

celestial harmonies

gagaku: "gems from foreign lands"
tokyo gakuso/tadaaki ōno
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the project

Gagaku is the oldest of Japan's performing arts, with a history of more than 1000 years and is the oldest living ensemble music in the world. In its modern sense, the term *gagaku* embraces the complete range of classical Japanese music and dance performed by the musicians of the Kunaichō Gakubu (Music Department of the Imperial Household Agency, Tōkyō).

Tokyo Gakuso is a relatively young group, founded in 1978 in response for the need for a group of expert *gagaku* musicians able to deal not only with traditional repertoire, but also with the challenges of contemporary pieces for the *gagaku* ensemble. Its forerunner, the Shigenkai, was formed in the late 1950s by musicians of the Music Department of the Imperial Household Agency, as a means to promote the public's appreciation of their ancient art through activities outside their official duties at the Imperial Palace. Tokyo Gakuso was named by Toshiro Kido, at that time producer at the National Theatre in Tōkyō, and its founding music director was the *shō* specialist and Imperial Palace musician, Tadamaro Ōno.

After his death in 1994, his place was taken by his nephew Tadaaki Ōno, the present music director. Like other members of the Imperial Palace group, Tadaaki Ōno has spent a good deal of his life studying and performing on several of the instruments, the dance, and the vocal music of *gagaku*. Born in Tokyo in 1959 into the Ōno family, one that traces its genealogy back to the late ninth century, and that has been involved in the hereditary transmission of the art since at least the tenth century, Tadaaki may have been fated to carry on this tradition.

Since its formation, Tokyo Gakuso has been very active in the performance of new compositions, as well as long and rarely heard pieces from the classical repertoire. This is the second recording in Celestial Harmonies' series documenting Japanese *Gagaku* music. **GAGAKU AND BEYOND (13179-2)**, released in 2000, has proven to be an essential addition to the Celestial Harmonies catalogue of important cultural documents.

The music recorded on this CD, performed by a full *gagaku* orchestra of up to 16 musicians and over 20 instruments, represents all three major bodies of *gagaku* music and dance. *Ōuta* (Tracks 1 to 3) is a *kuniburi-no-utamai* performed only at very special ceremonies, such as those associated with rites of Imperial succession. Tracks 4 to 6 present a *kangen* (orchestral) performance of the *tōgaku* piece *Konju*, which can also be performed as a dance. In tracks 7 and 8 we are treated to an exceptional performance of the *komagaku* piece *Kitoku* in *kangen* style, with winds, strings, and percussion; it is generally performed as a dance, without the strings. The remaining tracks cover the two genres of accompanied court songs: the *rōei Harusugi* and the *saibara Anatō*, each preceded by the *netori*, or tuning piece, which establishes the mode in which it is performed. The full instrumentarium of the various *gagaku* ensembles is made up of wind, string, and percussion instruments. Traditionally, these have been referred to respectively as *fukimono* ('blown things'), *hikimono* ('played things') and *uchimono* ('struck things').

This rare and important recording has been put together at the very highest level of expertise. Booklet annotation is provided by Associate Professor Steven G. Nelson, the only Western member on the staff at the new Research Centre for Japanese Traditional Music, Kyōto City University of Arts, Kyōto, Japan.

