
In Search of the Wind-Band: An International Expedition

By Daniel Rager

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EXCERPT CHAPTER 9

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In Search of the Wind-Band: An International Expedition is a new interactive E-book, exploring 16 countries. The first-of-a-kind, interactive encyclopedic e-book uses text, video, mp3 and pdf files to bring the history and development of the wind-band to life.

The following pages contain a sample of
Chapter 9:
Japanese Wind Music

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In Search of the Wind-band

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CHAPTER 9: Japanese Wind Music

The history of wind music in Japan can be traced to its first traders who arrived on a Portuguese ship in 1542. These merchants from the West along with Jesuit missionaries were soon followed by Dutch, Spanish and English tradesman. Being a closed society, the Japanese were suspicious of Christianity and Portuguese support of a local revolt, so the shoguns (military dictators) of the Tokugawa (1603-1867) decided to prohibit trade with all foreign countries, except the Dutch, who maintained a trading post in Nagasaki. Trade relations failed until 1853 when Admiral Matthew Perry (1794-1858) sailed an American fleet into the Bay of Tokyo. Trade with the West was being forced upon Japan and Admiral Perry was ordered to leave the country. Perry insisted on presenting a treaty from the United States to the Japanese Government. Finally in 1854, the Japanese accepted it, but it was another fifteen years before Western culture and educational practices were accepted. This transitional period came about at the beginning of the reign of Meiji the Great (1852-1912), Emperor of Japan.

Before Matthew Perry arrived in the 19th century, the Dutch had a military school in Nagasaki that included band music. After Perry's arrival, every foreign delegation tried to impress the people of Japan with their marching bands. Perry himself added minstrel shows that were popular in the West.

Japanese military leaders began to incorporate Western style music into their armies to modernize them. The emperor, Meiji the Great was aware of the musical value displayed from the first foreign missions and ordered that gagaku musicians be trained in band music also.

Gagaku is a style or type of Japanese classical music performed for the Imperial Court in Kyoto. From its earliest inception in the 5th century, music and dance were brought to Japan by ancient civilizations from China and Korea. Gagaku is a fusion of this music and dance which consists of three primary repertoires:

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Although the music is not Western, it contains wind and percussion instruments that are used for a variety of functions. Gagaku reflects three types of performance which are: Kangen (Instrumental), Bugaku (dances and music) and Kayo (songs and chanted poetry). Japanese instruments include the Wagon and Kagura-bue, foreign wind instruments include the Hichiriki (oboe and flute), Sho (mouth organ), the So (Japanese harp, or Koto), and Biwa (lute) string instruments. The percussion instruments include the Kakko (drum), Taiko(drum), Shoko (Bronze gong) and San-no-Tsuzumi(hour-glass drum).

Recognizing the melding of traditional musics in Japan, Meiji the Great saw the similarities and influences foreign music had on his country and, so, ordered the gagaku musicians be trained on band instruments.

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Among the earliest foreign bands in Japan were the French Army and British Royal Marine bands. Both were stationed in the town of Yokohama, one of Japan's principle seaports. Their formation brought about in 1869, the first Japanese military band which was organized by English bandmaster, John William Fenton (1828-80). Fenton conducted Britain's 10th Foot Regiment (renamed Royal Lincolnshire Regiment), 1st Battalion which arrived in 1868. The regiment's role was to protect the foreigners in the community of Yokohama during the transition period between the Tokugawa shogunate and Emperor Meiji restoration.

Japanese naval cadets heard Fenton conducting his brass band and asked him to become the instructor of their band; thus, the Central Band of the Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Force was born. Better known as the Japanese Navy Band, this was the first of many naval bands to follow.

The first public performance of a naval band occurred in 1872 when the Satsuma clan performed for the opening of the railroad. In 1876, gagaku musicians, who were ordered to learn Western band methods, made their debut as band musicians for the celebration of Emperor Meiji's birthday.

This was a prosperous time for wind music as many new ensembles were created by English, French and German bandmasters. Japanese students along with foreign bandsmen began to write new music to match the spirit of the new Meiji modernism.

A good example of this exchange is Japan's national anthem. It was one of the first successful attempts to meld Western and Japanese music traditions together. Fenton, together with the gagaku musicians worked through several versions of the anthem. One of the court musicians, Hayashi Hiromori (1831-96) is credited with writing the melody in traditional gagaku notation while Franz Eckert (1852-1916), German composer and musician, translated it to Western notation and created the harmony to fit both gagaku mode (ichikotsu) and Western church tradition which was Dorian mode. The anthem was first performed in 1880 and has remained Japan's national anthem.

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All Japan buraban

In 1939, the All Japan Band Association (AJBA) was founded with sponsorship from the Asahi Newspaper Company. Its purpose was to create annual competitions between Japanese wind-bands or buraban, a popular Japanese slang term for wind-ensemble or concert band. The term is derived from the English word brass band, which is pronounced burasubando. In modern times the word has been shortened to buraban. The competitions promote concert bands, but in recent years, have included marching bands and smaller chamber music ensembles in its national competitions.

Categories for the All Japan Band Association encompass elementary, middle and high school, university, company, and community bands. The competitions are extremely competitive and include a three-tiered process which includes local, regional and national levels.

The world renowned Tokyo Kosei Wind Orchestra is employed to create premier recordings of required contest pieces each year. The final (national) portion of the contest is regularly held in Fumon Hall, located on the campus of the Risscho Kosei Kaireligious organization in Tokyo.

Similar to the wind-band organizations in Spain, such as the Certamen de Bandas of Valencia, the All Japan Band Association contest appears to be the world's largest music competition when considering the number of active contestants. According to Matsubara, there are around 15,000 wind-bands in Japan that include approximately 800,000 competing musicians. While figures fluctuate from year to year, the following AJBA statistics were presented in 2007.

Statistics of competing wind bands in terms of region and category:

Complete data listing of bands by region, member size, school, and company.

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Included in the above categories are industry or company bands. Japan has a large number of industry wind-bands ranging from small companies to corporate conglomerates. These groups flourish and compete for prizes and status among their home towns and villages. There are several examples of Japanese industry wind-bands found in the company wind-band chapter of this book. Additional content is provided in this section that transcends cultures and industry.

Modern vs. Traditional Instruments

Many modern Japanese composers incorporate traditional Japanese instruments into their wind-band compositions. Similarly to the gagaku musicians of the 19th century, composers use ancient instruments such as the Hichiriki (oboe and flute), Sho (mouth organ), the So (Japanese harp, or Koto), Biwa (lute) string instruments, and percussion instruments such as the Kakko (drum), Taiko(drum). According to Matsubara, Japanese composers incorporate ancient instruments into modern works to create new and exciting timbres. Students and audiences enjoy listening to traditional instruments because it reminds them of their heritage. The melding of old and new traditions is common place in Japan. Although few countries have such traditions, Russia and China are among others. The reasons may vary, but these countries were closed to the West for long periods of time creating original music and instruments without outside influences.

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The Tokyo Kosei Wind Orchestra

In addition to Japan's military wind-bands, there are other professional wind-bands that have significantly contributed to the genre. Perhaps the most recognized and internationally acclaimed ensemble is the Tokyo Kosei Wind Orchestra. They are a model of professionalism in all aspects and the reason to include them in this chapter.

In 1960, the Tokyo Kosei Wind Orchestra (TKWO) was established under the auspices of the Japan-based Buddhist organization Rissho Kosei-kai. The group was originally known as the Tokyo Kosei Symphonic Band but was changed in 1973 to reflect its professionalism and international status.



Tokyo Kosei Wind Orchestra

The TKWO took its first European tour in 1989 to Austria, Britain, France, the Netherlands and Switzerland. It has since performed an Asian tour of Taiwan, Singapore, Macao and the United States where they appeared at the 56th annual Midwest Clinic in Chicago in 2002. ...

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For more information, or to purchase the *In Search of the Wind-Band*, contact Daniel Rager at windbandhistory@gmail.com

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