

# JAPANESE MASTERPIECES FOR THE KOTO

Lyrichord Stereo LLST 7219

桜  
 SAKURA  
 そららん節  
 SORAN-BUSHI  
 黒田節  
 KURODA-BUSHI  
 庭の山菜奠の木  
 NIWA NO SANSHU NO KI  
 美しき天然  
 UTSUKUSHIKI TEN-NEN  
 桜変奏  
 SAKURA VARIATION  
 荒城の月  
 KOJO NO TSUKI  
 浜千鳥  
 HAMACHIDORI  
 晩秋  
 BANSHU  
 京の印象  
 KYO NO INSHO  
 玲琴  
 REIKIN



(LAS 7219)

## JAPANESE MASTERPIECES FOR THE KOTO

Koto music is divided into two distinct types. There is a kind which accompanies singing and another which is solely instrumental. The oldest known form of vocal koto music was called *Kumiata*, which was a group of short poems set to music to be sung in a given order. In the later koto music that developed from this, each poem was called a step or *dan*. The term “dan” is therefore basic to all discussion of koto music forms. (*Ichidan*, for example, means one step or 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 this form. There is reason to believe that this piece is of very ancient Chinese origin, although Yatsunashi Kengyo, who began the Yatsunashi school of popular koto music in Kyoto in the seventeenth century, is credited with this composition, as well as the other classics “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 ensemble form, called *sankyoku*, “music for three” became and, still is, a most acceptable way of presenting koto music.

In the latter part of the eighteenth century, yet another koto teacher, Yamada Kengyo, borrowing from narrative shamisen music, founded a school and a style in which vocal expression to koto accompaniment was emphasized. The Yamada and Ikuta schools each possess their basic repertoires of standard pieces.

Even in the nineteenth century they still tended to emphasize - one, the vocal aspect, the other, the instrumental. And though both produce more of the instrumental type of music today, the distinction is still present in people's minds as they compare the two.

The first four selections belong to Japanese folk music.

1. *Sakura*: Sakura Sakura is probably the most popular Japanese folk melody. It is elegant music which describes cherry blossoms in various stages of development, symbolic of the life cycle.
2. *Soran-bushi*: Soran bushi is based on a popular song of fishermen of the northern part of Japan, Hokkaido.
3. *Kuroda-bushi*: Originally, a song of the warriors of the Kuroda Family. The music is now adapted in Japanese spear dances, poetry chant, and for drinking parties.
4. *Niwa no Sanshu no Ki*: This is music based on the silverberry tree planted in the garden.

These four pieces of music are performed continuously. They are more modern than the first four, but are now regarded as classical popular music.

5. *Utsukushiki Ten-nen*: The exact translation of the title is “Beautiful Nature.” This is one of the very first popular melodies since the restoration (1868).
6. *Sakura Variation*: The variation on the Sakura, the first selection on this record, played on the Koto.
7. *Kojo no Tsuki*: This is music describing the old castle and, upon it, reflections of the moon. It was composed by Rentaro Taki.
8. *Hamachidori*: The music of plovers composed for children; it has nothing to do with the classical *Chidori no Kyoku*.

There are two elaborate pieces of modern koto music.

9. *Banshu*: *Banshu* (Late Autumn) was composed by Katsuko Tsukushi, master of the Tsukushi School from Kyushu. This music is also called *Ochibasurukoro* (“The Time of Falling Leaves”).

10. *Kyo no Insho*: "The Impression of Kyoto" was composed by the blind musician Tsutomu Sakamoto. It consists of two parts for two Kotos.



## THE LYRICHORD ARCHIVE SERIES

PO Box 1977 Old Chelsea Station  
New York, NY 10011 Ph: 212 404 8290 Fax: 212 404 8291  
email: [nick@lyrichord.com](mailto:nick@lyrichord.com) Web: [www.lyrichord.com](http://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.