and we have to proceed. At present, we have decided to issue an electronic journal correspondent to each research meeting.

In this first journal, although original papers are not present, we aim at the publication of a couple of original papers in the next two years. This is a first goal and in the meantime, our goal is that the publication frequency will increase so that it will become annual, with the eventual goal of publishing a seasonal journal.

In order to satisfy these conditions, we have listed up the following items.

### **3.1 Frequency of Research meetings**

The frequency of research meetings in item 2 is a very important problem. If there is only an annual meeting, there are few chances for direct communication and the society becomes rigid. It is adequate to run a stable organization, but it is not enough for it to adjust itself to the era. Therefore efforts will be made to have a meeting once every two or three months.

### **3.2 A society recognized by the public**

In item 3, we hope the academic society here becomes recognized by the Science Council of Japan, which gives us formal status as an academic society in Japan. There are some conditions which must be satisfied. The hardest barrier is the number of members. One of the conditions says the number of the members should exceed 100.

We have to consider strategies to increase the number of members. Until now this has not been the purpose of the society, but rather opinion leaders in particular fields have been invited. From now on an effort to increase the number of members should be made as well.

### **3.3 Incorporation of the society**

Item 4 is not a necessary condition for item 3. However, a free organization is a weak one in the public eye and some incorporation will be aimed at this.

As seen above, items 1 through 4 are the necessary conditions for ordinary academic societies. However, our society is not a group of only researchers but also of composers. Such a society has not existed so far, and it is not possible to acquire all the functions which other societies have as a matter of course. We want to fulfill the requirements one by one, confirming their necessity for our society.

#### 4. How research meetings should be conducted

Item 5 is a viewpoint born only by groups of composers. In our surroundings, there are so many occasions to perform composer's pieces. This society does not place providing occasions for the presentation of music piece as its first priority, but they will be presented either subordinately or parallel to research. By continuing such activities, new viewpoints might be established such that *Sosakugaku* is meaningful when it is presented together with concerts.

In reality, ICMC (International Computer Music Conference) functions similarly to that stated above. However, in founding the society, we set up music events as a subordinate activity since we cannot prepare both research and music at the same time, and the research aspect is weaker in Japan compared with other

regions stated previously. Doing otherwise would reinforce the insufficiency.

Item 6 is an abstract statement. New business models for concerts should be considered and proposed from our society. Generally a concert organizer tries to sell as many tickets as possible to provide good music and concerts. In a submission form for music grants, ticket fee income is one of the important items in the budget.

On the other hand, in a research output presentation, admission fee varies from that of a ordinary concert to more than 10 thousand yen for a symposium or an international conference. However, there are several events with free admission as well. In general, researchers supported by competitive research funds, such as Kakenhi, should organize research presentations with free admission. This is as a matter of course, since the fee necessary can be submitted and included in the budget. In such a situation, the performance of music pieces organized by a research organization should be set up as an event with free admission.

New business models were born for free software, starting from GNU, and Google's free search service, and we all receive benefits from them. While the benefits of such a business model eventually level off, everyone accepts it as having been successful.

If we make music performance events simultaneously research presentations, the possibility of people attending the event because of free admission is enlarged. Larger audiences can be expected from these policies.

## 5. International Strategy

This society should be one with an international viewpoint. Here I mean not biased to one particular region by “international”. Items 7 and 8 are established on this point. This society is based in Japan. However, in order to compensate for the lack of information domestically, we want advice and comments from members with foreign nationality, or the Japanese outside of Japan.

In item 9, it is stated that we want to have good communication with existing societies. A loose link such as a form of consortium is one of the solutions to this problem. Especially cross links with organizations abroad should be taken up with the highest priority. At present, Prof. Mara Helmuth, the [former] president of the ICMA (International Computer Music Association) and Prof. Mark Battier, the president of EMSAN (Electroacoustic Music Studies Asia Network) are members abroad, and we want to see if some collaborations can be made.

Art music is the main concern in the society. It is natural that we are strongly conscious of the trends of European music against the historical background. However, as music originally from Europe widely spread, many other factors are also incorporated, such as Japan’s original viewpoints, American music culture, Asian/Oceanic culture, etc. Even though each member has been affected by a particular region, we want to make an effort not to be biased toward the culture of one particular region. Although the number of members is quite few, happily it seems we satisfy the conditions stated in items 7 and 8.

## 6. Conclusion

In founding a new society—the Japanese Society of Sonic Arts—the history of the foundation, mission, and administration policies have been introduced. Critical mass is necessary for the activities of an academic society. Based on the ideas introduced here, let us examine the contents of *Sosakugaku* and modify it, develop our society, and enlighten the public about the ideas established here.

## References

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