

The Swinging Voice of Kasagi Shizuko: Japanese Jazz Culture in the 1930s

HOSOKAWA Shūhei

International Research Center for Japanese Studies, Kyoto

Introduction

The Teikoku (Imperial) Theatre, Tokyo, July 1939. The singer Kasagi Shizuko (1914-1981), swinging her whole body rhythmically, started singing with brilliant gestures and expressions: “You play the trumpet, full of swing/ Marvelous, joyful and sweet melody.” While she was scattling, a trumpeter got close to her to play a counter melody. The song is Hattori Ryōichi’s “Bugle and a Girl.” The stage critic Futaba Jūzaburō, excited by her performance, called her “the Queen of Swing.” She embodied what he had dreamt of for years in vain:

Her swing feeling is something contemporary Japanese singers are unable to express. We know many swing singers mainly through recordings. For example, the robust swing feeling of Ella Fitzgerald, the chic one of Maxim Sullivan, the thoroughly delicate one of Mildred Bailey, the jewel-like and finely stringy one of Lil Armstrong, and other types of swing feel of countless singers. We have been searching almost desperately for those feelings in our country. But Kasagi Shizuko turned our melancholy into hope and joy.¹

Futaba’s laudation was not an overstatement, because Kasagi Shizuko was the first Japanese singer who “got swing” and she had no imitators before 1945. Her vocals were positioned in a singular point in the history of Japanese popular music. It is the purpose of this article to contextualize her performance amid the prewar Americanism and anti-

¹ Futaba 1939.

Americanism, vocal primitivism and the technique of microphone singing, and Osaka regionalism. Today Kasagi is more remembered as an icon of the Occupation era (1945-52) because of her hits “Tokyo Boogie Woogie” (1947), “Shopping Boogie” (1950), and many “boogie” tunes. Her impressive performance of “Jungle Boogie” (1948) in Akira Kurosawa’s *Drunken Angel* (1948) also has been a strong influence on today’s collective memory of the era formed by television and photography. Therefore she is aptly recollected more as the “Queen of Boogie” while her prewar acts and the prewar swing frenzy surrounding her have generally sunk into oblivion. It is my intention to focus on the continuity of the “swing era” with an interruption by the Japan-U.S. War as represented by her career.

The majority of Japanese music history assigns the year of 1945 as an absolutely new starting point. Certainly, the defeat of war discouraged Japanese people and the Occupation was a totally new experience in national history. For the nation to be “reborn” from ashes, the postwar historians, academic or popular, tended to praise “democracy” by way of condemning onesidedly the prewar as “feudal.” Such history writings often conceal the continuous undercurrent in people’s mentality and lifestyle. Although general discussion on the historical consciousness goes far beyond the scope of this paper, I would like to underscore here that the boogie woogie fad during the Occupation era was a reiteration of swing boom before the war, yet with notable contrasts.

The “swing era” in Japan is better understood as a two-part play. The first part (ca. 1936-40) was a small movement among the urban middle class under the general persistent anti-Americanism and militarism, while the second one (ca. 1946-52) was a mass phenomenon principally among the first postwar generation under the general euphoric Americanism and “democracy.” David Stowe has argued the political implication of the New Deal policy in American swing culture in terms of racial ideology, labor ethics, nationalism, and others.² In the U.S. swing represented the whole socio-cultural shift including gender relationship, technological innovation, entertainment industry, middle-class and workers’ class lifestyle. By contrast, in Japan it was but a storm in a

² Stowe 1999.

small bottle which was detached from the mass phenomenon. However, studying the swing circle in the 1930s will reveal a reverse step to the national enemy against the irreversible social marching to the outburst of the Japan-U.S. War. It is true that it is necessary to research the postwar part to comprehend Japan's swing culture as a whole, but here I will deal only with the former with an emphasis upon the vocal style of Kasagi Shizuko.

1. Swing Comes to Japan

According to one of the most important jazz critics Oi Jazurō (alias Nogawa Kōbun), “swing” became a buzzword in the summer of 1935 and the following year saw “a plethora of writings and a pile of swing records.”³ The monthly bulletins of record labels endorse his notes. The summer of 1935 is of course the memorable turning point in jazz history because of the first triumph of the Benny Goodman Orchestra in California after disastrous gigs on the East Coast and in the Midwest. It was the first time that the “hot” sound arranged by African American composers-arrangers reached the white mass out of a small negrophilic circle.⁴ Benny Goodman contributed little to the creation of swing sound beyond its penetration into middle-class white America and the international market. As early as October 1935, a Japanese journalist called him “the hottest clarinetist around the world” and “a good friend of millions of dancers all over America.”⁵ The travel of information and vinyl records was speedy, as the time lag between the two countries could be hardly perceived. To a much lesser degree than in the U.S., swing music entered into the hip community of Tokyo.

Evidence for the emergence of the new jazz /swing scene was the establishment of the Rhythm Club (Rizumu Kurabu) in April 1936. It consisted of critics, singers, musicians, composers, and dancers of the first rank and its initial aim was to promote the “correct understanding and recognition” of “jazz music which is on the edge of our age and

³ Oi 1936.

⁴ Erenberg 1998, chapter 2.

⁵ Ishigami 1935.

plays the marching bugle of our century.”⁶ Its headquarters was set up at the Yamano Music Instruments Shop in Ginza, Tokyo, which was among the oldest and the largest music shops around that time (famous for its imported record section). It was organized probably through the initiative of Oi or other critics who had read about similar clubs founded in North America and Europe in American jazz magazines. Different from its Western counterpart, however, Japan’s Rhythm Club was not a fan club but an arena of critics and the top musicians and singers. I suppose that the originators intended to emulate the creative collaboration between John Hammond and Benny Goodman. Underlying the club was a shared recognition that jazz did not receive its due respect from the Eurocentric and art-oriented music world and that “pure and authentic jazz” should be valued as respectable music of the present century. Unfortunately, nothing is known about their activities. No news must not be always good news. Busy professional performers, I imagine, had little or no time to spare for the club.

2. The “Jungle Sound”

It is difficult to say when the records by African American artists became available in the Japanese market. The earliest references to Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong appeared around 1933. One of the first substantial articles on Ellington in Japanese included the following poetic impressions induced by “Creole Rhapsody” (1931):

Dim-toned blues and foxtrot wavering throughout the piece.
Melancholic blacks striding in a lazy and lustful manner appropriate
to the tropics.
The prayers of blacks that follow it. The slow rocking movement of
bodies. Blues.
The complexity of simple rhythm.
Eerie shouts of sorrowful blacks sparkling inside it.
Animal-like direct cries, at last.
The rhythm of one wavering hand stretching out to the sky.

⁶ *Ongaku shinbun* (music newspaper), 1 May 1936, p. 3.

A moment later, dim tranquility close to the strange silence recurred. Or, the explosion of honest, straight, and spiritual desire of the blacks.

The grotesqueness of primitive naked bodies
Unlimited flood of pleasure.⁷

The quote sounds like program notes for a symphonic-jazz piece or a program music work, expressing an artistic excitement far from the fleeting joy characteristic of ordinary dance music. Kawaguchi's emphasis on spirituality may come from articles on negro spirituals published around the same period. His African American stereotyping is easily noticed. Interestingly, he remarks that the rhythm and breath of negro spiritual and Buddhist chanting share the same basic technique. This similarity he discovered implicitly explains the Japanese emotional proximity to Ellingtonian art despite their geographical distance. It provides a prototypical discourse on the call for solidarity with the segregated in the 1940s which was more an attack aimed at the brutality of white America than a manifest of racial equality.

Kawaguchi's ambivalent view of the lascivious yet sincere, animal-like yet sorrowful, grotesque yet spiritual image of black people is typical of the "primitivist modernism" (Sieklinde Lemke) underlying jazz apotheosis in that period. Ellington's "jungle sound," he notes, "sings about the violence of jungle (forest zone) and the enchantment of the primitive. It deploys the cries of a hundred animals, mysterious prayers of the black, the effects of each instrument, and the gurgling of throat proper to blacks. It is abound with grotesqueness that depicts the mystery in the depth of an eerie swamp. It is one of the most outstanding dance pieces." The word "jungle" was perhaps little used in everyday speech and the very phrase "jungle sound," which he had presumably read in imported magazines, sounded so fresh that it inspired his poetic review.

Kawaguchi's article marks the transition in jazz criticism in Japan from the period of "sweet" jazz represented by Paul Whiteman, Vincent Lopez, and other white band leaders to that of "hot" jazz by a number of

⁷ Kawaguchi 1933.

African American bands. Paul Whiteman's idea that only the white can appropriately and artistically elaborate the primitive black sound was dominant in Japanese jazz discourses since the 1920s. However, the constant release of Ellington, Armstrong, Calloway, and other African American artists made Japanese listeners aware of the musical differences attributed to race. Whiteman's music was never called "white music" but "American music." Ellington's music was both "black" and "American" music, with weight given to the former. Underlying the reception of swing in Japan was the friction between "America" and "black."

The representative negrophile Muraoka Tei, who was dubbed "Japan's Hughes Panassié" after the eloquent French jazz critic who "discovered" black jazz art while despising white "plagiaries," compared the Valaida Snow and Mildred Bailey in the following way: the former (black) "sings a song with explosive notes that no women without chocolate-colored skin and flaming red blood could do. It's because she sings with a feeling expressed by clear breath." By contrast, the latter (white) "has mastered the negro way of singing and can sing swingy. Certainly she lacks in the nuances and *abandon* [English in original] if compared to black women, but it is unavoidable, given her whiteness."⁸ It is evident which singer and by extension which "race" is superior in his jazz appreciation. For him, Chick Webb was "an authentic drummer" while Joe Daniels, a white drummer ephemerally popular in the 1930s, was nobody but a "street music clown (*chindonya*)." Another negrophile blatantly wrote that he did not consider Artie Shaw or Harry James worthy because of his "*racial prejudice*."⁹ The "prejudice" in this context signifies nothing other than absolute preference.

Along with them were negrophobic critics in jazz journalism. Inayoshi Yukichi was one of those who "generally prefers white jazz to black jazz" because the music, according to his ideal, should conceal emotion which was not the case with black music.¹⁰ Black people had only naïve character and their music is "played almost exclusively with emotion." Worshipping black jazz signifies a "reflux against civilization." In his

⁸ Muraoka 1937.

⁹ Nishina 1938.

¹⁰ Inayoshi 1940.

view, Ellington's "Black and Tan Fantasy" sounds like "cheap sentimentalism" narrating sympathy for the oppressed race. Though the composer mentioned the name of Debussy and shows a transcendent technique far above the jazz standard, he could not help limiting himself in the frame of emotion. His categorical conclusion is: "Ellington is also a negro. It's his fate." No previous record reviews written in Japanese would feature the notion of race as clearly as these instances.

Some aficionados realized how the racial segregation in American show business favored white bands. For example, a journalist wrote that "American journalism which has usually ill-treated blacks has made Goodman the god of jazz because he has beaten the black swing bands." The author criticized the partiality of white American journalism. Another sympathizer for black swing bands disclosed that in American polls the blacks necessarily suffered 20 or 30 percent of loss compared to the white rivals. For him, "*my* Ellington orchestra" is number one despite the contrary ranking in American polls. By saying so, he proudly shows his attachment to Duke Ellington, rejecting the authority of some American journals. The praise for black orchestras, however, has not always led to the denial of racial prejudice. A privileged aficionado (later a notable steel guitarist) who had a chance to attend Fletcher Henderson's performance in Chicago and who believed them to be the "real swing" could not change his negative stereotyping: "Negroes are generally less intelligent and live a lower level of life. Because of it, they are good-humored but loose and flabby."¹¹ The great artists for him are exceptional to the inferior race. The discrepancy between musical taste and racial view is almost omnipresent in the consumer society. Changing musical taste does not accompany changing the racial view. Though in manners different from American ones, swing music both clearly and ambiguously articulated the racial image and view of Japanese fans.

3. The A.L. King Orchestra

What stimulated and was stimulated by the increasing curiosity toward swing was the African American band A.L. King and His Orches-

¹¹ Murakami 1940.

tra. Though no jazz encyclopedias refer to them, they were the first all-black band playing in Japan (the performance of black musicians was sporadically reported in Japan since the mid-1920s). They performed at Florida Dance Hall, the most prestigious dance hall in Tokyo, from spring or summer of 1935 to May 1936, and from August 1936 to the end of the same year or the beginning of next year. According to Florida's advertisement, they came "directly from Cotton Club." However, it seems that they were but a local band touring around East Asian cities. While they were called A.L. King and His Florida Original Rhythm Aces during their first stay, the dance hall named them in the second contract as A.L. King's Florida Swing Band. In the same year several local bands, following the fad, were also renamed: Sugihara and His Blue Swingers, Isobe and His Sweet Swing Band. This indicates how the words of swing became trendy in 1936. At least a dozen "swing"-named bands were known in 1938.

The A.L. King Orchestra had an impact on the local audience. One writer expressed admiration for their "timbre and performing technique proper to negroes." Another writer was satisfied with the vibration and phrasing of the sax section and the heavy "pep" of the rhythm section. Their polite stage manner that broke down the primitive stereotyping of blacks also surprised the audience. Their technique, according to a retrospective article, was far beyond Japanese jazzmen:

What they showed was too transcendental. It was hardly attainable by common players. The high register of brass, the lip slur, the stamina, the [Johnny] Hodges' styled alto, the tenor's timbre and false tones, the roll of foot cymbal, and piano, piano! They made Japanese realize the irreconcilable distance.¹²

This pianist who astonished him was the unknown Beatrice Willis. The other female member was the conductor and singer Golden Brown, whose conducting action was compared to that of Ina Ray Hutton, the leader of the most famous all-white all-girl big band. Her singing was "[only] a novelty for black singers yet her orientation is pretty high-

¹² Jiōji 1937.

brow.” Neither of them have been mentioned in the recent researches on jazz women.

Unfortunately only two Japan recordings of the A.L. King Orchestra are known. Both of these are the vocal renditions of American pieces, “St. Louis Blues” and “Shanghai Lil.” The singer Dick Mine (alias Kōichi Mine) was among the most successful jazzy singers at that time, known for his English-bent pronunciation of Japanese lyrics which superficially emulated the vocal delivery of Japanese-American singers performing in their parents’ home country. Their awkward (childish) pronunciation sounded “American” and therefore “jazzy” to Japanese ears. Mine’s “St. Louis Blues” is among the most hilarious versions of this well-known tune recorded in Japan. Mine puts interjections such as “uhhh” and “ahhh” between the phrases as if he were excited by the hot sound of the band. He even inserts scat singing of “di di di” to uplift the atmosphere. This is the first recorded instance of scat singing in Japan. His emotional expression, however, lacks flexibility and spontaneity according to my judgment. It seems that he was forced to match with the African American groove. Obviously he was challenging the new style but only with moderate success. He was principally a sweet crooner in the style of Tino Rossi or Bing Crosby, apt for tango and Hawaiian-tinged popular numbers (*hapa haole*). In the second part the members of the band took turns singing in English with screaming and howling like Cab Calloway or Screaming Jay Hawkins as if they had jokingly taught Mine how to get swing. As for the musical relationship between the popular (non-black) crooner and the African American band, their “St. Louis Blues” is a Japanese version of the more famous collaboration between Bing Crosby and the Duke Ellington Orchestra (1932).

4. Hattori Ryōichi Meets Kasagi Shizuko

So far I have outlined swing culture in Japan with focus on the concept and image of race, the presence of an African American band, and the elusive, tentative nature of scat vocals by a Japanese singer. Now we turn to the performance of Kasagi Shizuko. Kasagi Shizuko made her debut in 1927 at the age of thirteen with the Osaka Shōchiku Girl Revue. Although she recorded in 1934 for the first time (lost) and became a no-

table dancer around the same period, she would have remained a regional celebrity without an invitation from Tokyo. In 1938 she was called by the Shōchiku Revue Show (Shōchiku Gakugeki Dan), a new troupe established for the adult audience unsatisfied with girl revues. Their spectacle consisted of singing, collective dancing, tap dancing, comical sketches, chorus, and others. Many of the numbers came from parodies of American and European films. For example, the scene of trumpeter and singer quoted in the beginning of this article derived from a scene with Martha Ray and Louis Armstrong in Raoul Walsh's *Artist and Models* (1937). Many numbers of the Japanese revue shows in the 1930s reproduced the highlight scenes from foreign films. Astaire's and Crosby's musicals were always a source of inspiration. Whether we call them plagiaries, hommages, or quotes, it is undeniable that Japan took part in the transpacific traffic of electric image and sound.

One of the central figures of the Shōchiku Revue Show was the composer-arranger Hattori Ryōichi (1907-1993). Starting his professional career as a saxophone player in a boy band in Osaka in 1923 at the age of fifteen, he played in dance halls, radio stations, and recording studios mainly in the greater Osaka area. He learned classical music theory from an Ukrainian émigré in the late 1920s and his technical knowledge was soon used for composing and arranging jazzy tunes. His regional fame earned him a ticket to Tokyo in 1933 when he contracted with Nittō Record. After a few years with this minor label, he was transferred to Nippon Columbia Record. His first national hit was "Wakare no burūsu" (Separation Blues) recorded in 1937 by Awaya Noriko, the first home-grown torch singer. A year later, Shōchiku offered Hattori a position as conductor and arranger of a new troupe.

In retrospect, the encounter of these two artists was the most important contribution of the Shōchiku Revue Show to Japanese popular music. Their collaboration was so exclusive that over 90 percent of Kasagi's more than fifty recordings from 1940 to 1956 were composed and arranged by Hattori (only three are made by his disciple Hara Rokurō). Such a close and sustained relationship between singer and composer-arranger is very rare in Japanese popular music because good relationships are usually interrupted by the transfer of record company by one of them.

One of Hattori's specialties was writing his own tunes for stage. The majority of songs used in Japanese revue were either vernacular melodies or Western ones. Few composers dared present their own works, juxtaposing them with better-known numbers. Without doubt, the composer was inspired by the singer's extraordinary talent. In the above-mentioned praise, Futaba critiques her vocals as follows:

Her vocal volume and quality has a surprising toughness. Maybe saying that the volume is tough is a bit strange, but I have no alternative to describe her vocals which go totally beyond convention. For example, no other Japanese singers could sing "St. Louis Blues" with more stamina than she. Never. Moreover, her swing sense has an intuitive sharpness. Unhappily I know of no one else who can compete with her in terms of getting swing rhythm.¹³

It is true that the notion of "tough volume" is not common, but this phrase may convey the sense of the wildness Futaba sensed in her voice. In contrast to the crooners and the crooning geisha singers popular in the 1930s, Kasagi delivered her natural voice articulating clearly word by word. The sound and meaning of the words were neatly integrated to express her emotion as if it had been her own nature. The distance between the performed and the performing subject was perceived as minimal. The spontaneity, the intuition, and other concepts the critics often used to describe her performance pointed to her sincere-looking style.

5. "Bugle and a Girl"

Hattori-Kasagi's first recording was "Bugle and a Girl," a song from the Shōchiku Revue Show's *Green Shadow* (July 1939). The basic bass line is Do-Si b-La b-Sol, a minor descending sequence used in "Bei Mir Bis Du Schön" and "Sing, Sing, Sing" and other hit tunes. Probably "Bugle and a Girl" was the first Japanese tune that adopted it. The melody is constructed with a minor scale of La-Do-Mi b-Mi-Fa-Sol-La and the diminished fifth (Mi b, blue note) effectively creates a "hot" feeling

¹³ Futaba 1939.

(like Benny Goodman's international hits). The Columbia Jazz Orchestra backed Kasagi with a superb rhythmic impetus produced by the guitarist and the Crupa-like drummer. Yet, what makes the piece hotter are the irregular structure, the call and response form, the use of malleable tripartite beat, and the scat singing.

The piece consists of two contrasting parts. The first part is written in the ordinary 32-bars (A-A-B-A') formula. It simply repeats twice with the interlude with a Harry-James-like trumpet solo. But the song does not end there. The second part can be considered as a long postlude with more intense interplay between the singer and the orchestra. It is divided into three sections. The first section (II) "Blow your trumpet, more and more..." repeats twice the melodic line extracted from the first part. The second section of the postlude (III) begins the looser format (6-6-4-8 bars) with focusing on the exchange between the trumpeter and the singer. The intensity results from the repetition of shorter melodic units than the previous sections. The orchestra reiterates the phrases of Kasagi in the form of conversation. Such a form is essential for the aesthetic of jazz music and Hattori and Kasagi experimented with it probably for the first time in Japan. The third and last section of the postlude (IV) reaches the climax where the ascending minor phrase ("Ban ban...") in the exchange is accelerated from four beat to half beat as if the conversation became heated. The only intelligible word of this section, "Let's sing," is mixed up with the howling brass sound behind it. Of course, such a controlled chaos requires long rehearsals of all the performers involved. To my judgment, "Bugle and a Girl" shows one of the peaks of musicianship in prewar Japan.

The more one hears the prewar recordings by Japanese jazz singers, the more one realizes how Kasagi was singular in adapting herself well to the rhythmic malleability of American singers. As is noted by jazz theoreticians, the triplet with downbeat accent is basic for jazz musicians to create the special groove. In "Bugle and a Girl," she shows her swingy technique in, for example, "A-no ma-chi de- mo/ Ko-no ma-chi de-mo" (accent indicated with underline) and "Su-te-ki-na ko-no-u-ta." Singing in this way must be hard for many Japanese singers because according to the standard Japanese intonation adopted in school songs and lieder composed since the late nineteenth century, these phrases must have

been sung like “A-no ma-chi de- mo/ Ko-no ma-chi de-mo” and “Su-te-ki-na ko-no u-ta.”(accent on the first syllable of each word, alternation of strong-weak intonation). In the finale section, she scats the triplet with accents slightly ahead of the metronome and the two-note riff in a similar rhythmic pattern of “doowop doowop...” from Ellington’s “It Don’t Mean a Thing (If It Ain’t Got No Swing)” (1932).

The singer manages to interpret the complicated rhythmic patterns. This complexity is related less to the combination of simple (metric) elements in European music than with the expansion and compression of basic temporal units beat characteristic to hybridized music in the Americas. To transcribe it in European notation looks difficult, but those who “got rhythm” can do it with ease. Kasagi’s scansion displaces the accents of natural speech to experiment with a new possibility of vocal expression.

One of the most characteristic aspects of “Bugle and a Girl” is the extensive use of scat singing. In the first part, it is put alternately with the worded line to imitate the sound of trumpet. The idea of duet of a trumpeter and a female singer came from that of Martha Ray and Louis Armstrong. In the second part, the proportion of scat to the worded drastically increases to reach a point where the nonsense syllables displace the meaningful words. The voice finally overwhelms the instrument it has emulated. A voice about the trumpet transforms itself in the very trumpet.

Scat singing itself was not totally new in 1939. Earlier recorded examples such as “Oshare musume” (A Chic Lady, composed and arranged by Hattori, sung by Awaya Noriko, 1936), “Yamadera no Oshōsan” (A Monk in a Mountain Temple, public domain, arranged by Hattori, sung by the Columbia Nakano Rhythm Boys, 1937), and “Sing, Sing, Sing” (sung by the Nihon Victor Rhythm Jokers, 1938) used scat for a novelty effect. Their models were vocal groups such as the Mills Brothers and the Boswell Sisters and they articulated all the syllables in a near-equal attack and homogenous intonation. Kasagi’s scat, in turn, accentuates some syllables while inaudibly pronouncing the vowels of other syllables. Furthermore, she delivers some vowels and consonants in a faux-American English manner. For example, “Ba-do-ji-zu De-ji-do-dah” sounds like “bad-jiz-dej-dudah.” According to Gunther Schuller, jazz

singers, in comparison with European vocal music, sing “the syllables that begin with pretty strong and jumping consonant” and put stress on the offbeat sound groups slightly longer.¹⁴ This characterization is applicable to Kasagi’s vocal delivery.

6. “Hot China”

Synchronized with the import of swing, the concept of “hot” became current in the Japanese jazz community. One of the first signals of the “hot” aesthetic in Japan is found in the recording of “Hot Stuff” by the select members of Kansai dance hall orchestras in 1933. It was credited to a Filipino musician resident in Japan, Vidi Conde (probably Filipinos played the central or exclusive parts of this septet or octet). Its style shows a transition from Charleston to swing and sounds like Red Nichols, Bud Freeman, Miff Mole, and other contemporary American bands. In a few years, the word “hot” came to be used as an antinomy of “sweet” in jazz journalism. In this context, the “sweet” designated white syncopated orchestra with strings (Paul Whiteman, Vincent Lopez, Ted Lewis, etc.), while “hot” was associated with African American music. As Ronald Radano correctly points out, the concept of “hot” has resided in the heart of blackness since the beginning of the slave trade, embodying a variety of notions such as jungle, temptation, savagery, beast, life force, sex, rhythm, body, and anti-civilization.¹⁵

Hot and swing were almost interchangeable in jazz journalism in the 1930s because swing music meant a style conspicuously evoking blackness. The musicologist John Potter notes that the hot sound is created by overlapping the tripartite rhythm on the constant binary rhythm. The three united notes are not evenly divided but subtly displace the moment of attack. The irregularity makes the moment of coming attack difficult to predict. This technique of rhythmical flexibility on certain patterns stirs up excessive anticipation, excitement, and anxiety on a deep unconscious level.¹⁶ Because of this characteristic, jazz, Potter analyzes, comes

¹⁴ Schuller 1986.

¹⁵ Radano 2000.

¹⁶ Potter 1998, pp. 92ff.

closer to the form of speech which is irregularly polyrhythmic and more irregular than any other musical type.

One of the most illustrative examples of hot sound in prewar Japan is Hattori-Kasagi's "Hot China" (1940). As the title literally shows, the lyrics refer to the Chinoiserie popular throughout the period of warfare with China. A docile Chinese girl and an exotic festival are the principal images sketched by the words. It is too easy an exercise to relate it to Japan's colonialism. The China tinge is patent in the use of woodblocks in the introduction, certain phrases of oboe and violin imitating Chinese instruments, and the void fifth at the start of melody which was an Orientalist cliché in Western music. In the interlude one notices the quote from "Taikosen" (A Boat in the Big Lake), a popular repertoire of what Japanese called *Minshingaku*, or the music of Ming and Qing dynasties, which was Chinese instrumental music performed by merchants, sinologists, and liberal professionals in Western Japan during the nineteenth century. Performing Chinese music was an exotic high culture until European music replaced it in the twentieth century. These devices show how Hattori mixed up Western and Japanese Chinoiserie to construct a China image appealing to modern Japanese. This dual adaptation of exotica—one from the Western Orientalism established in the nineteenth century and imported to Japan in the 1920s mainly through the accompaniment for silent films, the band performance during the intervals in cinema palaces, and military brass bands, and the other from vernacular contact with Chinese culture—can be found in other popular songs composed in the 1930s and 40s. The implication is that Japan's China image was formed from these two sources. Now another question arises: how can this China sound be hot?

The piece is based on the dotted rhythmic pattern similar to that of "Bugle and a Girl." In retrospect, it is an anticipated boogie woogie. The overall structure, however, is more complicated than "Bugle and a Girl" since it consists of eight units whose length is irregular: one has seven bars, while another, nine. Between them there are units with common pair-numbered units. It dismisses the standard Tin Pan Alley format of 16 or 32 bars. Such structural complexity goes beyond the layperson's "singability." As a number from the Shōchiku Revue Show, *Aoi basha* (Blue Carriage), it was not aimed at commoners' singing but a profes-

sional performance by Kasagi.

While the scat in “Bugle and a Girl” imitates the sound of trumpet, “Hot China,” brings to the forefront the onomatopoeia of exotic drum and cymbals to introduce a festive atmosphere. Kasagi extensively made use of the swinging tripartite beat mentioned above. For example, the “Wasshoi” part (“wasshoi” is a typical yell to cheer on the group of people carrying the portable sacred shrine on their shoulders in shinto festivals) overlaps the tripartite unit (with the rest on the first beat) upon the four-beat bass, an archetypal device of swing music. Kasagi slightly displaces the note from each beat to swing the music more. The Finale part is as extraordinary as that of “Bugle and a Girl.” Here the singer yells repeatedly “China” and the tempo of yelling quadruples in the third stanza. At the very end of the number, she displaces the notes nearly ahead of a quarter tact. The gap between the beat and the sung notes makes the performance hot; Kasagi’s rhythmic sense and vocal delivery have more in common with black singers than with other Japanese ones.

7. Microphone Singing

It is well-known how the microphone has changed vocal expressions. This technological object did not only amplify the volume but also brought about new techniques such as crooning, lowering the register of female singers, rapid phrasing, “jungle voice,” and so on.

The microphone was introduced in Japanese recording and radio studios in the mid-1920s. In 1931 the first recording using a crooning technique was released (Fujiyama Ichirō’s hit, “Sake wa namida ka tameiki ka” [Is Sake Tears or Sighs?]). The tenor singer with classical training later related how his sister vaguely suggested the technique after she had observed the broadcasting in an American studio. After his success, so many crooners were born that soft male vocals became mainstream in the 1930s. On the female side, the microphone effect was clear in the appearance of torch singers. A torch song, in John Moore’s term, is “a lament sung by a woman who desperately loves a commonplace or even brutish man.”¹⁷ The languishing and heart-aching sentiment of the

¹⁷ Moore 2000, p. 264.

woman is usually expressed by low and slow melodies sung softly (throaty or husky) without “declamatory projection of pre-electric performance.”¹⁸ In the same vein as crooning, such a vocal technique would not be feasible without the amplifying competence of microphone.

The first home-grown torch singer was the soprano Awaya Noriko, who forcefully lowered her register when asked to sing “Wakare no burūsu” (Separation Blues) in 1937 by its composer Hattori. The “blues” in the title came from the designation in social dancing (a type of slow foxtrot) rather than from the African American genre. Her model was Damia’s “Gloomy Sunday” (Le dimanche sombre).

Both crooners and torch singers are concerned with creating the effect of intimacy through electric devices. Both intervene in blurring the gender boundaries as well. Crooners were often criticized as “feminine” whereas some torch singers sang in a register conventionally reserved for male singers (hence “lady baritones”). There is yet another type of vocals realized through the microphone. It is the “growler” type of vocalization, or the wild voice characteristic of Louis Armstrong, Cab Calloway, Ellington’s vocalists, and others. In European speech code, growling is associated with the antipode of politeness, sophistication, intelligence, and culture. Growling is a speech mode of the underclass, the savage, and the animal. In order to underscore their alliance with primitivist modernism, we may call it “jungle vocals”—an important ingredient of “jungle sound.” Their vocals owe in part to African American popular theater (minstrel shows, medicine shows, etc.) and folk tradition (field hollers, sermons, etc.) as well as to the invention of the microphone that enables the volume of voice to be as loud as the background orchestra. Without the microphone, even Louis Armstrong’s brilliant scat in “Heebee Geebee” (1928) would have been drowned out by the physically louder trumpet and quintet. Only when amplified can the human voice physically compete with the *fortissimo* of brass sections and trap drums. The call and response between the vocalist and the orchestra, characteristic of swing music, would not be possible without this amplification. The microphone subverts the conventional hierarchy of featured singer and background orchestra, juxtaposing them in equal terms.

¹⁸ Johnson 2000, p. 120.

Thanks to the microphone, vocals managed to become an integrated component of orchestral sound.

The “tough volume” of Kasagi’s vocals that moved Futaba was related to these “jungle vocals.” The “toughness” of her vocals synesthetically provoked the sensation of loudness. In other words, the quality was translated into quantity. He could not find a better word to describe her vocals other than that phrase because he was too deeply overwhelmed by the toughness realized by the microphone.

Kasagi was aware of the indispensability of the microphone in her stage performance. While most of the contemporary singers treated it as a transparent object, or neglected its objectivity, she used the microphone as a sort of addressee of her performance. According to the stage critic Uchida Mikio, “her singing style and gestures are very rude. Rather than addressing herself to the audience, she looks like she is playing alone with the microphone. Some like her rudeness, but I don’t find it entertaining.”¹⁹ Another stage critic, Haruna Shizuo, noted that Kasagi does not position herself correctly in front of the microphone: “Her use of microphone lacks in attention. Because she confronts it in the same position, with a similar pose whether she sings hot or blues, the vocal effects become very uneven.”²⁰ The microphone is thus embedded in her performance not only as a sonic medium, but also as a tangible object.

8. Dancing Voice, Dancing Body

“If Miss Kasagi abandons the whole-bodily expression in her singing, her act would be rather dull.” As shown in this fan’s review, Kasagi’s stage actions stood out. The detractors, by contrast, disliked it, saying “exaggerated but vulgar gestures” or “she sings well but that gesture is somehow in bad taste.”²¹ No other singers had received such praise and sarcasm regarding stage action as she did. Most of them just stood uprightly with little movement and expression like classical singers, whereas Kasagi not only posed herself (like many revue girls), but also ex-

¹⁹ Uchida 1939.

²⁰ Haruna 1939, p. 48.

²¹ T.F. 1939; Inayoshi 1938; Fujiki 1940.

pressed her bodily feelings induced by the music coming from outside. She herself talked about her actions as follows:

The choreography was done mostly by the director [Matsumoto Shirō] but there was room for my decision. If I do what I like, the movement will be soon fixed in easy patterns. Now I consciously move less than I used to do in Osaka. Hand and facial expressions are good enough. As I am convinced with this idea, I cannot move myself any more.²²

Moving less and expressing with hands and face may be a way to concentrate on singing. Contemporary American and European popular singers often used the hands and the face to suggest the contents of lyrics and the sentiment narrated, or pointed to the audience (or one particular person) to reinforce the emotional bond between them. This is especially the case of performances in small theaters where closer communication between stage and seat is expected. Such gestures are not secondary to the performance. Just as certain gestures and postures are essential for striking the keyboard or breathing for instrumentalists, the gesture of a singer is concerned with a conscious or unconscious channel for leading certain types of vocal address. It is an important technique to concentrate public attention on him/her comparable to the close-up in film. Kasagi may have learned her gestural overstatement from Hollywood film. Her comments on American singers indeed show an intriguing difference in the mode of reception between film and disc: "As for singing only, I like Conny Boswell and Liz Gorty. I like the overall atmosphere of Alice Faye singing in film but her records are not so good."²³ In this way she had different criteria for recording artists and film ones. Despite overtly mentioning her love for black music, she did not name black artists probably because musical films with African American singers were rarely imported in Japan. (Only "crossover" artists like Louis Armstrong and Josephine Baker could be viewed).

²² T.F. 1939.

²³ T.F. 1939.

7. An Osaka Entertainer

In addition to the face of dynamic swinging singer, Kasagi had another face—that of comical entertainer. Again, I quote Futaba's crucial article:

Who could associate her face and vivid expression with opera or lied? She incarnates the facetious and the light proper to the Osaka dialect. Osaka style things are very favorable for her and no Tokyo person could have the humorous tinge she grudgingly shows on stage. This is a very effective weapon in revue shows when a punch line concludes each scene.²⁴

It was in the 1930s when the Osaka dialect was heard nationwide for the first time through radio, talkie, record, and stage. Since many of the occasions were related to comical acts (*rakugo*, *manzai*, vaudeville, etc.), a fixed idea that the Osaka dialect sounds humorous and funny was embraced by non-Osaka people. This was in part brought about by the nationwide growth of Yoshimoto Kōgyō, an Osaka-based showbiz company in the 1930s. They successfully made use of the national radio network and large theaters established in Tokyo and other cities to launch their entertainers. Futaba's view on Osaka entertainers owed much to this actuality. In his view, show business was tougher in Osaka than in Tokyo, so that Osaka artists directly confronted with the unrelenting public. Along with her colleagues in the Osaka Girl Revue, Kasagi was a good example of the well-trained and intuitive artists from Osaka: "the first thing necessary for these [Osaka] types of artists is not intelligence but instinct. Kasagi Shizuko is the most instinctive."²⁵ In other words, for Futaba, Kasagi was closest to the primitive. She short-circuits modern and primitive, humor and discipline. For the Tokyo critic the Osaka entertainers were "Other."

²⁴ Futaba 1939.

²⁵ Futaba 1939.

8. Great Asian Tinge

In 1940, when she became popular outside the urban upper middle-class fandom, Kasagi's vocals were admired as "unlikely Japanese" (*nihonjin banare*).²⁶ This phrase means that she can do what Japanese usually cannot do. It is a positive evaluation of those who are believed to transcend the presupposed limit of national competence. It is used when a person seems to have mastered or adapted perfectly the superior things foreign (music, language, sports, behavior, gesture, outlook...). It is understandable that the xenophobic blames the over-adaptation to cultures overseas. In part under the nationalist pressure predominant all over Japan, Kasagi manifested in her explicitly-titled article "New Departure," her will to create "Japanese jazz," or "jazz-based music that is digested thoroughly by Japanese ways and penetrated by Japanese spirit." To realize this ambitious goal, she continues, she wants to "put a modern attire on Japanese folksongs born spontaneously from Japanese life and nourished by Japanese old tradition, arrange them with international brass and string instruments, and introduce them to people around the world." Her lessons of shamisen and traditional dancing in Osaka were useful for attaining this goal. "If Japanese folksong would go around the four corners of the world just as American jazz has overwhelmed the whole world in the past several years, Kasagi Shizuko would die of joy."²⁷

She believed that she had demonstrated the universality of jazz. Her new task was to prove the universality of Japanese folksong. It is too easy to interpret ideologically her idea of a cultural rally (rollback) from the periphery to the center as an anticipated declaration of the war against the U.S. The idea of creating Japanese modern music by means of fusing the folk or the traditional with the Western was nothing new in 1940. Since music educators and bureaucrats made a declaration that neither Japanese nor Western but syncretic music should be the future national music in the 1870s, a similar discussion had been recurrent among critics and composers. Kasagi's orientation was not far from Hat-

²⁶ Fuji 1940.

²⁷ Kasagi 1940.

tori's wish to create a "second folksong" which arranges the skeleton of the old folksong ("first folksong") with modern elements to better appeal to young Japanese. The "second folksong" should be almost synonymous with popular tunes as he had released.

After the dissolution of the Shōchiku Revue Show (1940), Kasagi mainly performed in the mixed shows in movie theatres like many other popular singers. Due to the official regulations further severely limiting public entertainment, the size of spectacles was forcibly reduced after 1940, and artists were obliged to work for shows during the interval of film exhibitions. The words of jazz and swing (and other borrowings from English) were avoided to prevent unnecessary intervention by the authorities. When she inaugurated the Kasagi Shizuko Orchestra under the auspices of Shōchiku in January 1941, an article mentions: "she has liquidated those barbarian songs and now concentrates on purely romantic songs." Two years later her small show (inviting Hattori as a guest) in a cinema was proudly titled "For Establishing Japanese National Music."²⁸ "Barbarism" was expelled while national music was welcomed. One of the few songs we know that she sang as entertainment for soldiers was "Aire kawaiya" (Pretty Aire). The lyrics (Fujiura Kō) have a folk taste unusual for Kasagi's uplifting songs which describe a girl named Aire wandering from village to village with a bird cage to see her favorite white bird. The bird whispers that Aire is pretty and brings a lot of happiness to her. The peacefulness appears to be an adaptation of a folktale. The white bird can be either a metaphor of peace or colonial subjects put into a cage. In the former case, Aire symbolizes innocence, while in the latter she is a colonizer with a benign face. To Japanese ears, the name of Aire sounds too exotic to locate where she comes from (somewhere from the South?).

The melody consists of a vernacular pentatonic scale (Mi-Sol-La-Do-Le) which has been often used in popular songs with a country flavor, but the second part in which phrasing is based on European music (Do-Le-Mi-Sol) takes off from simple folklorism. This dual structure reflects Hattori's and Kasagi's idea of the Japanese popular music to come mentioned above. Though the song is said to have been well received in

²⁸ *Ongaku shinbun*, 21 January 1941; *Yomiuri shinbun*, 30 May 1943.

the comfort shows for soldiers, it was recorded only in 1946 as a new departure for the two artists. In addition to an interlude with rumba rhythm, this postwar version has a long section of nonsense syllabic singing of folk festive rhythm produced by clapping and hi-hat cymbals. Different from “Bugle and a Girl,” the accents are put on the first beat, following the way of Japanese folksong. The melodic line of this part has a certain affinity with the famous Korean folksong, “Arirang.” The adaptation of vernacular elements including somehow Asian ones may allude to Hattori-Kasagi’s notion of modern folksong.

11. Conclusion

The Japan historian Miriam Silverberg proposes an “associative (or associated) history” as an alternative for Hegelian “comparative history.”²⁹ In her definition, the latter presupposes the comparing center and the compared periphery, while the former dismisses it and argues the singularity of each area with a focus on the cultural, political, and economic conjunction with other areas. Her thinking questions the implicit hierarchy in historiography between the center (the original, the authentic) and the peripheries (the derived, the non-authentic). To apply it to our theme, swing culture in Japan does not *derive from* American music but is *associated with* it to form Japan’s own version conditioned by various factors including nationalism, militarism, organization of the entertainment industry and mass media, technological mediation, distribution of information overseas, vernacular sensibility, censorship and other legal regulations, spatiality of dance halls, theaters, and cinema, and views on Americanism. Certainly, the last factor—Americanism—is the reverse face of nationalism in the U.S, where jazz/swing was called “our national music.” The complicity between Americanism and modernism blended with nationalism underlay the non-American jazz/swing cultures.

Under this general premise, my article has spotlighted Kasagi Shizuko’s swing aesthetic. In collaboration with Hattori Ryōichi, she explored a new way of associating Japan’s modernity with American music by means of idiosyncratic scansion, tough vocal delivery through the mi-

²⁹ Silverberg 1993.

crophone, dazzling gestures, special bodily movement, and other expressive devices. Spontaneous as it may look, she studied hard the bodily and musical techniques hitherto foreign to Japanese through talkie and record. Technological mediation was indispensable for Hattori's compositions and the stage performances of all the Japanese revue theaters as well. They appropriated what they had mastered from American music for creating local (Asian) variations that matched with the zealous patriotism in the 1940s.

According to a report in 1946, American occupational forces titled her "Japan's Martha Ray."³⁰ She did not deny learning of part from Ray's stage technique and outlook, but she did not limit herself to impersonating American singers. What is important is that she adopted American skills in her Japanese singing addressed to a Japanese audience. This totally transformed the socio-cultural meaning of her seemingly imitative performances. My article has dealt with contextualizing her singular position in the local entertainment scene. It is not until 1948 that her act was appropriated by other women singers. Then came the "boogie woogie era." An examination of the continuity and discontinuity between the two parts of swing history in Japan is reserved for another paper.

REFERENCES

Anonymous 1946

Anonymous. "Hai raito" (Highlight). *Sutaa* (February 1946), graphic page, n.d.

Erenberg 1998

Lewis A. Erenberg. *Swingin' the Dream: Big Band Jazz and the Rebirth of American Culture*. University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Fuji 1940

Fuji Reiko. "Ryūkōka yomoyama banashi" (Gossip on Pop Songs). *Eiga to revyū* (March 1940), p. 32.

Fujiki 1940

Fujiki Shigeru. "Kasagi Shizuko to Makishin Sariban" (Shizuko Kasagi and Maxim Sullivan). *Shōchiku kageki* (May 1940), p. 48.

³⁰ Anonymous 1946.

Futaba 1939

Futaba Jūzaburō. “Kasagi Shizuko ron” (On Kasagi Shizuko). *Staa* (1 June 1939), p. 49.

Haruna 1939

Haruna Shizuo. “Ongaku shou toshite no Shōchiku Gakugekidan no kōsei” (The Reform of Shochiku Revue Show as a Music Show]. *Modan dansu* (July 1939), p. 48.

Inayoshi 1938

Inayoshi Yukichi. “Shou rakugaki” (Show Graffiti). *Dansu to ongaku* (June 1938), p. 19.

Inayoshi 1940

Inayoshi Yukichi. “Erinton ni kansuru gyakusetsu,” (A Paradox of Ellington). *Modan dansu* (August 1940), pp. 2-4.

Ishigami 1935

Ishigami Yoshihiko. “Yokikana! Benii Guddoman” (Tremendous! Benny Goodman). *Jazu* (October 1935), p. 31.

Jiōji 1937

Jiōji Gashuin. “Jazuri keizu” (Genealogy of Jazzing). *Dansu to ongaku* (December 1937), p. 31.

Johnson 2000

Bruce Johnson. *The Inaudible Music: Jazz, Gender and Australian Modernity*. Currency Press, 2000.

Kasagi 1940

Kasagi Shizuko. “Atarashii shuppatsu” (New Departure). *Modan Nippon* (November 1940), pp. 127-28.

Kawaguchi 1933

Kawaguchi Shigeru. “Erinton to ‘Kureore kyōsōkyoku’” (Ellington and “Creole Rhapsody”). *Rekōdo ongaku* (June 1933), p. 99.

Miya 1936

Miya Morijirō. “Niguro bando: Kingusu Furorida Suwingu Bando” (A Negro Band: King’s Florida Swing Band). *Dansu to ongaku* (October 1936), pp. 16-17.

Moore 2000

John Moore. “‘The Hieroglyphics of Love’: The Torch Singers and Interpretation.” In *Reading Pop: Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular Music*, ed. Richard Middleton. Oxford University Press, 2000.

HOSOKAWA Shūhei

Muraoka 1937

Muraoka Tei. "Sangatsu no rekōdo" (Record Review in March). *Dansu to on-gaku* (March 1937), p. 48.

Murakami 1939

Murakami Masataka. "Amerika suingu pirugurimu" (American Swing Pilgrim). *Modan dansu* (December 1939), p. 37.

Nishina 1938

Nishina Shunsaku. "Gogatsu no rekōdo" (Record Review in May). *Dansu to on-gaku* (May 1938), p. 29.

Oi 1936

Oi Jazurō. "Jūnigatsu no jazu, tango, uta" (Jazz, Tango, and Songs in December). *Rekōdo on-gaku* (December 1936), p. 78.

Potter 1998

John Potter. *Vocal Authority: Singing Style and Ideology*. Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Radano 2000

Ronald Radano. "Hot Fantasies: American Modernism and the Idea of Black Rhythm." In *Music and the Racial Imagination*, ed. Ronald Radano and Philip V. Bohlman. University of Chicago Press, 2000, pp. 459-480.

Schuller 1986

Gunther Schuller. *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development*. Oxford University Press, 1986.

Silverberg 1993

Miriam Silverberg. "Remembering Pearl Harbour, Forgetting Charlie Chaplin and the Case of the Disappearing Western Woman: A Picture Story." *Positions* 1: 1 (1993), pp. 24-76.

Stowe 1999

David W. Stowe. *Swing Changes: Big-Band Jazz in New Deal America*. Harvard University Press, 1999.

T.F. 1939

T.F. "Kasagi Shizuko-san to no shichifunkan" (Seven Minutes with Kasagi Shizuko). *Staa* (1 May 1939), p. 49

Uchida 1939

Uchida Mikio. "Ryūkyū revyū, gurīn shadou" (Ryūkyū Revue, Green Shadow). *Kinema junpō* (1 August 1939), p. 73.

Acknowledgments

This paper is a revised version of my Japanese article, “Kasagi Shizuko no suwingu suru koe toshintai” (The Swinging Voice and Body of Kasagi Shizuko), in Inami Ritsuko and Inoue Shōichi, eds. *Hyōgen ni okeru ekkyō to konkō* (Border Transgression and Intermixture in Artistic Expression), International Research Center for Japanese Studies, Kyoto, 2005, pp. 17-36. The English text was first presented at the Department of Creative Experiments, University of California at San Diego, October 2005. The author acknowledges the financial support of the Scientific Research Fund of the Ministry of Education and Science (No. 17520102) and the intellectual one of Michael Molasky.