

Wataru Uenami

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Of all the Japanese figures that I have had the pleasure to meet, Wataru Uenami was one of the most open, progressive, free and available for dialog. He was warm, communicative, and his joie de vivre and ongoing interest in new and bold musical forms were accompanied by a very delicate sensitivity towards others. I have rarely seen a studio director who was as attentive and convivial with his whole team. He never needed to raise his voice to be heard ; his entire team – including assistants temporarily filling in from other studios and departments of NHK – felt a sense of friendship, solidarity and personal commitment to the creative role, untethered by conventions, which Wataru Uenami so masterfully occupied within NHK. I have never seen a comparable case in any large radio in the world.

To Uenami-san, I owe the good fortune to have lived my first extended stays in Japan in the best possible conditions, which is not always the case for uninformed foreigners. He enjoyed inviting and helping visitors discover and understand Japan. He liked initiating others into some of the secrets of the culture, never pontificating, but instead with simplicity, capturing meaning at its core. Thanks to him and to his organizational sense, I was able to gain access to places where few foreigners managed to venture. Among other things, I was privy to a whole part of an « Omizutori » ceremony in Nara. During my early visits, he helped me understand how and in what way a Japanese « yes » could at times mean ... « no ». To fulfill one of my wishes, he found a topnotch artist who provided beautiful calligraphy for selected titles of my work : « Gaku-no-Michi », « Tokyo », « Fushiki-e », « Banbutsu-no-Ryûdo », « Kaiso ». He helped me find housing. He taught me how and where to eat in Japan, both adequately and ... economically. This may seem trivial, but those who have lived alone in Japan for long periods of time understand how precious and useful such knowledge is.

He was a friend to John Cage, to Karlheinz Stockhausen ... I feel honored to be able to say that, for me as well, he was a true friend.

In the future, and every time I act as sound-projectionist for my work « Gaku-no-Michi », it will be impossible for me, while listening to these sounds, not to evoke the many facts and circumstances that associate his memory to the entire production of this work. I owe its existence to him.

The memory of Wataru Uenami is linked to a whole Japanese generation, whose other figures, today also departed, remain vividly inscribed in my memory : the composer Yoshiro Irino, a man devoted to intense involvement in cultural and social issues, who was to some degree like a father for me in Japan ; the composer Toru Takemitsu, whose artistic sensitivity and broadminded views served to guide thought and influence, at once aesthetically liberal and professionally demanding ; and other figures as well, equally captivating.

These men and the high ethical values represented by them will certainly be missed in the musical Japan of today.

Jean-Claude Eloy, Paris, September 29, 2003
Translated from the French by Meredith Escudier