

celestial harmonies

the art of the shakuhachi, volume 2
kifu mitsuhashi
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the artist

Born in Tokyo in 1950, Kifū Mitsuhashi studied Kinko-school *shakuhachi* with Sōfū Sasaki and the classical *honkyoku* repertoire of the Fuke school with Chikugai Okamoto.

He was awarded the Prize for Excellence by the Agency for Cultural Affairs for his first recital (1980) and the Arts Festival Prize by the same agency for his 1989 solo recital. He was awarded the Osaka Cultural Festival Prize in 1981, the 10th Nakajima Kenzō Music Prize in 1992, the Arts Festival Works Prize for his CD of works by Makoto Moroi, *Chikurin Kitan*, and the Yokohama Cultural Encouragement Award.

He traveled to Europe as a soloist with the Tokyo Philharmonia in 1994, gaining high acclaim for performances in venues such as the London Festival Hall.

He has also become active as a producer, organising events at the Serbia Expo and Festival Asia. He has given 77 recitals to date overseas, and twenty in Tokyo alone. He holds the qualification of *shihan* (master) in the Kinko school, and runs his own group for *shakuhachi* performance, the Kifū Kai.

the project

This recording is the second in Celestial Harmonies' series THE ART OF THE SHAKUHACHI, documenting the art of the *shakuhachi*, performed by one of Japan's foremost performers, Kifū Mitsuhashi. The *shakuhachi* is a bamboo end-blown flute with four finger holes in the front and one in the back. Although it is a very unpretentious instrument, a skilled player can produce an astounding number of pitches and a nearly infinite variety of timbres and shadings.

The sounds heard in the most traditional *shakuhachi* music (*honkyoku*, literally 'basic' or 'original') are usually not so much melodies in the Western sense of the word as they are a carefully composed series of short motives, phrases, and pitch cells played in a highly flexible rhythm and sometimes separated by long rests. Many varieties of grace notes, portamenti, pitch blending, explosive bursts of air, flutter tonguing, finger tremolos, vibrato and much else charge each pitch or phrase with great intensity and musical meaning. Although the pieces recorded on this CD are all of solo *shakuhachi* music, the instrument is also frequently featured in ensembles.

The oldest known ancestor of the *shakuhachi* is the *gagaku* (court music) *shakuhachi* imported to Japan from China or Korea. These somewhat slender instruments, made either from bamboo or from jade, stone, or ivory, are in three sections. They have six finger holes and were apparently used in court ensemble music. The exact nature of the music played on these instruments remains unclear; after the 10th century the *shakuhachi* was rarely used in the *gagaku* ensemble.

Several major "schools" or styles of traditional *shakuhachi* playing exist in Japan, each maintaining its own repertory, much of which, however, is shared with other "schools" as well. One of the largest and best known schools, of which Kifū Mitsuhashi is an exponent, was founded in Edo (today Tokyo) by Kinko Kurosawa (1710-1771).

Music for the *shakuhachi* performed by Kinko-school players today centers on the "basic pieces" (*honkyoku*) which often trace their roots to the music of the *shakuhachi*-playing Zen monks of the Edo or Tokugawa period (1603-1868).

Today, the *shakuhachi* is perhaps the most international of all Japanese instruments. Its repertory includes folk song, jazz, and contemporary art music of many styles. The pieces included on this CD, however, are all anchored in the traditional *shakuhachi* music of the Edo period. It includes *Ajikan*, one of the most famous in the entire *shakuhachi* repertory which is played by nearly everyone who performs traditional *honkyoku*. The title refers to an important meditative practice of Shingon-sect esoteric Buddhism.

His recent concert performance in Rome, Italy, with Nanae Yoshimura, was enthusiastically compared to Tony Scott's *Music For Zen Meditation*, the seminal recording credited with starting interest in new age music.

Booklet annotation and translation is provided by Associate Professor Gerald Groemer of Yamanashi University, Kōfu, Japan, based in part on material provided by Kayū Kanda.

