

GUITAR MUSIC BY JAPANESE COMPOSERS

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Abstract

The guitar had two beginnings in Japan. The first was when the Portuguese sailors and Jesuit missionaries brought the instrument in the late sixteenth century. There is ample evidence that this instrument was a relative of the lute, vihuela, or gittern. However no music from this period exists for the guitar as all foreign influence was forced out or destroyed in the early seventeenth century.

Westerners and the guitar returned to Japan during the reign of Emperor Meiji in the 1860's. This was a time of sweeping changes and reforms to bring Japan up to date with the Western world. All Japanese were to receive eight years of education, including Western music. The first guitar works by Morishige Takei in 1919 shows the first stages of assimilation through imitation. He adopted European and Latin American conventions such as Habanera rhythms, Romantic ideals of multiple tempos, and portamento devices used by Francisco Tarrega. The first guitar compositions that adopt the new trends of blending traditional Japanese and Western music are by Yosie Okawara and Takayuki Oguri in the 1930's. This was a period when composers in Japan were looking past just simply splicing together two ideas and were looking to the formation a new national music.

Following World War II the guitar had many more performers, makers, and publishers. Japan quickly adopted all the newest currents in Western composition including twelve-tone and indeterminate forms. Where in the prewar period most composers were set on creating a new national music, in the post war era individuality and originality became the main goal of composers. Publishers such as *Casa de la Guitarra* and *Zen-on* published a vast array of music that seems to cover most of these new trends. Before the war composers began to explore the harmonic vocabulary of the *Sho*. From the 1960 to the present this sound has permeated the tonal vocabulary of many Japanese composers. In the 1950's composers were exposed to the music of John Cage who showed them a new way of exploring the traditions of Japan. The aesthetic idea of *Ma*, silence that joins sound with the other, were explored by many composers and can be seen in works by Noro, R. Noda, and Takemitsu. While Composers, such as Homma, explored the formal design of *Jo-Ha-Kyu* (introduction-building-rushing). From the 1980 to the present *Gendai Guitar* has published many new works for the mass of guitarists in Japan, in simple, easy to understand harmonic languages by composers such as Sato and Yoshimatsu. On the other hand the *Japan Federation of Composers* has continued with new ideas in the realm of contemporary music.