

ARCANA IV
MUSICIANS ON MUSIC

EDITED BY
JOHN ZORN

HIPS ROAD 2009

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TUNING OF "PATTERNS OF PLANTS"

MAMORU FUJIEDA

Coming to Realize Possibilities of Tuning

In the early 1980s, I began to study composition at University of California, San Diego. At first, I was not so interested in the subject of tuning. After a while, I came to know that composer Harry Partch spent his latest years in San Diego and that many of the instruments that he built had remained in San Diego State University, so I came to be interested in the maverick composer. I had opportunities to see and play his instruments, through which I was able to experience actual sounds of the just intonation by Harry Partch. Meeting with Lou Harrison also increased my interest in tuning. It was when he came to UCSD for his concert that I spoke to him for the first time. Later, I had opportunities to visit him in Aptos, near Santa Cruz, and while hearing him speaking eagerly on the subject of tuning, I came to realize various possibilities of tuning.

When you see Western music from the point of view of tuning, some aspects of historical transition come up to the surface which cannot be seen through stylistic changes or each of the masterpieces. In each period, tuning changes, being combined with compositional styles, performance practices, and mechanisms of instruments. The music in the 20th century which appears to have had varied styles, however, seems to have evolved on the basis of one tuning system, i.e. equal temperament. In other words, innovative or constructive aspects in the 20th century music could become a reality only in the homogeneity inherent in equal temperament.

The musical style of "atonality" by Arnold Schoenberg which is based on equal temperament, has been afterward taken over by many of contemporary composers in the world. A number of compositional procedures were conceived to bring out non-musical effects through extended techniques on instruments and sonic textures such as the tone cluster which involve certain amount of noise. Were the procedures compensation to the

aggregate of tones in equal temperament which lack intervallic correctness? In order to heighten the density of sonic reality, priority was given to the compositional procedures to produce complexity, and as a result, the typical style of the 20th century music was established which was dominated by constantly strained, neurotic sounds. In the background of the situation, undoubtedly lurked equal temperament. I myself felt the limitation of the 20th century music after I came to know the music of Partch and Harrison in the west coast, though I also found that it was not so easy to extricate myself from the constraint of equal temperament.

You need a fair amount of courage and self-awareness to leave the equal temperament and try out alternative tuning systems as can be seen in the cases of Partch and Harrison. It seems to me that changing the tuning system would have a power that would affect not the exterior but the inward nature of the music. A new direction that just intonation suggests has a power to fundamentally convert the forms of music, the ways of listening to and producing sounds that the modern Europe had cultivated so far.

Training Ears: Improvisation on the Computer

After returning to Japan in the late 1980s, I, now being aware of the possibilities of tuning, tried to practice on tuning. I thought, however, it is not so meaningful just to study theories of tuning and calculate intervals. I should start listening to actual intervals and sounds. To do so, it requires diligent efforts such as building instruments, which Partch did, or studying gamelan music, which Harrison did, or learning Indian raga, which La Monte Young and Terry Riley did.

For me, the instrument that I felt most intimate to produce sounds was Macintosh computer. I hooked it to a Yamaha digital synthesizer that had a function for microtonal tuning, and started to listen to pure intervals and sounds in just intonation. The synthesizer, which preset scales including those in Pythagorean tuning, just intonation or well-temperament, also had a function to divide an octave into 768 or 1,024 equal parts. I used the tuning function to set the forty-three-tone scale by Partch and Indian or Arabic microtonal scales in close approximation.

It didn't occur to me to employ new scales in just intonation conceived on the computer and the synthesizer to my own composition right away. I thought I should train my ears to directly feel a variety of intervals

and sounds in just intonation rather than to think about just intonation by means of the expression of composition. I conducted improvised performance on the computer and the synthesizer for the ear training, which made my equally-tempered ears more flexible so as to gradually recognize subtle nuances of just intervals, delicate intonations, and diversity of modes.

I also wondered, however, if it was right to find a way to a new direction for just intonation with sounds obtained by the synthesizer. Would it be through acoustic instrumental sounds that a variety of just intervals can come to their own? The tuning and the instrument cannot be separated each other as the practices by Partch, Harrison, and Young evidenced it. When I found the fact, I encountered the instrument *koto*.

An Encounter with the Koto

In the 1990s, I was appointed music director for Interlink Festival sponsored by American Embassy of Japan, and on an advice from Lou Harrison, we invited Just Strings, an ensemble led by guitarist John Schneider. John submitted an idea of playing *In Just C*, a just intonation version of *In C* by Terry Riley with Japanese musicians. I thought that the *koto* would be a proper instrument for the joint performance, and immediately consulted with two *koto* players Yoko Nishi and Miki Maruta. When we experimented with retuning the *koto* in just intonation, we recognized the sound spontaneously started to resonate, vibrating the body of the instrument with its pure interval. The *koto* players were surprised more than I was. They told me that they had used a tuner in equal temperament for playing modern or contemporary pieces for the *koto*.

After the opening of Japan in the late 19th century, the Meiji government took active steps to introduce Western music, and equal temperament was also accepted as a standard tuning in the process. In this period, when equal temperament came to be common in Western Europe, Europeans nevertheless argued for and against it while other tuning systems such as mean-tone and well-temperament also remained to be used. When Japan introduced Western music, all the tuning systems other than equal temperament were not imported in the country. In brief, only equal temperament was introduced to Japan, being separated from the historical current of tuning in the West.

In the traditional *koto* music, the tuning has been flexibly conducted in each relationship between the player and the instrument by the pro-

cedure orally passed down from ancient times. After the modern times, however, during the process of westernization of traditional music, equal temperament became the standard for the tuning of traditional instruments, in particular in the case of the *koto* in which pitches needs to be fixed.

American music critic Peter Yates, in relation to the tuning of the *koto*, writes an anecdote on Stravinsky: "One evening I invited Igor Stravinsky and several others to my home to hear a Japanese musician, newly come to this country, play the *koto*. The player chose to begin with a modern composition for the *koto* tuned in Equal Temperament. After hearing this, followed by an older composition played in the same tuning, Stravinsky objected that the tuning was not correct for the instrument. Though Stravinsky had no previous experience of the instrument or its correct intervallic tuning, his acute ear had told him at once what the performer, for all his sensitivity, had accustomed himself to forget, that the *koto* and its tuning belonged together; one could not alter the tuning without altering the nature of the instrument."

Stravinsky's ears without doubt intuitively recognized how important delicate intonations and other traditional aspects peculiar to the instrument were, though they could not be felt in equal temperament. The equalization of *koto* tuning, to be sure, would have been reasonable in such practical levels as ensemble with Western instruments and adoption of modern compositional procedures. In experimenting the just tuning for the performance of *In Just C*, however, we foresaw that the *koto*, freed from equal temperament, could obtain a huge possibility in a new practice of tuning.

The performance of *In Just C* prompted me to have further opportunities for trial performances on the *koto* tuned in just intonation. I transcribed *Two Studies on Ancient Greek Scales* by Partch and *Suite* by Harrison among others for the *koto*, which now transformed itself to a new instrument. Just intonation possesses a power to change not only the instrument but also the consciousness of the player. Sounds in just intonation increases the ability to concentrate on listening, giving the player a right moment to "listen to the sounds." The right moment for listening combined with breathing by the player suggests the just timing for producing sounds.

I then formed the ensemble Monophony Consort with *koto* players Yoko Nishi and Miki Maruta, and *sho* (mouth organ) player Ko Ishikawa for exploring possibilities of new tuning systems, exploiting the

peculiarity of the *koto*. “Monophony” is a basic concept used in Partch’s theory of tuning, which suggests the meaning of just intonation. Incidentally, the *sho* is still now tuned in ancient Chinese system sanfen sunyi, which is based on accumulation of pure 5ths, which is identical with Pythagorean tuning. Sounds of the *koto* and the *sho* based on just intonation and Pythagorean tuning, through the performance of Monophony Consort, shake the modern sense of sound inherent in equal temperament.

Patterns of Plants: An Encounter with Plants

I tried to find possibilities of composition which would reflect the consciousness on tuning while I was working for Monophony Consort. I thought I should give priority in the process of composition on listening to sounds and intonations brought out from tuning systems such as just intonation rather than on organizing elements extracted from the tuning systems. Plants gave me a hint for such a procedure of composition.

Botanist Yuji Dogane, who is now active as a media artist working with plants, developed an apparatus “Plantron” in order to observe daily lives of plants and relationship between plants and the environment. When you attach an electrode on a leaf, the apparatus takes out automatic leaf potentials of the plant, which are then analyzed and converted to wave forms or sonic data by the computer. You can get real-time information of the plant which changes itself every moment, and observe it interact with the environment. The “Plantron” has enabled me to have a renewed relationship with plants. I have realized the relationship in the form of sound installation, collaborating with Mr. Dogane.

One day when I was listening to a series of sounds generated from potentials of a plant, I intuitively felt that there must be beautiful melodies latent in them. I soon started to make a composition program based on plant potentials with computer music program “MAX” so that I can find melodies in them. And I thought tuning would be quite important in the composition, a learning from works by Harry Partch and Lou Harrison. In such systems as Pythagorean, just, or well-temperament, each interval of a scale slightly differs each other unlike the case of equal temperament. A pure interval included in these tuning systems gives each sound a distinctive quality. It seemed to me that a slight difference of each sound and a consonance of pure intervals would give quite an energy to a melody generated from plant potentials.

I patiently listened to the sonic result over and over again which was produced from a synthesizer carefully tuned in some distinctive systems, while reproducing data of plant potentials. I found out and picked up melodies that I liked one by one, relying on my own ears. The behavior of “finding out melodies” is similar to going into a deep forest, wondering there in search of beautiful flowers and rare butterflies. I have come to think that “there must be beautiful melodies latent” in the patterns of plant potentials. Such a connection with plants has prompted me to continue an act of “finding out melodies.”

Tuning of Patterns of Plants

As of now (2008), I have completed eighteen collections of *Patterns of Plants* since I composed the first collection in 1995. Each collection which consists of four movements (*Patterns A, B, C, D*) differs in its instrumentation and tuning. I also composed some other pieces as derivations from the *Patterns of Plants* series: *Patterns of Plants Songbook*, which involved texts, and *Antiphon Resounded* for instrumental ensemble and choir.

Patterns of Plants, which was released from Tzadik in 1997, includes collections from the first to the sixth. The *First Collection* (1995) written for *sho* and two *kotos* is based on Pythagorean tuning which is inherent in the instrument of *sho*. The piece can be performed by viola da gamba as a substitute for *sho*, and guitar and harp as substitutes for *kotos*. A different mode in Pythagorean tuning is applied to each of the four patterns. The *Second Collection* (1996) for viola da gamba and two *kotos* is, as is the first collection, based on Pythagorean modes. At times, you hear melodic patterns that could remind you of European medieval music.

The *Third Collection* (1996) for three *kotos* produces an atmosphere of Indonesian gamelan music as the title *Koto-Gamelan Set* suggests. It employs two modes based on just intervals produced through a combination of the numbers “3” and “7.” Two different modes, (1/1, 9/8, 21/16, 189/128, 3/2, 7/4, 63/32, 2/1) and (1/1, 8/7, 9/7, 21/16, 3/2, 12/7, 27/14, 2/1), are used. One of them includes a microtonal interval (ca. 1/8 tone), which quite effectively produces delicate beats.

The *Fourth Collection* (1996) is a duet of an ancient Chinese instrument shitsu (twenty-five-stringed zither) and *koto*. The shitsu has twenty-five strings, which are divided into three sections, i.e. inside nine strings, middle seven strings, and outside nine strings. In this piece, the inside

strings and outside strings are tuned to pitches in the same mode, thus resonating each other. As the *Third Collection*, this collection employs a thirteen-tone mode (4/3, 32/21, 14/9, 16/9, 1/1, 8/7, 7/6, 4/3, 3/2, 12/7, 7/4, 1/1, 9/8) based on pure intervals of the combination of “3” and “7.” Some octaves of the mode are tuned to slightly different intervals (ca. 1/8 tone), which produce delicate shades of tones.

The *Fifth Collection* (1996), the first collection for any keyboard instrument, employs one of the well-temperament tuning systems, “Werckmeister No.3.” Some of the four patterns are written in a characteristic tonality based on this temperament, modeled after the strophic variation form in the Baroque era.

The *Sixth Collection* (1996) entitled *Seventeen-stringed Koto Suite* employs a tuning system based on pure intervals produced by the combination of prime numbers “3” and “7.” When I constituted a mode in this tuning, I superimposed pure ζ ths. As a result, the seventeen strings are tuned by the ratios (16/9, 64/63, 8/7, 32/27, 4/3, 32/21, 14/9, 16/9, 1/1, 8/7, 9/7, 4/3, 3/2, 12/7, 7/4, 1/1, 9/8), some octaves of the mode being tuned to ca.1/8 tone differed pitches, and microtonal intervals of 1/6 and 1/3 tone being included in the mode.

Patterns of Plants, koto suite, an album of Yoko Nishi’s performance on *koto*, was released from Japanese label ALM in 1999. It includes the *Eighth*, *Ninth* and *Eleventh* collections and other pieces composed to a commission from Yoko Nishi.

The *Eighth Collection* (1997) for solo *koto* is called *Tunes of Five* because a pure third interval (5/4) generated by the prime number 5 dominates the whole collection. The thirteen-stringed *koto* is tuned to a scale (1/1, 9/8, 5/4, 4/3, 3/2, 5/3, 15/8, 1/1, 9/8, 5/4, 4/3, 3/2). The pure third included in the scale was a basis of just intonation which characterized the music after the Renaissance of Western Europe. Then, the meantone tuning system, which maintained the pure third, was established for keyboard instruments. When the music of this period was imported to Japan, I’ve heard, the pure third affected the tuning of the *koto*. The pure third interval can be found in the tuning of *qin*, an ancient Chinese seven-stringed *koto*. You can recognize in this collection various musical identities of pure third in phrases reminiscent of *qin*, Celtic melodies with an elegiac atmosphere, and music in Indonesian style which is based on a Pelog-like mode with some semitones.

The *Ninth Collection* (1997), which is called *Tunes of Seven* as a counterpart of the *Eighth Collection* “*Tune of Five*”, is a duo suite for the seventeen-stringed *koto* and the *sho*. As is in the *Sixth Collection*, the seventeen-stringed *koto* is tuned to a nineteen-tone scale (1/1, 7/6, 4/3, 32/21, 12/7, 7/4, 1/1, 8/7, 9/7, 4/3, 32/21, 12/7, 7/4, 1/1, 8/7, 9/7, 4/3, 32/21, 12/7), and the *sho* to a fourteen-tone scale (1/1, 8/7, 9/7, 4/3, 32/21, 12/7, 7/4, 1/1, 8/7, 7/6, 9/7, 4/3, 32/21, 12/7), the ratios being generated from prime numbers 3 and 7. The tuning based on the prime number 7 is quite a new experience for the *sho* which has been tuned in the Chinese tuning system *sanfen sunyi* from ancient times. Various intervals included in the just intonation on the prime number 7 give forth quite distinctive tonal qualities in combination with unique timbres of the two instruments. In particular, microtonal intervals of the *sho* somehow reminds us of the musical world of the Near and Middle East.

The *Eleventh Collection* “*Suite for Koto and Sho*” is based on *sanfen sunyi* (Pythagorean tuning) that has been applied to the *sho*. A number of curved melodies are intertwined by two instruments, giving forth strained sounds of pure ζ ths.

Patterns of Plants Piano Collection, an album of Satsuki Shibano’s performance was released from the CD label from Ongaku-no-tomo-sha in 2000. It includes five collections from the series: the *Fifth Collection* (1996), the *Seventh* (1997), the *Twelfth* (1999), *Piano Selection No. 1* (1999), and *Piano Selection No. 2* (2000). Subtle differences of intervals and tonalities contained in the Werckmeister No.3 yield a diversity of sounds and intonations.

Patterns of Plants Piano Collection was taken up in the series of concerts *Form of Plants*, which I started at Myonichikan, Jiyugakuen school designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in Tokyo as the site of the series. For *Form of Plants No. 1*, Satsuki Shibano performed, and for *Form of Plants No. 2*, Sarah Cahill did. In each concert, about twenty patterns (pieces) selected from *Patterns of Plants, Piano Collection* were freely rearranged to form a new order. In the newly arranged program, each pattern that has a peculiar sense of tonality based on the Werckmeister tuning system is combined one another to present a striking contrast in tonality.

The third concert of the series entitled *Patterns of Plants Violin Collection* (2006) featured transcribed versions of *Patterns of Plants* for violin and piano, which were performed by Rieko Suzuki (vn) and Satoru Sunahara (pf). The tuning adopted for the concert was again Werckmeister

No. 3. The fourth concert *Patterns of Plants, played on the Clavichord* (2007) presented patterns that could be performed on the clavichord and the *Fifteenth* and *Sixteenth* collections (2007) composed especially for the clavichord. Unlike the harpsichord, the function peculiar to the instrument makes it difficult to choose a particular tuning system. So I consulted player Satoru Sunahara, and we decided to use the Kirnberger system to make good use of the instrument. The concert prompted the release of a new album *Patterns of Plants Played on the Clavichord* from Japanese label MAM in 2008.

In the fifth concert (2007), members of Monophony Consort and Rieko Suzuki performed five collections from *Patterns of Plants* series including new pieces. The live recording of the concert was out as album *Patterns of Plants II* from Tzadik in 2008. In the *Seventeenth Collection* (2007) for two *kotos* and a *sho*, a single pattern is transformed to a variety of shapes, which are interwoven with one another, and a certain pattern is rhythmically varied with irregular meters or in different times. The *Fourteenth Collection* (2006–07) is a work for unaccompanied solo violin written for Rieko Suzuki. Frequent use of double-stopping produces a drone-like effect, in which subtle changes of intonation in the single melodic line come to the surface.

The *Tenth Collection* (1998–2007) composed much earlier has been largely revised for *two tankin*. The *tankin* is a *koto* in a small size that can easily be tuned with a tuning hammer. For the revision, I have exploited the simplicity of the tuning on the instrument to apply a *new tuning system*. The procedure I have taken is the following: I regard *one string* of the *tankin* as a *monochord*, and divide the string in equal parts while listening to overtones included in the monochord. Through such a procedure, I have obtained a *ten-tone scale* (1/1, 8/7, 6/5, 4/3, 10/7, 3/2, 8/5, 12/7, 9/5, 40/21, 2/1). I set up a different mode that has consecutive semitones to each of the four patterns that constitute the *Collection*. Peculiar sounds and intonations produced from each of the modes reminds you of the blues or music by Harry Partch.

The *Fourth Collection* (1996), which is included as duo pieces for the *sitsu* (a Chinese zither with twenty-five strings) and the *koto* in the first Tzadik album, is presented here as a new version (2006) transcribed for the violin and the *sho*. In the sounds of the *sho* that is tuned in the *sanfen sunyi* system, a Chinese counterpart to the Pythagorean system, subtle nuances of the violin emerge clearly. In the *Eighteenth Collection* (2007) written for the

violin, the *sho*, and two *kotos*, different patterns are inserted into repeated patterns, and a temporal difference between patterns produces polyphonic layers, or some different patterns are superimposed one by one and interconnected with one another.

In *Patterns of Plants* series, I have adopted tuning systems such as Pythagorean, extended just, well-temperament etc. to make good use of peculiarities of the instruments such as the *koto*, the *sho*, and keyboard instruments. *I have done so because* I have been confident that unified relationship of the instrument and *the tuning would generate lush sonorities and unique intonations* as the anecdote of Stravinsky mentioned by Peter Yates suggests. *Following the word by Lou Harrison, I have also continued to find melodic patterns, focusing on inherent nature of intonations included in each of the tuning systems.* The consciousness on the possibility of tuning thus has worked as a driving force to develop *Patterns of Plants* series.

Patterns of Plants II released from Tzadik in 2008 suggests a new direction of the series. It is a tuning system employed in the *Tenth Collection*, in which one string of the *koto* is regarded as a “monochord” and tuned in just intonation. I am planning a new series *Patterns of Plants, a Catalog of Tuning Systems* based on a variety of modes, which would be generated by different kinds of combination of ratios obtained by equal divisions of a single string. Another plan is to use the original temperament by J. S. Bach recently found in the scrolls on the front page of *Well-tempered Clavier*. I am thinking to transpose patterns from the collections of *Pattern of Plants* for keyboard instruments, employing all the twelve tonalities based on so-called Bach temperament, or to compose new patterns and arrange them in the order of the circle of 5ths. A new *Collection “Well-tempered Patterns of Plants”* for the harpsichord is scheduled to be made public in 2009.

As the title Patterns of Plants indicates, melodic patterns transcribed by electric current of plants are incessantly proliferating, being enriched by a variety of tuning systems and instruments. Innumerable melodic patterns are assembled in varied manners and rearranged to form another world of Patterns of Plants. The series of *Patterns of Plants*, which continues to develop in a recurrent process of combination and transformation, *will not come to an end.*

A List of Patterns of Plants

- 1st Collection [1995] 2 koto (or guitar, harp), sho, Pythagorean
 2nd Collection [1996] 2 koto, 2 vila da gamba, Pythagorean
 3rd Collection “Koto-Gamlan set” [1996] koto, 20-stringed koto, 17-stringed koto,
 Just Intonation
 4th Collection [1996] version for hitsu, Just Intonation; [2006] version for violin
 and sho, Pythagorean
 5th Collection [1996] clavier, Well-Temperament
 6th Collection [1996] 17-stringed koto, Just Intonation
 7th Collection [1997] clavier, Well-Temperament
 8th Collection “Tunes of Five” [1997] koto, Just Intonation
 9th Collection “Tunes of Seven” [1997] 17-stringed koto, sho, Just Intonation
 10th Collection [1998–2007] koto, Just Intonation
 Songbook No. 1 “The Name of Orched” 1. *Servus Paphiopedilum* 2. *Quam me
 delectat horum Orchidaceae caro!* 3. *Euphsia puella parva est* [1998] sop,
 koto, 20-stringed koto, Pythagorean
 11th Collection [1999] version for koto and sho, Pythagorean; version for koto and
 violin, Pythagorean
 12th Collection [1999] clavier, Well-Temperament
 Songbook No. 2 “Today is a very good day to die.” 1. *Maria rosas amant I*
 2. *Maria rosas amant II* 3. *I am a woman.* 4. *Today is a very good day to die.*
 [2000] sop, koto, 20-stringed koto, 17-stringed koto, viola da gamba,
 positive organ, Pythagorean
 Songbook No. 3 “Night Chant” 1. *Chant I* 2. *Cant II* 3. *Dead Leaves* 4. *Blue
 evening falls.* [2002] sop, koto, 20-stringed koto, 17-stringed koto, viola da
 gamba, positive organ, Pythagorean
 13th Collection [2003] clavier, Well-Temperament
 14th Collection [2006–07] violin solo
 15th Collection [2007] clavier, Well-Temperament
 16th Collection [2007] clavier, Well-Temperament
 17th Collection [2007] violin, 2 koto, sho, Pythagorean
 18th Collection [2007] violin, 2 koto, sho, Pythagorean

Transcription

- Clavier Selection I* [1999] Well-Temperament
Clavier Selection II [2000] Well-Temperament
Clavier Selection III [2006–2007] Well-Temperament
Collection for violin (or viola da gamba) and clavier [1999–2007] Well-Temperament
Collection for violin and sho [1996–2006] Pythagorean

LOCUS

KENNETH GABURO

Notations are a kind of sign-language.

The universe is replete with them.

They occur not only as inscriptions on so-called tangible, concrete material, but also as ideas, images, sounds (e.g. in air), instruments, texts, words, thinking’s, et alia.

Notations mostly point.

Clearly, they are not “things” in themselves.

They act as necessary links to those more profound realities which they signify, and to which they are joined.

But, signifieds may also be taken as kinds of sign-language.

They, too, point!

No matter the how, when, where, why, or what of it, neither does there seem to be an end to this pointing to signs of signs by signs; nor is there any discernible end to the connections formed thereby. By this process, networks of astonishing consistency and magnitude are often generated.

Remarkable.

Still, that’s not all, for:

Notations are also “in themselves”.

They point to themselves, too.

They act as necessary links to those more profound realities which they signify in themselves.

The seeming clash between signs in continuous outward motion, and signs stayed in themselves, has little to do with so-called elusive nature of where the events to which the signs point, are.

Actually, signs are events, and: