



THE Stearns Newsletter

THE STEARNS COLLECTION OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

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The Japanese Shamisen

The *shamisen*, a three-string plucked lute, is the instrument par excellence of traditional Japanese music. It is also an instrument that attests to the ways musicians modify instruments to meet their needs. Historically and organologically, the *shamisen* is a direct descendant of the Okinawan *sanshin*, which was imported to Japan during the sixteenth century. The *sanshin*, in turn, was developed from the Chinese *sanxian* which is still a key instrument in Chinese ensembles. The *sanshin* and *sanxian* still share many similar features; for example, each has an oval soundbox that is covered with snake skin. Soon after its importation, the *shamisen* became a popular instrument in many folk and popular genres of Japanese music.

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A Gift of Kulingtang Gong Chimes

Last summer, the Stearns Collection of Musical Instruments received a set of eight *kulingtang* gong chimes from Dr. Robert A. Bunnell. An American professor, Bunnell acquired the instruments in 1966 from Marawi City in the Mindanao Island of the Philippines, where he was sent to help launch the newly organized Mindanao State University, a major collaborative project between the Ford Foundation and the Philippine government. Located on Lake Lanau, a volcanic lake of considerable beauty and depth, Mindanao State University represents political and social concerns about the minority Muslim people and their culture in the Philippines, which have been largely Christianized and Americanized.



The *kulingtang* gong chimes

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Kineya Yajuro IX and a Musical Bridge Between America and Japan

BY JOSEPH S. C. LAM, DIRECTOR, THE STEARNS COLLECTION OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Last fall, Ms. Maeda Toshiyo donated to the Stearns Collection a Japanese *shamisen* (three-string lute), a number of traditional scores of *nagauta* (a traditional genre of Japanese theater/dance music), two sets of stage kimonos, and several small performance accessories. This donation is particularly noteworthy because it brings to



Kineya Yajuro IX, Southern California

the collection not only a performance-quality *shamisen* but also historical artifacts of a musical bridge between America and Japan.

Kineya Yajuro IX, a master musician, was born in Tokyo, Japan in 1909 and died there in 1996. He nevertheless spent 34 years teaching and promoting Japanese music in southern California, building one of the many musical bridges that serve as conduits for cultural and musical exchanges between America and Japan. As a matter of fact, his musical biography tells many revealing events in the development of tra-

ditional Japanese music in twentieth century Japan and California. The Stearns Collection is thus honored to receive Kineya Yajuro IX's performance *shamisen*. It is a testament to musical lives in America and Japan.

Kineya Yajuro IX came from a long, hereditary line of professional musicians of *nagauta* music, a line that can be traced back to the early eighteenth century. His grandfather was once the head (*iemoto*) of the Yajuro branch of the Kineya school of *nagauta* music. Born into the family that controlled the Kineya school, Kineya Yajuro IX quickly became a professional musician himself. In 1924 at age 15, he debuted under the professional name of Yoshizumi Korokuro, a tribute to his early musical genius and a reflection of the distinctive naming prac-

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tices of Japanese musicians. It should be noted that much of traditional Japanese music is transmitted through highly organized music schools/guilds that not only have artistic-administrative masters but also hierarchical systems of teaching, licensing degrees, and controlling members' musical creativity and social standing. Because of these practices, Kineya Yajuro IX, an heir apparent, first presented himself as Yoshizumi Korokuro. In 1937 when he had



Kineya Yajuro IX at a monthly student performance, January 24, 1988

established himself as an artist/performer, he became the head of the school and assumed the honorable title of Kineya Yajuro IX, a title that symbolized a long musical tradition and demanded utmost respect from Japanese musicians and audiences.

Kineya Yajuro IX was professionally active and innovative. In 1931, six years after his debut, he became a teacher at the Tokyo Music School (Tokyo Ongaku Gakko), presently the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, which has produced many internationally renowned musicians and scholar-- the school teaches both Japanese and Western music. In 1936, Kineya Yajuro IX formed the Japanese Music Study Group (Hogaku Kenkyukai) to explore new possibilities in *nagauta* composition, performance, and education. In 1937, he opened the Kineya Yajuro Institute, a school-style teaching organization that broke down the restrictive conventions of the traditional *iemoto* system of *nagauta* music. In the 1940s, he became a leader in the development of Japanese musical drama (*ongaku geki*), an experimental genre that features Japanese songs with Western orchestral accompaniments.

Kineya Yajuro IX was forward-looking, an attribute that helped bring him to America when the chances presented themselves. Although Japan and America are physically separated by the immensity of the Pacific Ocean, they are closely connected by diplomacy, trade, culture and people. As early as the mid-1880s, Japanese immigrants began to make their way to Hawaii and then to the West Coast, and a sizeable Japanese/ Japanese-American population had developed along the West Coast by the 1920s. As they grew demographically, their demand for Japanese music and musicians intensified. To soothe their nostalgia and meet their cultural



Flowers are presented to Kineya Yajuro IX at the celebration of the publication of his autobiography



Kineya Yajuro IX giving a performance with a group of professional musicians in Japan, early 1990s

and expressive needs, traditional Japanese music became indispensable. It was this demand that laid the foundation for Yajuro's success in America.

As recalled by the master musician, his first contact with America occurred in the early 1920s when a Japanese woman visited his home in Tokyo and requested a license (*natori*) for teaching *nagauta* music to her American students—in the world of traditional Japanese music, only musicians with the proper licenses qualify as legitimate and professional teachers, and only they have direct access to the musical and social resources of the license-issuing schools. The woman's request was atypical, even though she claimed that she had studied under Kineya Yajuro VIII before her immigration to America in the 1890s. Her request was very timely because at that time, the Kineya Yajuro branch of *nagauta* music had no master; Kineya Yajuro IX was still a teenager and had yet to establish himself before he could assume the head mastership of the school. In any case, the woman's effort and her desire to teach *nagauta* music in America and to promote the Kineya Yajuro branch was favorably received and she was granted a license under the authority of the future Kineya Yajuro IX. She was given the professional name of Kineya Yasoyo and taught *nagauta* music in Los Angeles until the outset of the World War II when she returned to Japan. Before her death there, she sent a will to one of her American disciples, demanding that the disciple visit Yajuro IX in Japan and invite him to teach *nagauta* music in America.

Yasoyo's request was honored and Kineya Yajuro IX reached America in 1953 with no intention of settling there permanently. His coming to America, however, involved more than a duty to teach the music of his family. He also wanted to experiment with Japanese musical drama in a land where creative efforts were less limited by rigid conventions. His plans, however, were soon changed by reality. He promptly learned that singing with a Western orchestra, the feature that defined Japanese musical drama of the 1940s, was not considered something new in California. Ironically, his traditional *shamisen* music qualified as something unique and desirable. Kineya Yajuro IX was caught in a classic American experience of Asian immigrants: to survive in their new land, they are forced to reconstitute their cultural and ethnic practices, and music is one of the most effective tools with which to

...see Kineya Yajuro IX, next page

Kineya Yajuro IX...

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achieve their goals. Realizing that he could contribute substantially to the artistic life of Japanese Americans in California, Yajuro decided to remain there. In 1957, he was granted permanent residency as a professional *shamisen* teacher. Then he married an American-born Japanese dance teacher. Together, they founded the Japanese Music and Dance Institute of Los Angeles. Kineya Yajuro IX thus became a cultural ambassador of Japanese music, teaching it to many students in various places throughout California.

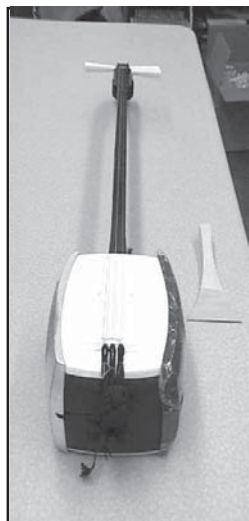
In 1987, when Kineya Yajuro IX was seventy-eight years old, he returned to his native land of Japan and began to give "Yajuro Recitals" (*Yajuro no kai*), concerts of *nagauta* music. Breaking the convention of *nagauta* performances that featured only a music master and his disciples, Kineya Yajuro IX performed only with professional musicians of his choice to present concerts of the highest standard. Moreover, he included solo *nagauta* singing in his recitals to feature the artistry of the singer--traditionally the music is performed by an ensemble of players and vocalists. In 1996 Kineya Yajuro IX passed away, leaving a musical legacy that had crisscrossed the Pacific Ocean and connected musical America to Japan, a legacy that will be permanently remembered through the *shamisen* donated by Ms. Maeda Toshiyo.

*Original data about Kineya Yajuro IX is supplied by Ms. Minko Waseda, an ethnomusicologist of Japanese American music and culture who has worked with the master musician extensively.

**This report uses the Japanese system of listing family names before personal ones.

Shamisen...

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Shamisen and plectrum

The *shamisen*, *sanshin* and *sanxian*, as they are today, are very different from one another. Aside from producing a unique sound, the *shamisen* is aesthetically distinguishable by its square soundboard that is covered with cat or dog skin, the presence of a small groove carved in the neck of the unfretted fingerboard which allows the lowest of the three strings to vibrate against the wood and produce a resonance called *sawari*, and the use of a large plectrum for plucking the strings. Contemporary *shamisen* are constructed in three sections, so that they can be neatly packed and transported in a briefcase (see illustration). The *shamisen* exudes Japanese

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Kulingtang...

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Through the help of his native friends, Dr. Bunnell accidentally purchased the *kulingtang* gong chimes in a small shop somewhere along the main street



Main street of Marawi City where Bunnell first discovered the *Kulingtang* gong chimes

of Marawi City. He was only interested in purchasing some souvenirs, but instead his friends discovered the beautiful set of gong chimes that was then covered with dust and dirt. Not being a *kulingtang* musician himself, Dr. Bunnell only used the gong chimes for decorative purposes, displaying them in his several homes during the past thirty



View of the ocean from Main Street, Marawi City

years. Upon his retirement and move to Florida last year, Bunnell donated the instruments to the Stearns Collection, where they will be restored and used as musical instruments once again.



Single *Kulingtang* gong chime

Kulingtang gong chimes are currently a symbol of Muslim identity and culture in the Philippines, even though music-making with gong chimes is a very widespread practice in Southeast Asia. One widely recognized example of the practice is the

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How Do I Get To The Stearns?

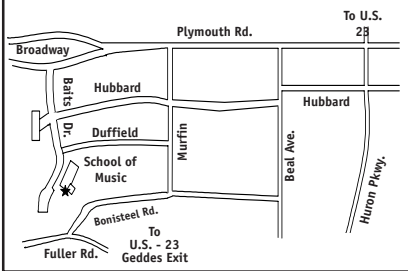
The Stearns Collection of Musical Instruments is located in the Margaret Dow Towsley wing at the south end of the Earl V. Moore Building of the School of Music on Baits Drive in the University of Michigan North Campus area. Enter through the doors nearest to the parking lot. The McIntosh Hall is just across the lobby and to the right of the entrance. The Stearns galleries are down the stairs at the end of the lobby to the right.

ADMISSION: Free at all times.

EXHIBIT HOURS: Monday to Friday 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

GROUP VISITS AND TOURS: To arrange for group visits or guided tours, please call (734) 763-4389.

PARKING: Metered parking is available south of the entrance doors.

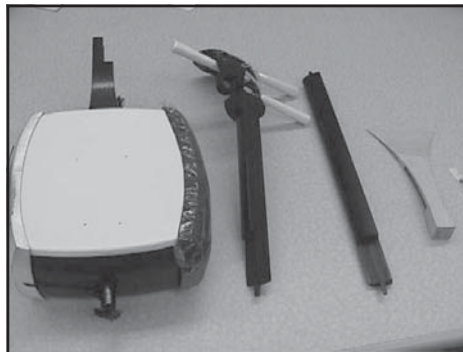


Shamisen...

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musical creativity and pragmatism.

According to demands of specific tone qualities and performance styles of different genres of Japanese music, *shamisens* differ in size, fingerboard thickness, plectrums, and other organological features. Kineya Yajuro IX's *shamisen* is fashioned for *nagauta* music. From head to tail, it measures approximately 36 inches; its sound box is approximately eight inches square.



Shamisen in three parts and plectrum

Kulingtang...

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gamelan music of Indonesia.

Laid horizontally in a row and



Beautiful etchings on the Kulingtang gong chimes

suspended on two parallel strings stretched out on wooden or bamboo frames, *kulingtang* gong chimes are used as melodic instruments, producing a focused and rich sound, and are accompanied by suspended gongs, drums, and other percussion instruments.

The largest of the *kulingtang* gong chimes donated by Dr. Bunnell measures nine inches in diameter on its top side; its boss, the protrusion on the top side, measures 1.75 inches high. Interesting geometrical designs are etched on the faces of the gong chimes.

BECOME A FRIEND OF THE STEARNS

With your help, precious instruments may be restored, played, displayed, and appreciated by the musical public. Friends receive *The Stearns Newsletter*, invitations to the Virginia Martin Howard Lectures, and announcements of upcoming exhibits and performances. Your contribution will help support all activities of the Stearns Collection.

Membership in the **Friends of The Stearns Collection** is available in the following categories:

Benefactor \$1000 *Patron* \$500 *Sustaining* \$100 *Friend* \$30 *Student / Senior Citizen* \$15

I (We) want to support the Stearns Collection of Musical Instruments and contribute to the following funds:

General Funds *Activities Funds* *Restoration/Maintenance Funds* *Scholarship/Fellowship Funds*

I enclose my check for \$ _____ made payable to: The University of Michigan Stearns Collection

Mr. / Mrs. / Dr. / Miss / Ms. _____
*Please circle title(s) and print your name above as you would like it to appear on donor lists.

Spouse's Name if not given above _____ () _____ Phone Number _____

Street _____ City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____