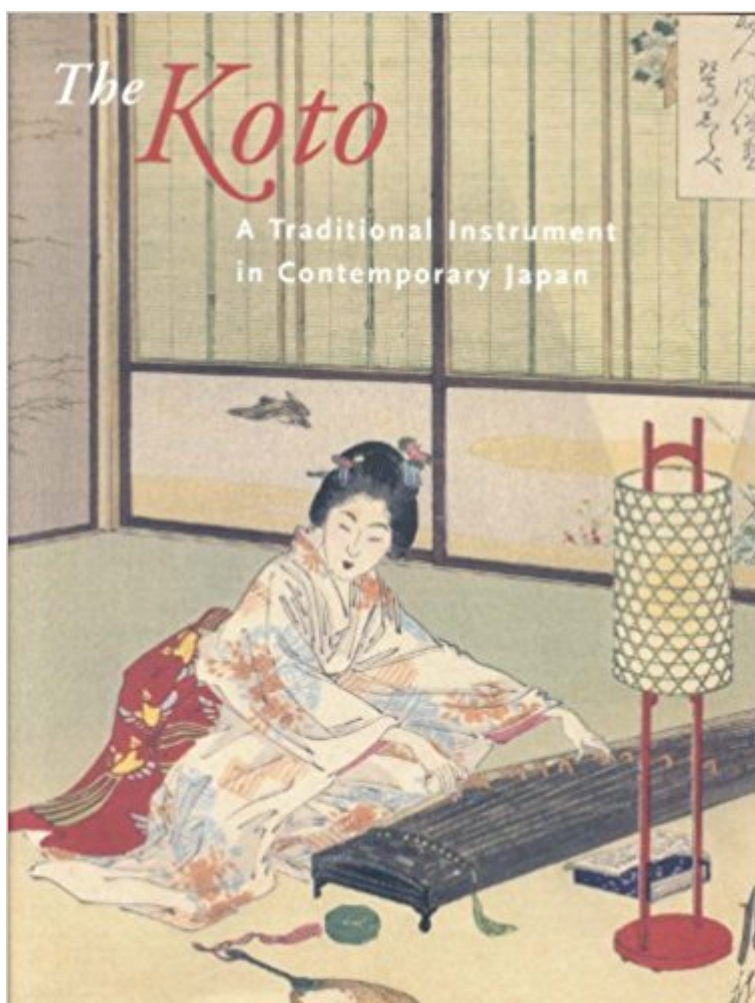


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# The Koto: A Traditional Instrument In Contemporary Japan



## Synopsis

The koto is a unique Japanese musical instrument. It has a history in Japan of over 1200 years and today does much to represent Japan's traditional past. This book examines this fascinating instrument in terms of its physical form, manufacture and instrument types, its performance traditions and social organisations, and its contexts of performance. Each of these aspects is explored in detail, providing ways of understanding the place of this traditional instrument in contemporary Japan. This well illustrated volume is the first in English to examine the koto in such depth. It brings together in one volume a detailed study of this remarkable instrument. Integral to this study is a look at the social organizations of koto performance, and how they regulate and influence the transmission of the instrument and its music. Emphasis is placed on the internal structures of performing traditions, as well as 'inside' and 'outside' perspectives that are important in establishing one's place as a player, Johnson also examines the koto and the significance of its main performance contexts, beginning with the role of the player and of mediated contexts. He demonstrates how different music traditions have used and devised notations systems as an additional means by which traditions identify themselves. Also included in the book is an examination of scales, tunings and music genres, as well as the instrument's idiomatic language of music ornamentation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The koto...is a thirteen-string Japanese zither' The traditional koto is about six feet long with thirteen movable bridges placed under its strings. The player sits at the end known as the 'head.'

Nontraditional kotos can vary in length as well as some of the design details. As with many objects and activities in Japanese society, the koto and the playing of it have been used to signify the social class and certain social situations. Varied individuals such as aristocrats, blind male professionals and female amateurs indicated their status by how they played the instrument. An ethnomusicologist at the U. of Otago in New Zealand, Johnson ranges through the construction and design of the koto, music for it and the performance of this, the koto's place in Japanese culture, and changes in these as Japanese society has changed. Color photographs of different perspectives, including close-ups when called for, accompany the technical, historical, and sociological topics. With the size and quality of a coffee-table art book, this work makes this somewhat specialized subject readily accessible to readers with different interests about Japanese culture and musicology."--The Midwest Book Review

Henry Johnson's "The Koto: A Traditional Instrument in Contemporary Japan" will appeal to a wide spectrum of musical instrument specialists and to generalists interested in Japanese music and culture. Lavishly illustrated and abundantly annotated, this book is an object of beauty as well as a scholarly resource. ( ) Henry Johnson is to be congratulated for successfully and artfully- representing the koto in its historical and present-day cultural contexts. Beth Bullard in "Journal of the American Musical Instrument Society," volume XXXIV, 2008.

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Henry Johnson is an ethnomusicologist at the University of Otago, New Zealand, where he teaches and undertakes research in Ethnomusicology and Asian Studies. Actively involved in interdisciplinary and intercultural studies, he lectures and performs on a number of instruments, including the Japanese koto and shamisen, Javanese and Balinese gamelan, and Indian sitar.

For so little useful information. I bought a koto years ago and love it. I was so hoping for a single useful concise volume to explain construction, maintenance, stringing, techniques, etc. Much of that is here but you have to wade through so much to find it. The writing style is stilted, verbose, and disorganized. Over all it did not make me a better Koto player who understands the mechanics and playing techniques.

Great Book, really interesting and contains lots of relevant information. Actually, it was the only good book on the topic that I've found. If you are interested in appropriate information as a beginner or practitioner of the KOTO instrument, it will definitely be of use for you. Plus - I've bought it from a great seller, the item was shipped really fast and with no problems incurred.

"The koto...is a thirteen-string Japanese zither." The traditional koto is about six feet long with thirteen movable bridges placed under its strings. The player sits at the end known as the "head." Nontraditional kotos can vary in length as well as some of the design details. As with many objects and activities in Japanese society, the koto and the playing of it have been used to signify the social class and certain social situations. Varied individuals such as aristocrats, blind male professionals, and female amateurs indicated their status by how they played the instrument. An ethnomusicologist at the U. of Otago in New Zealand, Johnson ranges through the construction and design of the koto, music for it and the performance of this, the koto's place in Japanese culture, and changes in these as Japanese society has changed. Color photographs of different perspectives, including close-ups when called for, accompany the technical, historical, and sociological topics. With the size and quality of a coffee-table art book, this work makes this somewhat specialized subject readily accessible to readers with different interests about Japanese culture and musicology.

Along with Mt. Fuji, Cherry Blossoms, Geisha, and the Shamisen, the Japanese koto is THE symbol of traditional Japan. Other than a couple of advanced musicological studies, and a chapter or two in other books about Japanese music, no other book gives such a complete reference to this all important instrument. Not only does this book include just about every aspect about the history, design, construction, and music theory of the Japanese koto, but it is also a beautiful book with wonderful photos, diagrams, and charts covering the full spectrum of knowledge about this instrument. From Yatsunashi to the most modern "Doremi Popcorn" koto, "The Koto" is also very

accessible to the average reader. As a student of the koto, I only dared to dream about a work such as this, and now my dream has come true. My only small complaint (if any) is that for the price, a CD might have been included with a sampling of koto pieces, illustrating the diverse music that the koto has produced over its almost 2,000 year history.

The Koto: A Traditional Instrument In Contemporary Japan is a thorough, illustrated history of a traditional stringed Japanese instrument. The text goes into depth on the koto's useage throughout history, techniques for tuning and playing it, its performance today, methods for constructing individual instruments as works of art, and much more. A comprehensive resource covering just about anything and everything there is to know about the haunting melodies that continue to be played on this remarkable instrument, up to the modern day.

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