



Kimura: spectacular *koto* on an excellent album

**Reiko Kimura** (*koto*)

Music for Koto

Celestial Harmonies

Ⓢ CD13191-2 (68 minutes)

This beautifully presented and produced album features five extended pieces from the *gendai hogaku koto* repertoire, or contemporary music for Japan's traditional instruments. But in order to situate the listener in the historical development of the instrument (and this album does not cover the *koto* as an accompanying instrument to vocal music), Reiko Kimura included as the opening track a 17th century classic, 'Midari', which she plays with stunning technique and great gusto.

The other tracks are all by contemporary Japanese composers like Matsumura Teizo and Miki Minoru. Teizo was one of the pioneers of extending the *koto*'s repertoire by adding extra strings, which started in the 1920s. His 'Ichiban' also features the haunting sound of the bamboo *shakuhachi* flute to stunning effect.

Even though I lived in Japan I was not aware just how far contemporary *koto* composition has gone in the last 80 years, in complete contrast to many other Asian countries where the *zither* is played. Minoru's 'Rhapsody for 21-stringed *koto* solo' is an example of the more modernist approach,

where composer uses a series of thematic transformations in different rhythms, but still retains a classical atmosphere. Kimura's playing is spectacular on this piece, as she showcases the richness of expression of the *koto* – sometimes sounding like Toumani Diabate's *kora* and sometimes like a *dulcimer*.

In the liner notes Kimura says she wants to present an album that offers a 'broad understanding of the music of the *koto*'. She has certainly done that – and much more. Highly recommended.

John Clewley