

Reiko Yamada is the principal keyboardist of the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra. She is a native of Nikko, Tochigi. She enrolled in the Department of Piano at the Tokyo College of Music and majored in instruments. During her four years of study at this college, she was an audit student in Akira Ifukube's seminars. As a result of these seminars, she became greatly inspired by Ifukube's compositions, philosophies, musical ideas and attitude towards music and, consequently, she developed a strong affinity for him.

After graduating from college, Yamada moved to Chicago. She received a scholarship to study in the Piano Performance program at Roosevelt University (Chicago College of Performing Arts), and earned a Master of Music degree. After graduating from Roosevelt University in 1993, she continued her study in the piano performance program at DePaul University to further hone her piano skills. While studying from 1992 to 1998, she served as a pianist (and became the principal keyboardist starting in 1995) with the Civic Orchestra of Chicago. In this orchestra, she performed with world famous conductors such as Sir George Solti, Daniel Barenboim, Pierre Boulez, and Zubin Mehta.

While performing for the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, Yamada auditioned for the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra and joined them as their principal keyboardist. For a period of time she simultaneously served as the principal keyboardist for both the Civic Orchestra of Chicago and the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra. She also taught piano at Richard J. Daley College, St. Xavier University and the Music Institute of Chicago. In November 2003, was involved in a traffic accident while driving on a Chicago highway. She was in critical condition subsequent to the crash, but thanks to the dedicated support of her friends and colleagues - and due to her incredible personal strength - she successfully made a complete recovery.

Although she had always wanted to try her hand at playing her teacher Akira Ifukube's piano concerto "Ritmica Ostinata per Pianoforte ed Orchestra" (1961), she hesitated to do so because of its extreme difficulty. After her experience with the traffic accident, however, her thoughts returned to attempting the piece. She also felt that she was slowly losing her identity as a Japanese after living in the United States for such a long period of time. As well, she wanted to achieve a skill level high enough to be able to express, faithfully and in her own way, what she believed Ifukube's intentions were when writing this piece. All of these factors contributed to her decision to take on the challenge of performing "Ritmica Ostinata."

In 2005, Yamada visited her teacher, Ifukube, at his home and repeatedly discussed the piece with him in his private study. In June 2006, for the first time, she performed "Ritmica Ostinata per Pianoforte ed Orchestra" with the Tochigi-ken Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Masaaki Hayakawa in

Utsunomiya, Tochigi. (Because Ifukube had passed away in February of the same year, the concert ultimately became a memorial to him.)

The concert received rave reviews both at home and abroad. After that, Yamada has performed "Ritmica Ostinata" with the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra concert in Kalamazoo, Michigan, under the direction of Raymond Harvey in 2008; at the concert to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the annexation of Nikko, "The World of Akira Ifukube" (conducted by Osamu Ogimachi and performed by the Tochigi-ken Symphony Orchestra) in Utsunomiya, Tochigi, in 2010; at the Akira Ifukube 100th Anniversary concert (conducted by Eiji Oue and performed by the Tokyo Symphony Orchestra) in Kawasaki, Kanagawa in 2014; at the 101th Regular Concert of the Tochigi-ken Symphony Orchestra: the concert commemorating the 10th anniversary of Akira Ifukube's death (conducted by Osamu Ogimachi and performed by Tochigi-ken Symphony Orchestra) in Utsunomiya, Tochigi, in 2016; and in the All Ifukube Program "Four Concertos" (directed by Michiyoshi Inoue and performed by the Tokyo Symphony Orchestra) in Kawasaki, Kanagawa, in 2016. "Ritmica Ostinata" has become the most important musical work in Yamada's repertoire. Her performances of "Ritmica Ostinata" exhibit extreme passion, which fully draws out the primitive life force of Ifukube's music and always earns high praise. She has broken new ground with these performances and it is no longer possible to talk about Ifukube's "Ritmica Ostinata per Pianoforte ed Orchestra" without mentioning Yamada's piano.

One of Yamada's life goals is to maintain the tradition of Ifukube's music and to pass on the composer's thoughts, ideas, aesthetic and creative vision. By introducing Ifukube's works through various concerts in Japan and in the US, and by putting the finest focus on Ifukube's concepts and designs in her piano performances, Yamada has gained considerable credibility with fans of Ifukube's music worldwide. In 2008, for the CD "Akira Ifukube Works for Piano, Volume 1" (highly recommended by the "Record Geijutsu" magazine), she and Patrick Gordon recorded "Joy of Fire" (reduction for two pianos) from "Fire of Prometheus" (1950) for the first time. She also performed the world premiere performance and recording of "Deux Caractères pour Violon et Piano" (1955/61) with Shigetoshi Yamada (violin) for the same CD. In 2010, for the CD "Akira Ifukube Works for Piano, Volume 2," Yamada and Patrick Gordon recorded the world premiere of "Fire of Prometheus (Ballet) for Two Pianos - Complete Score" (1950) with two pianos. She also played "Ritmica Ostinata per Pianoforte ed Orchestra (Piano II Orchestral reduction)" (1961, revised version 1971) on that recording. For the CD "Akira Ifukube Works for Piano, Volume 3" in 2013, she performed the world premiere recording of "Symphonic Eclogue for 20-stringed Koto and Orchestra (piano reduction)" with Souju Nosaka (25-stringed koto). She also included "Rhythmic Games for Children" (1949) on the same CD.

While assuming the heavy responsibility of serving as the principal keyboardist for the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra, Yamada currently and actively performs solos and chamber music in various cities

in the US and Japan. Her repertoire is wide and ranges from Baroque music to contemporary music; she even played the harpsichord in the Chamber Music Series of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. She asks herself each day what she, a Japanese pianist living in the United States, should do to contribute to the world and devote herself to music.

Yamada studied piano under Yuriko Shiraishi, Emi Maruyama, Ludmila Lazar and Mary Sauer, and harpsichord under Roger Goodman and David Schrader.

(Written by Atsushi Kobayashi)