



CU Japanese Ensemble

Mami Itasaka-Keister, co-director
Jay Keister, co-director

2 p.m., Sunday, Dec. 2, 2018
Grusin Music Hall
Imig Music Building

Program

Tokyo Ondo (“Tokyo Dance Song”)

This is an example of Japanese folk songs (*minyo*) that musically represent different regions of Japan. This song became a radio hit in the 1930s when it was first composed, and has since come to represent Tokyo in folk music. It traditionally accompanies circle dances, called *Bon odori*, during summer Obon festivals.

Kouta Songs

Kouta literally means “short song,” and this genre represents the music of Japanese *geisha* (female entertainers). Like *haiku* poetry, *kouta* songs are usually very brief, illustrating a single poetic idea or image. Typically, these songs are about unrequited love and reflect the hard life of the *geisha*. This medley includes two traditional songs, *Horete kayou* (“Lovestruck Journey”) and *Mushi no ne* (“Sound of insects”), and two original songs composed by Miko Bando, *Fukuro* (“Owl”) and *No Usagi* (“Wild Rabbit”).

Kokiriko bushi (“Bamboo stick song”)

This folk song from Toyama in central Japan was originally sung during rice planting to ask the gods (*kami*) for a good harvest. Performances typically feature percussion instruments originally used for their magic power: *kokiriko* is a pair of bamboo sticks struck together while singing and *binsasara* is a string of wooden plaques that are rolled together, each plaque representing the human desires and the causes of human suffering. Dancers wear straw hats (*tori oi gasa*) to chase away birds from the newly sewn fields.

Fuji Musume (“The Wisteria Maiden”)

This a classic *nagauta* (“long song”) dance piece from the 19th century that had its first performance in the *kabuki* theatre in 1826, in the city of Edo (now Tokyo). Composed by *shamisen* player Kineya Rokusaburo IV, the lyrics by the poet Gempachi Katsui were inspired by colorful woodblock prints that depicted a woman wearing a black lacquer hat and carrying a branch of wisteria. This piece uses wisteria as a central metaphor for love: in Japan, creeping vines of beautiful wisteria flowers typically wrap around pine trees, an important symbol of longevity, and together the wisteria and pine become symbolic of female and male in love. After initial images of the beauty of nature, the metaphor continues in a lyric section about the tragedy of a woman being spurned by a man as the flower cannot survive without the pine tree.

Shakuhachi Honkyoku: Sagariha (“Falling Leaves”)

The *shakuhachi*, a bamboo flute, is known for its associations with Zen Buddhism. This piece is from the repertoire of solo works called *honkyoku*, derived from the practice of monks (*komuso*) playing solo flute for meditation and for collecting alms.

Mogamigawa Funauta (“Mogami River Boat Song”)

This is a work song that was sung by boatmen in the pre-modern days of hauling goods by riverboat through the mountainous regions of Japan. Many of the words are based on vocables called *akegoe* (“shouts”) used to pass the time while rowing.

Taiko and Anime Medley: Animals and Demons

Wearing masks to transform into gods or spirits (*kami*) is a tradition in Japan that dates back to ancient times. The following pieces are presented as a mini-play arranged by Miko Bando and features masked groups representing animals and demons. In the first section, a group of animals gather quietly in the forest at night to play a series of songs: *Yami* (“Darkness”) is an arrangement by Miko Bando; *Kanashikute* (“Unbearable Sadness”) is a song featured in the anime film *In This Corner of the World* (2016); and an arrangement of a classic rock song called “Smoke in the Forest.” In the second section, the demons of the forest awake from all the revelry and frighten away the animals, then play a variation of the *taiko* piece *Hiryu*. This recounts a famous story from the 16th century, in which a community of defenseless farmers in Ishikawa defeated a *samurai* army by masquerading as demons drumming in the forest at night to frighten away the invaders. At the end of this piece, the demons are driven away by the power of handbells (*suzu*) used by Shinto priests for purification.

Soran Bushi (“Soran Song”)

One of the most well-known *minyosongs* in Japan, “Soran Song” comes from the northern island of Hokkaido and sings of the hard life of working fishermen. Originally sung by fishermen, the song is accompanied by a dance that depicts the work of rowing and hauling in driftnets full of fish.

Personnel

Members of the CU Japanese Ensemble

Brigitte Beck, Elise Bloom, Itgelma Chavгаа, Channing Hunker, Joshua McNulty, John Padden, Brandon Stover, Julianna Watson, Gavin Zimmerman, *Benjamin Cefkin, *Hannah Russek, *Caroline Joy Hofmann, *Arielle Schlickman-Elak, Naomi Pederson (Teaching Assistant), Atsuko Sono (Teaching Assistant), Mami Itasaka-Keister (Co-Director, Principal Dancer), Jay Keister (Co-Director)
**guest performers*

About the CU Japanese Ensemble

The CU Japanese Ensemble is a class in the College of Music dedicated to hands-on learning of Japanese music and dance, open to all CU students. The group learns a wide variety of music and dance from many regions of Japan. Japanese music is typically based on songs that reflect styles of Japanese poetry sung in lines of five or seven syllables. Song lyrics evoke images of landscapes, seasons, weather, animals and legendary figures of Japan, in order to illustrate Shinto religious ideals of harmony between the gods and human beings in nature as well as Buddhist themes of the transient nature of existence in this world. Traditional instruments studied by the group include *shamisen* (skin-covered, 3-string plucked lute), *shinobue* (transverse bamboo folk flute), *nokan* (transverse bamboo flute from *nohdrama*), *shakuhachi* (end-blown bamboo flute), *taiko* (double-headed, barrel-shaped, stick-struck drums of various sizes), *kotsuzumi* (shoulder-held, hourglass-shaped, pressure drum) and *otsuzumi* (hip-held, hourglass-shaped drum).

All CU World Music Ensembles are classes for credit offered by The College of Music and are open to all students of CU regardless of major. No previous musical experience or audition required to enroll.

Upcoming performances

📍 Ticketed events 📺 Live broadcast at cupresents.org

Sunday, Dec. 2

Gamelan Ensemble 📺
4:30 p.m., Grusin Music Hall

Dec. 7-9

Holiday Festival 📍
Macky Auditorium

Monday, Dec. 10

**Concert Band and
Campus Orchestra** 📺
7:30 p.m., Grusin Music Hall

Monday, Dec. 17

**Artist Series
Canadian Brass** 📍
7:30 p.m., Macky Auditorium

Thursday, Jan. 31

**Artist Series
Silkroad Ensemble** 📍
7:30 p.m., Macky Auditorium

Thursday, Feb. 7

**Wind Symphony and
Symphonic Band** 📺
7:30 p.m., Macky Auditorium

Tuesday, Feb. 12

CU Symphony Orchestra 📺
7:30 p.m., Macky Auditorium

Thursday, Feb. 14

Anderson Competition Finals
7:30 p.m., Grusin Music Hall

**Concert Jazz Ensemble and
Jazz Ensemble II** 📺
7:30 p.m., Macky Auditorium

Friday, Feb. 15

Spring Festival of Choirs
7:30 p.m., Sacred Heart of Jesus Catholic
Church, 1318 Mapleton Ave, Boulder

Saturday, Feb. 16

**Artist Series
Kodo One Earth Tour 2019** 📍
7:30 p.m., Macky Auditorium

Friday, Feb. 22

**Wind Symphony and
Symphonic Band** 📺
7:30 p.m., Macky Auditorium

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