

Koto Music (Program Text)

The *koto* is considered the national musical instrument of Japan. It is a type of long wooden zither with 13 strings that are plucked with fingerpicks worn on the right hand, while the left hand presses strings to alter the pitch. String instruments that eventually evolved into the modern *koto* were introduced to Japan from mainland Asia over 1,300 years ago. For many centuries, *koto* was played during performances at the emperor's court, and it was praised in classical literature for its romantic sound. In the Edo period (1603–1867), the *koto* repertoire expanded substantially, and two major schools were founded: the Ikuta school in Kyoto and the Yamada school in Tokyo. Both remain active today.

As part of this program, *koto* musicians of the Ikuta school play three pieces: *Midare* (Turbulence), *Haru no kyoku* (Ode to Spring) or *Chidori no kyoku* (Song of the Plover) depending on the season, and *Sakura sakura*, a popular tune about spring cherry blossoms.