

Japanese Traditional Music:
Songs of people at work and play
Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai 1941



ARBITER

Japanese Traditional Music • Folk Songs
Riyō (Min'you) • Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai (1941)

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total time: 76:51
recorded late 1930s-1940
producer & audio restoration: Allan Evans;
text & translations: Naoko Terauchi
graphic designer: Matthew Cobrin (*initial-creative.com*)

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Note: Complete texts & translations in English and Japanese are on our website, arbiterrecords.org

A historical background of the period of this recording

An extensive anthology of traditional Japanese music *Nihon Ongaku-shu* (Album of Japanese Music) was created sometime around 1941-42 by the *Kokusai Bunka Shinkô-kai* (KBS), International Organization for the Promotion of Culture. KBS was established under the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1934 for cultural exchange between Japan and foreign countries. In 1972 it developed into the Japan Foundation, an organization under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. KBS activities ranged from holding lectures and concerts, artistic and academic exchange, publishing books and photos, to producing films and records, establishing libraries and related cultural facilities abroad, among them this record set of traditional Japanese music. According to a description in the KBS journal *Kokusai Bunka* (vol. 16, October 1941), two ethnomusicologists Tanabe Hisao (1883-1984) and Machida Kashô (1888-1981), a phonetician Satta Kotoji, a music critic Satô Kenzô, the director of the international section at Tokyo Hôshô (forerunner of the current NHK) Tanomogi Shinroku, and Kuroda Kiyoshi, a board member of KBS, were involved in this project. Tanabe and Machida probably had a strong role in selecting the music. In July 1939, the first step in outlining the repertoire was made and a sketch of the whole plan was completed in October 1941. Yet, the final version of the list was not fixed until early 1942, as mentioned in a KBS annual financial report (*Showa jûroku nendo jigyou hokoku*, 26 June 1942). Comparing a list from October 1941 with the final content of the records in 1942, the number of discs is similar but 20 percent of the music is replaced with different works.

The collection consists of 60 discs (120 sides) arranged in five volumes, representing genres such as *gagaku* (court music), *shômyô* (Buddhist chants), *nô*

(Noh medieval theater play), *heikyoku* (*biwa*-lute narratives of battles), *shakuhachi* (bamboo flute music), *koto* (long zither music), *shamisen* (three-stringed lute music), *sairei bayashi* (instrumental music for folk festivals), *komori-uta* (cradle songs, lullabies), *warabe-uta* (children songs), and *riyou* (*min'yô*) (folk songs). Considering that the period of 1941-42 was a most daunting time for Japan in terms of economy and international relationships with Asian and western countries, it is remarkable that this excellent anthology of Japanese music was ever completed and published, as it contains judiciously selected pieces from various genres performed by top level artists at that time. KBS' recording project is of unique historical importance and culturally valuable as a document of musical practices in traditional Japanese genres during wartime. Very few copies of this collection survive in Japan. This CD restoration is taken from a set originally belonging to Donald Richie, a writer and scholar on Japanese culture (particularly on Japanese cinema), who had given it to Ms. Beate Sirota Gordon, known for her great contribution to the establishment of Japan's Constitution during the period of U.S. occupation after WWII. Gordon's father, Leo Sirota, a piano pupil of Busoni's, fostered many excellent Japanese pianists at the *Tokyo Ongaku Gakko* (Academy of Music, forerunner of present-day Music Department of Tokyo National University of the Arts) during 1928-1945. Ms. Sirota Gordon gave the set to Arbiter's director Allan Evans, who contacted this writer in the fall of 2006. Unfortunately, Sirota's set lacked the 10th disc of volume 5, which includes 4 songs; *Sado-okesa*, *Sangai-bushi*, *Iso-bushi*, and *Tairyo-bushi*. However, we successfully found a disc in the Tanabe Hisao Collection, one of the editors of this series. By generous courtesy of National Theatre Japan, the current holder of the Collection, we regained the missing sounds and happily conclude the restoration of this series. As the original purpose of the KBS was to promote cultural exchange between Japan and foreign

countries, the text is in both Japanese and English. It would truly be my pleasure if this revival of sounds heard 70 years ago once again brings to life the musical practices heard at that time.

Our CD restoration project is subsidized by Rohm Music Foundation.

Riyō (Min'you) Folk songs

Riyō, literally meaning 'local or folk songs', were widely used before the war-time and were replaced by a word *min'you*. Most of the folksongs have been sung and transmitted by ordinary people (non-professional singers) and the composers or writers of lyrics are anonymous. The term *min'you* already emerged in the beginning of the 20th century and a coined word *shin-min'you* that indicates 'new folksongs' emerged in 1920s. The movement of making new folksongs *shin-min'you* was advocated by the writer Kitahara Hakushū (1885-1942). *Shin-min'you* are distinguished from older folksongs in that they were newly created: a composer and lyricist could be identified. After the emergence of *min'you* and *shin-min'you*, the term *riyō* was still used up until the end of the war. This KBS set also employs *riyō* for indicating folksongs. **Volume 5** includes various folksongs from mainland Japan while four folksongs from the Miyako and Yayeyama islands (Okinawa prefecture, southern Japan) are heard in volume 4. Each song conveys a rich musical and lyrical expression closely related to local livelihoods and life styles.

Among the editors was Machida Kashō, a *shamisen* and folksong researcher. Machida released another record set: *Nihon min'you rekōdo* (Japanese Folksongs Records, 1940), almost at the same time as the KBS's. *Nihon min'you rekōdo* has 3 volumes, each containing 10 discs (totaling 30 discs). According to a 175 page

booklet *Nihon min'you shusei* (Collection of Japanese Folksongs) that accompanied the records, 300 songs were copied from discs previously recorded by Machida. Several pieces were shared with KBS volume 5. Machida's tireless endeavor to collect folksongs all over Japan brought a large-scale anthology of folksongs *Nippon min'you taikan* (A survey of Japanese Folksongs), nine-volumes of transcriptions and song notations from Hokkaido to Kyushu areas (published by *Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai* [NHK] (1944-1980), recently reissued with sound examples by NHK [1992-1994.]) Since some musical excerpts of KBS have the same text of lyrics and place of recording as those in *Nippon min'you taikan* and/or *Nihon min'you rekōdo* and could possibly come from similar sources. Thus some data on lyrics and performers and explanation on songs are borrowed from the descriptions in *Nippon min'you taikan* and/or *Nihon min'you rekōdo*. In 1949, KBS issued an extracts as *Album of Japanese Music* consisting of 20 discs (40 sides), followed by *Notes* (annotation in English), in 1953. Some data is also borrowed from the English *Notes*.

1. Taue-uta (Gunma pref.); **Momisuri-uta** (Akita pref.)

Related to making rice, a principal food in Japan, this is not merely a work song but also bears religious significance in yearning for a good crop. There are annual events for rice making, such as mimicry of rice making and its actual planning accompanied by songs and drumming and more artistically developed dances or plays. These performances began to decline in the 1960s during the so-called *economic boom*. When this recording was made in the 1930's it was reported that collective rice planting was already rapidly decreasing. *Taue-uta*, a rice planting song, was recorded in Kaigaya, Gunma, in the Kanto region, a village famous for preserving old traditions that had been lost in other areas. *Momisuri-uta* is a

threshing song. This excerpt was collected in Konoura, Akita prefecture in northern Japan.

2. **Taue-uta** (Hiroshima pref.); **Mochitsuki-uta** (Shimane pref.)

Around Hiroshima prefecture one can find an event called *hayashida* (lit. accompanying field), that gorgeously accompanies rice planting with songs, drums, flutes, and gongs. This excerpt was recorded in Hiwa in eastern Hiroshima prefecture. The songs are in a call-and-response style; a male leader called *sage* and planting girls *saotome* alternate. Both parts overlap at times and the whole performance displays a very complicated structure. *Mochitsuki-uta* is sung while making rice cakes. This excerpt was recorded in Gônotsu, Shimane prefecture.

3. **Hôhai-bushi** (Aomori- pref.); **Tusgaru-yamauta** (Aomori- pref.)

Hôhai-bushi is a folksong from Tsugaru, Aomori, northern Japan with a meaningless falsetto refrain, performed on occasions such as a wedding. *Tusgaru-yamauta* is also from Tsugaru where women originally sang this tune when going to pick vegetables or firewood. The song was later included in festivals, banquets, and became elaborated. This excerpt employs local lyrics relating to the town of Namioka and is slightly different from the well-known ordinary version.

4. **Mugiuchi-uta** (Chiba pref.); **Mugitsuki-uta** (Fukushima pref.)

Mugi-uchi and *Mugi-tsuki* mean wheat threshing. The first excerpt was recorded in Toyohata, Chiba prefecture. Two women sing alternately, accompanied by a

male yell. *Nippon min'yo taikan* includes staff notation of the song and lyrics performed by two female singers: Ms. Shiina Toyo and Ms. Kuwata Kiyo. The second excerpt was recorded in Mano village, Fukushima prefecture by an anonymous singer.

5. **Sakaya-uta** (Motosuri-uta) (Hiroshima pref.); **Cha-tsukuri-uta** (Chatsumi-uta & Chamomi-uta) (Shizuoka pref.)

Sakaya means a winery. There are several processes in making sake-wine: *motosuri* grinds steamed rice and water. The *motosuri-uta* song accompanies this process. This excerpt, a call-and-response, was recorded in Saijô, east of Hiroshima, renowned for its sake making. *Chatsukuri* means to produce tea. Shizuoka prefecture, 200 km. east of Tokyo is noted for Mt. Fuji and its green tea. *Chatsumi-uta* is sung as girls pick tea leaves in a field while *Chamomi-uta* is sung as the leaves are rubbed and made into thin rolls by hand.

6. **Kamisuki-uta** (Fukui pref.); **Urushi-kaki-uta** (Fukui pref.); **Benibana-tsumi-uta** (Yamagata pref.)

Fukui has long been famous for their *washi* Japanese traditional paper and *urushi* lacquer. *Kamisuki-uta* is sung while an artisan spreads paper fibers in water onto a wooden frame. This example was recorded in Okamoto, Imadate county, which seems to be the same performance in *Nihon min'you rekôdo* and *Nippon min'you taikan*. *Nihon min'you rekôdo* identifies it as sung by Ms. Taki Fui and Ms. Ishikawa Tome (rec. 1939.) *Urushikaki-uta* is sung during lacquer tapping. This example was recorded in Kawada village in Imadate county. Yamagata prefecture is

famous for cultivating the safflower called *benibana* (lit. ‘red flower’), that is used for dying. *Benibana-tsumi-uta* is sung when collecting safflowers.

7. **Wata-hokashi-uta** (Yamanashi pref.); **Ito-tsumugi-uta** (Yamanashi pref.);
Zakuri-uta (Yamanashi pref.); **Hataori-uta** (Saitama pref.)

Wata-hokashi is also mentioned as *wata-uchi* – a process to make cotton soft and remove its husk or dust by beating it with a bow. *Ito-tsumugi-uta* is a spinning song. Both were recorded in Mitsue, Yamanashi prefecture: the performer is supposedly Mr. Naitô Shôtarô, recorded by *Nihon min’yôu rekôdo* and *Nippon min’yôu taikan* (V/1939.) *Zakuri-uta* is sung as one reels off the silk from cocoons. Singers are possibly Ms. Nishimura Shige and others from Kawaguchi, Yamanashi prefecture who recorded for *Nihon min’yôu rekôdo* and *Nippon min’yôu taikan* (III/1939). *Hataori-uta* is a weaving song: this excerpt was recorded in Toyooka, Saitama prefecture.

8. **Kakuma-kari-uta** (Yamagata pref.); **Ikada-nori-uta** (Nara pref.)

Kakuma-kari is the mountain work of cutting and collecting firewood, sung on a mountain or field. The singer of this excerpt could be Mr. Katô Momogiku, who sang for *Nippon min’yôu taikan*. *Ikada* are rafts. *Ikada-nori-uta* is sung while sending logs downstream. The singer seems to be Mr. Kurimoto Otohachi and others, who recorded for *Nihon min’yôu rekôdo* in April 1937 at Shimo-kitayama, Nara prefecture, delivered in a call-and-response style

9. **Jizuki-uta** (Tochigi pref.); **Nagamochi-uta** (Akita pref.)

Jizuki-uta is sung while leveling the ground. This excerpt was recorded in Shinoin, Tochigi prefecture. *Nagamochi* is the long chest that holds a bride’s outfit. *Nagamochi-uta* is sung at a bride’s procession to her husband’s house with auspicious lyrics usually selected. This excerpt was recorded in Akita, possibly identified with an example on *Nippon min’yôu taikan* broadcasted on May 1941 by the Akita Broadcasting Station (sung by Mr. Itô Kansei).

10. **Nanbu-ushikata-uta** (Iwate pref.); **Nanbu-umakata-uta** (Iwate pref.)

Nanbu designates a region in Iwate prefecture, northern Japan. *Ushikata-uta* is sung when a caravan of cows travels. This excerpt was recorded in Shimohei county. *Umakata-uta* is sung when one urges horses onward. Recorded in Morioka city, the performer could be Mr. Hoshikawa Manzô of Morioka city who sang *Nanbu-ushikata-uta* for *Nihon min’yôu rekôdo* in September 1937.

11. **Settô-bushi** (Akita pref.); **Nanbu-kobiki-uta** (Iwate pref.)

Settô means stone knife. *Settô-bushi* is sung while workers are mining. The song can be found in Japanese mines. This excerpt is a version of the Osarizawa mine, Akita. *Kobiki-uta* is sung as wood is sawn into lumber. This example was recorded while a performer actually saws in Morioka city, Iwate prefecture.

12. **Matsumae-oiwake** (Hokkaido)

Matsumae is an old town located in southern Hokkaido that flourished as a key trading port between Japan and Ezo (Ainu). *Oiwake* originally means the point

whence two routes diverge. The original *Oiwake-bushi* song is believed to originate in Oiwake station, Nagano prefecture, which is a parting of the Nakasendô and Hokkoku-kaidô highways. The song spread through the Echigo (Niigata) region and reached southern Hokkaido. There are varieties of *Oiwake-bushi* such as *Echigo-oiwake* and *Esashi-oiwake*. *Matsumae-oiwake* is a local version from the town of Matsumae that requires a virtuoso melisma technique.

13. Nishinryô no uta (Hokkaido)

Work songs related to herring fishing in the port town of Otaru, Hokkaido. Three songs are heard: *Amiokoshi-kiyari*, *Okiage-ondo*, and *Kazunoko-tataki-uta*. The first one starts with a nonsense refrain that's sung to coordinate everyone's movement as a fish net is pulled up onto a boat. *Okiage ondo* follows when herring are taken off the net. This song is now well known in Japan as *Sôran-bushi*. When the net is still heavy with herring roe and is carried onto a beach, *Kazunoko tataki-uta* is sung as retired men, women, and children all come out to gather the roe.

14. Tairyô-utakomi (Miyagi pref.)

There is a custom in Miyagi and Iwate to sing a song when fishing boats return to port with a big catch. Its singing indicates a rich haul to people waiting on the shore, consisting of *Oiwai*, *Saitara-bushi*, and *Toshima-jinku*. *Oiwai* is a song for celebrative occasions such as a New Year, a boat's launch or big catch of fish. The song used to be a common auspicious song not especially related to fishing. *Saitara-bushi's* background: Saitarô, an ironsmith of Date province got banished to an island. A good singer, he remade a song of bellows into a fisherman's rowing

song and disseminated it. The leading singer's melody is accompanied by rhythmical refrains of other singers. This excerpt is possibly identical with a performance in *Nihon min'yô rekôdo* sung by Mr. Yagi Jusui and Mr. Matsumoto Mokuchô of *Miyagi minyou-dan* group. (rec. July 1937.) *Toshima-jinku* was originally an indoor entertainment song from Kesennuma that was adapted into rowing songs.

15. Bon-odori-uta: Dai-no-saka (Niigata pref.)

Bon-odori is a dance performed in the *bon* (ullambana) festival in summer when people welcome their ancestors' spirits. This excerpt *Dai-no-saka* was recorded in Horinouchi, Uonuma county and is accompanied by flute and drum.

16. Bon-odori-uta: Yagi-bushi (Tochigi pref.)

Yagi-bushi is a *bon-odori* song heard throughout Gunma and Tochigi prefectures. This example recorded in Yamabe, Ashikaga county, is accompanied by flute and drum and mentions Kunisada Chûji (1810-1851), a famous local chivalrous man.

17. Shônai-obako (Yamagata pref.); Akita-obako (Akita pref.)

Obako means 'young girl' in northern Japanese dialect. Here are two *obako* songs, one from Shônai province of Yamagata prefecture, the other from Akita prefecture. The former is accompanied by *shakuhachi* and *shamisen*, the latter by *shamisen*, flute, and drum.

18. Sôma-nagareyama (Fukushima pref.); Tsugaru-yosare-bushi (Aomori pref.)

Sôma-nagareyama is sung at a festival of chasing horses in a field in Sôma, Fukushima prefecture. *Tsugaru-yosare-bushi* is a folksong from Tsugaru, Aomori prefecture. It is merrily accompanied by *shamisen* and *taiko*. This excerpt includes a technically highly accomplished *shamisen* accompaniment that would later develop into *tsugaru jamisen* (an instrumental genre). *Yosare-bushi* can be found in Iwate, Akita, Niigata, and Hokkaidô as well as Aomori. Each region has its own lyrics.

19. **Sado-okesa** (Niigata pref.); **Sangai-bushi** (Niigata pref.)

Okesa is assumed to indicate a young woman's name or generally a young woman. The song used to start with a refrain *okesa*, from which the title of the song possibly derives. However, it now starts with *ha*. This excerpt, recorded in Sado Island (Niigata pref.), uses an *in*-scale (minor scale in western music), while *Okesa* song in other regions uses a *yô*-scale (like a major scale). *Sangai-bushi* is said to have originated in Kashiwazaki. Niigata prefecture. It used to be sung in *bon-odori* with an accompaniment of *shamisen* but was taken into the repertoire of indoor entertaining song and became elaborated. This excerpt is sung by geishas in Kashiwazaki. Its lyrics include an onomatopoeic refrain *pikkara chakkara dongararin* that evokes thunder sounds, a line repeated three times, whence comes its name, the original meaning of *sangai* being 'three times.'

20. **Iso-bushi** (Ibaraki pref.); **Tairyô-bushi** (Chiba pref.)

Iso-bushi developed and was enjoyed in the pleasure quarters of port towns at the mouth of the Nakagawa river, Ibaraki prefecture. It used to be a boat rowing song but was developed into elaborate chamber music by Yabuki Mansuke, owner

of a geisha house in the 1890s. A blind singer Sekine Anchû made this song famous by recording it. *Tairyô-bushi*, literally 'large catch song', can be found in various seaside villages all over Japan. This *Tairyô-bushi* was created at Chôshi port in Chiba during the late Edo period with lyrics written by three fishermen's bosses in a style of a counting song and a melody composed by *Tokiwazu* (a narrative genre with *shamisen* accompaniment) musician Yûchô.

21. **Kiso-bushi** (Nagano pref.); **Ina-bushi** (Nagano pref.)

Kiso and Ina are two big valleys in the southern province of Nagano prefecture. *Kiso-bushi* was once called *Kiso no Nakanori-san* or simply *Nakanori-san* while *Ina-bushi* was *Ontake-san* or *Ontake-bushi*. Both songs were introduced to Tokyo in the early *Meiji* period and became popular throughout Japan. This example of *Kiso-bushi* is sung by Ushijima Nirô, a representative singer from Kiso-Fukushima. Except for a refrain, its lyrics differ from the well known version. This excerpt is accompanied on the *shamisen* and *taiko*. *Ina-bushi* is older than *Kiso-bushi*. The song was originally performed for an occasion or summer festival both in Kiso and Ina valleys and gradually turned into a entertainment dance song. Its beginning *yosakoi abayo ha* was taken from a salutary word of the horsemen's song who alternated between Ina and Kiso valleys during the *Edo* period. This excerpt is performed by geishas from Ina, accompanied by *shamisen* and *taiko*.

22. **Ecchû-owara-bushi** (Toyama pref.); **Yamanaka-bushi** (Ishikawa pref.)

Ecchû-owara-bushi is sung at the *Owara kaze no bon*, a summer *bon* dance festival accompanied by *shamisen*, *kokyû* (fiddle), and *taiko*. *Yamanaka-bushi* is from

Yamanaka village where one enjoys hot springs in a mountainous valley. Originally sung for *bon* dance, it was adopted into chamber entertainment music's repertoire.

23. **Yasugi-bushi** (Shimane pref.); **Dossari-bushi** (Shimane pref.)

Yasugi-bushi derives from a boatmen's song *Izumo-bushi* of the Izumo region (Shimane pref.) which spread into other places such as Echigo province and Sado Island in the Niigata prefecture. The song changed musical styles and assumed various names such as *Wadami-bushi*, *Hamasada-bushi*, or *Ishibashi-bushi* as it traveled: *Yasugi-bushi* is one of its variations. The port of Yasugi prospered as an export center of iron sand and the song thrived in a pleasure quarter of the town. In 1916, Oito, a girl, went to Tokyo to record and perform it in vaudeville theaters, making the song famous nationally. This excerpt was performed by Hamada Umekichi, a geisha from Nima, Shimane and frequently heard in Asakusa, a Tokyo entertainment spot in the 1930s. The song is accompanied by *shamisen* and *tsuzumi* (drum). *Dossari-bushi* is well known in the Oki Islands, some 60 km. from the mainland. The song is often sung for fun by woodcutters or fishermen and also performed in banquets accompanied by *shamisen* and drums. *Dossari* means 'barely' or 'managed to' in local dialect, which is the origin of the title. A background story for this song; One day Omatsu, a girl who lived in the Chiburi island of Oki, fell in love with Shinzaburô, a man from Echigo (Niigata) and they lived happily for a while until a relative came and took her back to her native town. They could never see each other again. When she parted from him at the port, she learned *Oiwake-bushi* from him but could not completely remember it: each time she tried to sing her grief she barely managed to get it to the end. The song is not so similar to *Oiwake-bushi* but rather to *Kôdaiji*, a narrative repertoire in Echigo (Niigata) transmitted by *goze*, blind female singers.

24. **Hakata-bushi** (Fukuoka pref.); **Kagoshima-ohara-bushi** (Kagoshima pref.)

Hakata-bushi originated in the Iwami province, Shimane prefecture, where the song is widely sung by geishas and ordinary people. The song was brought to Hakata, Fukuoka prefecture and got a name of *orthodox Hakata-bushi*. The orthodox version lost its original simple style and developed into a refined one in Hakata where it is enjoyed in pleasure quarters. This excerpt is performed by Akasaka Koume (of Fukuoka pref.), a geisha who recorded many songs. Likewise, *Kagoshima-ohara-bushi* is not a native song of Kagoshima but introduced from Yassa in the neighboring Miyazaki prefecture. It is said that Yassa villagers sang it when they went to Ryûkyû on an expedition ordered by Lord Shimazu in 1609, but it is doubtful. Now sung on any occasion, outdoor or indoor, it is accompanied here by a *shamisen* tuned to *si-mi-la* (*san-sagari*). The song became nationally known when Shinbashi Kiyozô (a Kagoshima geisha) recorded it in 1934. This excerpt is sung by Akasaka Koume (1906-1992) accompanied by *shamisen* and *taiko*.

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cover photo: Planting rice sprouts (*Sin-e-do studio*, c. 1900)

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