

MUSICAL ATLAS

J A P A N

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The traditional music of Japan presents a rich variety of style covering the whole history of music in the country from the 8th to the 19th century. Among these must be mentioned the ancient court music (Gagaku), the musical theatre of the feudal lords of the middle ages (Noh), and various forms of music created by and for the citizens of the later feudal age (music of Koto, Shamisen, Shakuhachi and Biwa) between 16th century and 19th century. This later music is of a popular character and generally considered semi-classical when compared with the earlier more severe styles. Examples of ^{the} surviving folk songs and music, most of which dates also from the later feudal age, are given on the second side of this record.

The names of the performers are given in the Japanese way, the family name coming first.

The Koto is a long zither made of paulownia wood. The back of the upper board is hollowed to provide a thin and long soundboard. Thirteen silk strings are strung between both ends of the body. Each string is provided with an ivory movable bridge which determines the length of the sounding part. The player plucks the strings with three ivory picks, fitted to the thumb, index and middle finger of the right hand by leather bands. The instrument was brought over from China in the 8th century and used in the orchestra of the ancient court music, the Gagaku. In the 17th century, a blind musician Yatsunashi created a new genre of music using the koto as a solo instrument, and for the accompaniment of songs.

This type of music was developed by the successors, mainly blind professional musicians. It became fashionable among the common people, especially among women. Koto music was combined with a genre of Shamisen song, called Jiuta, also created by blind musicians, giving birth to the Koto and Shamisen ensemble. The kind of ensemble allowed the development of more and more sophisticated styles of