LISTENING GUIDE

Listening Sketch for Shakuhachi Music
“Koku-Reibo” (A Bell Ringing in the Empty Sky)

The shakuhachi is a bamboo flute with five finger holes. It is blown from one end. Its name means “one and eight-tenths,” because in Japanese measurement the shakuhachi has the length of one and eight-tenths shaku (a shaku is roughly a foot).

Music for the shakuhachi has a profound, mystical quality. The instrument was used in religious ceremony by Zen Buddhist monks in the seventeenth century, and it has been said that a single note of the shakuhachi can bring one to the state of nirvana (perfect blessedness).

“Koku-Reibo” is one of the oldest pieces in the repertory, dating back to the seventeenth century. The title refers to the death of Zen monk Fuke-Zenji, who used to walk around ringing a small handbell. When he died, the sound of his bell could be heard getting fainter and fainter as it ascended into the clear blue sky. “Koku-Reibo” and other ancient shakuhachi compositions are regarded as sacred and to be played only by great masters.

Playing the shakuhachi requires an enormous amount of control and subtlety of expression. The musician performing here, Nyogetsu Seldin, has studied the traditional art of the shakuhachi for thirty years. He studied with Kurahashi Yodo Sensei in Kyoto and is now a Grand Master of the instrument.

The music is riveting. It demands all of your attention, because it involves such minute details. There are only a few notes, but the variety of sounds is amazing. The player uses slides between notes, shadings of color and sound, variations of intensity, and carefully controlled gradations of volume to produce an atmosphere that is truly mystical. Our excerpt ends after only a few minutes, but the entire composition lasts more than fifteen minutes. Listen to the excerpt very carefully, and listen to it several times. Each time you will hear something new. The music will capture your imagination in an entirely new way.

Music and Islam

The extent to which listening to music is permissible is highly controversial in Islam. There is no explicit condemnation of music in the Koran. Accounts of the prophet Mohammed’s life describe him as either participating in musical activities or condemning them, so there is still debate as to whether certain kinds of music are acceptable or not. What is clear is that the call to prayer, which occurs in Muslim societies five times a day, and the recitation of the Koran, although they sound like singing, are not considered to be musical entertainment.

We shall listen to a Turkish call to prayer, which sounds musical to us, but is thought of more by Muslims as a heightened recitation. Sharia law provides detailed instructions on which types of musical entertainment are acceptable in strict Muslim societies. Acceptable types are work songs, family or celebratory music (such as lullabies and wedding music), and the singing of noble poetry. Unacceptable is sensuous music.
In Islamic countries of the Middle East, music has always been regarded with ambivalence. For centuries the scholarly study of music was assiduously pursued. Nearly 2,000 medieval treatises on music were written in Arabic, Turkish, and Persian. But during this time no tradition of religious instrumental music grew up, and the performance of music was usually handed over to non-Muslim minorities. Other aesthetic interests were pursued, however, such as visual art, architecture, and literature, and the Muslim world is filled with remarkable examples of these.

The Turkish musical tradition is very rich and has many and varied roots, including folk music from Asia, the culture of Persia and Byzantium, and the Islamic tradition. We shall listen to a Turkish call to prayer. As in other Muslim countries, the call to prayer is heard five times a day echoing from the top of a minaret, or tall tower of a mosque. Because of its ubiquity, its sound has influenced many other kinds of music in Turkey.

**Gamelan Music from the Indonesian Island of Java**

In Indonesia, traditional music is played on a group of instruments made up primarily of metal percussion. This small orchestra is known as a *gamelan* (an Indonesian word meaning "musical ensemble"). A gamelan includes a wide variety of instruments. Among them are metal xylophones of three pitches: high, medium, and low. There are also two sizes of bronze bowls, which rest on cords in a wooden frame; bowls of different shapes produce different tone qualities. A gamelan also includes a series of gongs (gong is another Indonesian word), one approximately three feet in diameter, with a very powerful sound, and several sizes of smaller ones. There are also skin-headed drums, wooden percussion instruments, and sometimes flutes, a bowed two-string fiddle, and a plucked string instrument. The sound of the gamelan is unique, with its highly varied metallic sounds, its wide range from the deep gong to the highest xylophone, and its interlocking melodies.

A gamelan performance is quite ceremonial. Players sit cross-legged on the floor, as do players in much Eastern music. The instruments, with their elaborately carved and painted cases, are spaced about the floor in a carefully organized manner. The performers treat their instruments with great respect. Gamelan

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**Listening Sketch for a Turkish Call to Prayer**

Duration: 3:15

Singing in the East is often strained (as opposed to the more relaxed vocal style of the West) and highly ornate. It often involves very rapid articulation of notes and sometimes a tremolo back and forth between two notes or an ornamental vibrato on final notes. The call to prayer is declaimed in classical Arabic, in free rhythm, and each phrase is repeated several times. We shall listen to the first three phrases of this Turkish call to prayer. The full version includes five or six additional phrases of text.

Allahu akbar, Allahu akbar.  
*God is great, God is great.*

Ash-hadu anna alla ilaha ill’Allah.  
*I testify that there is no god but God.*

Ash-hadu anna Muhammadan rasul Allah.  
*I testify that Muhammad is the prophet of God.*
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Listening Sketch for Javanese Gamelan Music  Duration: 6:21
Gangsaran - Bima Kurda - Gangsaran

Gamelan music usually has picturesque or philosophical titles. In Javanese, Gangsaran means “achieving one’s purpose,” and Bima Kurda means “angry hero.”

This composition features metallic instruments—xylophones, bronze bowls, and gongs—but you will also hear at least two sizes of drum: a large bass drum and a medium-sized drum. Soon after the beginning, the music slows down for the main central section; it speeds up again toward the end.

While the music is being played, a stylized dance is performed by two men—a drillmaster and a soldier. They utter occasional shouts and laughter, and twice they speak a ritual dialogue:

**DRILLMASTER:** Orang dua-dua!  Hey you!
**SOLDIER:** Yaaah!  Yes sir!

**DRILLMASTER:** Apa kita berani temen?  Are you really brave?
**SOLDIER:** Yaaah, berani temen!  Yes sir, I am!

**DRILLMASTER:** Haah, serobah!  Then carry on!
**SOLDIER:** Inggih djadhaaaak, sendika!  Yes, teacher, I obey! (laughs)

**GANGSARAN**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>CD</th>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>LISTEN FOR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 (3)</td>
<td>0:00</td>
<td>Regular rhythms, same note repeated.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0:26</td>
<td>Music slows down.</td>
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**BIMA KURDA**

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<tr>
<td>4 (4)</td>
<td>0:40</td>
<td>Melody gathers interest, more notes are heard.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0:55</td>
<td>Rhythm and melody become steady. Long section.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2:35</td>
<td>Beginning of dialogue.</td>
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<td>2:57</td>
<td>Quiet section. Occasional shouts and laughter.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4:20</td>
<td>Louder.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4:36</td>
<td>Music gets faster again.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5:18</td>
<td>Repeat of dialogue.</td>
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**GANGSARAN**

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<tr>
<td>5 (5)</td>
<td>5:32</td>
<td>Return of music from the opening section.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6:15</td>
<td>Abrupt ending.</td>
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Listening Sketch for Mbira Music
“Mandarendare” (A Place Full of Energy)

Duration: 5:32

For the Shona, a people who make up most of the population of Zimbabwe and extend also into Mozambique, mbira music is mystical music that is used to communicate with the spirits of ancestors and guardians of the tribe. “Mandarendare” (“A place full of energy”) is usually played at a dawn ceremony. The performer on this recording, Forward Kwenda, has been involved in keeping alive the musical traditions of the Shona people since he was a young boy. He says, “When I pick up my mbira, I don’t know what is going to happen. The music goes by itself. It is so much greater than a human being can understand.”

Although it sounds as though more than one person were playing on this piece, there is only one performer. Three distinct layers of sound can be detected: a deep, regular pattern in the bass and two interlocking lines above it. Although at first there seems to be constant repetition, careful listening will reveal slow, but constant, change. The tone quality is unusual; the notes are surrounded with a hiss or buzz that sounds to our ears like a sonic distortion. This hiss, which adds depth and complexity to the sound, is considered an essential element in mbira playing.