

Takemitsu works too elusive

By JOHN KRAGLUND

Toru Takemitsu, the Japanese composer who first attracted attention in Toronto during the time of Seiji Ozawa, was one of two guest composers at Saturday's New Music Concerts program at the Edward Johnson Building. The other was Montreal composer Gilles Tremblay, in a lesser but more active role, as he had only one work in the program but conducted it himself.

However, it was Takemitsu who gave the listeners most to think about and who may also have been responsible for the capacity audience and the numerous persons who had to be turned away. The only problem, for me, at any rate, was that the ideas to be pondered were exceedingly elusive.

If memory serves, it was George Santayana who suggested that an artist's work should be judged by how well he achieved what he set out to do. That may not be the whole story, but it certainly provides a convenient starting point. But trying to discover what Takemitsu has set out to do in his pieces is not easy, even with the help of program notes and the inclusion, in the printed program, of a testament by the composer.

The key may lie with the opening and closing statements—or somewhere in be-

tween. "Everything that attracts me to music is basically of an inner personal nature. . . . I would like to achieve a sound as intense as silence."

To pursue the subject further would probably compound the confusion. To me much of Takemitsu's work emerges as serene mood music, punctuated by occasional sharp sounds that provide dramatic interruptions. In other than a crowded concert hall, perhaps this would produce the kind of intense silence he is seeking. That was the case in *Sacrifice* (1962), for flute, lute, vibraphone and crotales. As for achieving specifically what he set out to do, that should give *For Away* (1973) a high artistic rating. He described it as consisting of "imperceptible changes within the limits of musical interval and rhythm." All I perceived was the beauty of even the brilliantly shattering tones in the cascades of sound produced by pianist Peter Serkin.

Munari By Munari was Takemitsu's most picturesque composition with three percussionists—John Wyre, Robin Engelman and Russell Hartenberger, who shared all of the evening's percussive duties—producing pleasantly musical sounds on iron pots, a length of hose, a koto, various kitchen utensils (dribbling or

in water). The aim was apparently a new virtuosity. And silence was most vividly created in *Stanza II* (1971) for harp, played by Erica Goodman, and tape, when a bird-call emerged briefly from an all but soundless background drone.

There were shades of early Schoenberg in *Stanza I* (1969) in the vocal line dramatically presented by soprano Mary Morrison. Otherwise, of the music for piano, celeste, guitar, harp and percussion I can remember only occasional shattering percussive sounds.

In Tremblay's *Oralleluants* (1975), commissioned by the CBC, the composer combined a prayer and an alleluia. In contrast to the Takemitsu compositions, it emerged as a highly emotional piece, with a variety of bells to suggest as much blending of east and west in his music as in that of the Japanese composer. Again it was Miss Morrison who had been entrusted with the vocal line and some remarkably melodic material—which she performed with the assured ease which has made her a favorite interpreter of new vocal music, with both composers and listeners.