

Kitaro's 'mind music' eases the war within us

By Kathy Proffit
Emerald Contributor

Recognized for his impressionistic, meditative "mind music," Japanese composer Masanori Takahashi, nicknamed Kitaro, brings his powerful presence and a slew of synthesizers to the Hult Center at 8 p.m. tonight during his first U.S. tour.

A guru-like figure with black, flowing, waist-length hair, Kitaro, a name meaning "music of love and joy," says his music comes not from his mind, but "from heaven, going through my body, and out my fingers through composing."

In his nine albums released on the Geffen label, the most recent being "The Light of the Spirit" (co-produced with Mickey Hart), Kitaro explores different themes in nature and the cosmos. "The Light of the Spirit" deals with Kitaro's visions of life, death and rebirth. It is a continuation of his previous LP, "Tenku," which was a meditation and reflection on childhood.

Born to a family of Buddhist/Shintoist farmers in the Toyohashi Prefecture in central Japan, Kitaro says he found a place in nature when he was very young. Now, when he composes, he opens up all the

windows to let the sounds of nature in. And since the early '70s his music has reflected his "acutely attuned consciousness, with an attitude of reverence for the natural world."

First influenced by American R&B, Kitaro didn't start playing music until he was a senior in high school. It was the music of Otis Redding, whose hits Kitaro heard in Japan, that inspired him to teach himself to play first guitar, and then keyboards.

Even at this early stage, Kitaro wrote about his relationship with nature. "trying to understand man's place in the scheme of things."

His impressionistic electronic

music began to emerge after he traveled to Europe and met Klaus Schulze of Tangerine Dream. He became fascinated with the creative power of synthesizers, and learned the techniques to become one of Japan's first synthesists.

Now, in his 24-track studio in the countryside near the base of the Japanese Alps, Kitaro has 40 synthesizers with which to experiment. Somewhat of a recluse, he does most of his recording at home. He is perhaps best known for the music he composed and performed in 1980 for "Silk Road," an hour-long documentary about the overland trade route from Europe to Japan.

In addition to his electronic music, Kitaro plays the wadaiko, huge wooden ceremonial drums that can be heard as far away as two miles. Each August at the first full moon, he performs passionately from sunset to sunrise at the foot of Mt. Fuji, often bloodying his hands, in a ceremony to give thanks.

The message of world peace infuses his entire life. He says he wants to create music that "eases the war within."

"Music has a transformative capacity. You can change a person's karma through music. I know it can change someone's karma, because it changed my own."

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