

Postscript

I am presenting you with a “Harbenter in G minor.”

You may be wondering what kind of a musical format a “harbenter” is. In fact, there is no such a thing. It was devised by my father.

He was a workaholic salaried man, typical in time of the Economic Boom in Japan in 1960s and 70s. All he cared about was work, a business dinner with clients, and mahjong with colleagues. He didn't particularly have any hobby and other than some vulgar Japanese popular songs, he barely had any ear for music. So when he started speaking of a certain “Harbenter in G minor,” he was referring to some imaginary musical form (which he thought was as legitimate as “concerto” or “prelude” that he had heard of and he was ostensibly demonstrating his familiarity with classic music that he, actually, barely knew. G minor was chosen to make it sound more plausible.

From early on, I loved literature, philosophy, and classic music. I detested my father's materialistic attitude. All he cared about was money. And perhaps he abhorred my unworldliness. The relationship was much like that between a Japanese celebrated novelist Naoya Shiga and his father, a director of several huge companies.

However, there were moments when I, as every other child, felt affection for a father. In one of those moments, I decided to turn the “Harbenter in G minor” into a real tune. As a lover of classic music, I had started taking violin lessons and teaching myself theories of music. I completed the tune and planned to play it myself on his birthday.

On that day when he came home from work, my mother told him that his son was giving a small concert for him, in which he would be playing a musical piece of his own composing. My father did not particularly appear to be delighted. Rather, sitting down to the dinner table, he looked annoyed. Then he immediately turned on TV. Apparently he was more concerned about a Giants-vs-Tigers game than his birthday party. I was a little offended at this but still I started playing the piece. Obviously, out of a sense of obligation, he turned toward me and pretended that he was listening to an artistic present from his son. But I knew his eyes were fixed on the game and his entire attention was directed at it. I finished playing in humiliation, disappointment, and indignation. I swore myself that I would never repeat an act of benevolence like this one.

Soon afterwards I was obliged to start working seriously to be prepared for an entrance examination for a college and, as a result, to give up violin lessons. I had no time for theories of harmony and counterpoint, either. Composition of musical pieces was completely abandoned.

Forty years have passed since then and I am a father to three boys and one girl,

enjoying a family life. Now one of the boys is hoping to become a musician and working hard to get into a good school of music. As I have been giving consultation to him on this matter and preliminary lessons of theories of music, my love for it has revived and I have started writing tunes. I wrote two songs and a piece for violin and piano.

Then I suddenly remembered my “Harbenter in G minor.” I searched for its score in the box where I kept my childhood memories. I found never-posted drafts of love letters to classmates, poorly written poetries, sketches of musical pieces, but no score for the “Harbenter.” Probably, after the vexing fiasco of its “premiere,” I threw away the score. But I remember the melodies. And I decided to compose it all over again.

When the work finished, I felt that the piece was probably quite different from what it was forty years ago. Some new motifs have been added, notably, a jazzy theme in the middle section, represent my more recent interest in jazz, which I hardly listened to as a student. And the piece is not in G minor, either. I started writing the tune in A minor, which is always the most facile way, thinking I would transpose it into the necessary key later. Then I used the tone that would be lower than G (the lowest tone that a violin makes) in transposition. Eventually emerged a curious piece as a “Harbenter in G minor” not in that key and in a factitive format. I believe I had to complete the piece whatever it took.

Was it a step toward “*Reconciliation*,” something that occurred between Naoya Shiga and his father (giving the title to his well-know novel); that I do not know. After all my father is not with me anymore. Rather I wish my eldest son may listen to it who has not been in touch with me for years. He detests me for a different reason than the one for which I detested my father. And if he decides to look at me and listen to me, I will do the same. It is a rule of life: when someone casts eyes on you, you should return the glance.

On Chinese Children’s Day

June 14, 2021

Takayuki Yokota-Murakami