

# Japanese music

**Japanese music**, the art concerned with



Courtesan playing a samisen, Japanese woodcut print.

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combining  
vocal or

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Music before and through the Nara period  
Early evidence

Predominant musical traits  
Aesthetic and formal ideals

Guilds

The Nara period  
Codification of court music

Influence of Tang-dynasty China

The Heian period  
Music of the left and of the right

Music notation

Tonal system

Vocal music

Shintō music

Buddhist music

Kamakura, Muromachi, and Tokugawa  
periods

Noh music

Melodic principles

Song types

Function of drum patterns

Role of the flute

Koto music

Schools and genres

Tunings and notation

Schools of *shakuhachi* flute music

Samisen music

instrumental sounds for beauty of form or emotional expression, specifically as it is carried out in Japan. Korea served as a bridge to Japan for many Chinese musical ideas as well as exerting influence through its own forms of court music. Also to be considered is the presence of northern Asian tribal traditions in the form of Ainu culture surviving on Hokkaido island. However, it should be pointed out that the island isolation of Japan allowed it to develop its own special characteristics without the intense influences of the Chinese giant and the Mongols so evident in mainland cultures.

Therefore, in the ensuing discussion all the “foreign” elements are placed in the matrix of traditions and styles that are characteristically Japanese.

## MUSIC BEFORE AND THROUGH THE NARA PERIOD

### EARLY EVIDENCE

Ancient Chinese sources and modern archaeological data provide the earliest surviving insights into Japanese music. Archaeologists have discovered materials of Neolithic people in Japan and pottery remains of the Jōmon culture dating back, according to some scholars, as far as the 11th millennium BCE. Among the items recovered from the subsequent Yayoi period (c. 300 BCE–c. 250 CE), the most significant musical finds are *dōtaku* bronze bells. They show that the native population had adopted Chinese metallurgy. The shape of the bells and the locations of their remains indicate that they may have entered the Japanese islands with tribes migrating from northern Asia.

That Japan gradually came to be dominated by one group called the Yamato clan became more evident in the Tumulus period (c. 250–c. 500 CE) and led to the present imperial system. Specific evidence of its musical life is found first in certain tomb figurines (*haniwa*), which were substitutes for the earlier Asian tradition of human sacrifices at the death of a leader. One *haniwa* has been found playing a barrel drum with a stick, while another figure is seated with a four- or five-stringed board zither across his lap. Crotal bells (pellet or jingle bells) are found on costumes, and some statues seem to be of singers. The zither is of special interest, for it is related to the Korean *kayagŭm* that appeared in the Kaya kingdom (on the central southern coast of what is now South Korea) by at least the 6th century. It also may be the earliest example of the *wagon*, or *Yamato-goto*, a six-stringed zither with movable bridges found in Japanese Shintō music. The crotal bells survive in the form of the *suzu* bell tree, an instrument characteristic of Shintō dances only. The interpretation of another figure as a singer and the presence of a drummer are rather too general for conclusions, although a Chinese history book of the 3rd century (*Wei zhi*, 297 CE) does speak of the natives of Japan as singing and dancing during a funeral. That source also notes two traits well-known in

Kabuki theatre

Onstage music

Offstage music

*Biwa*, vocal, and folk music

The Meiji period and subsequent music

Sources of Western influence

Religious and military music

Music education

Traditional styles

Composers in Western styles

Shintō today: a concern for purification and the use of hand claps in praying before a shrine.

The mention of shamanism is found in Chinese accounts and is of particular interest to those concerned with the northern Asian aspects of Japanese culture. In that context it must be remembered that the Ainu were as populous and strong as the new Japanese people at the time of the founding of the Yamato dynasty. Battles between the Japanese and Ainu are noted in 6th-century Chinese books such as the *Song shu* (513), and, rather like 19th-century American Indians, Ainu were found as mercenary troops in a group of Japanese forces sent to assist the Korean Silla kingdom in the 7th century. The Chinese *Sui shu* history book (630) mentions tattooed people like the Ainu as well as a five-stringed zither and a flute. Ainu culture today maintains a jew's harp—though not a flute—as well as a *tonkori* zither with two to five strings. It is unlike the zither on the lap of the earlier tomb figure in both its shape and playing position, being held like a banjo and played open-stringed with both hands. The surviving shamanism of the Ainu has equivalent forms in early Shintō and in a few surviving Japanese folk “mountain women” traditions. However, the guttural vocal style and the frequent polyphonic textures of modern Ainu music today seem culturally to point north rather than south or west. Perhaps the Ainu are a living link between present-day civilization and the life pictured in ancient Chinese documents.

As the Japanese people gradually drove the Ainu northward, they solidified their own internal structure and established stronger ties with continental culture. Records show that a Korean Silla (in Japanese, Shiragi) emperor sent 80 musicians to the funeral of a Japanese ruler in 453. Chinese Buddhism was officially introduced as a religion in Japan in the 6th century, selected converts being sent to China for proper training in the rituals (hence the music) of that faith. A Korean musician, Mimaji (in Japanese, Mimashi), is believed to have introduced masked dances and entertainments (*gigaku*) and southern Chinese music (*kuregaku*) into the Japanese court in 612. By the 8th century Japan had produced its own first written chronicles, the *Kojiki* (713; “Records of Ancient Matters”) and the *Nihon shoki* (720; “Chronicles of Japan”), which recount the origin of music in Japanese mythology as the form of an entertainment used by the gods to tempt the sun goddess, Amaterasu, out of her hiding in a cave. Indirect references to music appear in semihistorical accounts of early court activities in the books. In addition, the *Nihon shoki* contains the texts of some 200 poems, many of which seem to have been derived from the oral musical tradition.

## **PREDOMINANT MUSICAL TRAITS**

It is apparent that by the 8th century the documented history of Japanese music had begun. Although that predates an equal state of Western music history by some 100 years, certain interesting parallels between the two traditions can be made. Both seem more clearly established in the same general 200-year period, a short time when compared with Chinese music studies. Both developed a musical nomenclature heavily influenced by the music of religious organizations: the Roman Catholic Church in the West, Buddhism in Japan. Both traditions were equally influenced by the theories of a foreign culture from over the nearest sea: Greece for Italy and China for Japan. Herein many differences arise, one of the most significant being that, in the Japanese case, the foreign tradition of China at the time of its first major influence was alive and strong and could apply practical musical information and instrumentations as well as theories, whereas the Greek tradition was long dead by the same period, when European monks turned to it for guidance. Nevertheless, one can see that the general length and beginning of each history are comparable. Before discussing Japanese music in chronological detail, one should make an attempt to envision general characteristics, realizing that in doing so the tendency is to apply aphorisms to music that stretches over a series of styles as old and varied as the music of Europe from Gregorian chant through Claude Debussy. Keeping in mind that caveat, one can put forth general guidelines for the appreciation of Japanese traditional music.

## **AESTHETIC AND FORMAL IDEALS**

The guidelines fall under three general concepts: (1) the sound ideal, (2) the structural ideal, and (3) the artistic ideal; but those three things are not clearly separate in any musical event.

### **SOUND IDEALS**

In general one can say that the most common sound ideal of Japanese music is to produce the maximum effect with a minimum amount of material. For example, the *taiko* drum of the Noh drama consists of a barrel-shaped body over which are lashed two cowhide heads some 20 inches (50 cm) in diameter stretched over iron rings. Wooden sticks are used to hit one head. Obviously, the sound potentials of the drum are many, but they are deliberately suppressed. For example, the sticks are made of very soft wood, and the strokes are applied only to a small circle of soft deerskin in the centre of the head. The *taiko*, like Japanese ink paintings, accomplishes a great deal by concentrating on very carefully chosen limitations of the medium.

Another feature of much Japanese traditional music could be called the chamber music sound ideal. No matter how large an ensemble may be, one finds that the various instruments are set in such a way that the timbre, or tone colour, of each can be heard. That can be understood in relation to Western chamber music and contrasts with the Western orchestral sound ideal, in which the primary intention is to merge all the instrumental sounds into one glorious colour. The colour separation of Japanese music is quite evident in the large court ensemble (*gagaku*) as well as in drama music and actual chamber ensembles such as the *sankyoku*, for koto (zither), samisen (plucked lute), and the end-blown *shakuhachi* flute. Such textures support the strong multilinear (as opposed to harmonic) orientation of East Asian music.

## STRUCTURAL IDEALS

The structural intents of Japanese music are as varied as those of the West, but one of special interest is the frequent application of a three-part division of a melody, a section of a piece, or an entire composition. This is in contrast to the more typical two-part division of Western music. Of course, examples of both ideals can be found in the music of both cultures; the concern here is with broad generalities. The fundamental terminology of the Japanese tripartite form is *jo-ha-kyū*—the introduction, the scatterings, and the rushing toward the end. A Western musician might wish to compare this with sonata form and its three parts (exposition, development, recapitulation). But the Western example relates to a complete event and involves the development of certain motives or melodic units (such as first and second themes), whereas the Japanese concept may be applied to various segments or complete pieces that are generally through-composed (i.e., with new material for each segment).

Japanese music reveals its logic and its forward motion not by themes but by a movement from one section to a different one until the final section has been reached. Forward motion in motive Western music was often derived during the classical periods from the tension created by chord progressions. In Japanese music such sonic events generally are not used. Nevertheless, the need for aurally recognizable patterns falling into a progression that the informed listener can anticipate is necessary in all music. In Japan such stereotyped patterns are melodic or rhythmic, not harmonic; they will be discussed in detail later. The recognition, whether intellectual or aural, of the existence of such recurring patterns is essential to the appreciation of any music.

## ARTISTIC IDEALS

One of the artistic ideals of Japanese music is equally clear in all of East Asia. It is the tendency for much of the music to be word-oriented, either through actual sung text or through pictorial titles of instrumental pieces. With the exception of variation pieces (*danmono*) for the Japanese koto, one can seldom find a purely instrumental piece in the spirit of, for example, the Western sonata or symphony. Japanese ensemble pieces, like those of China and Korea, are either dance pieces, instrumental versions of songs, or descriptive. That ideal in all of East Asia was not weakened until the late 19th century, when such music was forced to compete with Western idioms.

## GUILDS

By the same token, the ideal of the composer as genius, so dear to Western hearts since the 19th century, had little place in earlier Japanese music. In Japan, as in China and Korea, the names of many composers are known, but the actual setting of their music was and still is often done by a group of fairly anonymous people. One may know who was helping out at a given time and in a given place, but in any written form of the music helpers' names, or even the name of "the" composer, may often be missing. The process might best be called communal composition. In East Asia, particularly in Japan, the performer is often the person remembered and noted. Such an ideal is understood in the West by fans of popular music. Although that ideal has given way to the Western composer "star" system in modern Japan, it does reflect an important social setting for any appreciation of the older Japanese classical traditions. In keeping with that artistic ideal, one should add that often there is not one "correct" version of a given piece. Most traditional music is organized under guild systems, and each guild may thus have its "secret" version of a well-known piece. A given guild will play its version precisely the same way in each performance, for improvisation has practically no role in any of the major genres of all East Asian music. Differences are maintained between guild versions, however, in order to identify a given group's musical repertoire as separate from all the rest.

The separation of guild styles can be carried further to one more artistic ideal, which holds that it is not just what one plays on an instrument but how one plays it. For example, in the case of the *taiko* drum mentioned above, the manner in which players sit, pick up the sticks, strike the drum, and put the sticks away will reveal the name of the guild to which they

belong and also can be used to judge their skill in performance. No Japanese instrument is merely played. One could almost say that its performance practice is choreographed. Such distinctions exist in the music of other East Asian cultures as well, although the clues to their understanding have not yet been revealed to outside listeners and viewers. This brief discussion of their existence in Japanese music will serve to enhance the appreciation of at least one Asian tradition as the discussion turns to a chronological study of its many styles.

## THE NARA PERIOD

### CODIFICATION OF COURT MUSIC

The previously mentioned documents from the Nara period (710–784) demonstrate how very active music was in the newly established capital in Nara. The general term for court orchestra music, *gagaku*, is merely a Japanese pronunciation for the same characters used in China for *yayue* and in Korea for *a'ak*—both of which refer to ritual music. As Japan absorbed more and more of the outside world, the music of the court, like that of Tang dynasty China during the same general centuries, received an increasing variety of styles. In 702 those styles were organized under a music bureau (*gagakuryō*), and by the early 9th century an additional Outadokoro (Imperial Poetry Bureau) had been created for handling Japanese-composed additions to the repertoire. Among foreign genres, the musical styles of the nearby Three Kingdoms of Korea have already been shown to be some of the first imports, Silla music being called in Japanese *shiragigaku*, Paekche music, *kudaragaku*, and Koguryō music, *kōkurigaku*. Music from the Three Kingdoms was sometimes collectively called *sankangaku*. Under all those terms were found still other Chinese and northern Asian traditions, in addition to music purported to have come from India as early as 736. Evidence of such a distant import can be found in a surviving court dance (*bugaku*) called *Genjōraku*, whose story about the exorcising of a snake can be traced to an ancient Indian Vedic tale. The date of 736 is also assumed for the entrance of music from peninsular Southeast Asia, which survived for several centuries in a form of music called *rinyūgaku*. Although that tradition is now lost, there are extant detailed pictures of the ensemble along with other ancient instruments and a variety of dances in sources such as the 14th-century copy of the 12th-century *Shinzeigakuzu* scroll.

### INFLUENCE OF TANG-DYNASTY CHINA

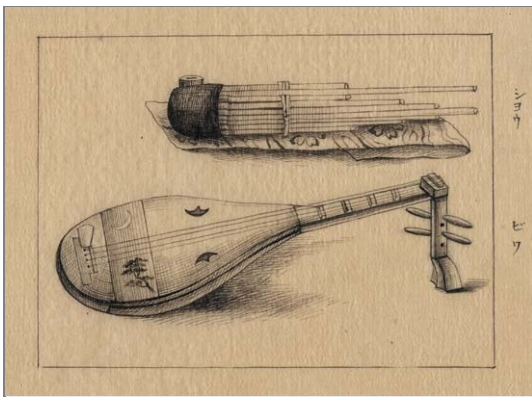
The dominant musical style of early gagaku was, naturally, from China and was called Tang music (*tōgaku*). In Japan, as in Korea, the establishment and maintenance of such a music has made it possible for modern listeners to hear foreign versions of famous pieces long forgotten in the country of their origin. For example, there are names of pieces played and dances performed in Japan that are also found in Tang Chinese lists. Unlike in China, however, many of those works are still played in Japan, and a few of the original costumes and masks used at that time are preserved. Perhaps the most-valuable treasure in Japan for such materials from the ancient traditions of all of East Asia is the Shōsō Repository, a storehouse built for the household goods of the emperor Shōmu after his death in 756. In that collection (which includes a few later additions from temples) one can find some 21 percussion instruments, 12 strings, and 12 winds, in addition to dance masks, notation, and drawings. Some of the materials are Chinese or Korean imports, while others are Japanese-made. The Chinese variant of the arched harp of the ancient Middle East (in Japanese the *kugo*) is best preserved here. The very decorations of certain instruments can also be historical gold mines. For example, the protective cover across the face of one plucked lute (*biwa*) contains the picture of a performer riding a camel near a palm-treed oasis. Another such cover depicts a group of foreign (i.e., not East Asian) musicians accompanying an energetic dancer, all on the back of an elephant. Etchings along a hunting bow show scenes of dancing and musical performances connected with a popular imported art of acrobatics and juggling called *sangaku*.

## THE HEIAN PERIOD

### MUSIC OF THE LEFT AND OF THE RIGHT

Further images of Japanese musical life can be captured from the Heian period (794–1185). In the very first chapter of the 10th-century *Ochikubo monogatari*, one of Japan's earliest novels, the sad fate of the heroine is noted by the fact that she was never able to learn how to play the Chinese seven-stringed *qin* zither, although she did have some training in Japanese koto music. The famous 11th-century works, such as Murasaki Shikibu's *Genji monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji*), are filled with romantic koto, *biwa*, and flutes, as well as gagaku and *bugaku* performances and the singing of many songs. Diaries also show that the courtiers, now moved to Kyōto, found music to be a useful and frequent adjunct to their insular courtly life. It was in this period that the many forms of official court music were organized into two basic categories.





Drawing of (top) a *shō*, a Japanese free-reed wind ...

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The so-called music of the left was called *tōgaku* and contained the Chinese- and Indian-derived pieces. The music of the right was called *komagaku* and contained all Korean and Manchurian examples. In both categories there were pieces that by this time may have been Japanese arrangements or original compositions. The terms *left* and *right* were derived from the Confucian-based administration system of the new capital, which divided the entire government into such categories. In *bugaku* they controlled the costumes of the dancers, left dances emphasizing red, right dances, green. In *gagaku* those two major divisions

standardized the instrumentation of the ensembles. When playing dance accompaniments, stringed instruments were deleted, but the two orchestras for purely instrumental performances were complete. Each used plucked 12-stringed zithers with movable bridges called *gaku-sō* or by the generic term *koto*. The string section was completed by a four-stringed plucked lute, the *gaku biwa*. A small hanging gong (*shōko*) and a large hanging drum (*tsuri daiko*) were found in both. The leader of a *tōgaku* piece would use a barrel drum (*kakko*) with two lashed heads struck with sticks, while a *komagaku* piece would be led by an hourglass *san no tsuzumi* drum similar to the Korean *changgo*. The standard melodic instrument for both was the double-reed *hichiriki*, with a *komabue* flute being added in *komagaku* and a *ryuteki* flute in *tōgaku*. The Japanese *shō* mouth organ appears in both.

## MUSIC NOTATION

In modern performances the *shō* plays a fascinating cluster of harmonies (different pitches sounded simultaneously), although there is some feeling that the original Chinese interpretation of its notation was melodic, with little or no harmonic addition. Part of the performance problem, outside the impressive age of the music, is that *gagaku* notations came only in part books, which were often rather like Western “lead sheets”; i.e., they served as memory aids rather than detailed guides. For example, the *shō* notation gives only one note for every four beats of a standard piece. The modern interpretation is that each note represents the bottom of a chord (specific set of three or more pitches sounded simultaneously), but the notes might actually have been the skeleton of a melody. The earliest surviving form of instrumental notation in Japan is a book, dated 768, of lute (*biwa*) music found in the Shōsō Repository. The earliest flute part book is dated 966, and a few

additional wind or string books remain from the 10th to the 13th century. More-abundant sources can be found from the last 300 years. Scores did not exist until modern times.

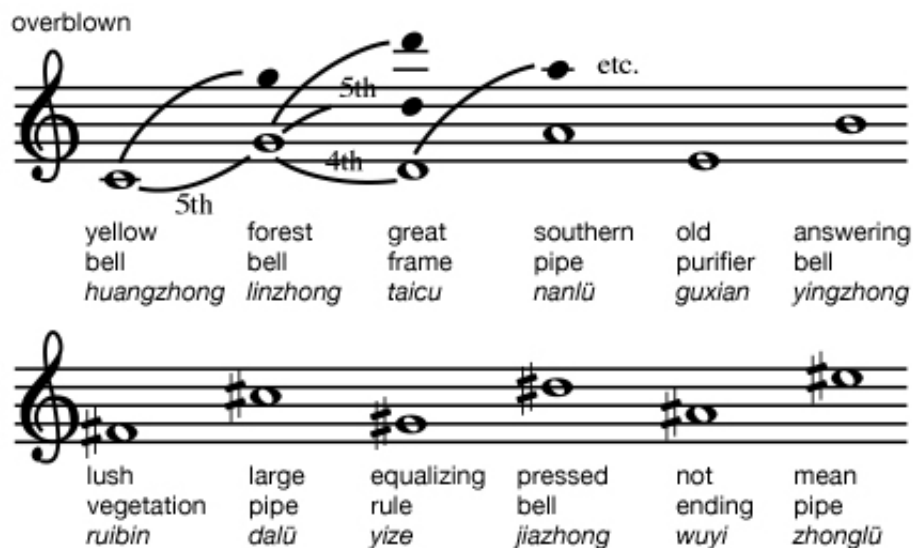
The traditional part-book notations reflect the importance of oral rote learning and the guidance of a teacher. For example, flute and *hichiriki* notations in their standard forms consist of columns first marked off by dots representing major percussion time markers (usually every four beats, though there are five- and six-beat pieces). Next, one finds a column of syllables called *shoga*, which were used to help players memorize the instrumental part by singing it. With that system it was even possible to substitute a vocal rendition of one part in an ensemble if that instrument was missing. Finally, there is another parallel column that contains a skeleton of notes or fingerings on the instrument itself. Obviously one can fully comprehend the subtle ornamentations and nuances of any melody notated in this manner only through the guidance of a teacher. In the case of the string notation, one generally finds only the names of stereotyped patterns along with occasional notes. The percussion notations likewise consist of names for stereotyped patterns. If both the strings and percussion are played as written, they appear to be merely time markers, in accordance with the colotomic principle found in much Southeast Asian and some East Asian music (the demarcation of time intervals by the entrance of specific instruments in prescribed order, a procedure contributing to the musical structure and imparting a sense of progression).

But, as in jazz, there must have been more to the music hidden in the oral tradition. Further clues as to the performance practice of the music in addition to its underlying music theory and its practical uses are found in several important sources. In 735 an ambassador, Kibi Makibi, brought back from China a 10-volume digest of musical matters (called in Japanese *Gakusho yoroku*), which implies the Chinese foundation of the art. In 1233 a court dancer, Koma Chikazane, produced another 10 volumes—the *Kyōkunshō*, describing Japanese gagaku matters. Of equal value is the *Taigenshō*, written by a gagaku musician, Toyohara Sumiaki, in 1512, when court music seemed on the verge of extinction.

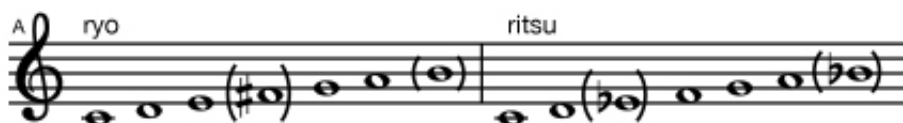
## TONAL SYSTEM

By studying a combination of sources—Buddhist music-theory tomes, part books, and present-day performance practice—one can understand many of the basic principles upon which ancient Japanese music was founded. From what has already been said about the

beginnings of Japanese court and religious music, it is not surprising to find that the complete tone system of both types consists of the 12 tones of the Chinese system. The only difference between the Chinese and Japanese tones is the pronunciation of the character for each pitch's name. Only the Chinese name is given in the illustration below.



Of the four Japanese scales *ryo*, *ritsu*, *yo*, and *in*, the first two show that ancient Japanese music followed the East Asian tradition in the use of two seven-tone scales, each with a pentatonic core.



The *ryo* scale shows no great



difference from the Chinese seven-tone scale.



The *ritsu* scale, however, seems to

reveal the early presence of an indigenous Japanese tonal ideal with the placement of its half steps.

Japanese gagaku and Buddhist music theories contain most of the classical Chinese ideas concerning transpositions and modes, but in practice the *ryo* and *ritsu* scales could be

constructed on only three pitches each: *ryo* on D (*ichikotsu*), G (*sōjō*), and E (*taishiki*); and *ritsu* on E (*hyōjō*), A (*ōshiki*), and B (*banshiki*). Note that the pitches for such transpositions form a classic pentatonic (D-E-G-A-B). The two names for the pitch E are present in order to make a distinction between the two scales possible on that same tone. In the unaccompanied court songs and the chants of Buddhism, one can observe the use of other transpositions, for all oral traditions in the world “adjust” notated pitches to the preferences of given singers. In gagaku instrumental music, the six tonalities are observed, part books for each instrument being organized in sections by the tonalities of the compositions. A few pieces, such as *Etenraku*, are found in more than one tonality. Although set in two *ritsu* tonalities (*hyōjō* and *banshiki*), it is obvious from that example that the piece, which is a “crossover” (*watashimono*), is more than merely transposed.

A *hyōjō* ETENRAKU

B *banshiki*

c *hyōjō*

*banshiki*

The pitch centre of the melody also

D KURODA-BUSHI

has been changed (from E to C#). That is one of the few clear examples in performance practice of the mode systems spoken of in music theory. A glance at the related folk song “Kuroda-bushi” and at the *in* scale provides a preview of an emphasis on such a different mode centuries later.

## VOCAL MUSIC

In the poetry-oriented court life of Japan, secular vocal music would obviously be important. Many of the poems in classical collections seemed originally to have been song texts. One of the oldest secular song forms is *saibara*, which was first inspired by the singing of packtrain drivers. Among the new fads of Heian period vocal music (called collectively *eikyoku*) were *rōei*, songs based on Chinese poems or imitations of them, and *imayō*, contemporary songs in Japanese. Many gagaku melodies were given texts to become *imayō* songs, while others were derived from the style of hymns used by Buddhist missionaries. Little of those vocal traditions remains, but memories of their importance are preserved in nearly every novel and diary of the period. For larger surviving repertoires it is necessary to turn to religious music.

## SHINTŌ MUSIC

The indigenous religion of Japan, Shintō, was closely connected with the legendary legitimacy of the emperor. Thus, special Shintō music was devised for use in imperial shrines. In Japan such Shintō music is called *kagura*. The kind of music and ritual used exclusively in the imperial palace grounds is called *mi-kagura*; that in large Shintō shrines, *o-kagura*; and Shintō music for local shrines, *sato-kagura*. The *suzu* bell tree, mentioned before as among the earliest-known Japanese instruments, is found in all such events; and the equally ancient *wagon* zither can be heard in the palace rituals and sometimes in the larger shrines.

General Shintō chanting (*norito*) is rather straightforward, whereas the surviving music of *mi-kagura* is more complex. Male choruses singing in unison (all at the same pitch) are accompanied by the *hichiriki* double-reed, a *kagura-bue* flute, the *wagon* zither, and the periodic rhythmic markings of a pair of long, thin *shaku byōshi* clappers. The music for *mi-kagura* ceremonies is divided into two types: one to praise the spirits or seek their aid (*torimono*), the other to entertain the gods (*saibari*) in the tradition, mentioned earlier, of the mythological amusements given before the sun goddess. Perhaps the most-famous surviving dance suite from the Shintō tradition is *Azuma asobi* (*The Entertainment of Eastern Japan*), which can be seen as a courtly reflection of the agricultural base of Japan in its annual performances during the spring equinox and the summer solstice. The work is said to be an imitation of the dance of a heavenly maiden who performed on the beach of Suruga in the 6th century. *Azuma asobi*, along with *bugaku* dances, may be seen at many other imperial, national, and shrine occasions—dim but nevertheless impressive reflections

of the colourful courtly life of the Japan of centuries ago.

*Mi-kagura* is exclusively a male event, but Shintō female dancers (*miko*) are found in other shrines. Historical documents show that the Heian court, like courts in ancient China or, for that matter, all over the world, appreciated the value of female dancers and their music. In later times the Heian-originated *shirabyōshi* female dancer-musicians became important elements in the transfer of courtly and religious traditions into later theatrical forms. Although the influence of Shintō music in the Japanese music traditions is evident, the major source of religious musical influence is found elsewhere, in the Buddhist temples.

## BUDDHIST MUSIC

There are many forms of Buddhist hymns, such as *saimon*, as well as semireligious dance songs, such as *goeika*, *nembutsu odori*, and the *bon odori* performed at folk festivals. But the basis of Buddhist classical music, and hence the core of Buddhist influence on Japanese art music, is found in the theory and practice of chanting known generically as *shōmyō*. Such a tradition came originally from foreign Buddhist missionaries and next from Japanese converts studying in China. Noted sources from the many Japanese interpretations of that tradition are the *Shōmyō yojinshu* by Tanchi (1163–1237) of the Tendai sect and the *Gyosan taikaishu* (1496) of the Shingon sect. The theoretical bases of those studies are similar to the ones already discussed under the topic of gagaku.

Here need be added only comments about Buddhist notation systems. Most early chant notations used neumes, squigglelike signs that, like those of the early Christian traditions, served primarily as memory aids with which an initiate could recall the details of a given melody. The most influential system was the so-called *go-in hakase*, attributed to Kakui (b. 1236) of the Shingon sect. Under that method the five notes of each of three octaves of a pentatonic scale were indicated by the angle of a short line, rather like the hands on a clock. Variations of that method were of great influence in the notation of all vocal music of the period and continue to be used in Buddhist chant today.

## KAMAKURA, MUROMACHI, AND TOKUGAWA PERIODS

### NOH MUSIC

The Kamakura period (1192-1333) marks the end of Heian court splendour and the start of a new military government located in Kamakura, far away from Kyōto. In such a context it is not surprising to find the development of long narratives of military history and the flourishing of plebian theatricals. The story of the defeat of the Heike clan (the *Heike monogatari*) was known in mansions, war camps, and temple grounds primarily as sung by *biwa*-playing bards. As in the traditions of ancient Greece and Europe, those minstrels were often blind or built their style in that of the blind-priest lute tradition (*moso biwa*) in which mendicant monks used to recite sutras (scriptures) from house to house or at temples. More lucrative forms of entertainment grew under the circus acts that developed out of the *sangaku* (folk theatricals) mentioned above, its companion comic acts, *sarugaku* (literally, monkey or mimic music), and theatricals derived from folk rice-planting dances, *dengaku*. Street parades (*fūryū*) and Buddhist entertainments (*ennen*) also were part of the colourful scene. By the subsequent Muromachi period (1338-1573) the terms *sarugaku-no-nō* and *dengaku-no-nō* had become the dominant terms for temple and shrine pantomime and dialogue dramas, while the comic interludes of such plays were called *kyōgen*. Through the support of the military rulers and the efforts of individual artists such as Kan'ami (1333-84) and his son, Zeami (1363-1443), the first major form of Japanese theatre developed. It became known eventually as Noh.

The music of Noh as it is performed today consists of vocal music (*yōkyoku*) with an instrumental ensemble known collectively as the *hayashi*. The singing is done by the actors or by a unison chorus (*jiutai*). The four instruments of the *hayashi* are a flute (*nō-kan*), a *taiko* stick drum (described earlier), a small hourglass drum (*ko-tsuzumi*) held on the right shoulder, and a larger one (*ō-tsuzumi*) placed at the left hip.

## MELODIC PRINCIPLES

The writings of Zeami, such as the *Kaden-sho*, contain terms reflecting the traditional tone systems and terminologies of former times. A distinction was made between the recitative section (*kotoba* or *serifu*) of a play and melodic parts (*fushi*). The melodies of Noh can be categorized into two basic styles, the strong (*tsuyogin*) and the lyric (*yowagin*). Their differences are most evident in the placement of fundamental tones and the use of auxiliary tones around them. In the lyric style the three basic tones (*jō*, *chū*, and *ge*) are a fourth apart. The movement to and from each note is regulated in a manner comparable to the regulated approach to certain intervals in 16th-century Western counterpoint. Similar but different laws are applied to the strong style, the fundamental tones of which are much



closer, the standard procedure today being that *jō* and *chū* are one pitch and *ge* is approximately a minor third below.

Melodies contain various formulas and ornamentations, the names of which often reflect earlier traditions in Buddhist chant and secular court songs. The choice of combinations depends on the musical needs of the given dramatic text as well as the position of the music in the general form of the piece. Once more, such restrictions in an “exotic” music should seem reasonable to students of Western art music, with its needs for stylistic restraints. The notation of Noh singing (sometimes called *uta*) is derived from simpler Buddhist and early *biwa* forms that used teardrop-shaped neumes along with important pitch names to remind singers of the performance practice of a given passage. That so-called sesame-seed notation (*goma-ten*) remains basic to Noh vocal music today, and there are many detailed books in modern Japanese to help the initiate follow the music with the aid of a teacher. Variations in notation style and in the interpretation of specific passages are maintained by the various schools of Noh along with the “secret piece” tradition basic to much of Japanese traditional music since its beginnings.

## SONG TYPES

The musical-dramatic form of Noh has as many variations as any other creative genre, such as an opera or a symphony. One such variation is the *jo-ha-kyū*, or tripartite form, which is applied in the context of sections (*dan*) and includes typical placements of Noh musical styles. The *jo* portion generally consists of the *shidai*, usually an introduction, the *na-nori*, which allows the first character to identify himself, and the traveling song (*michiyuki*), and it is followed by a song emphasizing higher tones (*ageuta*). In the second and third parts (*ha* and *kyū*, respectively), songs with lower melodic emphasis (*sageuta*) and other styles (*issei*, *kuri*, and *rongi*) mix with more recitative sections (*sashi*, *kotoba*) and with entrances (*deha*), closings (*kiri*), and dances (*kuse* and *mai*).

The image displays musical notation for Noh singing and drumming. It includes four staves: 'spoken (kotoba) style' with 16 notes and lyrics 'Moonlight shimmers in the waters All along the silent seashore'; 'strong singing (tsuyogin)' with 8 notes and the same lyrics; 'lyric (yowagin)' with 16 notes and lyrics 'Moon light shimmers in waters Along the sea shore', with brackets indicating 4, 3, and 5 syllable groups; and two drum patterns for 'ko-tsuzumi (small hourglass drum)' and '5-tsuzumi (larger hourglass drum)' with notes 'yo', 'ho', 'jo', 'ha', and 'kyū'. A grey box at the bottom states: 'The top line illustrates the *o-nori* notation (one syllable ...

Within each of those sections and subsections, drama and text have their influence as well. The drama is not all poetic, but many lines of the text are indeed poems or are influenced by poetic form. Although there is great variety in the syllable lengths and combinations, the most common divisions in Noh are into lines of 7 or 5 syllables. Such a 12-syllable line pair may be expanded, for instance, to 16 syllables, to accommodate different settings. The placement of a text rhythmically can be done in three major ways: *o-nori*, with 1 syllable per beat; *chū-nori*, with 2 syllables per beat; and *hira-nori*, in which 12 syllables are worked into an eight-beat frame.

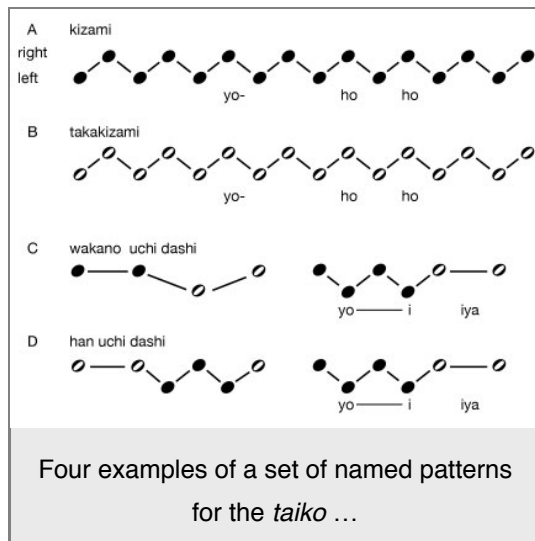
Sometimes, two sections of 7 and 5 syllables may actually be presented as tripartite (4 + 3 + 5)—i.e., in the form of *jo*, *ha*, and *kyū*. Lines of greater numbers of syllables in *hira-nori* require more beats, and 12-syllable lines themselves can be handled in many other ways. Although no single example can definitively represent the style of Noh text setting, an analysis of the syllable displacements and the melodic contours of any such passage reveals fundamental elements of the internal logic of the music. Indeed, the logic of Noh music, like that of Western art music, is detailed in a complete written music theory.

## FUNCTION OF DRUM PATTERNS

The principles of Noh text setting extend to the drum accompaniment. The music of the Noh drums consists of a series of named, stereotyped patterns that are aurally perceivable and tend to progress in given orders.

Both drum parts (*mitsuji*) and the drummers' drum calls (*kakegoe*) support the vocal line, although the two drummers may play different patterns. The *kakegoe* uttered by the drummers are as essential to the performance and recognition of a given pattern as are the drum sounds themselves. They help to give each pattern a unique aural image. Also, the manner in which the calls are performed by the player helps to signal and control the timing of each beat in a music that is often very elastic in rhythm. In performance the spacing of the beats in the vocal line is not always even with that of the drums, though

beats 3 and 5 often match. The controlled but subtly varied relations of song to rhythmic accompaniment in Noh drama are analogous to harmonization in Western music.



The *taiko* stick drum is used only in dance sections of a play. The patterns (*tetsuke*) played by *taiko* drummers are divided into families, or *tegumi*. Once more the principles of harmony in Western music come to mind; i.e., a C-major and C-minor chord are related because they share some common aural traits (the tones C and G in this case). If one looks into a lesson book of *taiko* music, one will find that, as in many Western harmony books, the student will be told what patterns may appear before or after each item. In Western music one learns in a similar way that certain chords may be

preceded and followed by others. In both the Japanese and Western cases there is a selection of permissible choices of preceding or following events for each pattern. Thus, it would seem that the concept of prediction and anticipation is fundamental to the listener's sense of logical progression in the music of both cultures. The major difference in this case is that the aurally perceivable, named, stereotyped pattern of Western traditional music is a vertical sonority called a chord, whereas in Noh music it is a horizontal time unit called a *tetsuke*.

## ROLE OF THE FLUTE

The music of the Noh flute (*nō-kan*) too has many stereotyped patterns, but it functions in rather different ways from the drums of the *hayashi* ensemble. Although it seems to have related originally to the vocal line, today it does not play the singer's melodies. The Noh flute looks like the *ryuteki* flute of gagaku, but a short cylinder has been inserted inside its tube so that the upper holes of the flute overblow a seventh (as A-G) rather than the octave, as with all other flutes. That unique characteristic of the flute seems to reflect the tonal principles of Noh mentioned earlier, whose three basic notes, each one fourth apart, outline a seventh. The flute may give a specific pitch to set the tonality of a vocal entrance, but its normal functions today are to signal sections of the form and to play one of the dozen standard dance pieces used in various Noh dramas. The dance pieces are set in sections (*dan*). Each piece is learned by rote or by a notation consisting of flute mnemonics placed in a frame of eight squares representing beats in a manner rather like Korean notation. The

flute's seven holes are fingered by the middle joint of the finger rather than the fingertip, producing an impressively fluid melody that would not fit into the graphic notation system of traditional Western music. At the same time, it does not compete with the Noh vocal line by being too melodically clear. Indeed, a discussion of the Noh flute seems to be a particularly appropriate finale in this brief survey of Noh music (*nō-gaku*), for it shows that the form of each musical item—whether performance practice, pitch relations, structure, or notation—follows the needs of its functions. The music of Noh drama seems on first hearing to be one of the most puzzling of East Asia's sounds, but a study of its principles reveals it to be as reasonable and as beautiful as a Bach cantata.

## KOTO MUSIC

### SCHOOLS AND GENRES



Kōgō no Tsubone, the emperor's mistress, playing a koto; Japanese woodblock print.

Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (file no. LC-DIG-jpd-00064)

The koto, a 13-stringed zither with movable bridges, has been mentioned as one of the basic instruments of the court ensembles as well as a common cultural accoutrement for court ladies. The development of independent solo and chamber music genres for that instrument becomes more evident as one moves into the Muromachi period (1338–1573). The earliest surviving school of solo koto music is Tsukushi-goto. It was first noted in the late 16th century on the island of Kyushu where, over the centuries, court refugees and exiles gathered during upheavals in Kyōto. Earlier Chinese influences also are claimed as part of its

creation, though historical facts are obscure. Tsukushi-goto repertoire is said to begin with variants of *imayō* court songs. Sets of songs were accompanied by the koto and sometimes by the three-stringed plucked *samisen* (*shamisen* in Tokyo dialect). The sets were called *kumiuta*, a term applied to much of the chamber music that followed. The 16th-century priest Kenjun is credited with the creation of the school and its first compositions. The tradition became more secular when it appeared in Edo. There a 17th-century blind musician named Jōhide, who was a student of Hōsui, himself a student of Kenjun, developed his own version of such music. He added compositions in more popular idioms and scales, named himself Yatsunashi Kengyō, and founded the Yatsunashi school of koto. The title Yatsunashi was adopted later by another apparently unrelated school to the far

south in the Ryukyu Islands.

Additional schools of popular, or “vulgar,” koto (*zokuso*) reflected the mercantile life of the new Tokugawa (also called Edo) period (1603–1867). In 1695 another third-generation extension of Kenjun’s koto tradition was Ikuta Kengyō, who began his Ikuta school. The term *kengyō* had been one of the basic ranks of musicians under the guild system and so is frequently found in professional names, but the name Ikuta remained as one of the primary sources of koto music until the creation of still another school by Yamada Kengyō (1757–1817). In present-day Japan the Ikuta and Yamada schools remain popular, whereas the earlier traditions have faded considerably. Both schools have provided famous composers, and there are several pieces from their schools, as well as a few earlier works, that are now shared by the guilds as part of the classical repertoire of the koto. The slightly longer and narrower shape of the Ikuta koto produces a tone easily distinguishable from that of the Yamada school.



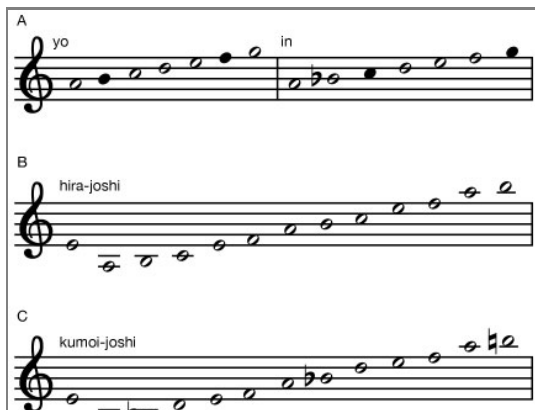
Woman playing a *kokyū*, a stringed instrument played ...

Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (file no. LC-DIG-jpd-02371)

Koto music is known in general as *sōkyoku*. In the koto solo instrumental music (*shirabemono*), the most important type is the *danmono*, a variation piece in several sections (*dan*), each normally of 104-beat length. The term for koto chamber music, *sankyoku*, means music for three. The standard instrumentation today consists of a koto player who also sings, along with performers on a three-stringed plucked *samisen* lute and an end-blown *shakuhachi* flute. In earlier times a bowed variant of the *samisen* called the *kokyū* was used more often than the flute. The basic genre of chamber music is called *jiuta* and combines the earlier *kumiuta* tradition of accompanied song with instrumental music by alternating sections with singing (*uta*) and instrumental interludes (*tegoto*). After the 19th century a second embellishing koto part (*danawase*) often was added to the instrumental interludes. Twentieth-century innovations are covered below.

# TUNINGS AND NOTATION

Each school of koto music from the courtly tradition to the present time involves changes in the structure of the instruments as well as changes in playing method and notation. The ancient court koto (*gaku-so*) is similar to the modern koto and is played with picks (*tsume*) on the thumb and first two fingers of the right hand or with bare fingers, although, unlike the Ikuta and Yamada styles, the left hand is not used to alter the tone by pressing the string on the other side of the movable bridges. Its notation consists primarily of the names of basic patterns in addition to occasional melodic fragments and the text. The survival of such music is dependent on a continuing viable rote tradition; thus, most of the tradition is lost.



The tonal systems of Edo koto traditions, which revealed new, apparently indigenous influences, ...

The tunings of the 13 strings of the court koto were derived from the modes of the *ryo* and *ritsu* scales of the earlier periods. The tunings used in the Edo koto traditions, however, reveal new, apparently indigenous, tonal systems. Those concepts were eventually categorized under the two scales called *yo* and *in*. The *hira-joshi* tuning appears in such famous early works as *Rokudan (Six Dans)* ascribed to Yatsushashi Kengyō, the “founder” of the modern koto styles. In all, there are some 13 standard tunings for the koto and many variants. Like all the other popular Japanese music from the 17th century on, those koto tunings are based

either on the older tradition preserved in part in the *yo* form or on the more “modern” *in* scale. One can note occasional pieces from the 19th century that were deliberately written in the previous gagaku mode style as well as the use of the Holland tuning (*oranda-choshi*), the Western major scale derived from the Dutch business area on Deshima in Nagasaki. Nevertheless, the *yo-in* system remains the fundamental tonal source for new Japanese music from the 17th century on, exceptions being revived court music, new Noh plays, and the work of avant-garde composers after World War II.

The earliest printed notations of koto, samisen, and flute pieces from the Tokugawa period are found in the *Shichiku shōshinshū* (1664), the *Shichiku taizen* (1685), and the *Matsu no ha* (1703). Although many sections of such collections contain only the texts of songs, certain pieces among them parallel the line of words with numbers representing strings on the koto or finger positions on the samisen, names of stereotyped koto patterns, or mnemonics



for the particular instrument with which the piece is learned. In the late 18th century both the koto and the samisen traditions developed more visually accurate notations. The koto version (first seen in the *Sōkyoku taisho*, 1779) used various-sized dots to indicate rhythm. In the early 19th century string numbers were placed in columns of squares representing rhythm. The numbers and squares eventually were combined with the  $\frac{2}{4}$  bar-line concept of the West, so that the notations of both schools today, although separate systems, maintain a balance of traditional and Western ideas. Modern compositions attempt to do the same, but before those can be treated, attention must be given to the traditions connected with the other major instruments of the Tokugawa period.

## SCHOOLS OF SHAKUHACHI FLUTE MUSIC



Musician playing a *shakuhachi*, a Japanese end-blown flute, ...

E&E Image Library/Heritage-Images

The *shakuhachi* end-blown flute is a variant of the Chinese *xiao*, and examples of it can be found in the famous 8th-century Shōsō Repository mentioned earlier. During the Muromachi period (1338–1573) a smaller Japanese version called the *hitoyogiri* became popular as a solo instrument, but the best-known form of the *shakuhachi* is the one developed in the Tokugawa period. The instrument was used by *komusō*, priests who begged or sometimes spied while wandering through the streets playing the flute incognito, their heads covered by special wicker basket hats. With the changes that had occurred in Japanese society, many former warriors no longer carried their swords, whereas young merchants carried more money. One curious side effect of such changes was the occasional appearance of a *shakuhachi* tucked in the back of one's belt for use as a musical device or as a club.

The major schools of *shakuhachi* music today come from guilds, the Meian and Kinko, whose origins derive from two sects of an earlier Fekeshu guild of *komusō* priests. In the Meiji era (1868–1912) the monopoly rights of the various music guilds of the previous period were abolished, and a



The Japanese end-blown flute, or  
*shakuhachi*.

*Lombroso*

Tozan school was founded for teaching the music to amateur musicians, a custom soon adopted by the other guilds.

The instruments of all schools may vary in size and the number of finger holes for the purpose of pitch as well as differences in timbre ideals. The standard *shakuhachi* has four finger holes along the front and one thumb hole behind. A bell is formed by the bamboo root stems at the end of the flute. The mouthpiece is cut obliquely outward, and a small piece of bone or ivory is inserted at the blowing edge in order to help produce the great variety of subtle tones typical of *shakuhachi* music. The basic repertoires of the music are divided into three general types. Original pieces (*honkyoku*) are those claimed to be composed by the founders or early teachers of a given school, whereas outside pieces (*gaikyoku*) are taken from other genres or other schools of *shakuhachi* music. New pieces (*shinkyoku*) continually appear and are kept in that category. *Shakuhachi* notation varies with each school; however, all are based on mnemonics with which the music is taught. Given the exceptional subtlety of tone changes and ornamentation in all traditional *shakuhachi* music, such a notation system seems quite logical. The beautiful introverted sounds of *shakuhachi*

music seem closer to Buddhist chant than to other instrumental forms and are best learned by the ear and heart rather than by the eye and brain.

## SAMISEN MUSIC

The three-stringed plucked lute of Japan is known as the *shamisen* in the Tokyo area or as the *samisen* in the Kansai district around Kyōto. It seems to have arrived in Japan as an import of the *sanshin*, or *jamisen*, from the Ryukyu Islands in the mid-16th century. The Ryukyu form of the instrument, with its oval body and snakeskin covering, is obviously derived in turn from the Chinese *sanxian*. Evidence for such an origin is reinforced by

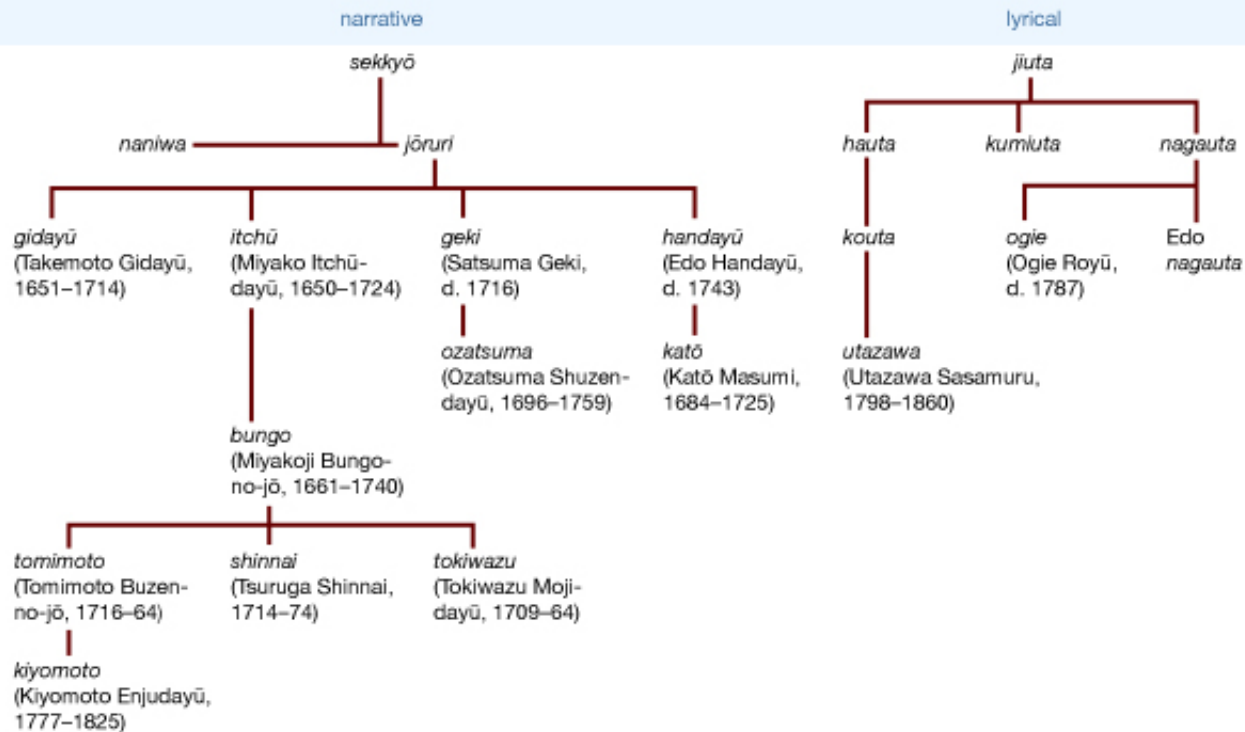


collections of early Ryukyu music, which use a so-called *kukunshi* notation. The Japanese samisen underwent considerable physical change, its body being rectangular and the skins coming from a cat or dog. Apparently under the influence of contemporary *biwa* lute traditions, the plectrum of the instrument was changed from the talonlike pick of the Ryukyus to a wooden or ivory *bachi* with a thin striking edge. In addition, the lowest string was kept off the small metal upper bridge near the pegbox so that it produced a buzzing sound (*sawari*) distinctly reminiscent of the tone of a *biwa*. The three basic tunings of the Japanese instrument are *hon-chōshi* (b–e'–b'; b represents the B below middle C, b' the B above), *ni agari* (b–f# '–b'), and *san sagari* (b–e'–a'). Those tunings have remained standard to the present day, although there are occasional variants.

Greater variety is found in the many genres of samisen music. The earliest types seem to have been played by old *biwa* entertainers around Ōsaka, then called Naniwa; hence, the name of the new genre was *naniwa-bushi*. Samisen was used for folk music and party songs, but, in keeping with the *biwa* origin of the first performers, narrative music was of prime importance. Such music became known as *jōruri*, the term being derived from the title of a famous story of the princess Lapis Lazuli (*Jōrurihime monogatari*). As different guilds of samisen evolved, it was possible in modern times to divide them into two basic styles: narrative traditions (*katarimono*) and basically lyrical musics (*utaimono*).

The table of samisen genres shows the development of those two styles in terms of genre names.

## Genres of samisen music\*



\*Names of founders of some styles are given in parentheses.



Japanese print of several women in a room, two of whom are playing samisens, one a koto.

Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (file no. LC-DIG-jpd-00802)

The most famous and perhaps most demanding of the narrative styles is *gidayū*, named after Takemoto Gidayū (1651–1714), who worked with Chikamatsu Monzaemon in the founding of the most popular puppet-theatre tradition (known as Bunraku) of Ōsaka. The *gidayū* samisen and its plectrum are the largest of the samisen family. The singer-narrator is required to speak all the roles of the play as well as to sing all the meditations and commentaries on the action. The part is so melodramatic and vocally taxing that the performers are often changed halfway through a scene.

There is little notated in the books (*maruhon*) of the tradition except the words and the names of certain appropriate stereotyped samisen responses. The samisen player must know the entire drama by heart in order to respond correctly to the interpretations of the text by the singer. The two musicians sit on a platform to the stage left of the theatre and through the intensity and skill of their performance help bring life and pathos into the wooden characters, who move with frighteningly realistic gestures in the hands of three puppeteers. The power of *gidayū* is such that it can be heard in concert versions as well. In the 19th century a school of female performers (*onna-jōruri*) carried on the concert tradition

with equal ability.

## KABUKI THEATRE

The *nagauta* form of lyric music, like most of the narrative forms, began with a close relation to the Kabuki popular theatre of the Tokugawa period. The first Kabuki performances used instruments (*hayashi*) from the Noh drama. Because Kabuki was related to the flourishing demimonde of the major cities, however, the music of the party houses and brothels was soon added to the theatre. By the mid-17th century the names of *nagauta* singers and samisen players were listed on posters along with the casts. In the same manner, the names of musicians in many of the other genres were adopted to denote parts of a play. Although nearly all the music listed can be heard in concert forms today, the major genres still included in Kabuki productions are *gidayū*, *tokiwazu*, and *kiyomoto* from the narrative styles, and *nagauta* from the lyrical. Rather than being discussed individually, they will be viewed in the total theatrical context, and later brief reference will be made to their concert forms.

## ONSTAGE MUSIC

The musical events of Kabuki can be divided into onstage activities (*debayashi*) and offstage groups (*geza*). In plays derived from puppet dramas the *gidayū* musicians, called here the *chobo*, are placed on their traditional platform offstage left or behind a curtained alcove above the stage-left exit. If other genres are used, the performers are placed about the stage according to the scenery needs of the play. There are some plays in which several different kinds of onstage music are required, a situation called *kake-ai*. The most common dance scene today, however, is one in which the onstage group consists of *nagauta* musicians and the Noh *hayashi*. The samisen and singers are placed on a riser at the back of the stage, and the *hayashi* sit before them on floor level—thus, their other name, *shitakata*, meaning “the ones below.”

There are as many different types of dances that require different kinds of music as there are in Chinese or Western opera. In a general view perhaps the most intriguing side of that variety is the relation of the older drum and flute parts to the vocal and samisen melodies of the Tokugawa period. In totally Kabuki-style pieces, the *tsuzumi* drums play a style called *chirikara* after the mnemonics with which the part is learned. The patterns of that style

follow closely the rhythm of the samisen part. If the Noh flute is used as well, it is restricted to cadence signals; if a simple bamboo flute (*takebue* or *shinobue*) is substituted, it plays an ornamented (*ashirai*) version of the tune. There are many sections, however, in which the drum patterns and Noh flute melodies discussed earlier are combined with samisen melodies. In a classical repertoire of hundreds of set pieces, there are several different combinations, but to many listeners those situations seem rather puzzling at first hearing, with apparently two kinds of music going on at the same time. If the situation is from a play derived from a former Noh drama and uses the full *hayashi*, a listener notices first that the flute is not in the same tonality as the samisen, nor is it playing the same tune. The drums in turn do not seem to relate rhythmically to the melody, as they do in the *chirikara* style. The drums and flute are, in fact, playing named stereotyped patterns normally of eight-beat length as in the Noh. The essential difference between them and the samisen melody is that they do not seem aurally to have the same first beat. A given samisen melody will often make room through silence for an important vocal call in the drum patterns, but the deliberate lack of coordination of beat “one” creates a vital rhythmic tension that makes the music drive forward until it is resolved at a common cadence. Each part is internally rigid and progressive, but its conflict with the other parts forces the music (and the listener) to move the musical event through a time continuum toward a mutual completion.

The Noh flute music is frequently related to the *taiko* stick-drum rhythm, so they can be considered a common unit rather than separate parts. There are situations in which the *tsuzumi* drums play *chirikara* patterns in support of the samisen melody while the *taiko* and Noh flute play either Noh patterns or later Kabuki-named drum patterns “out of synchronization” with the other music. At such moments one can notice that in Kabuki dance music, as in Western classical music, there are three kinds of musical needs. In the West they are melody, rhythm, and harmony. In this music they are melody, rhythm, and a third unit of one drum and a flute that functions like harmony although its sound is totally different. If that third Japanese feature is called the dynamism unit, then it can be said that *nagauta* dynamism and Western traditional harmony both serve to colour the line, to create tension that drives the music onward, and to help standardize the formal design of the piece by clarifying cadences or by creating the need for them. All that brings back the earlier point that music is not an international language. The equally logical but different aspects of Japanese music and Western music are certainly most obvious and striking.

The formal aspects of Kabuki music are as varied as the plays with which the music is connected. In dance pieces derived from Noh plays, many of the sectional terms of the Noh

mentioned above are found. The classical Kabuki dance form itself often consists of sections divided into the traditional tripartite arrangement as shown below:

(1) *deha* or *jo*

*oki michiyuki*

(2) *chūha* or *ha*

*kudoki, monogatari, odori ji*

(3) *iriha* or *kyū*

*chirashi, dangire.*

Generally speaking, the *oki* represents all kinds of introductory instrumental sections (*aigata*, or in this case *maebiki*) or vocal parts (*maeuta*) before the entrance of the dancer. The *michiyuki* usually incorporates the percussion section as the dancer enters. The term *kudoki* is found in the early history of samisen music as a form of romantic music and is used here for the most-lyrical section, in which the percussion is seldom heard. The *monogatari* (story) relates to the specific plot of the dance, and the *odori ji* is the main dance section, rather like the *kuse* or *mai* of the older Noh form. During that section, the bamboo flute may appear for contrast and, in Noh style, the *taiko* drum may be important. The *chirashi* contains more-active music, and the final cadence occurs during the *dangire*. There are endless variations and extensions of this form, but the many specific instrumentational and stylistic traits found in each of the sections help the listener to become aware of the logical and necessary progression of a given piece through a moment of time to its proper ending.

Most early collections (*shōhon*) of onstage music consisted of the text and samisen mnemonics (*kuchi-jamisen*, mouth samisen) of instrumental interludes (*ai-no-te*). In the 18th century some of the lyrical forms began to use syllables to represent fingering positions on the instrument, a system called the *iroha-fu*. In 1762 a set of circles with various extra markings along with the string number were combined in a book called the *Ongyoku*

*chikaragusa* to create a more-accurate, if complicated, system. Further rhythmic refinements were created in the 1828 *Genkyoku taishinsho*, but it was not until the modern period that Arabic numbers in the French *chevé* style (apparently learned in Germany by Tanaka Shōhei) were combined with Western rhythmic and measured devices to create notations that could be sight-read without the aid of a teacher. Three variations on that technique form the basis of most modern samisen notations, although occasional pieces can be found in Western notation as well. Thus, it is possible to purchase large repertoires of *nagauta*, *kouta*, or *kiyomoto* music for performance or study alone. Motivating such notational changes was the increased interest during the mid-19th century in samisen music composed for concert performance (*ozashiki*) rather than as dance accompaniment. Such a tradition is common practice for all the samisen genres today.

## OFFSTAGE MUSIC

Returning to the theatre, one finds rather different music offstage. That *geza*, or *kagebayashi* (shadow *hayashi*), music is normally placed in a small room on stage right with a view of the drama through a bamboo curtain. The music consists of special samisen and vocal pieces and a great variety of percussion signals. For example, a huge *ō-daiko* barrel drum with two tacked heads signals the beginning of a program, in keeping with the sounds given by the same drum from a tower over the entrance of very early Kabuki theatres. Other drums, bells, gongs, and clappers are used to reinforce stage action, and special offstage songs may set the mood or location of a scene, particularly in those scenes in which onstage musicians do not appear. For example, the singing of the offstage song ““Eight Miles to Hakone”” will tell an audience that the scene is set along the old Tōkaidō (the ancient road between Tokyo and Kyōto), whereas the sound of waves (*nami-no-oto*) beat on the *ō-daiko* drum indicates that the scene is on the road near the sea. A type of offstage song called *meriyasu* may be used to reflect the silent thoughts of the stage character, while the call and response of occasional beats offstage of two *ko-tsuzumi* drums will place a scene in a mountain area with its echoes. As in Western musical theatre and films, many of the sounds are naturalistic, whereas others are traditional means of evoking desired responses from an audience.

Theatre-goers in both traditions are often unaware consciously of the means used for such reactions, even though familiarity has made such methods' dramatic value very real indeed. The specific musical devices used in a given Kabuki play are under the control of a headman, *hayashi gashira*, who works with the first samisenist, the actors, and the director to produce the desired results. Thus, the musical contents of a given play may change with

different productions. In Kabuki the combination of offstage and onstage music creates a total atmosphere that has few parallels in other world theatres. Perhaps it comes as close as anything to the composer Richard Wagner's ideal of the all-embracing art form (*Gesamtkunstwerk*).

## BIWA, VOCAL, AND FOLK MUSIC



Benten (the Buddhist goddess of literature and music, wealth, and femininity) playing a

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Courtesy of the Museum für Völkerkunde,  
Vienna

During the late 19th century the *biwa*-accompanied narratives enjoyed a revival. The blind-priest *biwa* (*moso biwa*) tradition had originally been divided into two schools named after the provinces in Kyushu from which they came, Chikuzen and Satsuma. The tradition declined greatly over the years. When the imperial restoration began in the Meiji period, many members of the new administration were from those provinces. Thus, new schools of narrative *biwa* music arose under those two names, influenced at that time by several samisen narrative traditions. The topics of the new *biwa* pieces were often military and appropriate to the modernization period. The 19th century also saw one of Japan's periodic revivals of interest in things Chinese, reduced somewhat with the advent of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95. Another late Tokugawa period style was *shigin*, the singing of Chinese poems in an intense solo style quite unrelated to the Heian *rōei* tradition of Chinese-based songs. *Shigin* was later accompanied by *shakuhachi*, and during the increased military spirit of the Meiji period it was combined with a posturing sword dance, *tsurugi-mai*. It also appeared in *biwa* concerts and could still be heard on rare occasions after World War II.

Courtly writings have left little information about the music of the peasants in any detail, but some folk songs and theatricals of the Tokugawa period remain for modern study. The rice-planting, harvesting, and other work songs that survive may retain ancient melodies and may also be evidence of the indigenous origins of the *yo-in* scale systems to which most

such music belongs. Most folk songs are, of course, regionally functional but historically vague and subject to the normal changes of any oral tradition. Viewing as a whole both the performance practice and voice qualities of Japanese folk music, one finds a great variety of styles. Such richness may reflect the long periods of Japanese feudalism, which fostered many different musical dialects.

The many processions and pantomimes of folk theatricals are accompanied by flutes and percussion, the generic term for such ensembles being *hayashi*. During the Tokugawa period the Shintō shrines of Edo (Tokyo) developed festival ensembles (*matsuri bayashi*) for the various major districts of the city. Most of those combine a bamboo flute with two folk-style *taiko* stick drums, an *ō-daiko* barrel drum, and a small hand gong called the *kane*, or *atarigane*. When such groups are playing general festival music, they all use a suite of five pieces: *yatai*, *shoden*, *kamakura*, *shichome*, and another *yatai*. However, their versions of each piece can be very different. When dance or pantomime is involved, the *sato-kagura* music mentioned earlier is used. The *kagura-bue* flute is often replaced by the Noh flute. It combines with an *ō-daiko* and a *diabyoshi* barrel drum. One head is struck with thin bamboo sticks, the drum sitting to the side so that the player can better see the dancer. Lion dance (*shishi mai*) ensembles often use a trio consisting of a bamboo flutist, a gong player, and a drummer who plays a *taiko* and a small *odeko* barrel drum. Cymbals (*chappa*) and samisen may appear in other folk pantomimes or dances. The most common folk dances are the summer *bon odori*, traditionally performed in circles around a high platform (*yagura*) where the musicians or music recordings are located.

Given the oral base of all folk music, many songs are lost from generation to generation. Scholarly and commercial interest in national music remains strong, however. Folk song preservation societies (*minyo hozon kai*) exist whose functions are to preserve “correct” performances of a single folk song. Such specificity seems unique to Japan. Regional and international folk-based Japanese ensembles flourish, and the summer dances can be seen in Japanese communities from Tokyo to Detroit.

## **THE MEIJI PERIOD AND SUBSEQUENT MUSIC**

### **SOURCES OF WESTERN INFLUENCE**

The period of Japanese history after 1868 is often thought of primarily in terms of its



Westernization. The three major sources of Western music in Japan were the church, the schools, and the military.

## RELIGIOUS AND MILITARY MUSIC

Christian music had, in fact, been introduced into Japan as early as the mid-16th century with the arrival of Portuguese merchants and Roman Catholic priests. With that importation came Roman Catholic music and Western musical instruments, the most lasting of which was the double-reed shawm, which survives today as the tuneful accessory of itinerant noodle sellers. The bowed *rebeca* lute may have combined with the Chinese *huqin* in the creation of the bowed *kokyū* of 17th-century Japan. However, the suppression of Christianity in that century destroyed the bamboo organs, choirs of mass singers, and most of the other direct Western musical imitations until the Meiji Restoration. The official doctrine of new religious freedom in 1872 brought large numbers of Protestant missionaries into action, and collections of hymns with Japanese text were printed by 1878. Interdenominational editions were necessary by the 1890s. Since that time, typical Roman Catholic and Protestant musical activities can be found, and, with the international growth of Tokyo, one can even add the sounds of synagogues and mosques. But the growth of musical acculturation in Meiji Japan is better seen in its other foreign imports.

Band music, as part of a military table of organization, had already been tried in Dutch style at a military school in Nagasaki during the early 19th century. After Matthew C. Perry's arrival in 1853, every foreign delegation to Japan did its best to impress the Japanese with marching bands (Perry added a minstrel show). Thus, the various Japanese regional and national military leaders were quick to add such organizations to their modernized armies. The emperor was equally aware of the Western musical values displayed by the first foreign missions and ordered that the gagaku musicians be trained in band music as well. A navy band from the Satsuma clan gave the first Japanese public performance of that new music at the opening of the railroad in 1872, and in 1876 gagaku musicians made their debut as band musicians on the occasion of the emperor's birthday. The training of the many new ensembles was in the hands of English, French, and German bandmasters, and new music was created by them or by their Japanese students to match the spirit of Meiji modernism. The most-famous case is the national anthem, "Kimi ga yo," which was one of the few successful early attempts at combining Western and Japanese traditions. A British bandmaster, William Fenton, teaching the Japanese navy band, worked together with gagaku musicians through several unsuccessful versions; and the search continued through

his German successor, Franz Eckert. A court musician, Hayashi Hiromori (1831–96), is credited with the melody, which was given its premiere in 1880 and has remained the national anthem since that time. Hayashi first wrote it in traditional gagaku notation, and Eckert “corrected” it with Western harmonization, noting that it fit in both a gagaku mode (*ichikotsu*) and one from the Western church tradition (Dorian). As Japan’s military prowess grew, standard Western-style marches and patriotic pieces dominated the repertoire. They also influenced popular music with such genres as *rappa-bushi* (literally, “bugle songs”) as well as music in the schools.

## MUSIC EDUCATION

Public-school music in Japan was organized by a member of a Meiji educational search team, Isawa (Izawa) Shūji (1851–1917), and a Boston music teacher, Luther Whiting Mason (1828–96). Mason went to Japan in 1880 to help form a music curriculum for public schools and start a teacher-training program. Although there was much talk of combining the best of East and West, the results of the sincere efforts of an American late-Victorian and a Japanese bureaucrat were less than glorious. The first children’s songbook, the *Shōgaku shōkashū* (1881), contained both Western pieces with Japanese words and songs newly composed by Mason.

The primary sources of Western tunes were those pieces from Boston schoolbooks that appeared to be pentatonic. Through that method songs like ““The Bluebells of Scotland”” spoke of beauty (“Utsukushiki”) and ““Auld Lang Syne”” concerned fireflies, and Stephen Foster became the song composer best known to educated Japanese children. The newly composed songs with their artificial tunes and moralistic words quickly faded away and eventually were replaced by more-popular children’s school songs based on military music (*gunka*) from the Sino- and Russo-Japanese wars. The teacher-training school had become the Tokyo School of Music by 1890 and included instruction in koto and, because of the lack of proper violins, the bowed *kokyū*. The music department of the modern Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music is still located at the spot of the original school in Ueno Park, Tokyo, with a bust of Beethoven beside the entrance. Koto, samisen, Noh music, and Japanese music history are now taught there, along with extensive offerings in Western music. However, until the late 20th century, music education was totally Western in orientation. Japanese music was presented in middle-school music appreciation courses only some 10 years after the end of World War II. The teaching of Western-style singing and the use of choruses were fundamental to a proper education in Japan, with the results that youth and workers’

choruses of the 20th century were cut off from original Japanese music. Only in the mid-20th century, with the worldwide rise of the search for cultural or ethnic identities, did Japanese music education begin to accommodate a new approach, using the public-school choral tradition in new textual contexts. Behind the robust volume of such functional, harmonized tunes lies the equally viable if quieter sounds of older, traditional music.

## TRADITIONAL STYLES

The pre-Meiji period of 19th-century Japanese traditional music, known generically as *hōgaku* vis-à-vis Western music (*yōgaku*), was generally strong. It has been noted that certain styles of samisen music had been able to create concert repertoires disconnected from dance or party accompaniment. Koto teachers and composers also flourished, and *biwa* music began to return along with court music, paralleling the restoration of imperial power. The most-devastating effect of the restoration on the arts was the canceling of monopoly privileges previously held by the various guilds, including those in the music fields. That temporary socioeconomic setback was overcome by the admission of students from all classes of people and, at the same time, by a concerted effort on the part of more imaginative musicians to make some compromise between their old traditions and the new sounds flowing in from the West. In general, the evaluation of Western music by Japanese traditionalists showed that it differed from *hōgaku* in the following ways: it used other tone systems; it was thicker in texture, with more high and low notes going on at the same time, and part of that thickness was sets of chords; it was generally considered better if it was faster and louder and the instruments were played more fancifully; it used more instruments at a time; it used different kinds of metres; and it had other forms, often organized by the concept of primary and secondary themes. A survey of late 19th-century and early 20th-century musical experiments in Japan shows that every one of those characteristics was tried out, particularly in koto and samisen music.

Perhaps the most obvious and successful composer in the new traditional music (*shin hōgaku*) following World War I was Miyagi Michio (1894–1956), a blind koto teacher in the Ikuta school. In 1921 he composed the piece *Ochiba no odori* (“Dance of the Falling Leaves”), which used two koto, samisen, and a 17-stringed bass koto of his invention. Later works by Miyagi combine orchestras of traditional instruments, sometimes with strikingly successful results, although concerti for koto by some composers, with their mass koto and *shakuhachi* accompaniments, rather negate the entire sound ideal of the original idioms. The 1929 duet for *shakuhachi* and koto, *Haru no umi* (“Spring Sea”), has proved Baroque-like in its

performance practice, for it is often heard played by the violin, with koto or piano accompaniment. Its style equals that of the French composer Claude Debussy in his most “orientale” moments. The Japanese traditionalist’s view of Western music described above continued to be employed after World War II with such works as multimovement pieces using mixed orchestras in other contemporary idioms, including electronic manipulations. Such trends are best seen in the context of Western-style Japanese composers.

## COMPOSERS IN WESTERN STYLES

Although graduates of the Tokyo School of Music and modernized court musicians were involved in many of the first concerts and compositions in Western classical music, the major Japanese forces in that direction came from young men who studied in Europe. The most-famous surviving composition of that era is *Kojo no tsuki* (*The Ruined Castle*), written in 1901 by Taki Rentarō after his training in Germany. In its piano-accompanied version it recalls the style of Franz Schubert, but as sung in the streets it sounds Japanese. Yamada Kōsaku was training in Germany when the Meiji era ended (1912) and returned to Japan with a new name, Koscak, and a strong interest in the founding of opera companies and symphony orchestras, as well as in the teaching of Western music. His opera *Kurobune* (1940; *The Black Ships*) deals with the opening of Japan to the West and reflects his knowledge of Wagnerian style. Attempts at nationalistic operas can be represented better by the work *Yuzuru* (1952; *Twilight Crane*) by Ikuma Dan. The plot is a Japanese folktale, and, although the musical style is a mixture of the music of Maurice Ravel and the late works of Giacomo Puccini, one finds as well deliberate uses of folk songs and idioms. Shimizu Osamu is perhaps more successful nationalistically in his choral settings of Japanese and Ainu music, in which the style of vocal production and chordal references seems to be a more honest abstraction of Japanese ideals. Mamiya Michio combined traditional timbres with 12-tone compositional technique in a koto quartet. Mayuzumi Toshirō produced many clever eclectic results in such works as his *Nirvana Symphony* (1958); Buddhist sutra texts mix with a combination of choral writing in the style of Igor Stravinsky, orchestral tone clusters, and sweeping vocal lines derived from Japanese Buddhist chant style.

It has often been felt that no true combination of Japanese and Western music would be possible until there was some composer who was equally knowledgeable in both Western and Japanese traditional styles. Such a musical aesthetic barricade seemed unbroken until the last third of the 20th century, when international music styles made culturally transcendental eclecticism a viable medium for those composers with enough talent and

insight to control the infinite idioms available to them. In Japan, Takemitsu Tōru seemed a likely candidate for such an accolade. His music was totally contemporary and never directly “orientale,” yet some of his timing, texture, and structure were characteristically Japanese.

In modern Japan all styles of music are available, from the traditional to the most avant-garde. Fully professional performances of Kabuki music are matched by complete Beethoven symphonic series. Huge choruses singing polemics of every type and mass bands of children bowing violins in the widely imitated method of instruction developed by Shinichi Suzuki compete for audiences with intimate recitals of Heike *biwa* music and hundreds of other events. Research in Japanese traditional music has flourished among native scholars as well as among an increasing number of foreign devotees; and national, private, and academic organizations have been founded for the collection, study, and publication of material dealing with all aspects of Japanese musical life.

From the outline of Japanese musical culture given above, it should be evident that old traditions can still be heard along with the newer ones. For the most part, the older forms probably do not sound the same today as they did in their heyday. Such changes in traditions are inevitable, however, and are common to music in most other world cultures, including the West. For example, present-day gagaku performances are undoubtedly different from those of 1,000 years ago, but Mozart symphonies as well do not sound the same as they did in the 18th century. Now modern technology has made it possible to “freeze” a given performance of some musical event through a recording. Musicians in each generation may choose as they desire to add fresh flavour to such earlier items or to leave them “pure.” Part of the charm and fascination of Japanese music is that it still offers so many stylistic listening and studying choices to anyone curious or energetic enough to want to know them better. A major point of this entire discussion is that none of the various styles of Japanese music is any more mystical or incomprehensible than Bach or Beethoven. Each tradition is simply different. All of them are also logical and—perhaps of greater importance—beautiful to those who learn their special forms of musical language.

*William P. Malm*

*The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica*

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