



From the liner notes of  
*Music of Hikari Oe 2* (1994)

“A Soul Wailing in Darkness” by Kenzaburo Oe

*Music of Hikari Oe (2)* is appearing two years following the release of *Music of Hikari Oe*. During these two years Hikari's music has developed on both the conceptual and technical levels, as I am sure will be evident to anyone who hears the music on this disc after listening to the earlier disc.

Attending the performances of these pieces — in particular *Grief No. 3*, *Nocturnal Capriccio* and *Nocturne No. 2* — as they were being recorded, I felt that they represented the voice of a soul wailing in darkness. Owing to his mental handicap, Hikari is unable to express his inner feeling in words; as his father, I was profoundly shocked to gain this impression from his music.

Listening to music was Hikari's principal daily occupation as he grew up. He eventually encountered people willing to teach him music; the impression I gained was that his musical training amounted to the comprehensive education of a handicapped child in an everyday environment. He then began to compose his own music. Both my wife and I have felt ever since that Hikari is striving to express through music those inner feelings that he is unable to express verbally.

Hikari now brings to bear a fuller conceptual approach to the act of creating music and he has mastered techniques of greater complexity. Hikari's music — although I would not go so far as to say all of it — has become the voice of a soul wailing in darkness. We have to face up to the fact that this voice is present within him.

How is it possible to soothe by means of words those feelings which Hikari gives vent to through his music and which my wife and I are compelled to acknowledge? This is a supremely difficult task. As an individual who has spent his life working with literature and words, awareness of this difficulty lies deep within me. For as long as I remain a writer, for as long as I live together with Hikari, I shall continue to be taxed by this question.

As to the music itself, Hikari was present throughout as his scores were transformed into sound by the acutely perspicacious and sensitive performers. He seemed the very image of contentment. Although it is his soul wailing in darkness that has motivated him to compose these pieces, I sensed that it is by listening to the pieces being performed that his soul is soothed.

All I can say is that this is one of the wonders of music. But I feel that the wondrous quality of Hikari's art has a broad potential appeal which may well strike a sympathetic chord in the spirits of many people.

Simone Weil once wrote that prayer "is the orientation of all the attention of which the soul is capable towards God. The quality of the attention counts for much in the quality of the prayer." I have concluded that Hikari is able to be attentive and foster his attention only through the medium of music. I wonder whether this attention might lead him towards his own unique mode of prayer. Such are the thoughts that his recent music has begun to inspire in me.

— 20 August 1994



Notes by JRW:



Simone Weil is clearly the sort of French philosopher who would be dear to Oe's heart. She struggled through her life, under considerable physical distress, to find her way to be close to God, among other things. Here is her biography according to Wiki:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simone\\_Weil](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simone_Weil). The full essay (English translation) from which he quotes above follows beginning on the next page, for those interested. And here is a quote lifted from the Wiki page because we will be discussing throughout class this dichotomy between those prone to "thinking" and those prone "acting" as well as the difficulties of appropriating reality. And similar to Weil's remark, Ōe rarely located predispositions to thinking and acting in the same

person: "One can never really give a proof of the reality of anything; reality is not something open to proof, it is something established. It is established just because proof is not enough. It is this characteristic of language, at once indispensable and inadequate, which shows the reality of the external world. Most people hardly ever realize this, because it is rare that the very same man thinks and puts his thought into action..."

Please also note this from Flannery O'Connor's letters:

To A.

Dear A.,

The Lord knows I never expected to own the Notebooks of Simone Weil. This is almost something to live up to; anyway, reading them is one way to try to understand the age. I intend to find that *Time* with her picture (some weeks ago [JRW: [the article online](#)]) and cut out the picture and stick it in the front. That face gives a kind of reality to the notes. I am more than a little obliged to you. There are books that I can't begin to exhaust, and Simone Weil is a mystery that should keep us all humble [JRW: *humility is a common factor, in my opinion, between O'Connor and Oe*], and I need it more than most. Also she's the example of the religious consciousness without a religion which maybe sooner or later I will be able to write about. [JRW: *This is the explicit theme of Somersault, but implicit in much of his work.*]

(December 28 1956, *O'Connor: Collected Works*, 1014)