

Cherry blossom, bamboo, wind

Japanese flute music, ancient and new

Works by Somei Satoh, Yoshizawa Kengyo II, Yatsuhashi Kengyo
and Min'yo music

Ute Schleich

Recorders, one-handed flute and drum

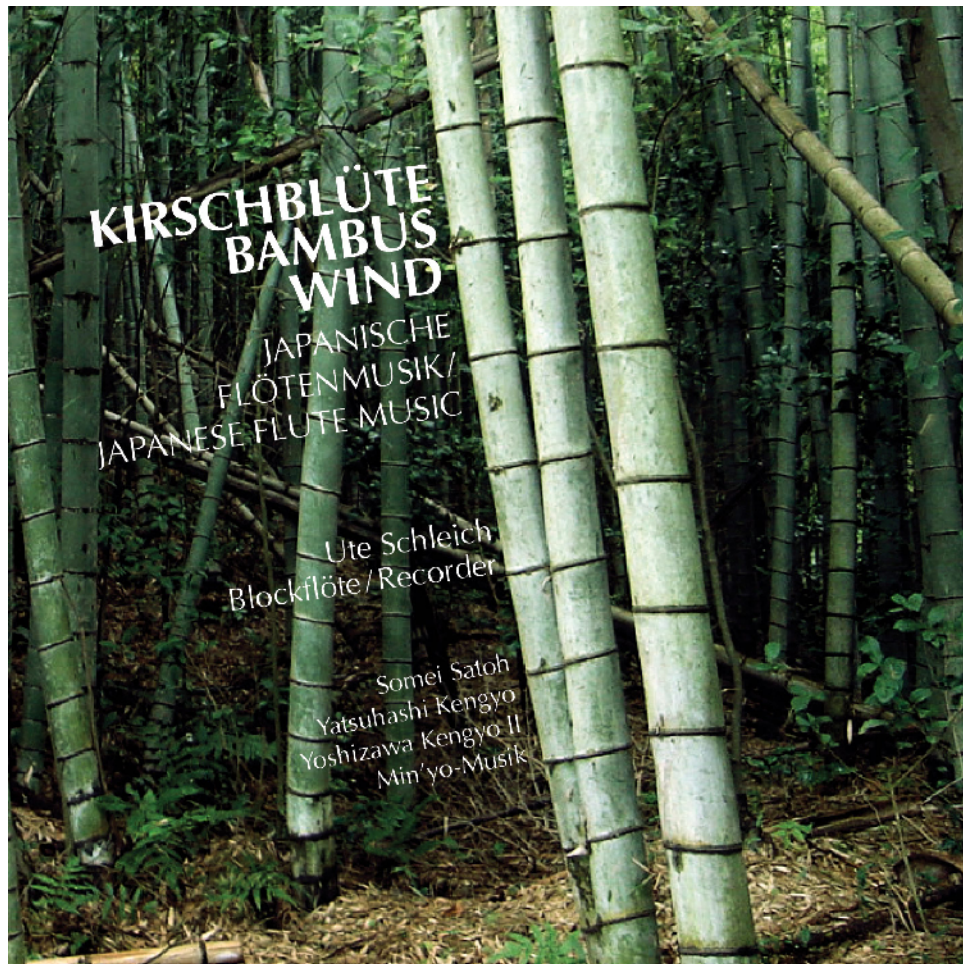


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Introduction to the CD

The CD 'Kirschblüte, Bambus, Wind' ('Cherry blossom, bamboo, wind') is an invitation: new, exquisitely beautiful, yet fragile, notes and melodies lead us over a bridge to the ancient and new Japan. Very few Europeans are familiar with Japanese music – in contrast to European music which is well known in Japan – and this music has hitherto remained "unheard". Listening to this music is a very rewarding experience which you will not regret!

The CD contains classical flute works dating from the 17th and 19th Centuries, an avant-garde work from the 20th century and folk music.

The melodies, powerful, at times delicate, never banal and always fascinating, of the Japanese min'yos (folk songs) with their humour and their melancholy offer a stark contrast to the "classical" works. The famous "Rokudan no shirabe" from the 17th Century and "Chidori no kyoku" ("Song of the plover") from the 19th Century which are both equally well-known in Japan, elucidate the liveliness and the range, the wealth and the versatility of classical Japanese flute music.

In the piece by Somei Satoh "Kaze no kyoku – Music of the Winds", written in 1984, it is possible to hear in a very unusual way the atmosphere of the 20th Century. This work is influenced by traditional Japanese shakuhachi music and

European minimal music. The listeners embark on a spiritual journey between archaic and new notes, between sound and silence.

Most of the instruments are low-range recorders (tenor and bass recorders) which provide with their timbre and range a wonderful musical translation of the works which were originally written for the Japanese bamboo flute or were sung. At the same time, the CD – while it is a serious attempt to be as authentic as possible – is also a European view of a Japanese theme.

The recorder virtuoso Ute Schleich plays with passion and powerful musical expression. She is an expert in the field of Japanese flute music. She transfers many of the specialist playing techniques of the shakuhachi to her recorder playing. The result is a masterful and intense version of the Japanese flute music that brings the genre closer to a western audience while at the same time reaching Japanese listeners.



Pieces recorded on the CD

- 1) Kokiriko-bushi (Kokiriko melody)
- 2) Tairyo Utai Komi (fisher folk song)
- 3) Esashi oiwake (song of the rider)
- 4) Yagi-bushi (melody from Yagi)
- 5) Rokudan no shirabe Yatsushashi Kengyo (1614-1685)
- 6) Itzuki no Komori Uta (lullaby from Itzuki)
- 7) Hanagasa Odori (flowery hat dance)
- 8) Kaze no kyoku II (1984) Somei Satoh (geb. 1947)
(Music of the Winds)
- 9) Ho, ho, hotaru Koi (song of the glowworms)
- 10) Mogamigawa funa uta (boatman song)
- 11) Aizu Bandai San (volcano in the prefecture of Fukushima)
- 12) Chidori no kyoku (song of the plover) Yoshizawa Kengyo (1808-1872)

Total time: 56:15



About the works

Rokudan no shirabe

Means six-part song – and is the most famous work by the koto master Yatsushashi Kengyo. Originally written for koto (Japanese string instrument), the work was arranged for shakuhachi (Japanese flute made of bamboo) because it was so popular – and is now available for the first time for recorder.

Yatsushashi Kengyō (1614-1685) was a blind koto master from Kyoto, Japan.

“Kengyo” is the highest possible honour bestowed on a blind musician.

Yatsushashi Kengyo made the koto, which hitherto had been reserved as an instrument only played at court, accessible to be played and listened to by all.

“Rokudan no shirabe” was written by Kengyo for his advanced students. The piece consists of six sections of equal length – the first is extended by the main motif that is played right at the beginning. The tempo accelerates continuously throughout the whole piece and ends with a slow coda.

“Rokudan no shirabe” entrances the listeners with its constantly accelerating pace and condensed time. Unlike the piece that follows later on the CD “Music of the Winds”, the piece does not contain a single rest.



Chidori no kyoku by Yoshizawa Kengyo II (1808-1872)

The title means "Song of the Plover". The plover is a common and popular bird in Japan. "Chidori no kyoku" was composed for the kokyo (a 3-stringed instrument) and arranged by the koto master Yoshizawa for voice and koto. This too became widely known – so famous that further versions appeared for very different instruments. Thus the piece was also reworked for solo shakuhachi solo, and it is this version that you will hear on the CD, since this work is now available for recorder thanks to the transfer from the Japanese score to western musical notes.

The composition is based on two ancient waka poems from the tenth and twelfth Centuries which are both about the plover –its call, the beating of its wings and the atmosphere of its habitat. The first song-poem is framed by an introduction and a postlude, after which you will hear a prelude to the second song which completes the piece. The work could be called a suite of programme music; the separate movements transition however almost seamlessly one into the next and are separated by a *ritardando* (gradually becoming slower) and not by pauses.

The atmosphere of the various situations is powerfully conveyed and there are passages that change from fast and cheerful to sober and exquisitely melancholic.



Kaze no kyoku – Music of the Winds - by Somei Satoh (born 1947)

“Kaze no Kyoku II - Music of the Winds II” was written by Somei Satoh in 1984 in New York. This work is dedicated originally to the recorder. It also exists in another, different, earlier version, both for the clarinet and for the shakuhachi.

Somei Satoh writes on his website:

Music is born of silence

Music returns to silence

Silence is the mother of music

(Silence is not merely the absence of sound. Silence must not be confused with nothingness.)

Somei Satoh lived as a Buddhist monk for a while, he spent a year in New York working as a composer funded by a grant and after that he returned to Tokyo. His music is defined by Buddhism and Shintoism and shows influences of European music, from whose contrasts the music derives an immense tension force that can be felt in his work.

Music of the winds is characterised by vibrant, long and very long notes, which often peter out to piano – to ppp, but which also break out into a forte or even ff.

Fast passages form a brief counterpart to the slow calm of the piece. The tempo is extremely slow – a timelessness, that means for people socialised in the European culture beneficence and challenge at the same time. The music has its roots on the one hand in shakuhachi music and European minimal music on the other. The work was originally written for the recorder and is a unique and valuable contribution to the repertoire.



The Min'yo Pieces

Kokiriko-bushi (the sound of bamboo sticks being struck against each other) is one of the oldest Japanese folksongs. The song originates from the village of Goka, near the town of Toyana in the prefecture of Gokayama. The village is listed world heritage, as there are many very special and very old farmhouses there. The roofs of these farmhouses are thatched with bamboo and are hundreds of years old. The name Kokiriko refers to an instrument, which consists of two bamboo sticks that are struck against each other. The name evokes the very special sound of the old, dried bamboo sticks on the roofs. The lyrics of the song describe how the length of the kokiriko should not exceed the precise measurement of shichisun gobu, 23 cm, as otherwise it will get caught in the sleeves of a kimono during the dance. At the same time the lyrics suggest the sound and the rhythm of the kokiriko. The dance is homage to the mountain goddess Shirayama Kukurihime.

Tairyo utaikomi (fisher folk song) In this song two different parts are united: an old boatmen's song and a story from the 18th Century, in which a young man called Saitaro is banished to a remote island and sings this lament on his sea journey. From the region of Matsushima, which was largely destroyed by the tsunami in 2011.

Esashi oiwake (rider/seafarer song) Esashi oiwake was originally a song sung by pack-horse drivers from the mountains of Shinshu. It was brought by wandering shamisen players to the Northern Sea on Hokkaido to the town of Esashi and has turned down the years into a seafarer's song.

The piece consists of three parts: the introduction, the song itself and the concluding part. The contents changed from an observation of the life of a horse rider, in the mountains to a description of the countryside, the customers and fishing in Esashi.

First part

The open sea is stormy
The waves are breaking on the cliffs
Captain, we may talk a lot this evening, but let's not put out to sea, let's wait...

Middle part

We mourn those who set sail in wind and waves,
Now the sea is calm.

Last part

"Don't weep," they tell me, "open the lock, see, the plover is not weeping either."

Yagi-bushi: Yagi-bushi means 'melody' (bushi) from the region north of Tokyo (Yagi). With its compelling rhythm for (barrel-) drum, the song tells the story about a Japanese "Robin Hood" character called Kunisada Chuji.

Itzuki no Komori Uta (lullaby from Itzuki)

The melancholy song of an impoverished nursemaid who is sent to work in the home of rich people. From the province of Kumamoto.

Hanagasa Odori (Flowery hat dance)

This Buddhist dance is sakyo-ku, devoted to the protective goddess Kuta, at the Shikobuchi – jinja shrine. This exhilarating dance originates from the Muromachi Period (around 1336–1573). The dancers wear hats decorated with flowers, sing Buddhist prayers and dance to the rhythms of the drums and bells, while swaying their hips.

Ho, ho, hotaru Koi was originally a canon – about glowworms dancing on water. The current version is for several voices: on this recording you will hear a one-handed flute and drum and replaces the voice parts that are missing with the drum in some places (arrangement: Ute Schleich).

From the province Kumamoto.

Mogamigawa funa uta (boatman song)

The Mogami river is the longest river in Japan with many waterfalls, rapids and other dangers. This song describes this treacherous river on the one hand, with dangerous and calm stretches, and the singing of the boatman on his journey while he navigates the river. From the prefecture of Yamagata.

Aizu Bandai San (volcano – Fukushima region)

Famous folksong from Aizu (a district in the prefecture of Fukushima) about the volcano of Bandai San and a rather doltish man called Shosuke Ohara, who loves drinking sake and who sleeps too much.

Bandai mountain is a magic treasure

That turns bamboo grass to gold.

Why does young Bandai paint his face in the lake's reflection?

To the north is Bandai, to the South the lake

In the middle cheerful Okishima

My husband plays flute up by the celebratory drum

I dance down here.

Tell me, why has Mr. Ohara Sho-suke squandered his riches?

Because he's a lazy good-for-nothing and he would rather soak in a hot morning tub.

About the Japanese bamboo flute shakuhachi

Shakuhachi is the Japanese traverse flute made of bamboo, whose measurements give it its name: 1 shaku (30 cm) and 8 (hachi) sun (3 cm)

The flute's lowest note is a D and corresponds to the D of a tenor recorder at 440 Hz.

The sound of every single note is what is the most important thing about playing the shakuhachi. Thus this instrument was and is still very important for meditation in Zen Buddhism. Although "Chidori no kyoku" and "Rokudan no Shirabe" were written for shakuhachi, they are pieces of 'worldly' music.



Notes on the techniques and fundamentals of Japanese flute music

- The Japanese flute is called shakuhachi and is a traverse flute made of bamboo. It gets its name from its measurements: 1 shaku (30 cm) and 8 (hachi) sun (3 cm). On the CD you will hear works mostly played on low-note recorders that are similar to the shakuhachi in pitch and range. (see also "Introduction to the CD", page 3)
- The naturals of the shakuhachi are pentatonic (d,f,g,a,c). The player can create all other notes, but they have a different timbre because she blows these notes by changing the embouchure. The notes with the different tone colour are called "meri" and "kari" notes and you will tell on the CD that

because the shakuhachi pieces were rewritten for the recorder, these notes are created on the recorder using alternative fingerings.

- The articulation is quite different from ours. Notes are not tongued at all; the articulation of every note is achieved using the fingers and each note has a short, higher note (osu) and a rarer, lower note (utsu), the whole piece is slurred. This effect is easy to reproduce on the recorder.
- The shakuhachi repertoire calls for many different vibrato techniques – which provides great scope for experiment and a wonderful challenge when it comes to authentic interpretation of shakuhachi pieces on the recorder.
- Also important are “significant” ornaments, which appear in the original text, as well as free ornament improvisation.
- The Japanese language has no word stresses, instead it has a melodic, or pitch accent. As the language in old music is very important – with Japanese music it is no different – it is important to take this difference into account when playing ancient Japanese flute music.



Instruments played

"Yagi-bushi" was played on a Ganassi alto recorder, which is a recorder with a cylindrical bore with a flare at the bottom giving a powerful, clear note. The lowest note g (in 466 Hz) can be played especially loudly, thanks to the extended bore. The instrument played on the CD was made from maple wood by the Dutch recorder builder Adriana Breukink.

"Kokiriko-bushi", "Aizu Bandai San" and "Tairyo utaikomi" were played on a modern tenor recorder in C made by Geri Bollinger. This recorder made of applewood has an extra hole in the block called the "souffleur", which allows additional timbres and an intensive piano. In addition, it is also possible to take off the "beak", which makes the windway extremely short, and this creates great scope for creating other tone colours. Kokiriko and Tairyo utaikomi were played without a beak, but Aizu Bandai San with the whole flute. The same system applies to the bass recorder in G also made by Geri Bollinger, on which Mogamigawa fuma uta, the boatman song is played (without beak).

"Ho tarukoi" was played on a one-handed flute made out of bamboo by Jeff Barbe and a medieval snare drum made by Mario Folch.

For "Itzuki no komori uta" (lullaby), "Esashi oiwake" and "Rokudan no shirabe" a modern tenor recorder in C (440 Hz) from the firm Yamaha was used. Like

the tenor recorder made by Geri Bollinger, this instrument has a pitch that is identical to the shakuhachi.

“Chidori no kyoku”: Voice-flute made of boxwood by Joachim Rohmer from the German town of Celle based on a historic flute by Peter Bressan, a baroque-pitched recorder in D (415 Hz). Thus Chidori sounds a semitone higher than the original version on the shakuhachi. For Hanagasa Odori (flowery hat dance) I used a Bizey copy tuned to French pitch from Margret Löbner (392 Hz). This instrument was also perfect for “Kaze no Kyoku”, but for this piece I exchanged the original headpiece with the headpiece of a Stanesby recorder made by Schimmel with a very narrow windway, which in certain ppp and pp places is made even narrower using dental floss which makes for wonderfully quiet and supple notes.

Jeff Barbe: one-handed flute (440 Hz)

Geri Bollinger: Tenor recorder with souffleur and removable cap (440 Hz)

Bass recorder in G – with souffleur and removable cap

Adriana Breukink: Ganassi alto recorder in G (466 Hz)

Mario Folch: Medieval snare drum

Friedrich van Huehne: Stanesby alto recorder (415 Hz)

Margret Löbner: Bizey copy – in 392 Hz

Joachim Rohmer: Voiceflute (415 Hz)

Yamaha tenor recorder (440 Hz)



Ute Schleich

Ute Schleich studied recorder and traverse flute at the University of Music, Karlsruhe, Germany. In addition to completing her degree in both these instruments, she also took a final examination in artistic performance. Then she went on to take master classes with Walter van Hauwe, Peter Holtslag, Adriana Breukink, Mareike Miessen, Gerd Lünenbürger, Han Tol, funded by scholarships and grants awarded by the foundation Kunststiftung Baden-Württemberg.

Ute Schleich taught at the state music school JMS in Hamburg, was involved for many years in preparing students in seminars in Rendsburg and from 1991-1994 she was a lecturer in recorder at the University of Music in Lübeck. As of May 2011 Ute Schleich lives and works as a musician and breathing therapist in Leimen near Heidelberg. She performs regularly in concerts with various different ensembles and programmes: her repertoire comprises both ancient music and contemporary works. She gives concerts for children and is interested in the connection between painting and music (concert in at the city art gallery Kunsthalle Hamburg: "Klangbilder-Bilderklänge" ("Sound pictures – Picture sounds" both inspired by and in the company of original paintings). Intensive preoccupation with Japanese music.

In 2005 Ute Schleich completed a five-year training course to become a breathing therapist in the philosophy of Ilse Middendorf's perceptible breath. Training course at the Ilse-Middendorf-Institut in Berlin and at the Institut für Atemtherapie in Hamburg. Ute Schleich has her own breathwork practice and works with musicians, such as, for instance, on courses offered at the Landesmusikakademie Hamburg and at the Festival of Ancient Music in Urbino, Italy. Thus Ute brings music and breathwork together.

Production/**Technical expertise:**

Recording, sound engineer, editing, mastering:

Andreas Walter, www.derheiteresees.de

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Portrait photos: Patrick Willner, Hamburg; Peter Pack – Packwerk - Ladenburg

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"Rokudan no shirabe" is also featured on the CD Kasseler Avantgarde-Reihe Nr. III, published by Miero-Verlag

Note:

Look out for the following CD:



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