

# UC Santa Barbara

## UC Santa Barbara Previously Published Works

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Akio Suzuki (front) with musicians including dj sniff (crouching) on a sound walk in Kyotango

## Asian Meeting Festival 2017

Various locations and venues, Japan

Bedraggled musicians from across Asia are scattered along the shore of Kyotango on the North coast of Japan, triumphantly wet to the bone, laughing and scratching in the sand. The 2017 Asian Meeting Festival is taking a break from a hectic tour schedule across Japan to meet with the great sound artist Akio Suzuki, who is leading us on a sound tour up mountain paths, into roadside tunnels, and onto the rocky beach to discover his favourite oto-date, special spots for listening to unique local sounds. We try clambering over to a small cave once used for illegal gambling, where Suzuki recorded his 1997 CD *Na-Gi*. But the waves are heavy today. Those intrepid enough to attempt the rocky path return soaked; the camera operators following the tour curse quietly and back away, mopping their lenses. Suzuki doesn't bat an eyelid as he instead drops to the beach to explore what the sand sounds like: "If you rub and push at the same time, it sounds just like a puppy whining!"

The next morning, the group reconvene at the abandoned elementary school that houses a project of Suzuki's volunteer-run Art Camp Tango, where they spend the morning exploring the different spaces throughout the building. Alice Hui-Sheng Chang voices creaky peeps in a dark

staircase, testing the reverb; Caliph8 nabs a steel rack from a chemistry classroom and slaps on a contact mic. A few hours later, they split into duos and trios and scatter throughout the school, leading an audience from room to room for a series of unique mini-improvisations that ends with Suzuki gently hooting into his self-made Analopos echo instrument as an autonomous sculpture sends a stream of paper ribbon dancing around the room.

Opportunities for listening and connecting through sound are at the heart of the Asian Meeting Festival, or AMF for short, a remarkable musical gathering that was first initiated in 2005 by Otomo Yoshihide and revitalised in 2014 with Yuen Chee Wai, of Singapore based group The Observatory, and dj sniff aka Takuro Mizuta Lippit as co-directors.

The festival is itself a project of the Japan Foundation funded Asian Music Network, which in two years has launched over 20 performances, screenings, talks, research projects and other events across Japan and a variety of Asian cities. In 2016, I joined the AMF tour in Singapore and Malaysia to watch young superdrummer Ann Murasato duet with noise veteran Jojo Hiroshige; Kok Siew-Wai warble and howl against C Spencer Yeh's gritty, droning violin; and a roaring crowd of local freaks greeted

the explosive Senyawa at Kuala Lumpur's Live Fact. The 2017 meetings traversed Japan from Fukuoka to Kyoto to Sendai, ending up in Sapporo with two highlighted performances in the Sapporo International Arts Festival (which was curated this year by Otomo as a wonderful cluster of site-specific performances and sonic and visual installations).

Each year's AMF features unique combinations of musicians from cities across East and South East Asia – most of whom have never met before – to improvise together in small groups, which are rearranged each night. In AMF 2017, the core mix includes Alice Hui-Sheng Chang (Taiwan), Arnont Nongyao (Chiang Mai), C Spencer Yeh (New York), Caliph8 (Manila), Musica Htet (Yangon), Nguyen Thanh Thuy (Hanoi) and Yui Kah Hoe (Kuala Lumpur). At each concert, local performers are brought on board to join the crew. In Kyoto, YoshimiO (Yoshimi of Boredoms, OOIIO) drummed in a thunderous trio with Yuen on prepared guitar and Nguen on the Vietnamese đàn tranh zither. Later I travelled with the touring party up to Sapporo, where the performances featured solo sets by Keiji Haino and Oren Ambarchi, and locals Shimettainu, TENTENKO and legendary drummer Ikuro Takahashi incorporated into group sessions. One highlight of the Sapporo sets featured

Takahashi wandering from his drum set to pound the walls of the concert hall, as dj sniff and Yui put down transcendent layers of ambient turntable noises with traditional Malaysian flute.

It takes serious organisational chops to make an endeavour of this scale come together, with an absolutely epic level of effort behind the scenes from an accompanying crew of sound engineers, videographers, fixers, writers and non-profit and foundation staff. Funding the festival is an equally complex puzzle. Japan Foundation grants restricted the Asian Music Network to members in the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), which leaves Chinese and South Korean musicians out (though Otomo loops Beijing based Yan Jun and Seoul based Ryu Hankil into the Far East Network ensemble). These funds have now dried up, leaving Yuen and Lippit searching for ongoing funding for next year's events.

But so far, the experiment has paid off exceedingly well. AMF is jumpstarting the emergence of an exciting inter-Asian network of experimentalists, ranging from Yogyakarta to Yangon. The just issued collection *Asian Recording Sessions #1* (doubtmusic) captures the excitement of the project in seven improv sessions, recorded earlier this year at GOK Sound in Tokyo. David Novak