

ENSEMBLE EAST

Takamizu Mutsumi, *Shamisen* and *voice*; Kurosawa Yumi, *Koto*; James Nyoraku Schlefer, *Shakihcahi*

Notes on the program

Komuso introduction

YUGAO ("Moonflower")

Kikuoka Kengyô (1791-1847)

The story told in this piece comes from the classic Japanese novel, *The Tale of Genji* (c.1000 A.D.). It concerns the tragic love affair between Prince Genji and a commoner, a lovely maiden called "Yûgao," or "Moonflower." On his way to visit his lover, the Princess Rokujo, Prince Genji stops to pay a visit to his ailing foster-mother. Nearby is a shabby dwelling set in a thicket of moonflowers in bloom, which catch the Prince's attention. Sending a maid to request some of the beautiful flowers, he is surprised to receive them arranged on a woman's fan. The fan is inscribed with a poem, and carries a lingering scent of perfume. Intrigued, he falls in love with the young woman who sent the fan, whom he nicknames "Yûgao." Despite her low social position, the Prince passionately insists that Yûgao come and live with him openly, and he forgets all thought of the Princess Rokujo. Yûgao reluctantly agrees, but soon the haunting thought of the jilted princess, and the impossibility of her own position drive her mad, and she dies.

MAEUTA – Opening song

Who lives in the humble hut, surrounded by moonflowers in bloom?

My carriage comes to a halt in the gathering dusk;

I am burning with curiosity...

A drop of dew on the white flower, offered on a graceful fan.

It sparkles in the moonlight.

TEGOTO (Instrumental Section)

ATOUTA (Closing song)

I awake from a dream of my sweet Yûgao with a moonflower in my hand.

The midnight breeze chills my heart with the memory of the love that is no more

MIDARE ("Disorder")

Yatsunashi Kengyô (attr.) (17th century)

Midare was a decisive work in establishing the koto as a solo instrument during the early Edo period. It demands a free and unrestricted interpretation, and shows that although the composer lived in a restricted, feudal society, he possessed a freedom which makes his composition almost modern. *Midare* is in *danmono* style, a form which presents multiple sections each with an equal number of beats. However *Midare* ("disorder" or "confusion") lives up to its name because it breaks free from the normal restrictions of this form by having sections of unequal length.

IFU SASHI

(Traditional Zen Meditation Piece)

This honkyoku, (or original piece,) was taken into the Itcho-ken Temple repertory within the Meian line of honkyoku, following its discovery in Hakata, on the island of Kyushu. "Sashi" is the Japanese representation of a Sanskrit word that stands for the death of Buddha.

**CHAONDO ("Songs of the Tea Ceremony")
Koto part by Yaezaki Kengyô (d.1848)**

Kikuoka Kengyô (1791-1847)

This piece was composed around a poem that was originally written as a highly involved series of puns concerning various aspects and objects of the tea ceremony, and the contrasting theme of a cheap prostitute's hopes of finding true love. Both the music and the text express the conflicting qualities of the two themes, as the elegance of the fine arts is juxtaposed with the tawdriness of the pleasure quarters. The title, "Chaondo," is a popular corruption of "Cha-no-yu ondo," or "Songs of the Tea Ceremony." Lines in the translation that are put in brackets are poetic insertions not explicitly stated, but implied in the Japanese text.

MAEUTA

The fairest cherry blossoms in the world can be seen at Mount Yoshino; for all foliage, Tatsuta is the best;

and the town of Uji, southeast of the capital, is famous for its tea....

But better by far than these delights, in a place to the southwest, there are houses of refined, artistic taste [and which lady has made their name, I wonder?] where strong tea [and stronger passion] is served;

-- its color a rich, dark green, like that of the noble pine, [so highly-rated are some women].

Though the tea room doorway be low and humbling [and I but a concubine of low and humble rank, my love's as good as anyone's!] the alcove is tastefully decorated [while I myself am plain, within and without] over and under, the tea-cloth is folded in intricate fashion,

[Would I could manage my feelings so neatly!...If I dared to ask, would I find my lover's intentions to be the same as my own, or different?]. Different length shelves adorn the wall, their edges never meeting.

[And out next meeting, how shall it go? This way, that way, this way?]. This interesting incense box... Though the dipper handle be straight and true [as I am to you], the tea-scoop is bent in a curving letter.

TEGOTO (Instrumental section)

ATOUTA

The finest tea can wash away all care.

[Perhaps, like the aged couple of ancient tales, our love will never grow cold...]

Keeping hot, over the hearth the iron kettle hangs by a long, descending chain.

[And may the chain of our love last as long, even for ten thousand years, even for ever!].

SANKYOKU ICHIBAN (First Trio)

Shin'ichi Yuize (b. 1923)

I. Tegoto style

II. Kumiuta style

III. Danmono style

Shin'ichi Yuize is a well known koto and shamisen player. As a composer he is best known for his series of "Sankyoku" pieces, of which "Ichiban" (meaning number 1) is the first. At an earlier period in his life, Yuize studied composition at Columbia University with Henry Cowell. He is still active as a performer and teacher of traditional music. The three movements of the work are each reflective of, and named for a traditional style. 1. *Tegoto-style* - an instrumental arrangement of a Jiuta song; 2.- *Kumiuta-style*, a collage of sounds from Japanese poems; 3. *Danmomo-style* - divided into five sections (dans) and in the classic Japanese form.

About the Artists

Mutsumi Takamizu is a master of the Koto, the Sangen (Shamisen) as well as vocals in Miyagi Branch of the Ikuta School. She began her musical career at the age of 19 in Japan under the tutelage of Grand Master Yoshie Shino. After receiving her teaching certificate, she continued her musical studies in New York with Grand Master Reiko Gasen Kamata. In 2001, she received her Shi-han (Master's license). Mutsumi has been actively performing and conducting demonstrations at colleges, museums, cultural centers in recent years. Recently she collaborated with jazz musician Nancy Harrow to create a CD titled "The Cat Who Went to Heaven: A Story in Jazz for Children." Last November, she organized and performed in a traditional Japanese Music and Dance concert at Tenri Cultural Institute. It was a great turnout and plans to organize future performances. The main motivation for her performances is to give her American audience a deeper understanding of the Japanese culture with her music and vocals.

Born in Morioka, Japan in 1975, **Yumi Kurosawa** (koto) began studying the 13-stringed-Koto from the age of three under her parents, Kazuo and Chikako Kurosawa. At the age of fifteen she was drawn to the contemporary sound and technique of the 20-stringed-Koto and began studying the 20-stringed-Koto under Nanae Yoshimura, and classical Koto music under Sosui Yoshimura. Kurosawa received first prize at National Koto competition for students, Japan in 1989 and 1992. She performed a duet with Evjan Rattai of Prague Cello Ensemble at Suntory Hall, Tokyo in 1993. Following extensive performances in Tokyo, she began performing in worldwide in concert tours to Canada, Germany, Malaysia, Russia, and United States. In 2002, she moved to New York in pursuit of new innovative collaborations with artists and musicians. She is currently producing her own compilation of original compositions and performing as a solo artist and collaborator in NYC. In addition to musical composition, arrangement and improvisation Kurosawa's training in Modern Ballet led her to perform and collaborate with New York dance companies.

James Nyoraku Schlefer (shakuhachi) is a leading performer and teacher of *shakuhachi* in New York City. An ardent performer of traditional *Sankyoku* and *Honkyoku* music, Schlefer also performs modern music for the instrument and is an active composer. He has appeared at Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, Tanglewood, the Metropolitan, Brooklyn and Philadelphia Museums, & BAM. Schlefer has three solo recordings, *Wind Heart* (which was aboard the Space Station MIR for over one year) *Solstice Spirit*, and *Flare Up*, and his music was featured on NPR's *All Things Considered*. He received the *Dai-Shi-Han* (Grand Master) certificate in 2001. His principal teacher was Ronnie Seldin, and subsequently he has worked with Aoki Reibo, Yokoyama Katsuya, Yoshio Kurahashi, Yoshinobu Taniguchi, and Mitsuhashi Kifu among others. He holds a Master's degree in flute & musicology from Queens College and currently lectures on music in the CUNY system. Visit www.nyoraku.com for more information about shakuhachi and upcoming performances.

About the Instruments

The **SHAKUHACHI** is an end-blown bamboo flute that has been played in Japan for over 1200 years. It is the only instrument associated with the practice of Zen Buddhism, and was performed during religious rituals by priests of the *Fuke* sect. During the Edo Period (1600-1868), Shakuhachi-playing monks known as *Komusô* ("Priest of Nothingness") wandered throughout Japan playing the shakuhachi in exchange for food or alms. They would pass from temple to temple, learning pieces that were played at the various temples, as each had developed its own music. Thus was the repertoire expanded and shared as they sought to strike a perfect sound that would enlighten the world.

Traditional shakuhachi music, or *honkyoku*, are performed solo and are considered to express the original voice of the bamboo. The music is reflective and contemplative, and the instrument's penetrating sound often produces an effect similar to sitting in meditation. As the music, playing technique, and instruments themselves developed over the centuries, concert performances of *honkyoku* became more frequent and many of the pieces became stylized, emphasizing the musical as well as the spiritual elements. Today there are several different and distinct styles of shakuhachi *honkyoku* which represent different schools of playing.

Shakuhachi music is at once spiritual and sensual. It combines breathing and silence with rhythm, melody, and the other elements of music to create a captivating and entirely unique art form of great depth and beauty. This extends to the secular, chamber music pieces, called *sankyoku*. Played together with *shamisen* (3-stringed lute) and *koto* (13-stringed harp/zither), this music has been performed for over three hundred years.

The **KOTO** is a string instrument that originated in China and came to Japan in the 7th-8th century. The Japanese koto is a large instrument, about six feet long, consisting of a hollow body made from Paulownia wood (*kiri*). Underneath the body are two sound holes, one at each end. There are 13 strings each the same size and same tension. Movable bridges, called a *ji*, are placed along the length of each string. The *ji* lift the strings off of the body so that they will resonate when plucked. The strings are tuned by sliding the movable bridges back and forth.

At first the koto was used only in court life but, later it was played mainly by blind musicians.(Almost all Japanese pre-modern music was played by blind musicians or monks and court people.) In the 17th century (Edo period), Yatsushashi Kengyo (1614-1685), a blind koto master, succeeded in making the koto a solo instrument by composing many new pieces for the instrument. Thus he is known as the father of modern koto music. In the 20th century, Michio Miyagi (1894-1956,) who was also a blind koto player, modernized the koto yet again by introducing western styles of music in his compositions.

The **SHAMISEN** (also known as a **Sangen**) is a lute-like instrument with three strings and a very long neck. The body is made out of wood and covered with cat or dog. The three strings are traditionally made of silk. The lowest passes over a small hump at the "nut" end so that it buzzes, creating a characteristic sound known as *sawari* (This is a little like the "buzzing" of a sitar, which is called *jawari*). Players often wear a little band of cloth on their left hand, to facilitate sliding up and down the neck. In most genres the shamisen is played with a large weighted plectrum called a *bachi*, traditionally made with ivory or tortoise shell. The sound of a shamisen is similar in some respects to that of the American banjo, in that the drum-like skin-covered body amplifies the sound of the strings. As in the clawhammer style of American banjo playing, the *bachi* is often used to strike both string and skin, creating a highly percussive sound.

As often to be found in Japanese arts, the shamisen has its origins in China. From China the instrument came to the Southern Islands of Ryukyu (Okinawa). Around the late 16th century it arrived on the Japanese main island and soon became popular. It was first used by street singers and geishas and considered a lower class instrument. The shamisen plays a major role in Japanese theater, in kabuki, and in bunraku, Japanese puppet theater. It was and is still used as principal instrument for background music in kabuki plays. And with the rising attraction of kabuki during the Edo period, the popularity of this musical instrument soared. During the 19th century, the shamisen rose to become a classical concert instrument.