

## Introduction to *Lineage Traces*

*Lineage Traces* was written in 2019 as a musical exploration of my half-Japanese, half-American bicultural heritage. Growing up in Japan and moving to the US at twelve years old, much of my personal identity is rooted in Japan and Japanese culture. However, I have always pondered the way such identity intersects within my American background, and in particular with the highly western approach to music I've trained in as a classical composition conservatory student. I chose to musically explore this dichotomy in *Lineage Traces*. Like the title suggests, this piece is based on traces of music both literally and figuratively from home.

This piece was originally written for violin, cello and piano as part of a composer-performer collaborative suite "Impressions of House and Home". This project, taking place over Winter Term 2019, explored various interpretations of home and how our distinct cultural upbringings influence our musical language. After winter term, I chose to expand the piece and rewrite it for orchestra. The recording you will hear is from a reading with the Oberlin Chamber Orchestra in May 2019, which was facilitated through our composition department's curriculum. I was mentored by my composition professor Jesse Jones throughout the process of writing this orchestral expansion. The Oberlin Chamber Orchestra will be performing the piece in concert on October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

Orchestral music has been on the forefront of Western classical music for centuries, yet it has been extremely Eurocentric for most of its history. Growing up I had heard very few classical pieces, if any, that represented or referenced Eastern Asian music and culture. In fact, it was only after the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century when orchestral music from Japan became more integrated into global standards of orchestral repertoire. Because of this lack of diversity, I was determined to reflect my cross-cultural experiences throughout *Lineage Traces*. Similar to the way my understanding of my once-seemingly-separate cultural identities has blended over time, I wanted to ensure a development of musical ideas that demonstrated a clear distinction between Eastern and Western musical sounds that would gradually blend together as the piece progressed.

In order to strengthen the Japanese foundations of my piece, I chose a variety of musical snippets from my childhood in Japan upon which to develop the music. I primarily drew from two main melodies: one, the school song of the Japanese elementary school my mother and I attended, and the other, a fragment of the traditional folk tune *Ureshii Hinamatsuri* (嬉しい雛祭り) that celebrates Girl's Day in Japan. The former represents a place where countless familial and culturally rich memories were born, and is the only place I've lived that was quite removed from western influence and language. The town of Kitamoto, Saitama, where the school remains, is my Japanese family's hometown and thus is where I have always felt most connected with my Japanese heritage. On the other hand, the latter melody represents my appreciation of significant Japanese customs and values that are inherent in the holiday that this music celebrates. It further reflects the positive

memories of my upbringing in a traditional Japanese home. In addition to these two melodies, I also incorporated a fragment of short songs that local farmers sang daily while they sold their crops down the street, as well as rhythms reminiscent of traditional Japanese festival dance, *obon*.

Ultimately, the piece evolved into a fun experimental collage of several musical fragments, Japanese in nature but juxtaposed against a Western musical language. It is a musical representation of the way I have found Eastern and Western cultures to intersect in my own life. More than anything, I take Japanese musical elements and manipulate them to fit the language of Western music that drives contemporary classical music today. To me, the back-and-forth statements of pure Japanese melodies and its distorted variations reflect the various expectations I face when composing - fitting into the Eurocentric soundscape that dominates classical music, but also wanting to use other tonalities and other cultural elements. The music further reflects the various aspects of Japanese orchestral music that I have always loved but never been confident to utilize in my own work. Finally, the back-and-forth further represents the comforting yet simultaneously difficult grappling of multicultural understanding I have experienced over time, trying to adhere fully to both my cultures but also never fully fitting into one or the other.

Of course, this piece's narrative is based on my personal experiences within multicultural spaces. This inherently limits the music's function as a commentary on wider cross-cultural interactions that are not based on cultural heritage. However, I think *Lineage Traces* maintains its value regardless as it seeks to integrate truly Japanese musical and cultural elements, both traditional and modern, within a genre largely focused on the Western world. For example, instead of simply utilizing an "Asian-sounding" scale to evoke images of exotic 'faraway' cultures, as historical Western composers have often done, this piece specifically identifies and then manipulates Japanese musical fragments, adapting the orchestral palette to make room for Japanese music to blossom within a Western musical context.

If anything, I simply hope that this piece contributes to the slowly-growing movement within classical music that interacts with narratives reflecting the realities of globalization, cross-cultural understanding and multicultural identities. In a world more internationally connected now than ever, I hope that the Western-dominant world of classical music slowly transforms to be welcoming of all musical cultures, merging and celebrating various musical histories that extend beyond that of European, white backgrounds. *Lineage Traces* is a small way for me to personally attempt this interaction of cultures, expressed through my own experiences as Japanese and American composer.