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# Authentically Inauthentic

Queering Cultural Identity Through the  
Soundtrack to *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence*

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Music and the Moving Image 2019  
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# Introduction

- Director – Nagisa Oshima
- Score by Ryuichi Sakamoto

David Bowie as “Maj. Celliers”



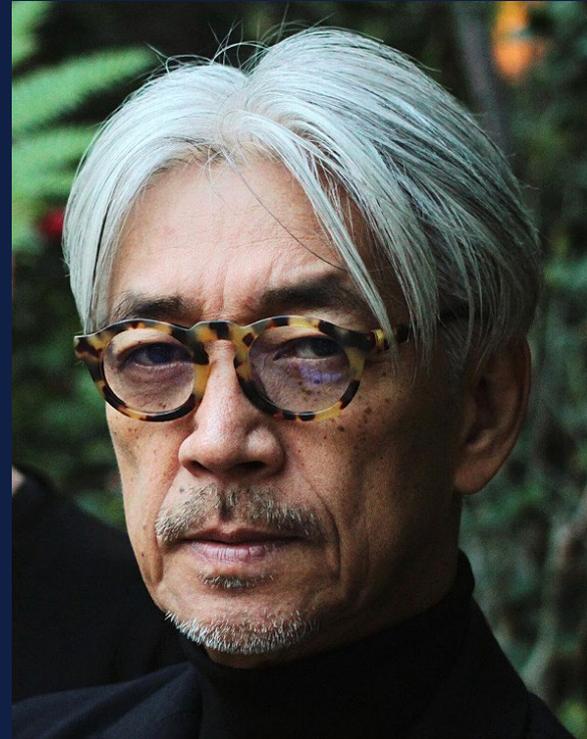
Ryuichi Sakamoto as “Capt. Yonoi”



Images from: Nagisa Oshima, *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence*, Blu-ray special edition (Criterion Collection, 2014).

# Historical context

- Sakamoto grew up in Shinjuku
  - Center of counter-cultural revolution
  - Inspired by New Wave
  - Member of “Yellow Magic Orchestra”
- Composition of the score
  - Sakamoto given complete control
  - Three months to complete the project



Ryuichi Sakamoto (2018)

# Theoretical framework

- Queer theory highlights artificiality of cultural construction
- Chen: “an array of subjectivities...outside of the heteronormative.”
- Taylor: queerness as post-structuralist critique of identity coherence
- Doty: Queer readings of texts are *real* readings, not “alternate” readings

# Japanese masculinity post-WWII

- Defeat by Allied forces, 1945
- Yukio Mishima and radicalism
- Representations of Asian men in Western media
  - Nguyen: “Oriental Passivity”
  - “Failed masculinity”

# Failed Western masculinity

- Iconic Bowie cast under Japanese directorial “gaze”
- Derfoufi: “creative and artistic subjectivities”
- Contaminated the Western hegemonic subject
  - Unidentifiable
  - A “failed” colonizer

# Compositional intentionality

- Score as a “dichotomy”
  - Western Christmas bells, set in Asian contexts
  - Neither Japanese nor Western
  - Purposefully exoticized

# Queer codes

- **Minimalism:** avoids semiotic constraint of traditional harmonic form
- **Melodrama:** overly stylized, unobtainable
- **Camp:** excess of emotion, mimicry, and overblown identity

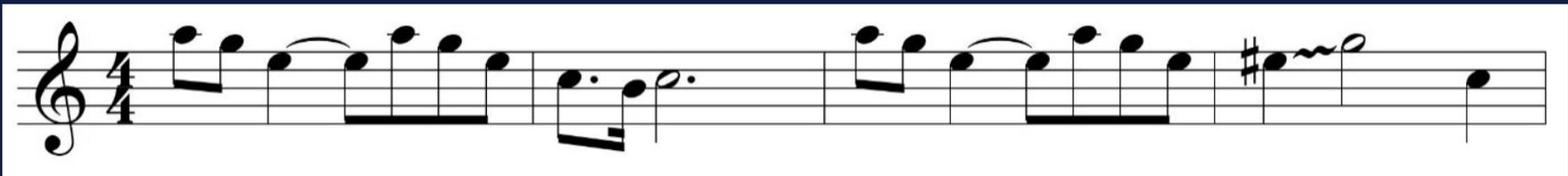
# Kenjiki

- “Forbidden Colors”
- Reference to Yukio Mishima
- Use of synth “gamelan” to invoke “Asian-ness”
- *Kenjiki* – homosexual novel by Mishima



Figure 1: Primary theme from *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence*

# Germination (Var. 1)



# Germination (Var. 2)

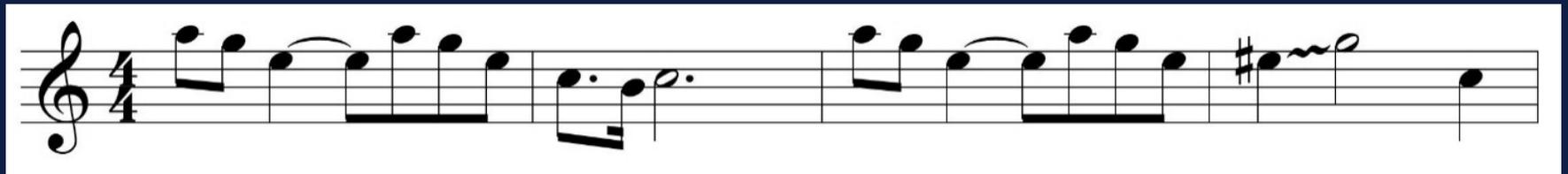


Figure 2: Theme from Germination

# Germination (Var. 3)

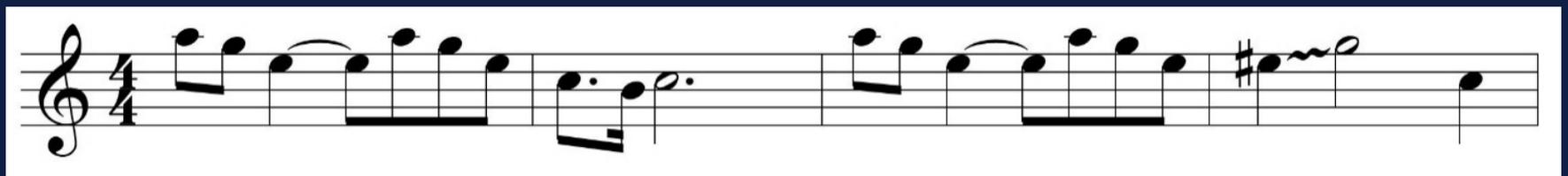


Figure 2: Theme from Germination

# The Sower



Figure 3: The Sower Theme from “Seed and the Sower”

# The Sower (1<sup>st</sup> Appearance)



# The Sower (2<sup>nd</sup> Appearance)



# The Seed, The Sower, and Germination

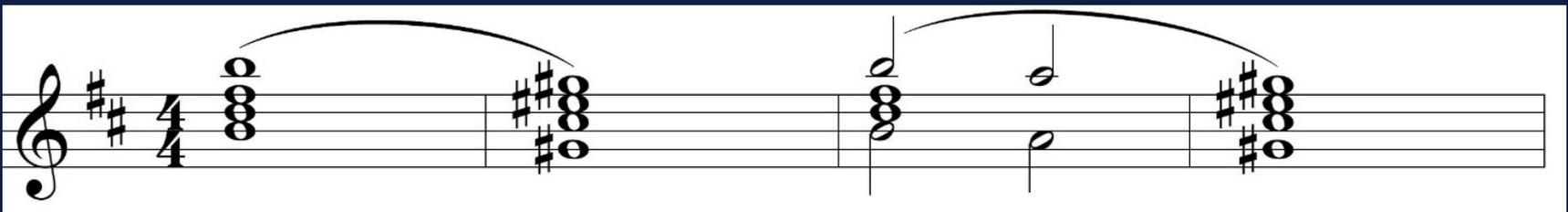


Figure 5: Harmonic pattern from “The Seed”

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# Conclusion

Questions?