

INTRODUCTION

Cinq regards sur Noh for (Noh) voice and violoncello, commissioned by ensemble-no and dedicated to Ryoko Aoki, was written in 2019. The piece basically combines three diverse ideas: Japanese Noh chant, Latin mythology and contemporary music.

When Ryoko Aoki asked me to write a piece for her, it took me some time to decide how I would incorporate the idiom of Noh chant. First, I was intimidated by the idea, as the compositional challenges felt enormous. There simply were too many areas I was not acquainted with. After pondering certain possibilities for several weeks, I finally found a way that seemed passable.

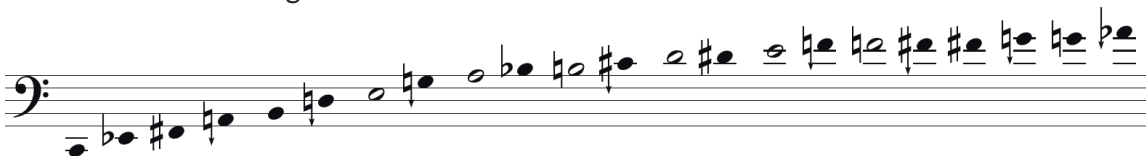
The piece is called **Cinq regards sur Noh**, as the composition represents the view of a Middle European composer on Japanese Noh chant. (Similarly, Messiaen's **Vingt regards sur l'enfant-Jésus** are not musical depictions of, but Messiaen's musical contemplations on Jesus.) The piece can be easily divided into five parts; each part represents a story of Latin mythology, taken from Ovid's **Metamorphoses**. The selection of the text passages is inspired by the five types of Noh plays. The first group of Noh plays, the God plays, finds its equivalent in the story of **Philemon and Baucis**; the second group (warrior plays) in the story of **Cadmus**; the third group (woman) is represented by the story of **Echo**, the fourth group (madness) by the story of **Narcissus' death**. The fifth group (demon) inspired the selection of the story of the petrification of **Atlas**. (Dramaturgical considerations finally led to a different order in this composition.)

The role of the singer consists of two different tasks, which are inspired by "Kotoba" and "Fushi": each part of the composition starts with a short summary of one of the stories. This summary is spoken in Japanese. Each time a metamorphosis takes place in one of the stories, the narrator also undergoes a transformation and becomes a Noh singer who sings the original Latin verses depicting the metamorphosis. Depending on the story, the chant is either inspired by "Yowagin" or "Tsuyogin" – the two different modes of Noh chant. The following chart gives a formal overview:

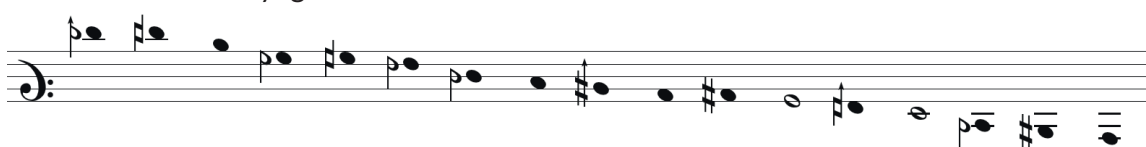
	Latin Story	Noh play	Fushi
Part 1	Philemon and Baucis	God play	Yowagin
Part 2	Cadmus	Warrior play	Tsuyogin
Part 3	Narcissus	Madness play	Yowagin
Part 4	Pentheus and Atlas	Demon play	Tsuyogin
	Interlude (violoncello)		
Part 5	Narcissus and Echo	Woman play	Yowagin

The musical scales of "Yowagin" and "Tsuyogin" (as shown on Ryoko Aoki's website "Study of Noh chanting for composers") serve as the basis for two larger microtonal scales.

The microtonal "Yowagin" scale:



The microtonal "Tsuyogin" scale:



In both cases the white noteheads depict the exact pitches used by Ryoko Aoki. From these scales most of the harmonic material of the piece is derived.

The composition of **Cinq regards sur Noh** was supported by the SKE-Fonds.