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Soundtracking a New 'Japaneseness' — Musical Aesthetic and Aspiration in Japan's Economic Bubble

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Abstract

Japanese animation (anime) has become one of Japan's most popular cultural exports, but the audio component of this audio-visual medium has to date been largely ignored in English-language scholarship. Beginning in the 1980s, buoyed by the socio-economic backdrop of Japan's economic bubble, music began to take on a larger role in the emerging 'media mix' of associated product (eg. CDs, toys, model kits, VHS) that accompanied the production and consumption of anime.

This paper takes as its focus the career of multi-million-selling pop producer Tetsuya Komuro to illustrate how the nature of anime music became increasingly transnational in nature during the years of Japan's booming economy. Spurred on by his time spent in the UK, where he was influenced by the budding rave culture he found there, Komuro quickly became known for the synthesised, Western-influenced sound of his productions, the soundtrack for a new breed (*shinjinrui*) of twenty-something consumers living in life's fast lane. Both generating and reflecting a new image of Japanese affluence and aspiration, this music was consumed at a national level, but crucially, was representative of wider global trends in pop cultural aestheticism. Incorporating a mix of Japanese and English lyrics, Komuro's music allows us to unpack the question of an 'auditory Japaneseness' and its role within the wider socio-cultural backdrop of the time.

Key words: Anime, Japanese Music, Jpop, Japanese composers, Soundtracks

Introduction

The term 'anime' is used to refer to animation originating from Japan, traditionally hand-drawn, although increasingly incorporating computer generated elements, and can be understood as a specific artistic style or medium, encompassing within it a wide spread of distinct genres. Although early examples of Japanese animation date back as far as the early 1900s, the beginnings of what is typically seen as 'anime' are generally linked to the work of Osamu Tezuka in 1960s, where, influenced by the Western animation of Walt Disney, he introduced many of the aesthetic archetypes now associated with anime. Historical accounts of the Japanese animation industry see the burst of activity in the 1960s surrounding the landmark release of Osamu Tezuka's *Astro Boy* (1963) as a watershed moment, marking the 'beginning of a new age in Japanese animation' (Clements 2013: 116). This was then followed by a 'long 70s'; a gestation period of sorts, in which incremental technical and stylistic advances in anime-as-medium bubbled away beneath a veneer of relative stability (Clements 2013: 155). The 1980s, in contrast, saw change happening on a far more rapid, dynamic level. Expanding from 324 individual animated productions in the 1970s, production in the 1980s boomed to a total of 926 works across the decade (Anime News Network), driven by a sudden expansion in 'adult-oriented' material and the commercial prospects entailed by the arrival of home video. Indeed, Japanese home-video sales of anime increased from 2.7 billion Yen in 1983 to 28.4 billion Yen in 1989, indicative of the booming economy of the time and the increased availability of investment capital which was working its way through the production system (Clements 2013: 157).

As a fundamentally audio-visual medium, music plays a key role in defining the aesthetic and wider 'value' of anime for its audiences. Taking centre stage in this paper is composer Tetsuya Komuro, whose music for anime such as *Vampire Hunter D* (Kyūketsuki Hantā Dī, Toyō Ashida, 1985) and *City Hunter* (Shitī Hantā, Kenji Kodama, 1987) preceded his rise to fame as a multi million-selling record producer for some of Japan's biggest popstars in the nineties. Komuro, in particular, is useful to focus on because his musical career incorporates both traditionally composed 'background music' (BGM) as well as the vocal-led 'Opening' and 'Ending' theme songs

that invariably accompany anime, allowing us to trace evolutions in both the style and application of his music across a defined period of time.

By examining Komuro's career and output in closer detail, as well as the societal backdrop he and his contemporaries were creating music in, I will look to interrogate to what extent we can envision them as specifically transnational pop cultural outputs within the context of what John Fiske describes as 'Popular Productivity' (Fiske 1991: 142); specifically, production as consumption, in which 'the products of capitalism became the raw materials, the primary resources, of popular culture'. He envisions a struggle between the nature of these resources (as provided by the financial economy) and the cultural needs of everyday life. In this manner, popular culture is more than simply a consumption of images (or sounds), but a 'productive process'; something that invites us to ask not only 'what' is being created/consumed, but also 'how'. It is this specific process that I will seek to locate within Komuro's music for anime; the kind of 'popular text' that Fiske sees as characterised by their flow into both 'each other' and 'everyday life'. Further to this he states that 'one of the main distinctive features of popular culture against high culture is its resolute refusal of any distance between the aesthetic and the everyday' (Fiske 1991: 126). Popular texts such as anime and the music that accompanies it epitomise this space between the aesthetic and the everyday; products of the societal backdrop that created them, but also reflections of it.

In the 1980s, Japan found itself in the grip of a 'bubble' economy; a period marked by uncontrolled money supply and loose controls on credit, which led to real estate and stock prices becoming highly inflated. This wash of money lent itself to an era characterised by young people switched-on to leisure activities and 'consumerism as a way of life' (Manzenreiter & Ben-Ari 2004: 494). Against a backdrop of Bubble Japan, aesthetic *became* the everyday; a kind of lived aspirationalism driven not only by commodities themselves, but the image of owning said commodities. As popular texts and commodities in their own right, to what extent can we see music and anime as forces for generating (and reflecting) this new image of Japanese affluence?

For this, we must turn to what Fiske sees as the two core functions of commodities: the material and the cultural. The material function is, in essence, the identifiable real-world use-value of the commodity. In the

instance of anime music, this could encompass a number of dimensions: To advertise the show it accompanies, to provide background music for it, to sell CDs, to provide pleasure to the listener, to give them something to dance or sing along to. The cultural function is more nuanced, as Fiske puts it, '[it] is concerned with meanings and values: All commodities can be used by the consumer to construct meanings of self, of social identity and social relations' (1991: 11). Here, we might consider how consuming anime music might make the consumer *feel. A* sense of inclusiveness, of 'coolness', of affluence, and so on; a whole gamut of social identifiers that signify their position (and who they, themselves, are) within a wider society, because of the *kind* of music they choose to consume.

As the next section will aim to highlight, the career of Tetsuya Komuro and the music he was creating for anime in the eighties is an ideal lens through which to examine many of the above questions about the production, consumption and value of anime music as pop-cultural 'commodity'. For Fiske, the link between a society and its popular product are self-evident: 'We live in an industrial society, so of course our popular culture is an industrialised culture, as are all our resources,' (1991: 27). In line with this, the suggestion is that a systemised flow of commodities from producer to consumer will naturally give rise to a systemised 'kind' of commodity, one in which its very purpose and existence as a piece of *popular* culture is reflective of the societal conditions it emerged from.

Tetsuya Komuro - The soundtrack to success

Today, Tetsuya Komuro is best known for his work as a songwriter and producer for hit Japanese pop acts such as Namie Amuro. In Japan's Oricon singles chart of April 15th 1996 he monopolised the Top 5 positions (McClure 1996: 44), and, as of 2008, records produced by him had sold more than 170 million copies. His career has even encompassed international collaborations, such as with French electronica musician Jean Michel Jarre on 1998 FIFA World Cup theme song *Together Now* and production work for the Dannii Minogue-featuring club track *Rescue Me* as part of his dance group EuroGroove in 1995. For all his status as a kind of 'musical tycoon' (Craig 2015: 5) however, it is worth noting that Komuro's earliest successes

in the eighties were as part of the anime industry, producing both soundtracks and theme songs for a number of properties (eg. City Hunter, Mobile Suit Gundam) that would go on to become some of the most fondly remembered titles of the decade.

Komuro's first solo compositional work was the soundtrack for the feature-length film *Vampire Hunter D* (1985), released on Epic Sony Records. A fittingly dark, atmospheric collection, the record's sombre, melancholy soundscapes recalls the background music for fantasy video-games from the same era. Although the musical palette is limited to electronic keyboard instruments, it manages to effectively conjure up an aura of decaying, baroque splendour; an ample match to the flowing, effeminate character designs created for the anime by Yoshitaka Amano (best known for his illustrations for the video-game series *Final Fantasy*). The clarity and melodiousness of these sonic leitmotifs not only highlight deft usage of film music tropes as processed through electronic instrumentation (as opposed to a traditional, classical score), but also hold hints of the kind of pop fare Komuro would go on to create as a producer and pop musician. In this respect, it is important to note that his role within *Vampire Hunter D* was not merely limited to creating the background music for the film's soundtrack; it also encompassed his band TM Network, which he had formed a year earlier with Takashi Utsunomiya and Naoto Kine, providing the closing credits theme *Your Song*, highlighting how even at this early stage, Komuro was operating simultaneously as both composer and performer.

Two years later, TM Network would get their big break, when their single *Get Wild* was released as the first ending theme for the anime *City Hunter* (1987). The openly (perhaps even indulgently) transnational nature of the song is evidenced not only in the fact its title is written in English characters as opposed to Japanese, but also in the particular kind of sonic aesthetic it strives to construct. A product of clear Western influence, and yet resolutely situated within the cultural space created by both the Japanese pop music and anime industries, the song's auditory identity is worth interrogating in closer detail to better understand its engagement with, and possible subsumption of, the transnational mode. Blending both Japanese and English language lyrics, *Get Wild* is emblematic of the increasingly 'adult' direction anime themes had been taking across the decade. Whereas the kinds of tracks

attached to shows in the early eighties had often favoured a 'brighter', more rock-orientated sound, *Get Wild* was sleek, sensual and, most importantly, sounded like something at the cutting edge of current club trends. Both critics and the public were quick to pick up on TM Network's ear-catching sound, tagging them as the 'group that plays pop music with futuristic sounds making full use of synthesizers' (PIA) with their sound frequently compared to 'Eurobeat', the high-energy dance music genre that was rapidly gaining in popularity in the clubs across Europe at the time. Komuro had spent time in the UK and been 'profoundly inspired' by the rave culture he had experienced there; the influence plain to hear in the music he would go on to create in the late eighties and early nineties (Brasor 2008). In descriptions of their sonic aesthetic, TM Network's identity is fully encompassed by their electric, 'synthesised' nature; in essence, they are as much a product of the eighties as their keyboards and synthesisers. Even the band's name, which is reportedly an abbreviation of 'Time Machine Network', lends itself to a feel of mechanised interconnectedness. Komuro would further play with knowingly mechanical self-branding in the nineties and 00s with his subsequent project 'trf', aka. Tetsuya Komuro Rave Factory, who contributed theme songs to the anime series *Black Jack 21 (Burakku Jakku, Makoto Tezuka, 2006)* and *Wangan Midnight (Wangan Middonaito, Tsuneo Tominaga, 2007)*. Across his varying incarnations, Komuro's music would posit a potent cocktail of high technology and 'European'-influenced sound; something resolutely 'beyond' the hum-drum everyday, a promise of barely controllable excitement in line with TM Network's original call to *Get Wild*. Following the initial 1987 series of *City Hunter*, three subsequent seasons followed, alongside a number of theatrical features, one-off TV specials and even a live-action adaptation starring Jackie Chan, cashing in on the global popularity the show had reached by the early nineties. (Clements & McCarthy 2015: 137-138).[1]

The show offered up two core thrills that would become the driving factors behind its popularity; violence and sensuality. With an empowered male lead who is shown to possess notable skill with his weapon (a Colt Python .357 Magnum) and a revolving cast of attractive women for him to

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[1] The Anime Encyclopedia is notable in specifically commenting on how closing theme Get Wild became a hit 'in its own right', beyond its simple attachment to City Hunter itself

act lecherously toward, *City Hunter* essentially became a kind of tick-box exercise in satisfying a particular kind of masculinity; one that would go hand in hand with anime's increasing lean toward more mature audiences in the eighties (MacWilliams 2014: 54). This friction between pain and pleasure would manifest itself directly in the lyrics of *Get Wild*:

It's your pain or my pain or somebody's pain	*It's your pain or my pain or somebody's pain*
Dareka no tame ni ikirarerunara	*If you can live for someone*
It's your dream or my dream or somebody's dream	*It's your dream or my dream or somebody's dream*
Nani mo kowakuwanai	*You won't be afraid of anything*

In presenting a segment of the lyrics to *Get Wild*, it is worth unpacking some of the complexities present in the mixing of English and Japanese within the song; a trend that has characterised Komuro's music throughout his career. In his account of the Japanese music industry, Martin provides a useful explanation of the way language can be utilised with specific agency to convey meaning not only on the literal level, but also the conceptual:

> Language doesn't just embody meanings of individual words; it also embodies thought processes, and these aren't always mutually and directly transferable. Language can be seen as a set of rails on which thoughts can travel, and different sets of rails carry thoughts to slightly different places. (Martin 2016: 171)

In essence, it is not just the literal meaning of the line 'It's your dream or my dream or somebody's dream' in *Get Wild* that carries a certain thought process for the listener, but more importantly, hearing this line sung in English (as opposed to Japanese) creates a *different* kind of thought process. Moody touches on similar themes, commenting on the use of English within Japanese popular culture and Japanese pop music (J-Pop) in regard to the role language-use can play in forming expressions of identify, and more specifically, that 'individual expressions may function as a vehicle of change in identity, and

an expression of the community's desires rather than practice' (Moody 2006: 220). Much like Martin's comments on the distinction between individual meaning and the embodiment of a thought process, if we are to read the use of English within Komuro's songs as embodied *desire*, we encounter a new kind of ambiguous playfulness, in which these theme songs act as a playground in which the specific act of utilising English embodies a freedom not possible in singing the same words in Japanese. This chimes with Fiske's observation of title sequences and music videos as not only commodities of 'explicitly commercial purpose', but also moments of 'licensed play' and a 'carnivalesque, liberated pleasure' (Fiske 1989: 205). In this manner, we can envision TM Network's title music sequence for *City Hunter* as precisely this kind of 'licensed play' area, a space designed not only for the immediate auditory pleasure of the music itself, but somewhere to locate various kinds of aesthetic desire.

Writing in the late eighties, Fiske fills his study of popular culture with an analysis of many of the most recognisable commercial signifiers of the decade; Madonna's music videos, Coke commercials and the TV show *Miami Vice*. Fiske sees the style of *Miami Vice* as 'borrowed' from music videos and commercials, utilising hit pop songs to soundtrack (in much the same way *City Hunter* did within the medium of anime) masculinised images of 'cruising the urban landscape' (Fiske 1989: 208). His subsequent close analysis of the show and the lyrics of one of the songs that appears in it centres on pleasure, as mediated through the imagery of its signifiers (eg. fast cars, porn, drugs etc). In this context, can we perhaps read the desire embodied in Komuro's English lyrics as a similar kind of pleasure; a signifier of something above and beyond what the lyrics literally translate as? Fiske offers hints at unravelling this separation between signifier and meaning in his explanation of a specific kind of 'commodified pleasure'. Here, he cites examples of people window-shopping in malls as a way of consuming not commodities, but the image and space said commodities occupy (Fiske 1989: 214). For these people, consuming the *image* of the commodity, the *desire* of owning it, is enough; to be in the same shared, physical space as the commodity is to be part of its world, part of its aesthetic excitement. In much the same way, for Japanese audiences hearing the English lyrics in Komuro's music, the meaning is supplementary to the concept of Englishness and the liberated pleasure entailed in using it.

'Multihyphenate' identities - Defining the 'Japanese composer'

What can Komuro's dual identity as both 'anime composer' and hit pop producer tell us about his status as a creator, and the appetite for his particular 'brand' of music in Japan? Komuro's eventual rise from a creator of domestic Japanese product in the eighties, to someone operating within the global music market in the nineties, also presents interesting questions about how we might juxtapose his international status and influences with his identity as a Japanese creator, and to what degree the 'pop-ness' of his music eclipses its status as a 'Japanese' cultural product. These kinds of frictions form part of an ongoing dialogue regarding contemporary Japanese music, with De Ferranti commenting that 'little of extant scholarship gives sustained attention to the theme of Japanese popular music as Japanese music,' before going on to note that '[Japanese] musicians have often articulated the urgency of their struggle to reconcile Japanese cultural identity with the Euro-American roots of jazz, rock and other genres' (De Ferranti 2002: 199). We have observed already how much of the excitement and newness attributed to Komuro's music was due to the 'European' nature of his electronic, keyboard-driven dance-pop style, but it is also useful to observe similar discussions of musical nationality in regard to two of his contemporaries: Joe Hisaishi and Ryuichi Sakamoto. Like Komuro, both were born in the 1950s, growing up in the rapidly recovering economic climate of post-war Japan and ultimately were to become famed for the 'melodic recognizability' or familiarity of their compositions (Lewis 2009; Roedder 2013: 55; Hadfield 2018). As arguably Japan's most famous 'anime composer', in the 1980s Hisaishi's profile rose dramatically following his work with Studio Ghibli. With iconic soundtracks to films like *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* (Tenkū no Shiro Rapyuta, Hayao Miyazaki, 1986) and *My Neighbour Totoro* (Tonari no Totoro, Hayao Miyazaki, 1988), the partnership between Hisaishi and Ghibli's Hayao Miyazaki has been likened to that of John Williams and Steven Spielberg, and his music is arguably now synonymous with the wider Ghibli 'brand'.

Ryuichi Sakamoto presents a more immediate comparison with Komuro - moving fluidly back and forth between the pop and film music industries. His soundtrack for Studio Gainax's anime *Royal Space Force: The Wings of Honnêamise* (Ōritsu Uchūgun: Oneamisu no Tsubasa, Hiroyuki

Yamaga, 1987) followed his earlier successes with *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence (Senjō no Merī Kurisumasu, Nagisa Oshima, 1983)* and his position as part of the influential electronic music trio Yellow Magic Orchestra (also known as YMO). To Western audiences, he remains particularly memorable for not only providing the score for the aforementioned *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence*, but also acting in it, alongside David Bowie. Indeed, such is the plurality of his career that some have lamented the ability to easily offer a retrospective or encapsulate the entire scope of his work. This can be seen, for example, the documentary film *Ryuichi Sakamoto: Coda (Stephen Nomura Schible, 2017),* which ignores his score for *Wings of Honneamise* in favour of his Oscar-nominated soundtrack for *The Revenant (Alejandro G. Iñárritu, 2015)* (Clarke 2018). Such was Sakamoto's global success that his status as a 'Japanese' musician began, it seemed, to morph. By the mid-nineties, critics were identifying him as a 'transnational' star, more easily located within a wider, nebulous context of 'world music' than as a creator of specifically 'Japanese' music (Currid 1996: 69-102; Young and Treat 1998: 143). Much like the discussions surrounding famed Japanese composer Toru Takemitsu (Siddons 2001: 12-18), descriptions of Sakamoto's work on one hand applaud his use of Western compositional techniques while others, like De Ferranti, focus on his use of 'Asian scales' within contemporary music (something also identified in Komuro's music). Sakamoto himself goes one further, seeing this intermixing as a coming full-circle, stating that: 'Asian music heavily influenced Debussy, and Debussy heavily influenced me' (Yalcinkaya 2018). The circularity of this argument might suggest that the question of nationality is in fact entirely irrelevant to the music in the end. The important distinction here, however, is that nationality doesn't only manifest itself sonically (ie. in overtly Asian-sounding scales of notes), but also in the creative influence, technique and mode of production of the music. Does a Japanese composer working in a traditionally 'non-Japanese' musical idiom such as dance-pop or classically orchestrated soundtracks make that music somehow less 'Japanese'? Sakamoto's self-contradictory statement, that the auditory origin of his music is inherently circular in nature, in fact lays out the fundamental role inspiration plays within the transnational flow of music; namely, that by identifying music as part of a locale 'other' to that in which a creator resides, it possesses a particular, and identifiable allure, even if that allure can

ultimately trace its origin back to self-same point.

Figures like Sakamoto and Komuro call into question not only an identifiable national identity within their music (an auditory Japaneseness), but also their hybrid, combinatory roles as both producers and composers; functioning under different guises at different points in time and at different locales around the world. Komuro is particularly indicative of this, transitioning the dance-music record label Avex, through which he released many of his productions, from small independent outfit to major-league player; in essence replicating the trajectory of his own career path. In this manner, Komuro shifted in status from an individual creator fulfilling a singular role (soundtrack or theme song) as part of a larger media mix, to an organisational figure with specified agency in developing his own 'brand name' further. De Ferranti sees this flow of creative talent as linked closely to the role of 'individual producer-composers' as having particular agency in this 'fluidity of labour exchange' between the various spheres of 'mainstream and independent pop music scenes' (2002: 204). In essence, the moveability of musical talent between the designated roles of 'producer' or 'composer' gives rise to a value in that process of movement itself, whereby much in the same way transnationality adds breadth to a national 'music', this 'fluidity of labour exchange' adds a similar breadth to the kind of talent (and its creative influences) producing that music.

These ideas chime with Hischak's discussions of 'multihyphenate' (2015: pp.109, 230, 376, 607) creators and how their existence problematises the classification of film composers. Does the title 'composer' necessitate the creation of a 'film score', or can it also include individuals responsible for the creation of any kind of 'movie music'? To what degree does the term 'composer' imply a career wholly devoted to compositional work, at the expense of other creative outputs, musical or otherwise? Namely, if a composer begins to become better-known for work outside the specific ouvre of orchestrated, classical concert music, do these supplementary identities begin to complicate the validity or 'seriousness' of their existence as a composer in the first instance. It is exactly this kind of problematisation that Siddons touches on in his biography of Toru Takemitsu (2001: 12-18).

The role of identity, as attached to the figure of the composer, can be observed in Steve McClure's observations of Komuro's individual agency at

the core of not only a wholesale reconfiguring of not only the Japanese music industry, but the creation of a new kind of awareness of what 'dance music' meant in Japan. For him, the Japanese music industry prior to figures like Komuro was a markedly more un-transnational place, where Japanese labels were unable to distinguish between particular sub-genres of dance music. With Komuro at the helm of indie label Avex, his figure-head like approach to bringing commercial club sounds to the masses typified exactly this kind of attributable, brand-like agency. (McClure 1998: 84). McClure's account of the relationship between Komuro and Avex is open in its admission of the brand-name qualities of the label, claiming that at the time, dance music was 'virtually synonymous with Avex', and that the label had become one of Japan's top five record labels by the mid nineties. Much of this success is attributed to a distinct business-savviness and marketing acumen; relying initially on the 'overseas' allure of imported dance records, before eventually morphing into the thrill of a 'new generation' (echoing Condry's 'new breed') of pop idols like Namie Amuro, for whom Komuro produced a multitude of best-selling singles. Additionally, in December 1994, Komuro launched the nightclub Velfarre (McClure 1998: 91)[2]. The real bubble may have by that point burst, but for Velfarre's club-goers, the dream could live on.

Conclusion

Just exactly what Komuro's music was 'producing' can be cast as part of a far larger narrative of music's role within Japanese society, and the cyclical creation of a series of 'new' Japans in tandem with the introduction of Western-influenced music to the country. Indeed, as Galliano notes, 'the creation of the figure of the composer' in Meiji-era Japan (1868-1912) was something completely alien, having not previously existed within traditional Japanese music (Galliano 2002: 33). Galliano sees the emergence of a newly urbanised Japan in the early 1900s as going hand in hand with the 'aim' of music producers creating popular hits with the explicit purpose of entertaining the masses. In this sense, popular music is not merely the product of a 'modern

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[2] A venture in which its reported 3 billion yen cost and glamorous decor openly recalled Japan's 'early bubble economy'.

consumer society', (Galliano 2002: 108) but also one of the drivers behind that transformation. The role of the society is important, because it was precisely the kind of societal 'miscellaneous knowledge' that Komuro's music represented for Japanese music fans that compelled them to learn his tracks to sing at karaoke; the pressure to be part of something bigger. By performing karaoke with friends, this effect was to be magnified up and down the country, countless local 'performances' of music manifesting themselves on a national level; bringing with it an enlarged, national consciousness of popular song.

This picture of a heavily systemised, societally cohesive engagement with popular song at a national level is one that rarely matches up to the diversified, individualistic drive of consumer culture observed in the West. In *Understanding Popular Culture*, Fiske observes that 'white patriarchal capitalism has failed to homogenize the thinking and the culture of its subjects…. Our societies are intransigently diverse, and this diversity is maintained by popular and cultural forces in the face of a variety of strategies of homogenization' (1991: 29). But what if, instead of a white patriarchal model of capitalism, we were to instead take the image of a harmonious, homogenous eighties Japan, as suggested by Kubota (2003: 73) as our subject? Would these kinds of cultural conditions give rise to a different kind of popular product and a different manner of engagement with it? It is perhaps in this light that we can better understand the emergence of karaoke culture within Japan, of the sense that karaoke can reinforce a kind of group mindset or shared 'karaoke space' (Ogawa 1998: 46). Within this space, we are not only sharing a physical locale with our fellow karaoke-goers and friends, but also a kind of mental locale that is reinforced through our knowledge-in-common of popular songs; a group mindset that exists on a larger, societal level. When Get Wild's lyrics speak of 'your dream... my dream… somebody's dream', it is as if Komuro's brand-name image becomes everybody's image; a plasticised emptiness that, in an osmosis-like manner, commands to be filled - whether by a succession of processed dance-pop starlets, colourful anime characters, or by countless karaoke fans up and down the country.

The significance of Komuro's music is that at its most basic level, it is fundamentally transnational in nature; at the forefront of bringing the kind of electronic dance music popular in the West in the late eighties and early

nineties to mainstream Japanese audiences. And yet, as the above arguments about an auditory Japaneseness and the kind of national consciousness that can be created by an engagement with popular song demonstrate, Komuro is also more than simply a musical 'tycoon', importing foreign sounds to domestic Japanese audiences. By complicating the essence of what it means for popular music to sound Japanese, his 'new breed' of song, and the audience it engendered poses the question: if said music is fundamentally absorbed into the national consciousness of a nation, does it cease to be transnational in nature? This paper would suggest that rather than individually reinforcing or dismantling a sonic sense of Japanese identity, Komuro's music is important precisely because it manages to do both, simultaneously. Much like Sakamoto's comments about the cyclical nature of inspiration behind the 'Asian' sound observed in his music, we would suggest that Komuro's music could instead be positioned as part of a newly global musical modernity. This modernity is Japanese, yes; through virtue of its creators and consumers, but it is also simply 'popular'; with all the associated guises of global, contemporary capitalism that brings with it.

Biographical Note

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