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Akira Ifukube Is Dead at 91; Composed Score for 'Godzilla'

By AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Published: February 10, 2006

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TOKYO, Feb. 9 (Agence France-Presse) — Akira Ifukube, a former forestry officer who taught himself to be a prolific composer and wrote the score for the celebrated monster movie "Godzilla," died on Wednesday. He was 91.

The cause was multiple organ failure, said the Tokyo College of Music, where he was president from 1976 to 1987.

Mr. Ifukube is said to have composed about 300 to 400 works for film throughout his career. He was named a Person of Cultural Merit, one of Japan's highest honors, in 2003.

Born in 1914 on the northern island of Hokkaido, Mr. Ifukube taught himself to compose music as a teenager, even though his formal training was in the lumber industry. His work was heavily influenced by the culture of the Ainu, the indigenous people of Hokkaido who practice an animist faith.

He started his musical career on the side while working as a forestry officer in Hokkaido during World War II. His works ranged from Western classical music to pieces in his own distinctive style.

Mr. Ifukube began to build an international reputation in 1935, when his "Japanese Rhapsody" won first prize in a contest promoted by the Russian-born composer Alexander Nikolayevich Tcherepnin.

He was most famous for writing the main theme for the first "Godzilla" film, released in 1954. That piece used his characteristic repetition of musical phrases to create a dynamic rhythmic score with a tribal feel.

Since then, 27 more Godzilla movies have been produced in Japan, with Mr. Ifukube's score occasionally reappearing.

Mr. Ifukube left the forest after World War II to become a music instructor. His first stint was between 1946 and 1953 at a school that later became the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music.

His work regained popularity in Japan in the late 1990's with the release of new CD's of his work played by younger musicians.

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