

**Orientalism in John Zorn's**  
*Forbidden Fruit and Torture Garden*

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Racist! Misogynist! Asiophile! Such heated rhetoric could be found in many publications throughout the United States, all talking about saxophonist and composer John Zorn. Asian Americans summarily condemned Zorn and his use of Japanese erotic art, and a national scandal ensued. Though controversial I believe that Zorn's use of orientalism in these works presents a truthful view of Japan that doesn't reduce Japanese culture to a jumble of non-functional signifiers, as is sometimes the case with multi-national postmodernism. This paper will examine two of Zorn's postmodern works that deal directly with orientalism musically, visually, and textually. The two works selected, *Torture Garden* and *Forbidden Fruit*, have outraged many, but also contain very original music with a unique perspective on the darker side of Japanese culture.

### **On Orientalism**

Since Edward Said coined the term in *Orientalism* (1978),<sup>1</sup> it has been applied to many aspects of society, philosophy, and culture. In a basic sense, it deals with the representation of the orient (Near, Middle, and Far East) by the West in everything from politics to art. Apropos music, one can see a great number of works, both pre- and post-1978 exhibiting oriental traits, some more explicit than others. Because music is an inherently abstract method of communication, purely musical elements that evoke the orient are somewhat limited: we have the use of traditional oriental scales, such as the pentatonic; exotic instruments, such as the koto of Japan, or the zarb of Persia; and the use of folk song, as composers such as Bartók explore. There are also extra-musical methods of evoking the orient; the foremost being the textual, which could consist of a program note, a traditional poem recited as part of the work, the narrative of an opera, or

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<sup>1</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

simply a title. While one may contend that the recitation of a poem or text during a work could constitute a musical element, it seems that the importance is on the language and the sound of the foreign tongue rather than the element of melody in the voice. In the case of opera, there is also the visual aspect—costumes, dance, and set design all play an important role in evoking the orient. Later in the twentieth century recordings gained popularity and added another visual aspect to orientalism, namely the cover art. While some works may contain each of these elements, many works employ few, or only one of these techniques.

The largest issue of orientalism is the motive of the composer choosing to evoke the orient. Specifically, is the composer showing proper respect, or exploiting the culture? Some composers simply wish to expand their color palette, others assimilate it into their own culture, and others leave the unique aspects of the culture intact. For a composer such as George Crumb, who deals extensively in odd sounds and extended techniques, the orient provides a cornucopia of different instruments, timbres, and colors. A work such as *Music for a Summer Evening* uses Japanese temple bells, African log drum and African thumb piano, Chinese wood blocks, Tibetan prayer stones, and many other exotic instruments of a non-Western origin. The plurality of his instrument selection indicates that he isn't trying to present some clear concept of a specific culture, but rather is using them in a more-or-less arbitrary fashion simply because they present unusual sounds to Western audiences. Steve Reich's *Tehillim* exemplifies the second category as it deals with Hebrew Psalms and Middle Eastern rhythms while using Reich's own Western techniques of layering and jazzy chords. This presents an interesting and thoughtful use of non-Western material and creates a novel synthesis of Eastern and

Western art. The third category can be clearly seen in John Zorn's work. His artwork and texts present certain aspects of oriental culture free from a Western influence.

Frequently, it is evident that the creation of an orientalist work requires no actual knowledge of the orient, as a working knowledge of oriental signifiers is sufficient. Umberto Eco amusingly illustrates this point in his essay "How to Play Indians,"<sup>2</sup> a satirical examination of the generic clichés found in westerns written so that Native Americans playing themselves in a film will behave as expected. Frequently, composers borrow from the orient rather indiscriminately. Surely, a Korean listening to John Chance's *Variations on a Korean Folk Song* would be surprised to learn that Chinese temple blocks figure so prominently in their folk tradition.

The composers may genuinely misunderstand the culture they attempt to represent, they may be willfully ignorant or lazy, or they may simply not care. Regardless, there is very little pressure from audiences for them to 'get it right'. An opera composer can insert widely recognized, but widely misunderstood elements—a white-faced actress, small black eyebrows, a kimono, a paper fan—and the audience understands that the composer means to evoke Japan, or China, or Korea, or Taiwan, whichever the particular audience member thinks of first. These are all elements of Japanese Noh Theater, but the majority of the audience may not understand this, so is it really necessary for the composer to go to the trouble of actually understanding the culture he or she wishes to represent? I'm sure there are a multitude of Japanese people who would argue that their culture *is* important and a Westerner shouldn't confusedly plunder their heritage.

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<sup>2</sup> Umberto Eco, "How to Play Indians," In *How to Travel with a Salmon & Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1994).

Thus, because of the many hazards found in the use of orientalism, composers must be assiduous in their efforts to accurately and respectfully represent a different culture. Although composer's intent may be far from malicious, he or she may fail nonetheless in the representation of an actual, specific culture resulting in a Baudrillardian simulacrum, or in Borgesian terms, "a chaos of appearances."<sup>3</sup>

### **On Postmodernism**

When examining orientalism in a composer such as Zorn, one must take into account the influence of postmodernism. The effect of Lyotard's "incredulity towards meta-narratives",<sup>4</sup> continues to spur many interesting changes in the musical world. Although frequently misunderstood, postmodernism presents an array of interesting concepts. A distrust of hegemonies and recognition of the Other, fundamental to the philosophy of postmodernism, is a positive trend for oriental countries because they can finally take their place in a musical history previously ruled by the elite, educated, white Anglo-Saxon protestants. Because pluralism is, in some cases, a consequent of incorporating the Other, it can be both a positive and a negative concept depending on the necessarily subjective perspective of the critic. A composer like Crumb, who borrows rather indiscriminately from many cultures within the same piece, can be innovative for cohesion within heterogeneity, or he can be a wrecker of cultural distinction, depending upon the listener's perspective.

Reaching back into the past, both deferentially and irreverently, is another prominent feature of postmodernism. Traditionally, orientalism was almost entirely

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<sup>3</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, "An Overwhelming Film," In *Movies*, edited by Gilbert Adair (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 215.

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Edited by Wlad Godzich and Jochen Schulte-Sasse (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.

anachronistic—works depicted ancient rituals, exotic locales, and outdated customs. This practice was culturally safe because, in the event that the composer got some of the facts wrong, it didn't appear that he was commenting in any important way on anything that was currently happening in Eastern nations. Subjects also tended to be very safe—though orientalism tended to make Middle Eastern races into savages and slave-traders, they were careful to represent the cultures in a positive light and to avoid the taboo. Few complained about this light-hearted, fanciful treatment.

However, when John Zorn's *Torture Garden* hit the street, suddenly orientalism presented a major problem for Asian Americans. The problem began with the album cover, which features a bare-breasted Japanese woman holding a whip, while standing over another woman. Suddenly, it isn't the past any more—suddenly, someone isn't playing it safe with smiling Asian caricatures carrying chopsticks. It is firmly in the present or recent past and dealing with the taboo no less. Zorn's CD provoked moral outcry across the United States and was especially attacked by Asian Americans. But what exactly is going on here? Is Zorn a perverted Asiophile? Is he trying to express the idea that white men should dominate Asian women, or is he actually making an artistic and worthy statement with his music?

### **On John Zorn**

John Zorn is impossible to pin down and his oeuvre is made up of many styles and genres including string quartets, Jewish jazz tunes, twentieth-century art music, and blues concertos to name a few. But he does not chase fads or change style to stay with the times, as is the case with David Bowie or Madonna. He is involved in a myriad of projects simultaneously, yet they are all instantly recognizable as Zorn works. Above all

else, Zorn is an idealist and continually resists the controlling hand of the market driven culture industry. He has stood by his philosophy since he began composing in 1972 and hasn't changed since. He makes music exactly how he wants.

The business-driven practice of labeling is perhaps Zorn's greatest antipathy. This is evident in his preface to *Arcana*.<sup>5</sup> “[Terms such as] surrealism, postmodernism abstract expressionism, minimalism, are used to commodify and commercialize an artist's complex personal vision.”<sup>6</sup> He goes on to say that not only is this a tool of marketing, but also for consumption. Once one affixes a certain label to a work, the listener no longer needs to “hear” it, as there is already an elaborate system of value judgments in place—the critique writes itself. Zorn strives to constantly surprise his listener—to remove them from their comfort zone. With Zorn's music all bets are off—the listener must create their own interpretation and critique it based on some aesthetic criteria, not presupposed values that come with the label.

Along with the music industry's classification system, Zorn constantly rails on prejudice and elitism in musical scholarship. He says of the idea of ‘high art’ and ‘low art,’

that distinction's a bunch of fucking *bullshit*. That's the kind of thing created to make it look like you listen to classical music while you're sipping champagne and with rock music you're boogeying [sic] with a bottle of beer and jazz you're in some dirty club with a shot of whiskey or some shit like that...There's good music and great music and phoney music in every genre and all the genres are the fucking *same*! Classical music is not better than blues because this guy went to school and got a degree and studied very cleanly while the other guy was out on the street *living* it.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> John Zorn, "Preface," In *Arcana: Musicians on Music*, edited by John Zorn (New York: Granary Books, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, v.

<sup>7</sup> Cole Gagne, *Soundpieces 2: Interviews with American Composers* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1993), 128-9.

Although this sparks cries of relativism,<sup>8</sup> Zorn chooses to endorse music that moves him spiritually. Nothing is excluded, as long as it's sincere and has decent craftsmanship. Of course, some styles are near to Zorn's heart such as grindcore and occur frequently in his music (especially that of Naked City), but he doesn't seem to place higher importance on any particular style. His film music is just as important as his orchestral commissions, which are as important as his chamber works and his thrash-jazz trio, Painkiller.

Zorn's influences and interests are, like his music, incredibly varied. He writes in the liner notes to *Spillane*

I grew up in New York City as a media freak, watching movies and TV and buying hundreds of records. There's a lot of jazz in me, but there's also a lot of rock, a lot of classical, a lot of ethnic music, a lot of blues, a lot of movie soundtracks. I'm a mixture of all those things...We should take advantage of all the great music and musicians in this world without fear of musical barriers, which sometimes are even stronger than racial or religious ones.<sup>9</sup>

Along with his genuinely eclectic musical taste is his love of film, also equally catholic. Although his biggest influence is probably Jean-Luc Godard, his film library includes everyone from Russ Meyer to Maya Deren.

Around the time Zorn composed *Forbidden Fruit*, he was living in Tokyo about six months out of the year. In Japan Zorn found a stimulating change of culture. "The Japanese," he writes, "often borrow and mirror other people's cultures, that's what's so great about the place. They make a crazy mix out of it all."<sup>10</sup> He plays with Japanese musicians, goes to movies, and absorbs the culture. But aside from the rather mainstream interests in Japanese pop music and television, he is also interested in the obscure and the

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<sup>8</sup> How can we express value judgments if anyone's opinion is as good as the next?

<sup>9</sup> John Zorn. *Spillane*. Digital disc. Elektra/Nonesuch, 9 79172-2, 1987. 9

<sup>10</sup> John Zorn. *Spillane*. Digital disc. Elektra/Nonesuch, 9 79172-2, 1987. 9



taboo. Japan's rich history of erotic and sadomasochistic art figures prominently in his Naked City and Painkiller projects sometimes as inspiration and sometimes as subject matter.

With regard to orientalism, there is one crucial concept necessary to understand Zorn's music. He sees his CD releases not as music on a disc inside a plastic container, but as a complete package that is intimately related to his subject. Both the visual (cover art) and the textual (liner notes and track titles) serve to enhance the musical experience. One could listen to track 11 on *Torture Garden* and see it as simply a "crazy" free improvisation, but once one digests the violent album artwork and the descriptive track title ("Perfume of a Critic's Burning Flesh"), the track's meaning becomes very clear.

### **Examining Orientalism in *Forbidden Fruit* and *Torture Garden***

Orientalism is present in *Forbidden Fruit* both visually and textually. The music itself doesn't contain any explicit references to Japan. Though there is a Japanese vocalist, for the purpose of this essay, I am considering it a text, not a melody. The work, written for the Kronos Quartet, plus vocalist Ohta Hiromi and turntablist Christian Marclay, deals extensively with quotations both from the 'live' string quartet and from the turntables. There are twelve themes and four sets of twelve variations for a total of sixty sections within the space of just over ten minutes making it a very compact, concentrated work. Zorn indicates that some small parts may involve controlled improvisation, but from listening, it's impossible to differentiate between notated and un-notated passages.

Although Japanese music doesn't appear, it's clear, thanks to the artwork, the title, and the text, that this piece deals with Japan. It is tempting to interpret the title as an

allusion to a sort of young, unattainable, and precocious Japanese girl containing some forbidden sexuality—an Asian Lolita if you will. However, I believe this reading fails to take into account the accompanying artwork. *Forbidden Fruit*, found on Zorn’s CD *Spillane*, is accompanied by a full-page picture in the liner notes which serves as the cover it would have received had it been released independently. The picture is a still from the film *Kurutta Kajitsu* (Crazed Fruit) and shows a young Japanese woman sitting with her back to the camera while two young Japanese men gaze longingly at her. The film deals with two brothers who are visiting the beach for some youthful decadence when a woman shows up and becomes the object of their teenage lust. From here, one sees that, instead of an older man lusting over a young woman, it is a meditation on teenage desire. It is important to note that in *Eros plus Massacre*<sup>11</sup>, David Desser credits *Crazed Fruit*’s theme of uninhibited teenage sex as sparking the sexual revolution that was led by Japanese iconoclast filmmaker, Nagisa Oshima who will be discussed later. Suffice it to say, this film was a major landmark in the reemergence of open sexuality in modern Japan.

The original texts by Reck are the final touch of orientalism in this work. Ohta Hiromi’s sensual, breathy vocals convey the eroticism of the texts without requiring the listener to understand a word of Japanese. A translation is provided in the liner note, but it is largely unnecessary because it is not what Hiromi is saying, but rather how she says it – the fact that it’s Japanese and sensual. Both the textual and visual means impart a distinctly oriental flavor on the work, even though it contains no Japanese instruments or

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<sup>11</sup> David Desser, *Eros Plus Massacre: An Introduction to the Japanese New Wave Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 41.

sounds. Both its postmodern use of quotation and its examination of the Other contribute to a very unusual, but moving work.

If *Forbidden Fruit* is refined, serious, lush, and beautiful, *Torture Garden* is the diametrical opposite: confrontational, provocative, abrasive, intense, and volatile, but also humorous and free-spirited. It consists of 42 vignettes (or songs) totaling slightly over twenty-five minutes in length; the longest, “Osaka Bondage,” one minute and fourteen seconds and the shortest, “Hammerhead,” a mere eight seconds. A sticker on the album describes the music as, “combining free jazz, bebop, R&B, country, funk, rockabilly, surf, metal, hardcore, grindcore—and usually in the same song!” Zorn’s love of speed and the music of Warner Brothers cartoon music of Carl Stalling are especially obvious here, especially on the song “Speedfreaks.” Though thoroughly composed, Zorn’s band Naked City, a quintet consisting of sax, bass, drums, guitar, and keyboards with guest vocalist Yamatsuka Eye, brings the work to life.

Like *Forbidden Fruit*, the orientalist aspects of the work are less musical and more visual and textual. One needs to absorb the whole package before the work takes on some distinctly Japanese flavors. The album artwork is perhaps the most important thing to understand before trying to decode the music. The cover, described earlier, along with the double gatefold booklet contain stills from kinbaku (Japanese bondage) films. The inside of the gatefold contains a manga illustration depicting a man in uniform peeling the skin off the face of a young girl in a school uniform while licking her exposed eyeball. The intensity of the images matches the track titles such as, “Jazz Snot Eat Shit”, “The Ways of Pain”, “Osaka Bondage”, and “Victims of Torture”. Although not all of the songs intend to evoke the orient, such as “N.Y. Flat Top Box,” and “New Jersey Scum

Swamp,” the overarching themes seem to be, like it’s namesake (Octave Mirbeau’s 1899 book), pain, torture, degradation, and death. It is worth mentioning that Mirbeau’s *Torture Garden* takes place in China, but Zorn has obviously relocated the themes to Japan. There can be no question of the culture that he’s dealing with.

### **The Controversy**

The controversy surrounding Zorn’s artwork might have gone unnoticed had it not been for Asian American music theorist Ellie Hisama’s wonderfully oversensitive, contentious article, *Postcolonialism on the Make*.<sup>12</sup> She examines the orientalist elements of *Forbidden Fruit* (the cover photograph, the title, and the text) and comes to the conclusion that Zorn is an “Asiophile *extraordinaire*.”<sup>13</sup> To be clear, the term “Asiophile” would seem to indicate “one who loves Asian culture”, but in Hisama’s usage, it is a negativism with predatory implications similar to “pedophile”. Based solely on Zorn’s *Forbidden Fruit* and *New Traditions in East Asian Bar Bands*, she claims that, “Zorn habitually performs works that are predicated upon [a] troubling gender stereotype about Asian women.” She goes on to say that the two works “indicate a disturbing obsession with Asian women’s sexual impact upon him.”<sup>14</sup> Around the time her rather emotional article was published, Zorn released *Torture Garden*, which sent the Asian American community into an uproar. Although today one can find Zorn CDs for sale in certain large music stores, at the time of Hisama’s article, one would have to go far out of their way to acquire his music. *Torture Garden*, released on the Japanese label Toy’s Factory, was only available from specialty shops at inflated “import” prices or from Zorn himself.

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<sup>12</sup> Ellie Hisama, "Postcolonialism on the Make: The Music of John Mellencamp, David Bowie and John Zorn," *Popular Music* 12, no. 2 (1993): 91-104.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>14</sup> Ellie Hisama, "Postcolonialism on the Make: The Music of John Mellencamp, David Bowie and John Zorn," *Popular Music* 12, no. 2 (1993), 95.

It's not as if suddenly every record shop across America was displaying or even selling the disc. Soon, deriding articles appeared in newspapers and magazines including *AsianWeek*, the *Asian New Yorker*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. In fact, Zorn lost two high profile concerts due to the amount of negative discussion about his music.

Evidently, this is the price of dealing with a modern and provocative aspect of orientalism. But what were Zorn's motives for using the subject matter that he did? From a postmodern perspective, Zorn's music freely combines styles and subjects that interest him. In *Conventional Wisdom*<sup>15</sup>, Susan McClary warns of the practice of international eclecticism without regard to cultural differences. However, she accurately observes that Zorn avoids that pitfall because he possesses an acute knowledge of Japanese culture. He's not throwing around empty signifiers haphazardly – he intimately understands the oriental elements that he uses in his music.

It is important to understand that Asian Americans, not the Japanese, were offended by Zorn's music. The Japanese CD and LP releases were without incident. In fact, Japan is just about the only country that would release *Torture Garden* with its artwork intact. Because of his ideals, Zorn left his American label, Nonesuch, when they refused to allow the album cover that he selected. It's possible that Zorn knows more about specific areas of Japanese culture than some Japanese Americans do. Zorn, involved with the darker side of Japanese culture for quite some time, understands that the practice of bondage and domination is fairly mainstream unlike the West where it is highly aberrant.

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<sup>15</sup> Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 146.

While the Japanese have a rich tradition of eroticism, much of this changed in the twentieth century and it wasn't until the sixties, with films such as *Crazed Fruit*, that sexuality started to regain its place in Japanese culture thanks largely to Nagisa Oshima, the man who single-handedly brought sex back to the cinema with the genre of *pinku-eiga*<sup>16</sup> (pink film). *In the Realm of the Senses* remains his most famous work, but others such as *Cruel Story of Youth* and *Death by Hanging* began challenging what Oshima saw as a repressed society where the path to modernization crushed the traditional Japanese approach to sexuality. Pre-Meiji Japan, he claims, “thought differently about sex and had a different sexual culture.”<sup>17</sup> He points to the Edo period (1868-1903) when “a free sexual culture existed.”<sup>18</sup> One needs only to look at the Edo period's collections of erotic woodblock prints to get a sense of this history.

Even at this time, an obsession with bondage and domination was evident. However, it wasn't until the Korean War that the modern Japanese bondage appearing in Zorn's work began to form. Around this time, the work of American John Willie made connections between Western and Eastern concepts of bondage through the “abnormal” magazine *Kitan Club*. The Japanese proceeded to produce pictures such as *Ten Naked Tied Women* by Reiko Kita, which is the first occurrence of *seme-e*, or a picture of sexual assault. This practice evolved into the *pinku-eiga* films that Oshima along with Tetsuji Takechi helped to champion. In the beginning, they were exploitative with nudity and sex as the *raison d'être*, but later, they became decidedly transgressive and violent, almost always towards women. They also gained wild popularity with the general public. So

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<sup>16</sup> Softcore sex films, often violent in nature

<sup>17</sup> Nagisa Oshima, *Cinema, Censorship, and the State: the Writings of Nagisa Oshima, 1956-1978*. Translated by Dawn Lawson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 243.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

much that by the mid-1960s, *pinku-eiga* accounted for one half of film production in Japan.<sup>19</sup> From here it is apparent that sadomasochism is fairly mainstream in Japanese culture and that Zorn's use of it isn't nearly as radical in Japan as it is in America.

Zorn's use of *manga* (Japanese comics, as opposed to *anime*, Japanese animation), also works with this same idea. Unlike American cartoons, *manga* targets all individuals in society and deals with an incredible range of topics from how to be polite at the table, to invasions of supernatural space rock stars, to the voyeuristic antics of housekeeping hamsters.<sup>20</sup> There is also *hentai*, a type of both *manga* and *anime* that deals exclusively with pornography and almost always involves a wide variety of transgressions visited on women. The gruesome inside of the *Torture Garden* booklet is an example of such *manga*. Though remarkably disturbing to most Westerners, it is, in Japan, acceptable and even common to find people reading this type of material in public without shame. Therefore, it is logical that Zorn's choice of artwork would not be offensive to natives of Japan.

Violence is also prominent in Japanese culture, as it is in most cultures, and the bloody samurai films of Kurosawa or the ultra-violent *yakuza* (Japanese gangsters) films of Takashi Miike show this well. It is certainly present in many genres of anime and can be found in many types of music as well. Ichiro Tsuji's Dissecting Table project thematically centers on pain, suffering, and death as does much of the work of Merzbow (Masami Akita). Akita is primarily a composer, but also a film director dealing with a very specific mix of sex, violence, and death called *hara kiri*. *Lost Paradise*, his most

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<sup>19</sup> David Desser, *Eros Plus Massacre: An Introduction to the Japanese New Wave Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 98.

<sup>20</sup> Evan Torner, e-mail message to author, July 25, 2005

renowned film in America, watches as a woman commits the ancient form of ritual disemboweling known as *seppuku*, in amazing, gory detail.

These are not the smiling, kimono-wearing, rice-eating Asian caricatures of most orientalist works. Of course not all Japanese people consume this extreme type of art, but it *is* a substantial part of their culture. *Henti*, *hara kiri*, *pinku-eiga*, and the like are not underground fringe movements, but it seems Hisama is somehow completely ignorant of them and it is questionable just how aware she is of her cultural heritage. She constantly makes Zorn out to be a perpetrator of violence against Asian women as if he himself had taken the photographs for his CDs, painted the pictures for his booklets, and practically invented the concept of a submissive Asian woman. Quite simply, Zorn went to Japan, was introduced to this world of sadomasochism, and decided to use it in his music.

Perhaps part of the reason for her invective is that he is a white American male. Maybe if an Asian presented this artwork, it would be easier for Asian Americans to accept. However, based on Hisama's close reading of each of Zorn's pictures, this is doubtful. She is diametrically opposed to the depiction of a woman subjugated by a man, whether it comes from her heritage or not and therefore feels compelled to level charges of racism and misogyny at Zorn. Regardless of how Hisama feels about violent eroticism involving Asian women, Zorn has portrayed this specific aspect of the culture accurately. He hasn't added Western elements to the artwork, he isn't promoting colonialism, he isn't speaking against women, Asian or not – he simply presents it as having a relationship to his music. Zorn says of his artwork,

[The images] were never intended to denigrate or insult any particular ... groups of persons ... If someone criticizes me, they're not looking at the



scope of my work, as an artist who deals with these themes in a consistent way. I've used Caucasians in violent situations too.<sup>21</sup>

Hisama fails to mention people such as Ikue Mori, a Japanese electronic percussionist who frequently works with Zorn. She appears on fifteen of his currently in print CDs, but it would seem that if she felt Zorn was promoting the abuse of Asian women she would not collaborate with him.

In truth, Hisama, both as an Asian American and as a woman, has every right to be personally offended at the content of Zorn's work. There are plenty of women and men from other races that would be offended by sadomasochistic imagery and they have the right to ignore these themes in art and society. However, Hisama is not arguing that she is personally offended, but that Zorn is a perverted, racist, misogynist predator of Asian women. Wildly unsubstantiated claims such as these reveal that Hisama possesses a fundamental misunderstanding of Zorn's work and intent, and of her cultural heritage.

It's highly probable that few of Zorn's detractors even bothered to try to understand his complex artistic vision that they fought against to vigorously. Much of the criticism hardly mentions the music and gives no indication that the writer even heard it. However, they successfully attached a label to Zorn in order to save others the trouble of examining his work for themselves and coming to their own conclusions. The critical structure was already intact.

## **Conclusion**

It is evident that Zorn understands the culture that he is presenting in his art. It is also evident that he has no nefarious plan to coerce Asian women into submission. Based on the content of two CDs, accusations of racism are ludicrous. Whether Asian

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<sup>21</sup> Denise Hamilton, "Zorn's 'Garden' Sprouts Discontent," *Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 1994.

Americans realize it or not, violent sadomasochism is a part of Japanese culture and the fact that Zorn incorporates it into his work is a radical manifestation of orientalism taken in a new direction. Instead of the safe and clichéd evocations of past works, he presents current and very relevant portrait of Japan that is utterly unique.

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