



(LYRCD 7205)

## **JAPANESE KOTO CONSORT**

**Kotos, Jushichigen, Shamisen, Shakuhachi and Voice**

**Played by Master Musicians of the Ikuta Schools**

### **NOTES**

The development of koto music was one of Japan's most valuable contributions to the history of classical music. Some scholars trace the instrument back to the 8th Century or earlier but koto music became firmly established in the 16th Century, and the present-day 13-stringed instrument and the music written for it are inherited from that time.

Originally a court instrument, the koto with its harp like sound became a symbol of gentility and good taste in the home. Playing the Koto well is an accomplishment that enhances the marital prospects of well-bred Japanese girls.

Three schools were established among koto musicians from the 17th to the 19th Centuries. The traditions of each school (ryu) exist today. They are the Yatsunashi-ryu, Ikuta-ryu and Yamada-ryu. Each school used differently shaped finger picks, thereby producing different sounds and techniques. For example, musicians of the Ikuta-ryu who made this recording use square picks and play a koto that is longer than the usual six foot size.

During the Edo Period the koto began to be played in concert with the Shamisen (a three-stringed, plucked instrument) and the shakuhachi (bamboo flute). Such performances were called sankyoku, or music for three instruments.

In sankyoku concert shamisen plays the dominant part and is considered the "bone" of the music while koto is the "meat," shakuhachi, the "skin." Sankyoku is represented on this recording, as well as solo pieces for the three instruments.

All three can be traced back to Chinese prototypes. The koto was used at the Japanese Imperial Court (where it was known as the wagon or gaku-so) in the playing of Gagaku (Elegant Music) (LLST 7126 and LL 126).

1. YACHIYO JISHI: A classical piece composed by Kengyo Fujinaga during the Kampo period (1741-1744). It was originally a piece for the shakuhachi, but was later arranged for the koto, shakuhachi, shamisen, and voice. The melodies of Yachiyo Jishi are so famous that they are also adapted to Kabuki and Nagauta music (10:05).

2. AKI NO KYOKU: The music of autumn was composed by Kengyo Yoshizawa (1801-1872), a master of the Ikuta School from Nagoya. It is one of the pieces collected in the Kokon Suite (old and new). Other masterpieces of Yoshizawa are Chidori no Kyoku (Music of Plovers), and Haru no Kyoku (Music of Spring). A poem for koto, shakuhachi and voice (13:12).

3. KYO NO WARABEUTA: This music is based on children's songs of Kyoto. Scored for koto, shamisen and shakuhachi, it belongs to the Ikuta School (4:21).

4. MARBOROSHI O OTTE: Maboroshi o otte means to go after an illusion. It is a fantasy composed by Katsuko Tsukushi, master of the Tsukushi School of Kyushu. It is one of the more recent compositions composed for the koto and shakuhachi (4:21).

5. SASURAI: A wanderer (sasurai) is a piece of music composed by Tsutomu Sakamoto, a blind musician of Kyoto. It is composed for the koto and shakuhachi (6:53).

6. OEDO NIHONBASHI: Nihonbashi is a bridge in Edo (Oedo) or Tokyo. It is a short piece for the koto based on children's songs from the Eastern part of Japan (2:32).

7. KOJO NO TSUKI: Translated as The Moon of the Deserted Castle, this famous folk melody was originally composed by Rentaro Taki, and later arranged by a master of the Ikuta School (2:06).



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