



Traditional Japanese Music and Musical Instruments

William Malm

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When William Malm published his wide-ranging study of traditional Japanese music in 1959, it was the first time in the twentieth century that such a work had been brought out in a Western language.

Malm's book has still not been replaced as the single most interesting and authoritative text on the subject. But until now it was never revised or updated, nor were its illustrations ever changed. With the present publication, however, an extensively improved edition that includes a CD of sample music has been made available.

Professor Malm's aim has always been to attract the layman reader as well as the musicologist, which has given this book its strength and durability. The writing is clear, lively, and informed, the scope of his study being broadened by frequent comparisons with other traditions, East and West. Accompanying it all is a generous number of drawings and photographs of the players and their various instruments.

The book opens with a brisk and eloquent history of Japan's musical life, then moves on to its religious music, Shinto, Buddhist, and Christian; its court music; the music of the noh drama; and the music of specific instruments: biwa, shakuhachi, koto, and shamisen. After examining the components of kabuki music, it closes with a chapter on folk music, popular musical arts, and the music of other ethnic groups in Japan. For the more technically inclined, there is a detailed appendix on notation systems. Lastly, to put all this in a practical context, a CD is provided, giving nineteen examples of these different genres.

Whether your interest is in a particular form of Japanese music—the marvelous sonority of the bamboo flute, the sharp but wistful sound of the shamisen—or just in music in general, Malm's book will more than satisfy your curiosity.

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