

CONVENTIONAL UNCONVENTIONALITY

By [Janice Giteck](#) on March 1, 2005

About twenty years ago I heard Toru Takemitsu talk about a friend of his, a master shakuhachi player who had an approach to practice warm-ups I had not known of. Each morning he would raise his bamboo flute to his lips and whatever “note” came out first, this was the one he would play for the next two hours. On the in-breath came fresh air, and on the exhale, a magical, endless myriad of overtone ratios, amplitudes, durations, as well as emotional and spiritual expressions. All came pouring out into the space, then he would inhale and again the sound would pour out.



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Learning of this ancient Zen practice further illuminated the work of American composers such as John Cage, La Monte Young, Pauline Oliveros, Morton Feldman, Meredith Monk and a host of other minimalists and post-minimalists. My interest in Webern and Berio, with their “klangfarbenmelodie,” was also revitalized and deepened. All had ventured toward the actual

“presence” of sound, placing at the center of musical organization a more primal intention, rather than leaning on historic, logos-driven concepts. George Crumb’s chamber music, his beautiful, haunting instrumental colors hit the charts in the 1960s. Often dark emotional gestures were held in contexts of breath, vast space, and silence.

What happens when a full orchestra plays in unison for longer than eight bars? How does your listening alter? By decreasing the independence of parts, as did Lou Harrison in much of his music, melodies soon turn very earthy, primordial. Simple heterophony renders unconventional sounds by conventional instruments. These considerations are dynamic, current today, and will be for as long as conventional instruments are used. So then, right now, in the hip-hop, gamelan, amplified string quartet reality of “new music,” what makes some “extended techniques” an already-been-done-bag-of-tricks in one composer’s hands and a trove chest in another’s?

Janice Giteck, (b. 1946, New York) composer of music for concert, multi-media, dance and theater, has scored five award-winning films including Emiko Omori’s *Rabbit in the Moon* (Sundance, Emmy Awards—1999). Giteck has numerous chamber works recorded on CDs for MODE, New Albion, Periplum and Innova, was commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony for *TREE*, and held a Meet The Composer residency (1998-2000) in Seattle.

A professor at Cornish College of the Arts, Seattle (1979-present), Giteck teaches music composition and humanities classes focused on how artists respond to social issues. She is currently working on a recording project of *Ishi (Yahi for ‘man’)* commissioned by the Seattle Chamber Players in 2004.