



(LYRCD 7218)

THE SOUL OF THE KOTO

**Performed by master musicians
of the Ikuta-Ryu**

Koto, the traditional Japanese harp, consists of a long box over which 13 strings are stretched, each with a bridge. The instrument is played with both hands and tuned by shifting the bridges. Koto music is divided into two types: one, which accompanies singing and one, which is solely instrumental. The oldest known form of vocal koto music was called Kumiata; a group of short poems set to music and sung in a given order. In later koto music each poem was called a step or dan, a term basic to all discussions of koto music forms. Ichidan, for example, means one step of poem; Midan two steps. Rokudan refers to six steps; Kudan to nine.

Shirabemono is the term for all strictly instrumental works written for the koto.

“Rokudan” is a classic example of the koto form. Although Yatsunashi Kengyo, who began the Yatsunashi school of popular koto music in Kyoto in the seventeenth century, is credited with the composition of this piece there is reason to believe it is of ancient Chinese origin. Kengyo is also credited with other classics like “Midare” and “Hachidan.”

Not until the end of the seventeenth century, however, when Ikuta Kengyo founded a new style of koto music was the instrument combined with the shamisen and either kokyu or shakuhachi. This new type of ensemble was called sankyoku, literally meaning “music-for-three,” and became a very acceptable way of presenting koto music.

In the latter part of the seventeenth century another koto teacher, Yamada Kengyo, borrowed from narrative shamism music and founded a school and a style, which emphasized vocal expression to koto accompaniment. The Yamada and Ikuta schools possess their own repertoires of standard pieces. Even in the nineteenth century one emphasized the vocal aspect, while the other, the instrumental. Though both produce a greater volume of instrumental music today, the distinction is still present in people's minds as they compare the two.

TRACKS

1. KUDAN- (7:46)

While Rokudan refers to the music of six steps, Kudan consists of nine steps and was composed some time after Rokudan. Kudan is regarded as one of the most important examples of the Ikuta School, and is usually played only by its masters.

2. KUMOI ROKUDAN (6:19)

Rokudan, as one may know, was composed by Kengyo Yatsushashi (1614-1685), Kumoi Rokudan; one of the revisions of Rokudan was composed by Chiyoda Kengyo of the Yamada School of Koto. Kumoi refers to high pitch. Therefore the music is played by two kotos, one in the kumoi (high pitch) tone, the other hirajoshi (basic) tone.

3. MIDARE (5:10)

There may be no other classical Japanese koto pieces, which can be played in such variety of ways as Midare. Midare means rough, disordered and unorthodox; it is noted for its somewhat scabrous style. The original version, which we can no longer hear, was an improvisation by Rinsetsu describing the snow, blown by the wind in the forest. It was later completed by Kengyo Yatsushashi, the composer of Rokudan.

4. SAGANO AKI (5:10)

The Autumn of saga was originally composed for the koto by Kengyo Kikusue from Osaka. This music describes the scenes of autumn in Kyoto. The words for this music are taken from the Story of Heike.

5. DAIGO NO HANAMI (10:02)

Daigo No Hanami means "the flower viewing at Daigo, Kyoto." Every year the lords of the provinces used to sponsor flower-viewing parties. This music describes the flower party at Daigo, sponsored by the Grand Lord Hideyoshi who is now noted for having built the Osaka Castle.

6. SHIKI NO SHIRABE (7:23)

Music of Four Seasons is a rather modern piece from the Yamada School of Koto. The Technique of the Yamada is similar to that of Nagauta, with its brilliant and strong touch on the koto strings. Daigo No Hanami, which includes singing almost like that of the Nagauta and Shiki No Shirabe, are representative pieces of the Yamada School.

7. SAKUA (3:07)

This is probably the most popular Japanese folk melody. Its elegant music describes cherry blossoms in various stages of development, symbolic of the life cycle.

8. TWO IMPROVISATIONS (10:39)

These two pieces demonstrate improvisation on the reikin, the koto with steel strings. The reikin accompanies the poetry chant of the Shinshin School. Kofu Kikusui, the master of the shakuhachi of the Kikusui School, performs the improvisations with members of the Ikuta School.

Total running time: 57:51

CREDITS

Cover and back design by Duy Ngo

Booklet layout by Nicolas Simon

Digitally mastered by DSW Mastering Studios, NYC



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

© and (P) Lyrichord Discs Inc. These texts (including images) are published under copyright by Lyrichord Discs Inc. All rights are reserved.
The texts, and the music associated, with them, may only be republished, duplicated or sold, with written permission from Lyrichord Discs Inc.