

What is Gagaku?

Gagaku is one style of music originating from Japanese ancient music, which has been mixed with those of neighboring countries for centuries and matured into a unique Japanese style.

It is said that the foundation of *Gagaku* today was formed as early as about 1,300 years ago.

It has a long tradition as ceremonial music of the Japanese Imperial Court, and it is said that ancient aristocrats and emperors at the time enjoyed performing *Gagaku*.

In addition, during Heian-era (A.D 794 - 1185), "*Gakke*" who made their living by performing *Gagaku* started to engage in performance, and their descendants have still put their efforts to carrying on the long tradition at the *Kunaichou-shikibushoku-gakubu* (Music Department of the Imperial Household Agency).

Also, *Gagaku* performed by the *Kunaichou-shikibushoku-gakubu* has been registered as Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO.

In A.D. 752, a large-scale international event was held at *Daibuthu-kaigan-kuyoue* (a ceremony to consecrate the Great Buddha) in Nara and *Gagaku* performance took place as well, the records of which now exist.

Performance style of Gagaku: *Kangen* and *Bugaku* (wind/string instruments and dance)

Kangen is an ensemble style in which wind instruments and string instruments are played together.

In Japan, *Kangen* performance had already been established well before orchestra performance style came into existence in Europe. In other words, *Gagaku* is the "oldest orchestra in the world".

Basically, instrumental part of *Gagaku* consists of three kinds of wind instruments (*Sho* / *Hitiriki* / *Ryuteki*), two kinds of string instruments (*Biwa* / *Koto*), and three kinds of percussion instruments (*Kakko* / *Taiko* / *Shoko*).

In *Bugaku*, with performance of wind/percussion instruments, from one up to six dancers dance. Dance style can be divided into *Hiramaï*, *Hashirimai*, *Bu-no-mai*, and *Doubu*, in each of them dancers wear luxurious and gorgeous costumes in accordance with each piece of music. Basically in *Bugaku*, *Togaku* is called "*Saho*" (left side) and *Komagaku* is called "*Uho*" (right side).

About the *Bugaku* of "*Ryou-o*"

This is based on a story of *Ranryou-o-Cyokyo*, a king who actually existed during the ancient Chinese Northern Qi dynasty.

Cyokyo had very sweet appearance, attracting even men's eyes.

In this story, soldiers of his own army constantly looked at him and tended to lose their morale, that's why he was annoyed, so he decided to hide his face by wearing a terrifying mask, went into the battlefield, and eventually won a victory.

Please enjoy the dance of valiant king.

About the venue, *Hoshinji*

It is formally named as *Wajunzan-Kankiin-Hoshinji*, which was designated by *Chion-in* Temple in *Kyoto* in 1596 (*Sengoku-era*).

Amano Tosho, who served as chief cook for the General *Ieyasu Tokugawa*, devoted one of *Tokugawa* family's suburban residences which became the temple's foundation.

According to historical records, in 1627, this temple was established designating honor saint *Genrenja* as its first chief priest and *Kyotaro Amano* as its founder.

It is also publicly known as being related to *Ichijo Higuchi*, a famous Japanese novelist (May 2, 1872 - November 23, 1896).

It is very valuable just to look around *Hoshinji* with its tradition of more than 400 years.