



(LYRCD 7443)

## **MAKOTO – SHINJITSU**

**(With a heart of true sincerity...)**

Zen Meditation Music for Solo Shakuhachi

Played by Ronnie Nyogetsu Seldin on Shakuhachi

(PLEASE SEE LYRCD 7436, ICHI ON BUTTSU, THE FIRST OF TWO LYRICHORD CDS FOR SOLO SHAKUHACHI BY RONNIE NYOGETSU SELDIN.)

### **THE SHAKUHACHI**

The shakuhachi is an end-blown bamboo flute with five finger-holes, originating in China, but known in Japan for over 1200 years. It is the only melodic musical instrument that is associated with Zen Buddhism. The shakuhachi was used to play ancient Zen music by priests of the Fuke sect. Playing or hearing this music can produce an effect similar to that created by sitting in Zen meditation. Sitting in meditation is known as Za-Zen, whereas playing the shakuhachi is known as Sui-Zen (“blowing meditation”).

In the long tradition of the shakuhachi, these Zen meditative pieces are considered to express the original spiritual voice of the bamboo and there are more religious than musical in nature. The music is rather abstract and a-rhythmical. The player’s primary concerns are more with breather and meditation than with the elements of music production as an art form. Traditionally, one does not perform these pieces for an audience. The intent is not to entertain, but rather to raise the level of consciousness of both listener and player.

Consisting of a single length of bamboo, the shakuhachi is often referred to by the word “bamboo.” Kurahashi Yodo, a Sensei appearing in Shimin Geijitsu, Kyoto, Japan, December 1, 1974, has interpreted the ancient text by Haku Raku Ten called Yo Chiku Ki (“A History of Cultivation of Bamboo”), to provide an accurate description of the bamboo. He writes in the article, Take no Kokoro (“The Heart of Bamboo”):

The essence of bamboo is firmness: by means of this firmness, virtue is established. The character of the bamboo is honesty: by means of this honesty, fortune is established. The heart of the bamboo is emptiness: by means of this emptiness, the path is maintained.

The form of bamboo is a straight trunk marked by regular rings or joints; its substance is at once both firm and yielding, hard yet pliant; its color does not change with the seasons, being green all year round. The tall, noble bamboo is the sole material from which the shakuhachi is made. When the pure qualities of the bamboo become infused with the breath of a living human soul – Heaven and earth become one – a tone rich in essence of Nature flows forth!

The word Shakuhachi is both the name of the instrument, and the most commonly used length of bamboo. Sun, is a Japanese inch. There are eight sun in one hachi. Shaku, is a Japanese foot, which is composed of ten sun. Shakuhachi then, is one Japanese foot and eight Japanese inches, or approximately twenty-two American inches and plays in the key of D. There are various shakuhachi lengths, which will produce different pitches. The longer flutes produce sounds in a lower pitch and are especially suitable for playing Zen music. On this recording, three lengths; 1.9, and 2.4. are used.

Many shakuhachi playing monks, called komuso, wandered about Japan in the Edo Period, hoping to strike the one perfect sound that would enlighten the whole world. The komuso would also stop to play in front of individual houses to help relieve the people living there the burden of their sufferings.

In the Tokugawa-Period (1609-1868), masterless Samurai known as Ronin played this instrument as part of the sect of Zen-Buddhism known as Fuke-Shu. They wore baskets, or Tengai, over their heads to suppress the ego, as well as for anonymity. The “music” that they played was for healing, and they were known as Komuso (or priests of emptiness). As on my first Lyrichord CD, Ichi On Buttsu (LYRCD 7436), Makoto Shinjitsu, includes both original and traditional pieces.

## TRACKS

1. Makoto Shinjitsu (2.4) (with a heart of true sincerity) 6:14  
(Ronnie Nyogetsu Seldin, 1987)

This piece was written in commemoration of the 150th Anniversary of the Founding of Tenrikyo by Miki Nakayama in 1838. In the style of the Mei-an tradition of honkyoku, as practiced by the Fuke sect of Zen Buddhism, “Makoto Shinjitsu” expresses the wish that our actions be in constant harmony with our innermost spiritual feelings. It was composed in the Honkyoku tradition of trying to find the one perfect sound to cause world peace. This also involves the attempt to become a Boddhisatva, and trying to wait

until the rest of the world enters Nirvana, before entering oneself.  
...ICHI ON-BUTTSU

2. Daiwa-Gaku (2.4) - 3:47 Daiva-Gaku is a piece composed by the great Shakuhachi Master of the 20th Century, Jin Nyodo. The piece is of the few that have been composed in the modern era, and have been accepted into the ranks of the great traditional Honkyoku. While Daiwa Gaku literally means “the great piece”; it also speaks to the four seasons of the year, the four times of the day, and the four stages of a man’s life.

The title derives from the ancient teaching “good manners are the beginning of heaven; music (gaku) is the harmony (wa) of heaven.” Jin Nyodo has said this piece was written as a basic instructional piece for the Shakuhachi, and that all the basic sounds of the instrument are utilized and their arrangement is endowed with symbolic meaning – comparing and contrasting the transitions found in human life, time and the seasons. Throughout this piece, the technique called Kyosui is used. Kyosui is a method without yuri or komi (head movements) where the breath is blown evenly and calmly and allowed to fade away naturally. Because of its natural quality, Kyosui is the first step to natural playing, but in fact is quite a difficult technique to master. In this sense Kyosui can be viewed as both a basis of shakuhachi, as well as its highest attainment.

3. Five Minutes More (2.0 and Buddhist Bell) - 3:55  
(Ronnie Nyogetsu Seldin, 1991)

Very often if we just persevere a little bit extra we can receive great rewards.

Five minutes more to...satisfaction.  
Five minutes more to...comprehension.  
Five minutes more to...enlightenment.

4. Jinbo-Sanya (2.0) - 7:40

“Sanya” is a 400-year-old honkyoku, expressing a free flowing, boundary-less state in which there is no longer any up or down, left or right. It also refers to being unified in action, or to pure action from the heart rather than from the head. This particular version of Sanya was played by a komuso, or wandering priest, named Jinbo, who devoted his whole life to the perfection of this one piece. This piece is also played for safe and easy childbirth. When the woman goes into labor, uncooked rice is poured down the Shakuhachi. Then, during the birth, this piece is played. After the birth, the “blessed rice,” by now cooked, is given to the new mother to eat.

5. Shirinpo (2.4) - 7:44

Also known as MURAKAKI-REIBO)

This piece has been attributed to the great Zen Buddhist monk, Ikkyu Zenji (also popularly known as Ikkyu-san) who lived about 400 years ago. He was known for his great intelligence, and especially for his ability to see the simple, natural way of things. This piece compares the nature of people and clouds.

It is said that the alternating movement and stillness of clouds are truly in the spirit of nature. So too, should people imitate the clouds and know when it is time to move and when it is time to be still. “Shirinpo” (also known as “Murasaki-Reibo”) is a Meian honkyoku from Daitokuji temple in Kyoto. It is played with the intention of creating an overall feeling of peacefulness.

6. Hi Fu Mi-Hachigaeshi (1.8) - 7:32

This interesting honkyoku was often played by Komuso in front of houses, in order to take the problems of the ailing person of the house upon himself. It is made up of two different shorter pieces. The HiFuMi or “1,2,3” melody is used as a warm up, to flex the fingers and calm the mind; next is the Hachigaeshi or “Returning to the Bowl” melody which describes the actions of the komuso as he receives alms in his bowl. This is then followed by a section of music where he plays his gratitude on the shakuhachi; and finally, the “1,2,3” melody returns to form the conclusion. This piece is not a Meian style honkyoku, but rather a piece in the Kinko School (or Kinko-Ryu style). It is played in an attempt to take the problems upon himself.

7. Yugure No Kyoku (1.8) - 6:50

Yugure no Kyoku is also a Kinko-Ryu Honkyoku, and literally means “the evening bell.” The bell, which this composition refers to, is that of Chio-in Temple in Kyoto. The bell is very famous for being rung on New Year’s Eve every year. It is rung 108 times, to rid humanity of its 108 sins.

8. (Ki-Sui-An) Sanya (2.4) - 9:18

(Ronnie Nyogetsu Seldin, 1995)

This original composition was composed in the Shakuhachi tradition of each school or line, having its own Sanya or Reibo, the two most popular types of Honkyoku. As such, it is a meditative piece as well as a healing piece – see above, #4 – Jinbo-Sanya). It is unusual in that there is a brief improvisation section – something not usually found in traditional Shakuhachi Honkyoku music. Sanya also refers to being unified in action, or to pure action from the heart, rather than from the head.

9. Shizukesa (2.8) - 5:46

(Ronnie Nyogetsu Seldin 1996)

Shizukesa means Serenity. It is hoped that the peace of the Shakuhachi can help us to center ourselves, and to put aside all problems and stresses. This Honkyoku was composed for all those recovering from their diseases, obsessions, and illnesses.

The musical content of this piece directly relates to a quote from the traditional Soto Zen liturgy, which states: “May we exist in muddy water with purity like a lotus. Thus we bow to Buddha.”

#### ABOUT THE ARTIST

Ronnie Nyogetsu Seldin is the director and founder of the Ki-Sui-An Shakuhachi Dojo that offers instruction in honkyoku and sankyoku at several locations on the East Coast.

Ronnie Nyogetsu Seldin studied shakuhachi in Kyoto, Japan with Kurahashi Yodo Sensei, a disciple of Jin Nyodo. There, in 1975, he received the name Nyogetsu and a teaching certificate at the level of Jun Shi-Han in the Kinko School of Shakuhachi. After his return to New York, and efforts to spread the teaching of this instrument in America, Nyogetsu was awarded the rank of Shihan (Master), in 1978. Soon thereafter, he received his Dai Shi-han, Grand Master's license in 1980.

Mr. Seldin has performed in numerous concerts, lectures, and demonstrations throughout the United States and Japan. He has been interviewed on radio and television, and has appeared on sound tracks of several documentary films, in particular, the Academy Award nominated documentary, "A Family Gathering" (1989) for which he co-composed the soundtrack. Ronnie Nyogetsu Seldin also appears on several recordings of shakuhachi music.

The Ki-Sui-An Shakuhachi Dojo has branches in Queens, Manhattan, Upstate New York, Philadelphia, Providence, and Syracuse. In addition to teaching privately, Mr. Seldin is also part of the Japanese Music Program at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York where he gives lectures on and demonstrates the shakuhachi. He also teaches via cassette, and as of 1997, has students in seventeen states and five countries outside of the United States.

#### PRODUCER'S NOTE

"When I first met Ronnie not only was I impressed by his tone and quality of sound, but also with the variety of his repertoire. This is his second recording with Lyrichord, and a beautiful sequel to Ichi On Buttsu. As his producer I found his performance a perfect example of musical mastery. Enjoy!

Rev. Jorge Alfano –  
Producer/Sacred Sounds Institute

#### CREDITS

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