Gagaku Musical Instruments

Photos and Text by The Imperial Japanese Household
<http://iha-gagaku.com/english/instruments.html>

Wind

Ryuteki

A transverse bamboo flute with seven finger holes, sounding D (closed),D♯,E,F♯,G,A,B, and D'.





Komabue

A thinner and shorter transverse bamboo flute with six finger holes, producing higher notes, D♯(closed), F♯, G, A, B, C♯ and E'.



Hichiriki



A tiny oboe, the pipe of

which is bamboo, having nine finger holes, seven on the front and two on the back. A. thick double reed is inserted into the top of the pipe. The range of notes is G to A. By controlling the reed the notes can be raised or lowered by a half tone or less.

Shō

A mouth organ consisting of a wooden reservoir which is covered with a plate of water buffalo horn. Seventeen thin bamboo pipes are inserted through this cover. At the lower end of each pipe a metal reed, like a harmonica reed is





fixed except in two pipes which are mute. The instrument is played by blowing through the mouthpiece fixed to the reservoir. The sound of the reed is so tiny and high that it can scarcely be heard. Therefore, on the upper inside of each pipe, a thin, short slit is made which is approximately about 2 cm in length. The air column in the part of the pipe between the closed bottom of the pipe and lower end of the slit, resonates with the vibration of the reed, and makes the sound louder and low enough to be audible.

Since the instrument produces a harmony of five or six notes, the performer has to sound the correct pipes. Close to the cover, each pipe has a tiny finger hole. When the finger hole is open resonance does not occur, but when closed there is resonance and the pipe sounds.

Strings



Biwa

A four-stringed lute with a flat rear side. The silk strings are plucked with a wooden plectrum in arpeggio fashion, producing chords instead of melody.



Sō, Gakusō or Koto

A thirteen-stringed long zither, 189 cm in length, with silk strings, tuned by thirteen wooden bridges in six ways, according to the tonality used. The strings are plucked with three picks, which are made of bamboo and fixed to the thumb, the index finger, and the middle finger of the right hand by leather bands.





Percussion

Kakko



A barrel drum with two skin heads. It is placed horizontally to the player on a stand and played with two sticks by striking both heads.



San-no-tsuzumi



A round, bronze gong, hung in a frame on a stand. The size of the gong varies according to the style of music being performed. In the case of Bugaku the instrument is used in pairs and is played with two mallets.

Taiko

A large flat drum with two skin heads, hung in a frame on a stand. For Kangen it is smaller and called Gakudaiko while for Bugaku it is gigantic in size, used in pairs and called Dadaiko. The gigantic drum for Bugaku has a loud, beautiful sound.



