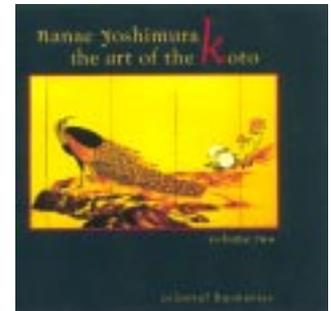


celestial harmonies

the art of the koto, volume two
nanae yoshimura
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the artists

Nanae Yoshimura was born in Tōkyō and began to study the *koto* from the age of three, receiving her teaching license with the Matsu-no-mi Kai of Ikuta-school *koto* performance at the age of sixteen. She studied the classical repertoire for *koto* and *jiuta shamisen* with Sōju Nosaka of the Kyūshū lineage, and contemporary works for *koto* and *nijūgen* (21-stringed *koto*) with Nosaka's daughter, Keiko Nosaka. She has been especially active as a specialist on the latter instrument since the early 1970s, always in search of new possibilities for musical expression and extending the horizons of the instrument.

Satomi Fukami, second *koto*, studied with the late Kiyoko Miyagi (a former 'Living National Treasure') and Kazue Miyagi. She has traveled extensively overseas to North America, Europe and Asia.

Kifu Mitsuhashi, *shakuhachi*, the recipient of numerous awards in Japan, holds the qualification of *shihan* (master) in the Kinko school, and runs his own group for *shakuhachi* performance, the Kifū Kai.

the project

Volume Two of this series, which features the artistry of the *koto* player Nanae Yoshimura, comprises six pieces ranging from the core classical repertoire of the 17th century to new works composed in the first decades of the 20th. Two great masters stand out: Kengyō (*Kengyō* meaning *master*) Yatsunami (1614-85), the founder of the tradition of Japanese *koto* music played by blind musicians, and Michio Miyagi (1894-1956), the great blind musician of the first half of the 20th century who not only embodied that tradition but opened up exciting new possibilities through his new compositional and performance activities.

The *koto* belongs to the family of long zithers, and as with many other Japanese instruments, it can be traced back to the Asian mainland. Its history in Japan spans more than twelve centuries. The slightly convex body of the instrument is a hollow shell made of *kiri*, or princess tree, and its strings are traditionally made of silk, although nylon strings are now in common use.

In the initial planning stages, it was envisaged that this second volume should continue the chronological survey of the history of music for *koto* started in Volume One, beginning with the second half of the 19th century, where the first volume left off. Lively discussions amongst those involved, however, encouraged Yoshimura to include two more pieces from the core classical repertoire attributed to Yatsunami: *Shiki-no-kyoku* as an example of his *koto kumiuta* ('song cycle') repertoire, and *Hachidan* as the third and final *danmono* attributed to him. The former, especially, is a brave choice. Although it was by means of mastering the thirty-something pieces of the *kumiuta* repertoire that musicians of this genre trained until the end of the 19th century, few *koto* players today are attracted by the refined restraint that they require. In contrast, the *danmono* repertoire is still extremely popular, and Yoshimura's renditions, in this and the preceding volume, of all three pieces attributed to Yatsunami should join the ranks of definitive readings.

Booklet annotation is provided by Associate Professor Steven G. Nelson, the only Western member of staff at the Research Centre for Japanese Traditional Music, Kyōto City University of Arts, Kyōto, Japan.

