

Wakako Kaku (September 1, 1961 -) is a Japanese lyricist, poet, singer-songwriter. To many Japanese people, Wakako Kaku is known as a lyricist for famous pop singers and the theme songs of Hayao Miyazaki's animated films, including Spirited Away, for which she won a prestigious Record Taisho award, the Japanese equivalent of the Grammy.

History

1985: Began her career as a lyricist by providing lyrics to an avant-garde rock band, 'Cioccolata'. Since then, she has provided lyrics to Kenji Sawada, Moonriders, FAIRCHID, ORQUESTA DEL SOL, Ayaka Hirahara, SMAP, Rimi Natsukawa, Kumiko, Tsutomu Aragaki, etc.

1992: Started poetry reading performances both within and outside of Japan. Kaku created her own new style of story-telling poetry called "Monogatari Shi" (物語詩, narrative poetry) which was highly praised.

2001: Won the 43rd Record Taisho award and the 25th Japanese Record Award for "Itsumo nandodemo" (いつも何度でも, Always With Me / Many Times Always sung by Youmi Kimura), the theme song of the movie "sen to chihiro no kamikakushi" (千と千尋の神隠し, Spirited Away).

2004: Released the first solo album "Aozora ichigō" (青空 1号, Blue Sky#1) from Sony Music Direct.

2008: Co-produced with Hayao Miyazaki, "Umi no okāsan" (海のお母さん, Mother of the Sea), the opening theme song of the movie "Gake no ue no ponyo" (崖の上のポニョ, Ponyo on the Cliff).

Kaku's works include the first collection of story poems "Zero ni naru karada" (ゼロになるからだ, Body Becoming Zero) published by Tokumashoten, 'Umi no youna otona ni naru' (I Will Be a Grown-up Like the Sea), published by Rironsha and essays, translated children's books and more.

Ya Chaika

She wrote an original story, scripted and co-directed (with Shuntaro Tanikawa) the film "Ya Chaika".

Hoshitsumugi no uta

The song "Hoshi tsumugi no uta" (星つむぎの歌, Weaving of Stars Song, sung by Ayaka Hirahara), which was planned, supplemented and supervised by Kaku was used in the outer atmosphere as a wake-up call for astronaut Takao Doi.

2009: Stage directed 'Todokanakatta rabu retā' (Love Letters Never Delivered), starring Kumiko and Yoshio Inoue at Le Theatre Ginza.

2010: Released her 2nd album 'Karumin' with the record label VALB.

2012: Released a single CD 'Hoshizora to tenohira to (Starry Night and Palms)', a theme song for the earthquake documentary film 'Kyō wo mamoru (Protecting Today)', directed by Yuka Kanno'.

2013: Began teaching at Middlebury Japanese Language Schools (Summer Program) in Vermont.

2014: Released her 3rd album 'Vegetal' with VALB.

2017: Released her 4th album 'cidle' from her workspace Momo-Launch.

Kaku has been participated in

Shizuoka Renshi (Linked Poem): 2010, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2017 and 2019

Kumamoto Renshi :2010

Roppongi Renshi: 2014

Inspiration and Style

Kaku is also known as a movie director, theatre producer, essayist, translator, vocal performer, and even a singer, with two solo albums. On her official fan website is a diagram entitled the "Kaku Chart", which consists of a Venn diagram of three circles representing the activities 'Produce', 'Sing' and 'Read'. Each of these link to the nine different genres in which she is active. Though seemingly diverse, her ventures knit together to form a universe whose centre of gravity is in fact poetry. Wakako Kaku began working as a lyricist upon graduating from Waseda University in Tokyo, but remained drawn to poetry as a means of "physical expression" over the years. In 1992 she gave a poetry-reading performance on a small island together with local children; this for her was a turning point. Being married to a Rakugo performer, a comic storyteller in the traditional Japanese fashion (and wholly different to the taciturn potter husband of the narrator in her poem 'Dear Ceramic Artist'), must also have helped her to realise the physical aspects of poetry: husband and wife have collaborated on various types of vocal performances.

The interplay between poetry and the human body, be it in the form of reciting, singing or dancing, two concepts which were inseparable in the days of purely oral communication, has been somewhat diluted since the introduction of the written language, and has become more or less neglected in contemporary Japanese poetry, which often seems too intellectual to pay attention to corporeal matters. Kaku tries to bring back the body to poetry, not only by performing poetry on stage but also by expressing the physical elements of our being in her writing:

Your skin is there to feel the breeze on your finger as it points to the sky
Your shoulders are there to catch flower petals
Your lips are for kissing
Your cheeks are there to be kissed, isn't that right?

When each and every one of them
is used just as it is supposed to be
your body comes alive, doesn't it?

(from 'Body')

In this regard, the title of her first poetry collection, *Body Becoming Zero*, is intriguing: it seems that Kaku searches, through her poetry, for a meeting-point between the body and the spirit in the depth of the human soul, where the boundary between reality and fantasy, or the living and the dead, is also blurred. Kaku's poems work on our mind similar to the way in which folklore does, and her recitation of them reminds one of traditional storytellers. Two of the poems presented here, 'Ogre Inside' and 'My Dear Ceramic Artist', best exemplify these characteristics of her poetry.

William I. Elliott and Kazuo Kawamura translated 'Applause' and Takako Lento translated the other poems featured here. We also publish here an essay by Takako Lento in which she discusses 'Ogre Inside' and 'My Dear Ceramic Artist' in particular. Written in the spirit of the traditional storytelling, these poems are filled with everyday details of modern Japanese life, so Lento's essay should be helpful as a readers' guide.

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Selected Works

Poetry

"Zero ni naru karada" (ゼロになるからだ, *Body Becoming Zero*), published by Tokuma Shoten, Tokyo, 2002

"Umi no youna otona ni naru" (海のような大人になる, *I Will Be a Grown-up Like the Sea*), published by Rironsha, Tokyo, 2007

Yes, co-authored with Photographer Junji Takasago, published by Shōgakukan, Tokyo, 2015

"Poetaro orakuru kādo" (ポエタロ オラクル カード, *Poetaro Oracle Card*) published by Chiyūsha, Tokyo 2015

"Hajimari wa hitotsu no kotoba" (はじまりはひとつのことば, *In the Beginning There Was a Word*), published by Minatonohito, Tokyo 2015

"2 Bariki" (二馬力, *2 Horsepower*), co-authored with Shuntaro Tanikawa, published by Nanarokusha, Tokyo 2017

Essays

"Seiten hakujiitsu" (青天白日, Blue Sky White Day), published by Shohbunsha, Tokyo, 2004
"Chōgakusei de deatteokitai 55 no kotoba" (小学生で会っておきたい55の言葉, 55 Words of Wisdom You Want to Know in Elementary School) , published by PHP Kenkyūsho, Tokyo, 2014
"Chūgakusei de deatteokitai 71 no kotoba" (中学生で会っておきたい71の言葉, 71 Words of Wisdom You Want to Know in Junior High School), published by PHP editor's group, Tokyo, 2012
"Kōkōsei de deatteokitai 73 no kotoba" (高校生で会っておきたい73の言葉, 73 Words of Wisdom You Want to Know in High School), published by PHP editor's group, Tokyo, 2012

Children's Books

Neh (You know . . .), co-authored with Shuntaro Tanikawa and Akira Sato, published by Froebel Kan, Tokyo, 2008
Hugtime (translation from English, originally written by Patrick McDonnell), published by Asunaro, Tokyo, 2008
Nedoko doko kana (translation from English, originally written by Judy Hindley), published by Shōgakukan, Tokyo, 2006
Hoshitsumugi no uta (Weaving of Stars Song) CD Picture Book , published by Kyōbunsha, Tokyo 2019
Shiawase no chīsai tamago (translation from English, originally written by Ruth Krauss), published by Asunaro Shobō, Tokyo, 2015

Music Albums

"Aozora ichigou" (青空 1 号, Blue Sky #1), GT Music, Tokyo, 2004
Karumin, Space Shower Music, Tokyo, 2010
Vegetal, VALB, Tokyo, 2014
cidre, Momo-launch, Tokyo, 2017

Directed Film

Ya Chaika, co-directed with Shuntaro Tanikawa, Frontier Works Inc., Tokyo, 2009

External Links

Wakako Kaku's official fan site
official website of Yah Chayka! (I, Seagull) , a film Wakako Kaku co-directed with poet Shuntaro Tanikawa
Wakako-Kaku Kaku's achievements featured in the Poetry International Archives.