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Artist's "Blue Piano" balances control with chaos

BY JAMES YOUNG/The Herald Mexico

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The Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros (SAPS) and the Colegio Nacional will hold three special presentations in Mexico City this week featuring world-renowned Japanese pianist Aki Takahashi and a project developed by Japanese artist Miho Hagino. In addition to a concert recital by Takahashi at the Colegio Nacional tonight, Nov. 15, the pianist will perform in Hagino's work titled "Blue Piano" to be presented at the SAPS Thursday and Friday evenings, Nov. 16 and 17. Hagino, who has lived in Mexico for the last seven years, developed the concept for "Blue Piano" out of a sense of nostalgia originating from her childhood in Asahikawa, Japan. From the age of 3 until she was 8 years old, Hagino studied the piano four days a week for 3 or 4 hours each day. An illness in the family brought her studies to a sudden halt. "(Blue Piano) is a way for me to act as the pianist that I thought I would become as a small child," said Hagino. Hagino has exhibited her work in Osaka, Berlin, Madrid, Los Angeles and in a number of spaces in Mexico. Her work up to this point has been largely characterized by the glossy, fiberglass sculptures of abstract forms that emulate the highly synthetic feel of Japanese comic books and animation. For "Blue Piano," Hagino has created 111 chairs for the audience, adding a visual component to the aural experience. "Growing up, I remember going to piano practice and the snow coming up to my waist," says the 35-year-old artist. She described the formal and minimalist feel of the auditorium where she took her piano lessons. Her sculptured seats are inspired by the balls of snow she would make as a child on the way to class, and she sees this as an attempt to intervene in the experience of the audience. "I wanted to bring something joyful into the space," she said. Drawing from another element of her childhood, Hagino wanted to involve an important figure in contemporary Japanese music from the 1970s, making Takahashi an obvious choice. A year and a half ago Hagino began working on the "Blue Piano," eventually collaborating with Mexican composer and sound artist Manuel Rocha, who knew Takahashi from participating in festivals in Japan. He contacted the pianist about the project, and she has enthusiastically agreed to participate. Takahashi, who has won numerous awards and recognitions, is known for her unique interpretive energy that has inspired a number of composers, including John Cage, Morton Feldman and longtime collaborator Toru Takemitsu, to create works for her to play. It is this dynamic element of freedom in interpretation that brings unpredictability to Hagino's project.

Tones interposed

Working with Rocha, Hagino developed a method for interposing musical tones using a computer program called Max that allows the artist to directly manipulate any media signal. In this case, they are using the signal from a Yamaha "Silent Piano," a grand piano that is capable of sending a high fidelity digital signal while remaining acoustically silent. Guests outside the entrance of the SAPS will be able to hear the piano as it is being played, unaltered. Those inside the SAPS' "Cubo" a new media and experimental art space will hear the music in its manipulated form, while those in the halls between the "Cubo" and the entrance will hear some combination of the two. "We wanted to create atmospheric spaces that provide unique aural and visual experiences for people at the show depending on where they are located in the SAPS," says curator Jennifer Teets. Organizers highly recommend making reservations for the "Blue Piano" events on Thursday and Friday by email or telephone, though if you wish to take your chances, there will be a line for those without reservations. For those who wish to hear Takahashi perform on her own, there will be an event free to the public coordinated by the Colegio Nacional's Mario Lavista. It will be held tonight in the capital's Historic Center and features compositions by Cage and Takemitsu and the Mexican premiers of work by Feldman, Giacinto Scelsi, new talent Sachiyo Tsurumi and Akira Nishimura. These composers were chosen based on their personal and professional relationships with Takahashi. Furthermore, Cage, Scelsi and Feldman experimented by physically altering instruments or applying mathematical algorithms to their work. These manipulations interact with Takahashi's dynamic interpretation to create a vibrant fluctuation between chaos and control. This motif plays out in "Blue Piano" as well, and Takahashi plans to do her part in the realization of Hagino's ambitious project. "I have always pushed for experimentation in music Miho (Hagino) is not a musician but an artist, so I am really excited about working with her in this project," said Takahashi. The performances at the SAPS will be the only chances to see the complete piece performed, though organizers are planning the documentation and a forthcoming DVD to appear some time next year.

The recital by Aki Takhashi will be held at the Colegio Nacional Tues., Nov. 15, at 7 p.m. on Donceles 104 in the Historic Center lasting approximately two hours. Free admission.

"Blue Piano" will be held at the Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros on Tres Picos 29 in Col. Polanco this Thurs., Nov. 17, and Fri., Nov. 18, at 7:30 p.m. The performances will be around one and a half hours long. Reservations will be limited to 250 per night. To make yours call 5203-5888 or 5531-3394 or send an email to difusionsaps@yahoo.com.mx. <mailto:difusionsaps@yahoo.com.mx> Free admission.