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# JAPANESE MUSIC

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# JAPANESE MUSIC

BY  
KATSUMI SUNAGA



BOARD OF TOURIST INDUSTRY  
JAPANESE GOVERNMENT RAILWAYS

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## EDITORIAL NOTE

It is a common desire among tourists to learn something of the culture of the countries they visit, as well as to see their beautiful scenery. To see is naturally easier than to learn, but flying visits merely for sightseeing furnish neither the time nor opportunity for more than a passing acquaintance with the culture of any foreign people. This is specially true of Japan and her people.

The Board of Tourist Industry recognizes both the obligation and the difficulty of providing foreign tourists with accurate information regarding the various phases of Japan's culture. It is therefore endeavouring to meet this obligation, as far as possible, by publishing this series of brochures.

The present series will, when completed, consist of more than a hundred volumes, each dealing with a different subject, but all co-ordinated. By studying the entire series, the foreign student of Japan will gain an adequate knowledge of the unique culture that has evolved in this country through the ages.

For those who wish to follow up these studies with a closer investigation of more erudite works, we append bibliographies, which we can recommend as authoritative guides for study.

Board of Tourist Industry,  
Japanese Government Railways

## FOREWORD

The manuscript of this brochure was prepared in the spring of 1935 by Katsumi Sunaga, to take its place in the present series. Later, at the suggestion of the editors, two or three additions were agreed to by him, but as he was planning to make certain emendations, he suddenly died in September of the same year.

Before the end came, this matter was often in his thoughts, and he was very anxious to bring the work to its completion. Because of his severe illness, however, he found himself unable to do so.

After his death his family undertook to carry out his last wish, and therefore requested his teacher, Mr. Hisao Tanabe, lecturer at the Tokyo Imperial University, to complete the manuscript. This he was kind enough to do.

On the publication of this brief study this simple reference is made, with profound respect, to the deceased author.

The translation into English has been made by Professors I. Matsuhara and E. T. Iglehart, of Aoyama Gakuin.

Board of Tourist Industry

September, 1936



# CONTENTS

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	Page
I. Variety of Forms of Japanese Music Tell the Story.....	9
II. A Study of Musical Forms .....	24
1. Gagaku .....	24
2. Noh-gaku .....	33
3. Music of Koto .....	37
4. Music of Samisen .....	43
5. Shakuhachi Music.....	52
6. Western Music in Japan .....	56
III. Present Tendencies and the Future of Japanese Music .....	61
Bibliography .....	66



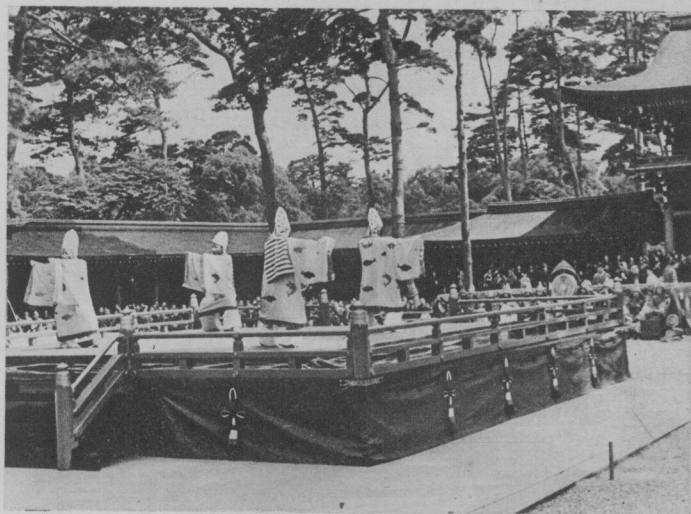


## 1. VARIETY OF FORMS OF JAPANESE MUSIC TELL THE STORY

When visitors come to Japan for the first time, many of them expect to find Japan a picturesque country, a real reproduction of Hiroshige prints. They are, therefore, amazed to find that her life is not different from that of the most highly-developed nations of the West. When they go about, visiting such centres of natural beauty as Mount Fuji, Hakone, Nikko, and the Inland Sea, they find that the Japan of their early dreams is not far from the true Japan. But at the same time they will find in the cities such a life as is in no respect different from that of the great capitals of the world, and they will thereby come to realize the unique dual aspect of the old and new as it is to be found here.

Such a dual aspect may be clearly seen in the manner of living, in the upper strata of society. The two elements which at first sight seem so inconsistent—that which has come down from the remote past and that which has been newly introduced or created—have found a peculiar harmony, such as gives a special character to Japanese life today. This harmonizing of the quiet, the contemplative, the spiritual, with the active, the progressive, the materialistic, has produced a new life suited to our new day.

Art born of such life will naturally reveal a two-



A performance of *Bugaku* at Meiji Shrine, Tokyo

fold nature. Music, the subject of the present study, clearly shows its dual nature. The native music of the past may be found side by side with Western music, quite recently introduced into our country. And these two, while exerting a mutual influence, at the same time preserve their own individual character and form.

Travellers sailing across the Western sea, as they approach Japan, are watching for the appearance of the summit of Mount Fuji above the clouds. But before it has appeared they have already received news through the ether from Japan's broadcasting stations. And if they should turn on their radio they would hear an evening of music and drama. The foremost broadcasting station of Japan is JOAK of Tokyo, and a stranger would be surprised to learn of the extent

and variety of musical and other forms of entertainment that make up its programme. If he continued to listen in he would hear such instrumental and chamber music as he could readily appreciate, then perhaps a series of songs whose language was strange to him, perhaps a recitation accompanied by some simple instrument producing a tone colour that was altogether strange to him. The variety of this radio programme reflects the varied character of present-day Japanese music. And the various forms of Japanese music also tell their own history. It is well, therefore, to give some consideration to the history of our music if we are to understand it as it is today.

Even those who have been in Japan long enough to study its historic buildings and sculpture, much of them well preserved for twelve hundred years, are sometimes sceptical when told that we still have music of as great an age. Music is not such an object as can be preserved in museum or library like other works of art. Musical instruments and musical scores may be preserved, it is true, but it is exceedingly difficult to hand down the living music itself. However, the ceremonies of which this music is a part have come down through the ages, and are still performed today.

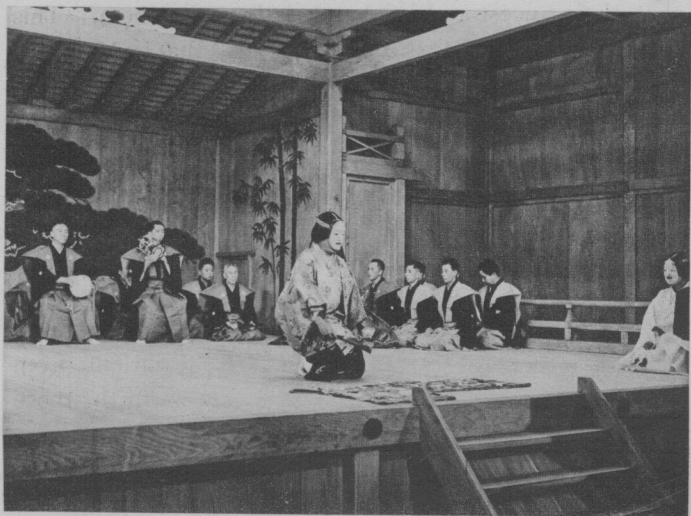
The oldest music of Japan has been protected and preserved by the Imperial Household, in one unbroken line through the ages. This music is known as *Gagaku*, or Graceful Music. In former days this music was played only within the Imperial Palace, but in recent times it has been performed in public on special occasions, so that people in general have been able to enjoy the music

that their ancestors have handed down to them. This music of the Court is of two kinds, that which has its definitely assigned part in the Imperial ceremonies, and that which serves to accompany the dance in the entertainments of the Imperial Household.

These ancient musical forms, as was true of most forms of ancient Japanese art, had their beginnings in China. Most of them were imported as the Court music of the Tang Dynasty. Although some modifications must have been made, it may be affirmed that they have truly preserved the idealistic music of the Orient, from the dim past. In China, the place of their birth, these forms of music long since ceased to exist. But in Japan, in which they were transplanted, they have persisted until today. It is not strange that to the people of China this should appear as a miracle.

The earliest importation of this music was about the year 453 A. D., when it came to Japan by way of Korea. By 700 A. D. its development had been completed. Later on, perhaps about the year 1000, the final adjustment was made, and there has been but little change until today, a truly remarkable chapter in the history of music. Certain families were appointed by the Imperial Court to conduct the musical ceremonies, and their duties were handed down from father to son through many generations. There were ten of these special families assigned to this service.

Just as the Christian church, at its beginning, had her ancient hymns, so the Buddhist sects of Japan also had their own music. And just as these sects themselves had been introduced from India by way of China, their



Noh play—a scene from “Aoi-no-ue”

music also came in from the same source and by the same route. Thus it is not possible for us to declare with certainty how closely they resemble their Indian origin. The oldest form handed down was the so-called *Bombai*, or Indian Sacred Hymn, in a recitative form, sung in Sanskrit. Its nearest analogy is perhaps the Psalm-singing among Christians.

In addition to the Buddhistic music thus imported into Japan, musical forms were gradually created, and they were enriched as time went on. This was due to the fact that the priesthood of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries represented the highest standard of the culture and scholarship of the age. As Buddhism split into various sects there came to be variations in its music, which persist to this day. As this music finds

its field of expression in Buddhistic ceremonies, tourists have but little opportunity to become acquainted with it. *Gagaku*, the Court music, had little influence upon the music of the common people. On the contrary, however, the music of Buddhism might fitly be termed the mother of the music of the common people.

What may be regarded as the direct offspring of the *Gagaku* was the music of the Noh play, which arose at the close of the fourteenth century. This is the music which is of chief interest to foreigners among present-day musical forms. It has many enthusiastic students among our guests from abroad. However, its interest lies largely in the song or recitation based upon the literary text, as also in the masques and costumes that are worn. The chief interest does not lie in the mere music. In other words, it is the Noh play that offers the attraction, rather than the Noh music.

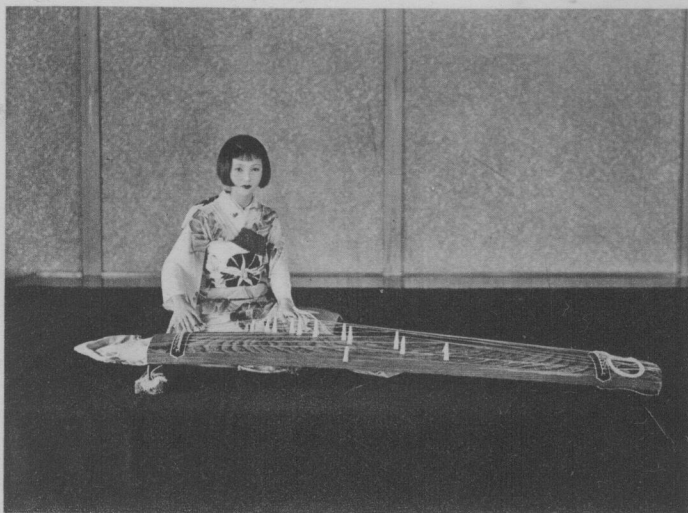
The music of the Noh is, in Japanese, called *yōkyoku* or *utai*. It is one of the most common forms of music in the Japanese home today. This is especially true in the families that are descended from the samurai. In the Tokugawa Period (1603-1867) the music of the Noh was regarded as the special property of the samurai. But even in its earliest age the Noh had received the patronage of the knightly families. It has been developed and perfected since about the year 1450, by those who have earned their living through its performance from generation to generation.

Among Japanese musical forms, that which truly is the most difficult for foreigners to understand is the Noh. Some well-known Western musicians, witnessing





*Yōkyoku*, or Noh music is the common music of the Japanese home



*Koto music is the chief music of the home*

the Noh performance, were deeply impressed by its dramatic form, but were greatly surprised to find that the music itself could not be recorded in any form of Western musical notation. This simple, rhythmic recitation, to the accompaniment of one flute and three varied drums, though incapable of being recorded in any Western musical notation, has its own true and progressive figure, governed by regular musical rhythm.

To think of the Noh as mere music is to fail to recognize all but one small element in it. The Noh must always be regarded in its entirety as a play. And this must be regarded as the most characteristically Japanese artistic form, a most representative expression of the spirit of Japan.