



(LYRCD 7200)

JAPANESE BUDDHIST DRUMS, BELLS AND CHANTS

BACKGROUND OF BUDDHISM

The Buddhist religion consists of three spiritual components, two traditions and many sects. The first of the three components is the legendary life of Gautama, an Indian prince who lived 600 years before Christ and who abandoned a life of luxury to seek enlightenment. Long meditation under a sacred Bodhi tree finally brought him to Buddhahood and the enlightenment or nirvana he sought. The Buddha devoted the remainder of his life to spreading his teaching throughout India with the help of his disciples. The second component is the set of beliefs (all of which have been passed on in the form of Sutras to be chanted or recited) and the eight-fold path to enlightenment he preached. The third component is the vast body of monks and nuns who practice the virtues of poverty, celibacy and non-violence.

Of the two traditions of Buddhism, Hinayana and Mahayana, the Japanese imported the later from China. Mahayana offers hope of enlightenment to laymen as well as to the religious, and its highest ideal is the Bodhisattva, the enlightened one who sacrifices himself for others. Zen Buddhism, one of the subdivisions of Mahayana, advocates a combination of prolonged meditation and shock to achieve enlightenment. Other subdivisions or sects limit their worship to the daily chanting of certain sutras that are only part of the whole tradition or canon.

THE SOUNDS OF BUDDHISM

Kyoto, the ancient hub of the Buddhist religion, resounds with the music of the bells of its five main temples. Within the temple compounds, monks are called to prayer by large gongs (kei) and their prayers and chants are accented by various gongs, large and small drums (taiko), clappers, cymbals (hachi), and bells of many sizes and tones. Pilgrims to the temples sing their poetic dedications (Goeika) accompanied by small hand bells and small gongs.

TRACKS

1. DRUM of the Zen service (3:15)

The taiko drum of the Zen sect is frequently used in place of temple bells and announces the beginning of rituals and lectures. The Zen monk beats the large drum, which makes three different kinds of sound. The first is the normal drum beat. The second is made by hitting the edge, and the third is made by sliding the wood on the pins that hold the drum-leather on the wooden frame.

2. HANNYA-SHINGYO (4:21)

Perhaps the most noted sutra of Buddhism; it is translated as the "Heart Sutra." It is used in the Jodo sect as well as in the Zen. Here, it is sung by women of the Jodo sect, accompanied by the use of wooden clappers.

3. GOEIKA (5:06)

These are short poems written in Hiragana (simplified writing) and dedicated to the temples that pilgrims visit. Goeika is always accompanied by hand bells and small metal gongs. Male pilgrims sing the chant.

4. AKI-WASAN (4:19)

The song of autumn is sung at funerals of the Jodo and Jodo Shinshu sects. It poetically describes the secular world and that world which comes after death.

5. GOSHUGYO WASAN (4:12)

This song of pilgrims resembles Goeika. However, while Goeika is chanted on pilgrimages, this particular song is performed at more ritualistic occasions. It is usual that Goeika, Wasan and Hannya-Shingyo are performed at funeral rites.

6. CHOS (3:16)

The most popular shakuhachi (bamboo flute) music played by Komuso (priests) of the Meian sect is accompanied by kei (gong) and mokugyo (a gourd-shaped percussion instrument, three feet in diameter). The recording was made at Ryugin-an of Kenninji Temple.

7. SHOMYO: SHICHI-KANGO (7:47)

Two songs of Shomyo are performed as part of a ritual. Shomyo is a pentatonic plain chant rather similar to Gregorian used by the esoteric Buddhists of the Shingon and Zen Rinzai sects. This song is written in Chinese and represents four aspects of Buddha.

8. GODAI-GAN (4:39)

This five-line prayer represents five important principles of the Zen sect: moderation, study, enlightenment, etc. Another version of this prayer is called Shikusegando, which represents four principles. This is a group chant.

9. TEMPLE BELLS (1:20)

The large temple bell, which hangs at the compound of the Myoshinji temple, Kyoto, is designated as a national treasure. Built in the Kamakura Period, it is tuned to Oshiki-Cho (E). Other temple bells are heard in the background.

CREDITS

This CD release is dedicated to Sandy Kadet (1930-1993), scholar, poet, teacher, and good friend.

Recorded at actual services in the temples of Kyoto, Japan.

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Lyrichord Discs Inc.

PO Box 1977 Old Chelsea Station
New York, NY 10011 Ph: 212 404 8290 Fax: 212 404 8291
email: nick@lyrichord.com Web: www.lyrichord.com

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