

The Use of the Octatonic Scale in Relation to the “Mother Chord” in the Works of Toshio Hosokawa: An Analysis of his Works for Large Instrumentation in the 1990s

MIYAKAWA Wataru

This study examines the use of the octatonic scale in the works of Toshio Hosokawa in relation to his “mother chord.” The composer has stated that he has used the octatonic scale for about twenty years as “a kind of tonality of his own.” In Hosokawa’s case, it seems, this scale is utilized particularly in connection with the “mother chord,” a harmonic device created by Hosokawa that functions as a central chord in his works, and influenced by the sound of the *shō* (mouth-organ) in *gagaku* and the atonal sonorities of Anton Webern.

This article analyzes twenty-one Hosokawa works for ensemble or larger instrumentation composed in the 1990s, in order to illuminate the period and the context in which the use of the octatonic scale in relation to the “mother chord” began. It also focuses on the “free twelve-tone composition” which, until then, had constituted one of his fundamental compositional techniques since the beginning of his career. Hosokawa has said that he abandoned twelve-tone composition from the mid-1990s, and his reasons for this may be related to his adoption of the octatonic scale in relation to the “mother chord.”

The analysis reveals two main tendencies related to his use of the octatonic scale. The first is that the use of the octatonic scale in association with the “mother chord” assumes a central importance in the works composed since 1995, but not in those composed before. The second is that we can observe the use of the “free twelve-tone composition” in some works written before 1995, but not in most of the works since 1996. These observations suggest to us that, in Hosokawa’s works for large ensemble, the octatonic scale in relation to the “mother chord” became his main strategy for pitch organization from the mid-1990s onward, replacing his “free twelve-tone composition.”