
Addressed to Hiroaki Zakoji from “Ma chaise”

Katsuhiko Okada

(Translated by E.Zakoji)

(Original Text) <http://kokada.web.fc2.com/essay12.html>

Written 23.2.1989, Published in 'The bulletin of Association of piano players' (1989 April edition)

Now I am writing my work, ‘Chapter Three for Violin, Clarinet and Piano’ (the Op. No will be 62 which is the same as the Chopin’s Nocturne), eating the tasty roast chicken sandwich, alone here, in the coffee shop, ‘Ma chaise’ in Shinjuku Nakamuraya. I thought of the plan at the party after the Kazarus Hall Audition on Feb. 12th and I have already written 7 pieces, but I am going to choose the best one after writing three more pieces.

Here “Ma chaise” has been the important space for me to come when I had a work to compose, when I was with Hiroaki Zakoji, and... even after it became permanently impossible to come with him any more.

When I recall..., it has been already more than 5 years since the first time I met Hiroaki Zakoji here, but I remember it as if it were yesterday..., the dark ski-tanned face of Hiroaki Zakoji was the mark by which to identify him, since we were not able to recognize each other.

It was January of last year when Hiroaki Zakoji died all of sudden by acute cardiac failure. It was less than one month since I accompanied him for Mr. Naoki Arimori’s “Congratulation Party for the Victory of Japanese Music Competition and the Year-end party for the Association of piano players”

We (Hiroaki Zakoji and I with Mr. Hajime Komatsu who was composer and also manager of Toshiba EMI Classical music department) were absorbed in a hot

discussion about Messiaen in the coffee shop 'Daphne' where Beethoven's 9th Symphony was played as BGM in Shinjuku in the 3rd Session of the party.

Finally, Hiroaki Zakoji stood up by saying that he was afraid of missing the last train.

'Yes, that's right! Hiroaki Zakoji is still newly-married! Your wife is waiting. You have to go home!'

'Don't tease me! I have been married for more than a half year. In fact, we are entering a weariness period. I am going to work all night on my composition tonight. See you!'

'Good night! I wish you a happy new year!'

He was leaving with a shy smile, wearing the beige trench coat, carrying the brown shoulder bag. How could I imagine that it was going to become the last time I would see him? Why didn't I stand up, and walk together with him to the Shinjuku station to see him off? If I did, perhaps, the wave of his biorhythm would be different, so perhaps, that makes it possible for him to stay alive, even now... in this world. This was the first thought which came to my mind when I heard the shocking news of his death.

Because.., he was my important dear friend and my teacher of composition, even though he was one year younger than me. He was still only 29 years old. It was less than one year since he got married. He had difficulty in gathering audiences for the concerts of 'SHIN-WAGAKU(new Japanese music) Consort' which was organized by him and his friends. However, some of his works got attention in Switzerland. Also some of his works were performed first time in the concert of Professor, Kumagai. Everything was about to start...!

Also, he was quite a sportsman, being proud of 'having born in Tokyo and brought up in Hokkaido'. He was teaching music and physical education in the Nihon University Art department. Also in winter, he was working as a ski-instructor in Shiga Mountain Resort.

"Katsuhiko Okada, it is not good to become fat without moving your body, it will be impossible to live long. After all, people with long life will win. For example, Brahms was quite a sportsman. Next time please come to Shiga Mountain Resort. I will teach you not composition, but how to ski!'

Like this, he was always criticising me not doing much sport. Therefore, it is impossible for me to believe that he has died. As for me, I continued thinking that he is still alive, even though I went to his Mourning Concert, and whatever has happened in the last two years.

The first time I saw Hiroaki Zakoji was in the concert hall in Ichigaya in

October 1983. I had received the invitation ticket from my friend who was a member of APA (Japanese Amateur Performer Association). I decided to go there for I found the program interesting because it consisted of both classical and contemporary works.

I saw a title of one work, Prelude for Stings (Op.20) 'For the deceased' by Hiroaki Zakoji in the program. The composer, Hiroaki Zakoji which name I had never seen or heard of. I thought it must be a trivial work which was probably making just the 12 tones elaborated without utilising chords like most of trivial contemporary works made by recent graduates from Music University. I was sick of such pieces so I said to myself, 'I hope it will finish soon. I would like to listen to the following Frank's organ piece.' I even had no intention to listen seriously. However, when the work was performed, I was completely surprised to find this tune, although as for chords they were not resolved, having been involved clearly obstinately in sound of E minor. In the limitation, the strong polyphony was constructed. *“This work is great!”*

I was deeply moved by the complete digestion of technique and the intense self expression. Well, there is somebody who makes such a great composition even in present Japan! At that time, I was feeling the lack of fundamentals in my own composition of Chamber music. I was starting to feel the conception of motif must be separated from the piano which is my own musical instrument. Therefore this Prelude for Stings (Op.20) had such impact. However, if this was just all, there was no need to become so close with this composer called Hiroaki Zakoji which name I had never seen or heard of. When the work ended, I was so deeply moved that I was not able to stand up for a while. Then, the composer came up to the stage, introduced by the performer. I was watching it thinking that “Well, he is a young composer, he looks just like my age.” Meantime the performer was giving him the microphone. I was wondering if he was going to talk about the detailed explanation of the background to composition, but all of sudden, he started reading one paragraph of the Buddhist canon (sutra).

“Those which have life will all perish (All living creature will die)...’ this work is the consciousness or the thought of a certain kind which symbolizes such evanescence of life.”

After giving this simple explanation, he disappeared back stage.

“That is all I would like to say with this piece. There is no need to say more, for the people who do not understand.”

It only shows the clear explanation of his basic attitude and nothing else.

There was no self flattery, no self PR or no measure inclination. He seemed like a person with strong self-confidence and belief. He was a person who makes his presence felt and he was a person with charisma.

Well...! This is the man! He is the one!

The first time in my life, I have encountered the person who I should learn composition from!! My six senses were telling me this.

Soon through my friend, I inquired about his telephone number from the Cellist, Mr. Mouri. We started exchanging our works, and corresponding with each other. About 1 month later, Hiroaki Zakoji proposed to meet at the coffee shop, “Ma chaise” in Shinjuku Nakamura every Wednesday evening. For Hiroaki Zakoji it was on his way home from the University. For me it was after my work (at that time Wednesday was the day for overtime work reduction campaign of my company so it was ideal for me) Like this we started the strange meeting at the coffee shop ‘Ma chaise’ every Wednesday. We ordered one cup of coffee and stayed there for 4 or 5 hours, discussing about music, bringing scores and engaging in composition together without saying a word. Perhaps it became like this because accidentally, we were almost the same age. He was only one year younger. He was saying things like this.

“I do not like to teach or learn about composition. If you find something good, you are welcome to take (learn) it. Therefore, In front of you, I will show you my entire attitude about composition and I will not hide anything from you at all. If there is something to learn mutually, that would be great.”

At that time, I could not believe if he had something to learn from me, but he made it in that way.

At that time, I could hardly believe, but he said that *he is going to orchestrate the “Concerto for 2 Pianos” which he had just started writing, bringing a big score to this busy and noisy coffee shop which was crowded with customers for appointments and dates, where the BGM was sounding noisy.* So, “Katsuhiko Okada, let’s start composition together, shall we?” he said like this at ease. I had no choice, but following him. Then I started working on my work, “Flute Sonata” which I was writing and finally completed this work in the “Ma chaise”. It was strange to say, but as he said, *I reached the point where the more noisy, the more I can concentrate,* It was very strange, but it was true. This experience was, when I think later, *very important to make me independent from the piano.* After that, I came to be able to write all Chamber Music in any place where there was no piano. Nevertheless, we two were engaged in composing in such a famous coffee shop, “Ma chaise” in the most crowded time, it made us a little bit famous.

Hiroaki Zakoji received an Invitation from an organization sponsored by the Swiss government. We continued this composition activity at “Ma chaise” for the half year until he left for Switzerland. During this period, Hiroaki Zakoji introduced me to his own teacher, Roh Ogura. Then I also studied under Roh Ogura’s guidance, but I can say that it was from Hiroaki Zakoji, I received the most intense impact concerning the principal attitude of composition. The things I learned from him were as follows.

Music exists for the audience. Therefore, we should write our works by thinking more about the audience than the performers.

There is no difference between professional and amateur in art. Everybody who loves to do it should engage in the activity.

He is writing in the 12 tone-system not because he is professional, but only because he likes the 12 tones. Therefore, if I do not like the 12 tones, I do not have to write a work in the 12 tone-system in all of my life.

We have to study Classical music, especially, Bach and Mozart.

Without being conscious, those ideas penetrated my composition, performance, and activities to organise concerts for the “La Vine School” and “Association of piano players” in several years. Come to think of it, if I had not encountered him, I would not be able to do all the activities which I am doing now. Also, he was encouraging me when I was coming to a deadlock of composition. He was showing only some samples of the past work for a reference and suggesting that I find a concrete composition technique for myself. His teaching method was to consider my future capacity more seriously than my present ability.

After having worked hard on our compositions in the “Ma chaise”, both of us were exhausted and walking along the underground passage towards Shinjuku station. He was always saying things like this.

“Somebody I can talk to with honesty about not only music and composition, but also about concert production (organizing concerts) so much, is only you, Katsuhiko Okada. I would like to be a friend with you all of my life.”

At that time, Hiroaki Zakoji was 25 years old and I was 26 years old. Both of us were young and full of energy (ambition).

In this way, I (who was almost giving up my composition, facing a deadlock) was saved definitely by Hiroaki Zakoji who gave me so much confidence and courage to continue composition.

On the 12th of February 1989, in the 2nd Kazarus Hall Amateur Chamber Music Audition, I won the 1st prize for my work “Op.61 Domestic Rhapsody for Clarinet and Piano.” Since I had been engaging in many concert activities for “LaVine School” and “Association of piano players”, I was happy to find many people (who are my friends and performers) came to the concert. However, the most impressive thing which I can not forget was that a bunch of red roses with a small card written “Takako Zakoji” was brought to me back stage. I realized that Hiroaki Zakoji’s mother came to listen to my performance. After the performance, I met her in the lobby.

“Congratulations. If my son was still alive, I am sure he would be here, but he has gone, already two years ago. . .” When I heard this word from his mother, I

had no choice but to accept the absolute fact of his death.

I came to think what he would say if I made him listen to my Rhapsody which won the 1st prize today. This thought was making me start to cry. Then I had to run to the Gentleman's (toilet), while wearing tuxedo because there were so many people around me. I could not stand the wailing with which I could not accept his death in my mind for two years.

The fond memories with Hiroaki Zakoji at "Ma chaise", the precious moments which are lost for ever and which I can never retrieve, were coming to my mind one after another.

Knowing both merit and defect of my work, the person who is able to give me an opinion without compliment or modesty is nobody, but only you. You were saying to me, "You can not live long if you do not do sports!" Then, how could you go before me...

I could imagine some points he would criticise if he would listen to my "Op.61 Domestic Rhapsody for Clarinet and Piano".

..... Perhaps, he would point out the insufficiency of motif operation (development) and the excessive dependence on the echo of sound.

..... I can also imagine my defence for this.

"I understand your point. However, if I do extra manipulation of motif or ignore the echo, the freshness of the motif itself and the impact will be lost. I believe it would be useless to try to manipulate the motif to a degree which would make it lose the fresh temperature or humidity of the initial moment when I thought of the motif.

After this he would say "Well, you are a helplessly damn Romantic...!" Then, he would stop saying anything any more as usual...

My close friend, only one friend who is able to tell me his honest opinion, and who composes, who plays the piano and who produces concerts like me ...has passed away. I lost an irreplaceable person.

Winning the prize in Kazarus Hall was a precious experience which made me realise both my potential and my limits at the moment.

After the concert, I received some letters (telling me the impression of my performance or requesting the score) from people I have not even known.

This experience was completely new and it made me really happy as I only received some reaction from the actual performers in the past. Now I came to understand the reason why Hiroaki Zakoji was always telling me that “The composition exists for the audience.”

It was truly good that I continued composition!

I am going to announce Op.62 as '*Three Chapters to Zakoji's memory*' with my deepest gratitude and respect for Hiroaki Zakoji who gave me the courage to continue composition.

“You might be not satisfied with some points such as motif operation. Also, I am sorry to use your name without your permission, but please forgive me because I write it with all my heart....Hiroaki Zakoji !”