



(LAS 7346)

SPIRIT OF SAMURAI JAPANESE CHANT

SHUNGYO SHUNYA NANKASHU
NIPPONGO FUGAKU O NOZOMU
YUKI (JIUTA)
1966

The poetry of Japan is distinctive. The tanka, a five-line verse of 5, 7, 5, 7, 7, syllables, and the three-line haiku, (5, 7, 5) are classic forms which have survived the centuries unchanged. The content, however, changed with the importation of Chinese metaphors and words.

The Japanese habit of chanting poetry originated as a result of studying Chinese poems (Kanshi) many of which were imported in the sixth century. Reading the poems with pitch and rhythm made recitation and memorization easier, and teachers of Chinese poetry must have composed their own melodies which are difficult to trace now. In the Edo Period (1615-1868), the singing of poems was used to inspire the spirits of Samurai, which required of the believer not only swordsmanship but also a literary education. Although musical notations were not yet invented, many students recited poetry in a school called Shoheiko in Yujima of Edo (Tokyo), and the students who went back to their native towns spread the methods of poetry chant.

Poetry chants are also done with short poems (waka), and, at the Imperial Court, every year a ceremony is held to introduce the poems for the New Year.

The poems chosen for this recording are as follows:

(The names of Chinese poets are given in the Japanese form of pronunciation.) The poetry singer is accompanied with various appropriate instruments which include the Reikin (a Koto-like instrument, Shakuhachi and Hoteki (both flutes), all played by Heizan Shibata.

1. SHUNGYO - 3:36

A famous poem written by Mokonen, a poet from a wealthy, cultured family, describes the beautiful scenes of a Spring morning.

The storm was roaring all the night Many flowers must have fallen by this time.

2. SHUNYA - 4:29

This poem was written by Soshoku who was also a Chinese poet in the So Period-Shunya. meaning Spring Night, describes the fragrance of flowers and the effect of the moon in Springtime.

A moment of a spring night

With flowers and the moon

Is worth a thousand pounds at gold.

Now the voices from the music hall have
quieted down

And the swing in the garden droops

In the deepening night.

3. NANKASHU - 8:45

The complete title of the poem is Nankashu No Fun ni Eshite Saku Art and was inspired by a famous warrior named Nanko. It was written by Rai Sanyo (1780-1833), who was possibly the greatest Japanese poet of the Edo Period. Written on his way to Tokyo in 1798, it tells about the history of the Setzu town and Kyoto as he recalled it during his journey through Western Japan.

4. MEISO NIPPONGO - 4:49

A drinking poem written by Matsuguchi Getsujo who was born in Fukushima, Japan in the Meiji Period (1868-1912). The poem is based on the story of a good drinker who was awarded a sword as a prize for his drinking capacity. The last part of poem is a famous song called Kurodabushi, praising the habit of drinking.

5. FUGAKU 0 NOZOMU - 4:42

The poem and the music were composed by Toya Motoda. Mt. Fuji against the blue sky, an object of veneration and inspiration to the Japanese is the subject matter of the poem which reflects both Chinese and Japanese influences.

6. YUKI (Jiuta) - 17:47

This is not poetry chant but a kind of vocal called Jiuta. A Jiuta piece is heard with Shamisen accompaniment, and the words of the song and effect of the instrument interact upon each other. Yuki. "The Snow", was composed by Koto Minezaki in 1624. In many songs in which cold weather is mentioned the melody of Yuki is employed as a motif. The music is uniquely in the traditional mood of Jiuta songs, a mixture of elegant, deep, and sober atmosphere, and for several reasons, Yiki is considered one of the most difficult pieces of Jiuta. The text tells of the romantic memories of a lady who determined to retreat from society to become a nun.

INSTRUMENTS:

REIDKIN (Steel-Stringed Koto)

SHAKUHACHI (Bamboo Flute)

HOTEKI (Japanese Flute)

CREDITS:

Poetry Singer: Shufu Abe

Accompaniment: H. Seizan Shibata on the Reikin

Recording: Katsumasa Takasago

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