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Journal
Selected Reports, Institute of Ethnomusicology, UCLA, 1(2)

Author
Garfias, R

Publication Date
1965

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The Sacred Mi-Kagura of the Japanese Imperial Court

Robert Garfias

The musicians attached to the Music Department of the Japanese Imperial Household are responsible for the performance of many kinds of music: Western music for the Emperor's banquets, the various types of court music, *Gagaku* for ceremonial events as well for some secular performances. The large group of songs used in connection with the sacred Shinto *Mi-Kagura* ceremony are regarded by these musicians as the most important aspect of their tradition. Yet they are perhaps the type of Gagaku least known outside the court.

The term Kagura is widely used throughout Japan in reference to music employed in connection with the Shintoism. The etymology of the word is unclear. In ancient Japanese it seems to have meant "place of the gods, "or "seat of the gods." Like many other native Japanese words, Kagura came to be written with Chinese characters the meanings of which differed from the original Japanese. In this case the Chinese characters employed mean "Music of the Gods."

The Chinese and Korean musical styles that were introduced into Japan with Buddhism beginning in the fifth century A. D. exerted some influence on Shinto music. Court life in Japan of the sixth to the twelfth centuries and the complex system of instrumental music which it required and supported were indeed based on Chinese patterns. The vocal music, however, and in particular those songs used in connection with Shinto ritual, followed the irregular phrase and rhythmic patterns of Japanese poetry. Two separate governmentally established departments of music and dance existed, one for the practice and performance of foreign instrumental music, the other for the practice and performance of Japanese vocal music.

Although many kinds of music are known as "Kagura," only the Kagura used by the court musicians in connection with the Mi-Kagura ceremony has a long history of continuous performance, making it the oldest autochthonous tradition in Japan. We can be certain that the tradition has been continuous, but not that it has remained unchanged. The Kagura songs seem to have been established in the early eleventh century at the old capital city of Heian, now called Kyoto. Most of the songs were new compositions though some may have been incorporations of earlier Shinto ritual music and others were adaptations from the large number of folk songs that were then very popular at court. From the time of its inception, the Mi-Kagura ceremony was performed by the court nobles, often including the Emperor himself, and the highest ranking of the professional guild families of musicians, the Ono clan. Later, when wind instruments were added to the performance, other court musicians from the Kyoto families were required to perform. The Abe family supplied the *hichiriki* player and the Yamanoii family or the Toyohara family supplied the *fue* player. Performance of the Mi-Kagura seems to have always been an event of great solemnity held far from the populace within the walls of the old palace in Kyoto. In modern times when the capital was moved to Tokyo, Emperor Meiji requested the Imperial Court musicians to continue the Mi-Kagura performances without his participation and without that of the court nobles. Whereas in former times only the Kyoto musicians performed the Kagura, today they are joined by the Osaka and Nara families of musicians and all three groups perform as a unit, the Court Musicians of the Tokyo Imperial Palace. Although his presence is no longer required, the emperor must, on the night of a Kagura performance, await a signal from his chamberlain informing him that the ceremony is completed before he is allowed to retire.

From the late eleventh century during the reign of Emperor Shirakawa annual performances of the Mi-Kagura ceremony have been held in mid-December. During the Onin war, which ravaged the capital city of Kyoto from 1467 to 1469, it is recorded that all the eligible members of the Abe family were either killed or fled the city. Rather than mar the perfection of the Mi-Kagura by the absence of a hichiriki player, a court musician from one of the Togi families of the Osaka branch of musicians was employed. The Abe family, as were all the Kyoto musicians, were accorded the honor of being regarded as native Japanese and therefore had the rank of *ason.* The Osaka musicians traced their lineage back to Chinese musicians and were classified as naturalized Japanese with the lower rank of *sukune.* But because of the special requirements of performing the Mi-Kagura ceremony, that one branch of the Togi family of Osaka musicians which was called for this emergency duty was thereafter given the rank of ason. This illustrates the importance that was given to the continued performance of the Mi-Kagura as well as the status of the musicians who performed it.

From the time of its establishment the Mi-Kagura was conceived as something different from the usual Shinto festival or ritual. Unlike other Shinto events this one did not require a large number of priests in attendance and the attendance of the laity was strictly forbidden. The main exponents of the ceremony were the musicians; when the Emperor and nobles participated, they did so as singers and musicians. The ceremony was in essence a ritual performance of music solely for the entertainment of the gods. As is the case with a large number of Shinto musical performances, the Mi-Kagura also symbolizes the well-known “dance before the cave” that occurred in mythical times. The story is perhaps important enough to bear one more repetition. The sun-goddess, Amaterasu-no-omikami, angered at the pranks of her brother, Susanoo-no-omikoto, sealed herself in a cave and the plain of high heaven was cast into darkness. The myriad gods of high heaven in great consternation called forth Ama-no-Uzume-no-Mikoto and she garlanded herself with branches of the *sakaki* bush and performed an erotic dance on an upturned tub singing, “Are not my charms all-powerful?” The gods laughed uproariously while the sun-goddess wondered at the merriment taking place in her absence. Meanwhile, a huge mirror had been placed before the cave door and when the goddess peered out in curiosity, she was fascinated by the brilliance of her own countenance and was easily led out.

The oldest known work in Japanese literature, the *Kojiki* gives the original version of this story and also includes several other versions, all basically similar. Recent archaeological discoveries have led some Japanese scholars to interpret the story as an illustration of the practice of cave burial by the early Japanese; the particular events related in the *Kojiki* might seem to describe the discovery of a premature burial. Putting such speculations aside, direct relationships to the present Mi-Kagura as performed by the Imperial Court Musicians can be noted in the use of the sakaki bush, which is now considered a sacred adjunct to all Shinto ritual, the use of the sacred Mirror, and the practice of attempting to entertain the gods with songs of a secular and even ribald nature.

The Mi-Kagura is performed annually in the Imperial Court on the night of the fifteenth of December. The Kagura songs form the center of most ceremonial music in the court, portions of which are employed, sometimes in modified form, for the anniversaries of the legendary first Emperor of Japan, Emperor Jimmu, and of the father of the present Emperor, Emperor Taisho; for such big Shinto court festivals as the Chinkonsai and the Shinjosai; or in connection with a coronation ceremony. In each of the latter instances this music is an adjunct to the ceremony whereas on the fifteenth of December the performance is the sole reason for the ceremony and therefore is given in its most complete form.

In early times the performance was held in the garden of white gravel in the inner palace in the ancient city of Kyoto, but more recently it has been transferred to the garden of the three sacred shrines in the Tokyo Imperial Palace: Each of these shrines is an elevated building in the gravel garden. In front of the central shrine, called the Kashikodokoro or Kensho, there is a small rectangular structure that consists of a thatched roof and plain cypress pillars standing on the gravel. Around these pillars is wrapped a thickly striped black and white curtain, called the *kujira-maku* "whale curtain," because the stripes resemble the skin and fat of a whale. The curtain covers three sides of the structure and only the side facing the shrine remains open. At the open end of the hut is a fire, called *Niwabi* "garden fire," contained in a metal basket on a metal tripod. The only person not one of the musicians who is allowed to observe the ceremony is the keeper of the niwabi, whose responsibility is to maintain the fire until dawn. Two long rafts of rush are placed along the sides of the inner part of the hut and on these the twenty-four musicians of today's court are seated according to seniority. They are divided into two groups, *moto-kata* and *sue-kata.* The ceremonies are under the direction of another of the musicians, called the *ninjo* who sits in the hut at the end farther from the altar. If the Emperor is present he wears a black robe; the highest ranking musicians wear red robes and the regular musicians wear blue robes, all patterned after the costume of the court nobles of the Heian period. Only the ninjo wears a pure white robe.

The tonal texture of the Kagura performance is thin. The entire repertory can be thought of as a series of songs separated by short instrumental interludes. The human voice, therefore, dominates the form and even the accompanying wind instruments emulate the vocal melody and style. The musical elements of the Kagura style may be divided into three: melodic, the main group, which consists of the voice, or voices, with two wind instruments, the fue and the hichiriki; abstracting and emphasizing of important tones of the vocal line, executed by the string instrument of the ensemble, the *Wagon;* and metrical punctuation, supplied by two pairs of wooden clappers.

The Kagura songs as well as the musicians who are to perform the ceremony are divided into two groups that are called *moto-uta* and *sue-uta.* These terms may be translated as "main song" and "after song." The designation refers to the antiphonal character of all the songs. Each of the two groups has a leading singer, called the *moto-byoshi* or the *sue-byoshi.* These leading singers also punctuate the phrases of the song with the wooden clappers called *shakubyoshi.* The most usual format for the performance of a song is as follows: after a sharp clap of the shakubyoshi, the moto-byoshi sings the first phrase of the song accompanied by the shakubyoshi joined sometimes by the wagon. This solo often consists of only- one word of the text but, because of the slow melismatic character of the Kagura songs, it may last up to a minute in duration. Following the solo section of the moto-byoshi, the .entire chorus and the accompanying instruments join. After the song is completed the sue-byoshi sings the solo accompanying himself with the shakubyoshi and the chorus and accompanying instruments re-enter shortly afterward. The point at which the chorus and the instruments join the soloist is called the *tsukedokoro.* In most of the songs the moto-uta and the sue-uta differ in little other than the use of different texts and in melodic modifications necessitated by textual changes.

The Court Musicians describe the Kagura singing voice as the natural speaking voice with the addition of musical intonation and are rigorously opposed to all attempts at artificially beautifying-the voice, for example, by the addition of vibrato. Their own choice of best singers selects those men who have a natural resonance to their voices, who are precise in their execution of the ornaments, and whose style displays an even flow of unhurried elegance. No compensation is made for the natural limitations of the individual I s voice other than if he has a low voice, he should sing strongly in the lower registers and manage as best he c an with a soft falsetto in the highest registers. (Actually, the use of falsetto is proscribed in the tradition.) Conversely, those with high-pitched voices can do no better than manage a hoarse whisper in the lower register, but by no means is anyone allowed to stop during the performance.

All of the songs are in strict unison. The only exception to be found is the overlapping of entrances for the short interjection, *oke.* The strength of the unison voice is never allowed to be diluted by individual interpretation. In the teaching of the Kagura songs, infinite care is taken to insure that the student not only learns the melody and all its inflections and ornaments, but also that he learns to reproduce the most subtle elements of breathing, attack, and release used by his teacher. Although this teaching method could easily lead to mere rote imitation and lifeless, insipid interpretation, the arduous training emphasizes a quality of smoothness, and naturalness. The court musician as a student spends the entire ten years of his training period learning Kagura along, of course, with other aspects of the tradition. In spite of this rather long training period, no one is considered a musically mature singer until he has sung the Kagura for at least another twenty or thirty years.

The effect of the chorus is to amplify the volume of the voice rather than to create the sensation of several separate voices singing simultaneously, and the relationship of the accompanying instruments to the voice is, of course, highly prescribed. The wind instruments are the hichiriki and the *kagura-bue.* The kagura-bue is a transverse bamboo flute similar in construction to the *ryuteki* and komabue which are used in the instrumental forms of Gagaku. The kagura-bue, simply referred to as fue, is long and thin and consequently produces a low, soft tone. All releases and attacks of the fue are made as softly as possible. The player attempts to ease the air column into vibration by gradually increasing his air pressure. This same technique is applied to the execution of octave leaps. During the execution of the melody, accents on either sustained tones or on new pitches are not permitted. The fue follows the voice in unison but with the addiction of occasional characteristic embellishment and the omission of some of the vocal ornaments.

The hichiriki is a small double-reed pipe with seven finger-holes on the front and two thumb-holes on the back. The instrument is an inverse cone in construction; that is, the larger end of the pipe is the one into which the reed is placed. The special construction of this instrument with its Large bore, short length, and stubby reed allows it to play exclusively in the higher registers and to make extensive use of microtonal embellishments. Changes in air pressure and embouchure make it possible to adjust the pitch of the instrument to any of the Gagaku tone systems, whereas three different systems of fue must be used. Like the fue, the hichiriki always employs a soft release and attack and must never overbalance the voice. This requires great skill because the hichiriki usually employs the tonal intensity of a trumpet.

The wagon is a six-stringed zither approximately six feet in length, made of Paulownia wood. The bridges for the wagon are formed from the natural joints of maple. Each of the strings is made of thickly wound silk, giving the instrument a dry-tone of short duration. The player holds a plectrum in his right hand and makes rapid strokes across all the strings. With the left hand single strings are plucked individually or in stereotyped patterns. The most important function of the left hand is the damping of the strings. After they have been struck by the right hand the left hand covers all the strings in such a way as to allow only the string tuned to the imminent melody tone to continue resonating. In spite of the very faint tone of the wagon, it is to these undampened strings that the singers adjust their intonation.

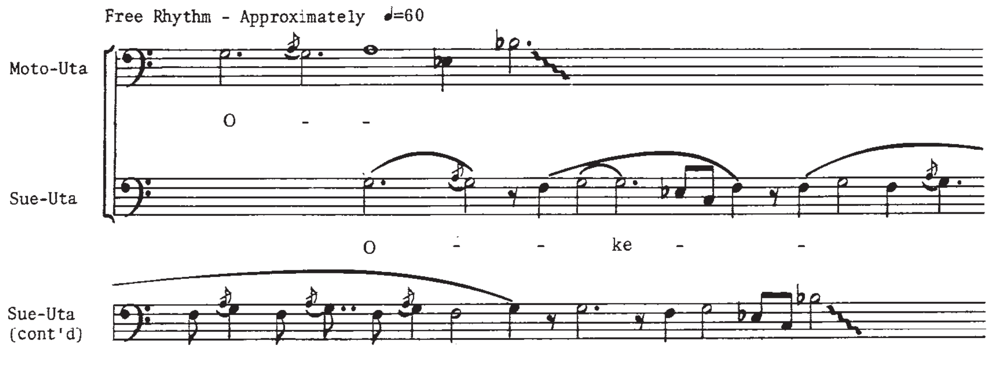
The last of the instruments is the shakubyoshi, a pair of hard wood clappers. The main singers mark out the metrical patterns of the text with these clappers. During sections sung by the chorus, the moto-byoshi and the sue-byoshi strike the clappers at a slightly staggered interval.

Old collections of notation for the Kagura songs list as many as forty-one or forty-two songs. Today the Imperial Court Musicians perform only about fifteen of these. Present performance of the complete cycle lasts about seven hours, always beginning at twilight. Traditionally, the performance should last from twilight until the following dawn, but with each generation the performance tempi employed by the court musicians is becoming faster with the consequent shortening of the duration of the ceremony. The songs can be divided into six groups, according to content and structure. These are, in order of performance: *Niwabi* and *Torimono,* which form the ceremonial part of the Mi-Kagura, *Kosaibari, Zoka, Hoshi, Asakura,* and *Sonokoma,* all of which form the second part of the performance and are intended for the entertainment of the gods. With the exception of the two intermissions, the songs are sung without pause and with a gradual increase in speed. However, the entire tempo of the Mi-Kagura even in the faster tempos of today always has a quality that is sedate and effortless.

At the start of the Mi-Kagura night, the ninjo ascends the steps of the shrine and receives .the branch of the sacred sakaki to which is attached the ring or hoop made of stiff, wound paper which represents the sacred mirror. The ninjo then returns to the hut. At first only the fue player and the hichiriki player enter. Each plays the *kagura-netori* separately. These are short preludes of fixed form intended for instrumentalists to warm up on their instruments and to establish the main tones of the mode to follow. After the netori, the musicians leave the hut and the ninjo also performs the opening ceremony before the gods. The secret ceremony over, the ninjo calls in separately the fue player and the hichiriki player, each of whom plays the long prelude called *Niwabi* "Garden Fire." The wagon player is also called in to playa solo. The fue and hichiriki then play a short duet, after which the moto-byoshi enters and sings the first song, a solo called *Niwabi,* accompanied by the wagon.

The sue-byoshi then enters and sings the same Niwabi song. This much of the ceremony, usually called "niwabi," lasts about two hours. After the "niwabi," the musicians re-enter and the fue plays another short prelude. The moto-byoshi and the sue-byoshi alternate in a series of short intoned interjections known as *ajime-saho* and *oke.* Both of these interjections are sung on what are now meaningless syllables; the ajime-saho is on what are thought to be the words spoken by the gods when the sun-goddess came out of the cave. Both the ajime and the oke employ a long downward glissando on phrase endings. Oke, in general, makes fuller use of the melodic patterns heard in the regular Kagura songs. Together and separately the ajime and oke interjections appear five times throughout the cycle. Here the entrance of the sue-byoshi overlaps the end of the moto-byoshi phrase, forming the only example of what might be termed two-part singing in the repertory.

Ex. 1



In the example an asterisk beside a single tone indicated in the manner of a grace note signifies the tsuku, an accent that must always be made in performance; when a series of such notes are indicated in the transcription they refer to a special kind of accent that occurs in the performance of the yuru and are not executed with equal clarity by all the musicians.

The first song sung by the entire ensemble is *Sakaki,* of the *Torimono* group. The last section of this song is called *shiri-age* and is sung entirely in the highest register. There follows a short oke and a brief interlude in which the shakubyoshi is struck three times and between each stroke the wagon plays a short pattern. The entire ensemble sings the song *Karakami,* which is followed by *Haya-karakami,* to which the ninjo does a short solo dance. The last section of *Haya karakami* is also sung in the high register. A short ajime and oke follow bringing to a close the ceremonial section of the Mi-Kagura night.

Aside from the formal role of the ninjo in the first section of the Mi-Kagura, sub-division into a ceremonial part and a second part for the entertainment of the gods is concerned more with the nature of the song texts and their traditional classification than with any special aspects of the performance. Without devoting much detail to the performance order of the second section of the Mi-Kagura, some familiarity with the general order and content of all the songs will be helpful in the later discussion of the musical structure.

Ceremonial:

Niwabi:		Three instrumental solos and one song in two parts.
	Niwabi	
Torimono:		Sacred objects to be given to the Gods. Old collections of notation included such objects as swords, bows, spears, and bells. Today only *Sakaki* ("Sacred Branch") is sung.
	Sakaki *Karakami*	
	Haya-karakami	Danced by the ninjo

Entertainment:

Kosaibari:		An ancient song form intended to entertain the gods, as opposed to the ritual nature of the Torimono.
	Komomakura *Sazanami*	
Zoka:		Various songs.
	Senzai	Lyrical repetitions of the words "one thousand generations, ten thousand generations."
	Haya-uta	"Fast Song"
	Hata-uta age-byoshi	Sometimes danced by the ninjo. Similar in character to the ancient folk songs in the Gagaku repertory which are called Saibara.
Hoshi:		Songs for the morning star.

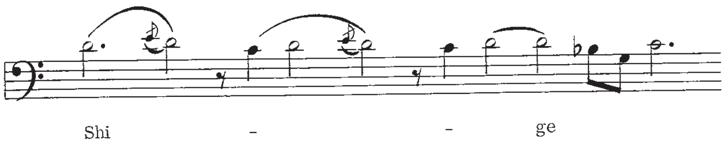
Kikiriri	
Tokuzeniko *Yutsukuri*	Has strong Buddhist elements in the text; Somewhat unusual melodic elements.
Three independent songs said to be derived from folk poetry	
Asakura	
Sonokoma, *Sonokoma age-byoshi*	Has two consecutive versions; the second is danced by the ninjo. All three. songs of this last group are sung in. high register and in fast *tempo* and mark “the ceremony’s end.

The entire repertory can be classified into four rhythmic types: songs in free rhythm with no metrical accents; songs in free rhythm with metrical accents; songs in strict regular rhythm with four beats to each metrical accent; and songs in strict regular rhythm with eight beats to each metrical accent. Only the opening niwabi song and some of the ajime-oke interjections are in the pure free rhythm. Rhythmic-type Two comprises the largest number of songs and the court musicians usually refer to this as the typical Kagura rhythm. The melody moves in the same manner as it does in the free rhythm song except that the shakubyoshi, clappers, play a series of metric accents that coincide with certain accented points in the text. These shakubyoshi strokes appear in the presentation as one strong accent followed by three weaker ones; in actual practice, however, no differentiation can be made between the strokes. The succession of strokes follows no strict pattern and the strokes are deliberately staggered with the voice entrances and melodic motion to heighten the free rhythmic effect.

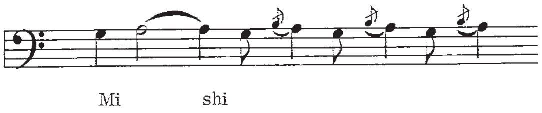
Of the two types of strict rhythm, three examples can be found in the repertory. Both rhythmic types employ the previously described shakubyoshi pattern, that is, one strong accent and-three weaker accents. In one type, which is represented by the songs *Haya-uta age-byoshi* and *Sonokoma age-byoshi,* the shakubyoshi strokes occur at four-beat intervals and in the other type, which is represented by the song *Haya-karakami,* the strokes are separated by eight beats. It will be noted that each of these songs in strict rhythm is preceded by a song of similar title which is set in free rhythm with metrical accents. Only in the case of the two Sonokoma songs can direct relationship between the melodic contour of the songs be found. The performance of paired compositions, the first in free rhythm and the second in strict rhythm, was very popular among the singers and musicians of the court during the Heian period (9th to 11th centuries). Many examples of such paired compositions can be found in collections of notation of the period, for instance, those for the *koto* and the biwa, the *Jinchi-Yoroku* and the *SangoYoroku.*

Unlike the instrumental forms of Japanese court music, all of which use tablature notation systems, the Kagura songs are notated in a special system known as *hakase* or *sumi-fu* which has long been in use for the notation of vocal music. The system was probably introduced with the notation of the early Buddhist singing known as *Shomyo.* and was later adapted to the vocal forms used by the court musicians. The words of the text are written syllabically from top to bottom. .At the left of each syllable appears a line that describes the contours of the melody. As is the case with many other notation systems in the Orient, much. is left to the performer’s memory. A simple descending line may signify a particular type of melisma, and in another case what appears to be the same line will be sung without any such ornamentation. The most obvious discrepancy lies between an angular line descending by even steps and its interpretation, which does not descend. but merely alternates a tone with its lower neighbor any number of times (see Ex. 2). The special techniques of the Kagura singing style are indicated in the hakase notation. A short wavy line indicates the *yuri,* a slow undulating alternation of a tone with its lower neighbor in gradually increasing tempo (see Ex. 3). Three is the usual number of alternations employed in the yuri although two are executed in the faster songs and in the slower sections up to six may be used. A small upward curve, or more rarely downward curve appearing in the middle of a line in the hakase, represents the *tsuku*_ a quick, accented introduction of the upper or lower neighbor (see Ex. 4). Although the notation system gives no indication of it, one of the fundamental requirements of Kagura singing style is that all attacks and entrances be approached with a quick slide up from an indeterminate pitch.

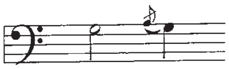
Ex. 2. "Shiriage" from Sakaki



Ex. 3. Karakami



Ex. 4.

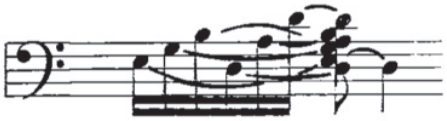


.Pitch indication, when it appears at all in the traditional notation, is given in the form of the names of the finger-holes of the fue or by use of the twelve tone names that were borrowed from the Chinese system used in the instrumental forms of Gagaku. Actually the Kagura songs are beyond the realm of Chinese theory; use of the tone-names is usually limited to the beginning of a phrase and the melodic contours are expected to suggest the succeeding tones.

The tradition of the court musicians recognizes in the Kagura a single mode with a fixed generating tone. In the Chinese theoretical system used by the Japanese court musicians this tone is designated *kyu* which means the “palace” and hence the central governing force. The term “kyu,” *kung* in Chinese, is often simply translated as the equivalent of the Western term, “tonic.” While the two concepts may share some common features it would be a serious mistake to assume that they are equivalent. Kyu of the Kagura songs is sounded by the fue fingerhole *kan* which is called *Ichikotsu* in the Gagaku twelve-tone system. Unlike other forms of court music, no instrument of fixed pitch (such as the mouth organ, *sho)* is employed to determine the pitch in the Kagura ensemble. In performance the fue player gives the pitch and the hichiriki and the singers tune to it as does the wagon player in adjusting the bridges of his instrument before the performance. A considerable degree of variation exists in the pitches used by the fue players and therefore the generating tone of the Kagura songs depends on the fue player who has been chosen for that night and on the instrument he chooses to play. A range of tones from 280 to 285 vibrations per second, near Western C-sharp, is usual for Ichikotsu; D is indicated in the examples herein.

Using the degree numbers produced by considering the fundamental heptatonic structure of the fue rather than attempting to translate all the theoretical degree names will facilitate discussion of the music. The fue intervals are of two types, one small, the other large. An ascent covering the range of one octave beginning from the lowest-used pitch of the fue, *kan* would produce the pattern, S L L L S L L. There is considerable variation in the exact size of these intervals and it is usually through the influence exerted by the leading singers of each performance that they are determined. The largest number of songs in the Kagura cycle have as finalis tone the fue note, kan, or Ichikotsu, thereby giving strength to the tradition that Ichikotsu is "kyu," or the prime. The structure of the Kagura netori as played both by the fue and by the hichiriki clearly places Ichikotsu as prime and gives strong secondary position to what would then be the fifth degree. The tuning of the wagon with two strings tuned to Ichikotsu means that this degree is sounded as a kind of drone each time there is a sweep across the strings.

Ex. 5.



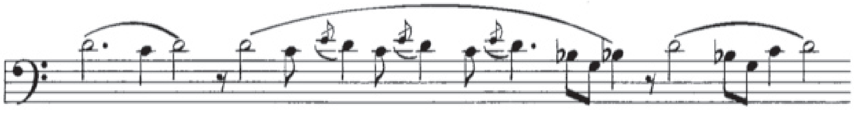
The court musicians have observed that at the Shinjosai, the festival of thanksgiving at which parts of the Kagura cycle are employed, before any music has been played the chief priest intones a short phrase, the pitch of which consistently coincides with the first tone of the fue Kagura netori, *Oshiki,* a fifth above Ichikotsu. This, the musicians are unable to explain other than by commenting that the exact pitch used for Kagura must have significance beyond the pitch of the fue.

Rather than to consider the tonal material of the songs in scale form it may be more efficacious to investigate the patterns of motion taken by the melody as they appear in the songs, putting aside for the moment descriptions of the tonal material in actual vibrations per second. Significant patterns of organization become apparent. The melodies seem to move in molecules of tone which shall for convenience be referred to as "registers." Each of these registers has a nuclear or generating tone. The function of each tone in the register is defined by its relationship to the nuclear tone. While the same tone may appear in more than one register, in each case it will have a different function.

Five such registers appear in the fifteen Kagura songs sung today by the Imperial Court Musicians. Within each of these registers the tonal material can be separated into strong degrees and subordinate degrees. Each type employs a special kind of inflection or ornamentation. The strong tones use the slow trill, yuri, and the ac*cent; tsuku,* The subordinate tones appear as part of short ornamental patterns, can be inflected microtonally, and use the accent, tsuku, only immediately before moving to a strong tone.

The high register has as generating tone the prime, which is also its only strong tone; there are four tones in this register and the remaining three are subordinate. The generating tone has a lower neighbor, the seventh degree, which serves as lower component in the yuri and is used as an alternating tone when the generating tone is sustained over a long period. The sixth degree is never used alone, but always in connection with the fourth degree in two different patterns: descending, 6 - 4 -6, etc; ascending, 6 - 4 - 7, very often followed by the generating tone, the prime.

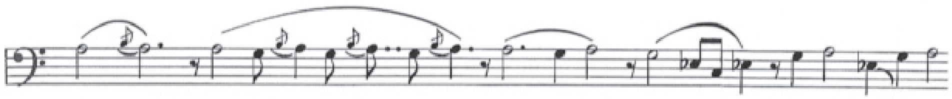
Ex. 6.



The high register is most often used as the dramatically high-pitched section that appears towards the end of many of the songs and is used almost exclusively in the last song of the cycle, *Sonokoma.* However, song-sections that begin in the high register end either on the lower fifth degree or on the prime one octave lower. The low register employs the same four tones that appear in the high register with the exception that in most cases the 6 - 4 - 6 pattern is simplified to 6 alone, which never occurs in the high register. The complete 6 - 4 - 6 pattern does tend to occur when the melody is descending below the low register.

The middle register generates-from the fifth degree and comprises five tones. The fifth degree is a strong tone and uses both yuri and tsuku, and when it is extended for a long period, it uses the lower neighbor, the fourth degree, as alternating tone. The fourth degree has a double function in that it serves as generating tone for the remaining degrees in the register. In this generating function the fourth degree and its subordinate tones form a perfect transposition, a fifth below, of the corresponding tones of the high register. Aside from the simple rising tendency of the fourth degree to the fifth degree there is a fixed ascending pattern, 4 - 5- - 2 - 4_- 5 (see Ex. 7). In long extensions of the fourth degree, the third degree is employed as alternating tone. No descending pattern generates directly from the fifth; all descending motion begins after moving down to the fourth degree. The fourth degree also makes use of the yuri technique but only when it has been clearly isolated from the fifth degree. The ascending and descending patterns on the fourth degree are transpositions of those used for the high register, a fifth higher.

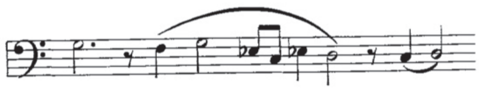
Ex. 7:



Beyond the high and low registers lie the extremes of the tonal system which shall be referred to as the highest and lowest registers. These lie an octave above and below the middle register. The highest register appears only once, in the high *shiri-age* section of the song *Sakaki.* In that instance only the third, fourth and second degrees are used and at that in the very unusual manner of a continuous extension of the high register. The lowest register is introduced several times as a separate register, but only in *Tokuzeniko.* of the Hoshi group are all of its five tones employed. The combination of all the five- registers gives the entire Kagura a range of two octaves and a fifth.

The broad tendency of the Kagura melodies is illustrated in the strong descending motion. With the exception of the above-mentioned shiri-age section of *Sakaki* there are no instances of one register ascending directly to that above it, but there are definite patterns that are consistently used for descending from one register to the next. In going from the middle register to the low register the pattern 4 - 3 - 4 - 7 - 2 - 7 - 1 - 7 - 1, is used.

Ex. 8:

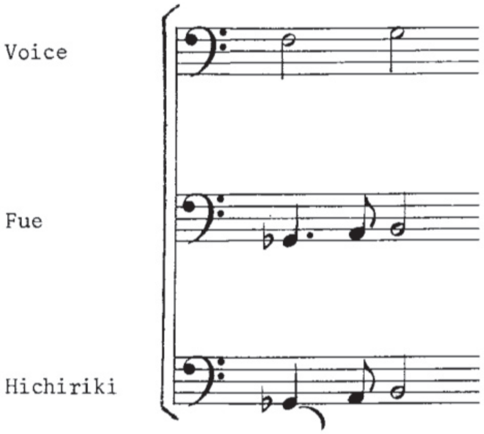


In moving down from the high register to the middle register the corresponding pattern 1 - 6 - 4 - 6 - 4 - 5 is used. This becomes simplified in the lower register to 7 - 1 - 6 - 5.

The assertion that the tonal material of the songs can be divided into five "registers" is based on two important observations. One, the melodies move in the four or five tones of one register without introducing any foreign tones until the complete descending pattern appears. Once the descending pattern has been introduced, the tones of the previous register are never re-introduced in the same phrase. Some compositions change register only once or twice throughout their length. The second observation concerns the fact that the melody can go from one register to a higher one only by beginning a new phrase after the lower pitched phrase has been resolved. The descending patterns serve to lead down from one register to another but the ascending patterns appear only as a means to return to the generating tone from lower tones within the same register.

The tonal material of the songs, then, may be thought of as a series of registers which in each octave comprise two identical structures placed a fifth apart and separated by a single tone, the fifth degree. In actual practice, however, the two structures are not the same. The 3 - 4 pattern and the yuri on the fourth degree in the middle register are made different from their counterparts a fifth lower by the addition of instrumental accompaniment. In accompanying the voice pattern 3 - 4, the fue plays 2 - 3 - 4 and the hichiriki plays an ornamental pattern, 3 - 2 - 4:

Ex. 9:



This discrepancy is more noticeable when applied to the yuri that alternates three with four. For the execution of the 3 - 4 yuri in the middle register, the wind instruments playa yuri on degree three going down by one small interval to the second degree. This makes the yuri of the winds one degree lower than that of the voice. The effect is startling when surrounded by the strict unison of the entire style (see Ex. 10, Appendix I).

The departure from the usual unison of the style is dictated by the special technical limitations of the wind instrument tradition. Hence, part of the clarity of definition of the Kagura tonal system is brought about by the enforced limitations of the winds. While the fue and hichiriki netori show the general downward tendency of the Kagura style, tonal function is much less clearly articulated there than in the vocal part and, in fact, the modal systems outlined by the instruments and the voices show marked differences. Although concentration in this study has been on the tonal system used in the Kagura, it is important to remember that the texts of the songs are given great emphasis. The fluid melodic style and loose formal structure of the songs help to highlight the text. The melodic material is, in fact, so uniform that except for the three “tuneful” songs in fixed rhythms, the entire cycle almost seems to be one continuous song with a changing text.

The relationship between melody and text is difficult to define because of the melismatic character of the singing. A single word may outline the entire basic movement of one of the main tonal registers. Example 10 (Appendix I), which is taken from the “tsukedokoro” of *Sakaki*_ consists entirely of two syllables, “ka wo, “ *ka* meaning fragrance and *wo* being a grammatical postposition indicating the objective case. In actual performance this would be preceded by the *moto-uta* phrase, “Sakaki ba no, “ and the words all together would mean “the fragrance of the leaves of the Sakaki tree.” By the end of the two syllables given in Example 10, the melody has clearly established the nature of the tonal register by extended alternation of the two highest tones, with occasional introduction of the lower supporting tones, and resolution on the lower strong tone at the end of the example.

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The “mota uta” of *Niwabi,* Example 11 (Appendix I), may serve as a clearer example. The entire example given is a part of a single line of the text, “Miyama ni wa arare furu-rashi.” Only “my a ni wa arare” is given in this example, the “miyama” having been condensed to “mya, “ which is now considered correct and standard by the court musicians. Even this short phrase is so long that it is further divided into two sections, “my a ni wa” and “arare,” and the sections are separated by a wagon solo. “Mya ni wa” begins in the middle register and remains there through the syllables “mya” and “ni.” The melodic phrase immediately following “ni,” which begins F, G, E-flat, C, E-flat, is a transitional phrase leading down to the next lower register. The remainder of the phrase through the syllable “wa” and until the wagon solo is in this register. The “arare” section follows very much the same structure except that it begins in a higher register.

Although each song is different in details, the general contour of *Niwabi* may be cited as typical. Usually not more than two registers are spanned within one melodic-textual unit. Two syllables are common before movement down to a lower register. In certain songs in which the moto-byoshi or sue-byoshi sings a solo before the other singers and instruments join in at the *tsukedokoro,* the ratio of melodic motion to text in the solo may lean slightly in favor of the text. Only at the beginning of a major phrase-division, which usually coincides with the introduction of a new register, does the syllable of the text appear in a strong melodic position. Within the course of a phrase, new syllables are usually introduced on already-stated pitches. This tends to give the text its own rhythm, since aside from the synchronized beginnings of phrases, text-rhythm is sensed only when the melody is at rest.

The formal structure of the songs, although rather loose, does show some interesting outlines. In this respect *Niwabi* is most interesting, although not necessarily characteristic of the other songs. In this piece, as throughout most of the repertory, the wagon plays a pattern called *suga-gaki,* which is made up of a combination of the strokes “zan,” “ji,” “oru,” and “tsumu.” “Zan” is produced by striking all of the strings and damping all except the third string, which produces Ichikotsu, D in the transcriptions. “Ji” is similar except that the fourth string is allowed to sound, rather than the third. “Oru” and “tsumu” are two different types ()patterns for plucking Individual strings. The suga-gaki pattern is “zan,” “zan,” “ji,” “zan;” “zan,” “ji,” “zan, “oru,” “zan,’” “tsumu,” “zan,” “zan,” “oru.” This pattern is repeated again and again throughout the piece.

The melodic line of *Niwabi* exactly parallels that of the wagon. Each complete statement of the suga-gaki pattern coincides with one large phrase-unit of the melody. This is surprising only because of the normally very loose relationship between the wagon part and the vocal line. There is no indication in *sumi-fu”* the vocal notation, of the placement of the wagon entrances. The wagon books merely indicate the syllable of the text which more or less locates the instrument’s entrance; and by tradition the relationship between the wagon and the vocal line is at most very loosely delineated: the singers and the wagon player know that approximately at the execution of this or that phrase, for example, the wagon should enter, a little early or late is apparently not important, for the songs here discussed are those in free rhythm.

The section of *Niwabi* I have transcribed includes the better part of two suga-gaki patterns; the second solo wagon playing of'" san" and "oru" has been omitted. Notice that in both the phrases included, the distance between the wagon figures varies. In the first half of the example, the first two "zan" figures are separated by approximately 22 beats, whereas in. the second half, after the wagon solo, the first two "zan" figures are separated by only three beats. What is most interesting is the fact that in each case in which a yuru, the slow undulating pattern, appears in the voice, the wagon accompanies it with the, oru pattern. The second oru pattern that occurs in the suga-gaki pattern always appears, with its preceding "zan," as a short wagon solo between phrases. The placement of the "oru" of wagon In regular support of the vocal yuru adds a layer of definition to the relationship between the two parts that is not readily apparent in the other songs. Thus *Niwabi* figures in the style as a kind of ideal formal structure. Although the example shown here covers only the first two melodic phrases of the moto-uta section, the remainder of the song tends to follow the same pattern.

The last example given in transcription, Example 12 (Appendix I), is also the final song in the Kagura cycle. s*onokoma-age-byoshi* follows *sonokoma* in free rhythm. Both songs show the same general melodic contour. At first glance *Sonokoma* in age byoshi, being set in a fixed rhythm, appears to have a type of .melodic motion quite different from that of the songs in free rhythm. On closer inspection, however, one notes that aside from the simple, clear, and angular quality of the entire song, many of the characteristics pointed out above in regard to the relationships between the rhythm of the. text and the melody, and in regard to the tonal relationships within each register, are here present also. The opening melody has a strong angular character owing to its repetitions of the C to D figure in the first three measures. After this first statement, however, that figure is not repeated; other C to D measures that appear in the course of the song are too strongly linked to a preceding D - B flat - A pattern -to be considered a repetition of the opening figure. What is perhaps most interesting about this song is the manner in which the voice is superimposed on the rhythmic pattern. Both the shaku byoshi and the wagon part indicate that the basic metric structure is of four measures' length. The first eight measures make up one textual phrase, "Sonokoma zo ya," "that pony." The second eight measures are with only slight variations two statements of the same melodic and textual material. With measure 17 new textual material is introduced; however, the melody at measures 17 and 18 is a direct continuation of the preceding material and the new melodic phrase does not begin until measure 19, two measures after the new line of the text. The next major textual and melodic sections appear at measure 26, and they begin together on the second-measure of the rhythmic cycle rather: than the first. The first major section of the song ends with a cadence at measure 36. At measure 37va new section begins, this time in the high register of the voice and with both text and vocal melody beginning at the first measure of the rhythmic cycle. The line "kusa wa tori" appears at measure 43; this is an exact repetition of what previously occurred at measure 26 but this time it happens on the third measure of the rhythmic cycle. This leads in the last four measures to a more extended cadence than the cadence that closed the first section (measures 33 to 36).

In *Sonokoma* the general characteristics of movement in Kagura tonal structure have been preserved despite the restrictions of a fixed regular meter. This is accomplished in part by the deliberate staggering of the melodic and textual lines against the regular rhythm. Also, although Sonokoma has a clearer melodic contour than the songs in free rhythm, the contrast between the two types is softened by the staggered phrase beginnings as well as by the use of rather homogeneous, melodic material. The two accompanying wind instruments, as in all the Kagura songs, slightly simplify .the vocal melody while at the same time adding special characteristics of their own. Sometimes these differences are owing to the tonal limitations of the winds and at other times they simply maintain the logic and orderliness of the individual lines, as for example the parallel fifths that occur in measure 28.

Therefore while it is true that the musical structure of the songs is complete in the vocal part alone, the style-as an entity is defined by the combination of the requirements of the vocal tradition with the separate tradition of the accompanying instruments. The fixed melodic patterns and the clearly delineated registers are indications of the secondary position of the melodic elements to those of the text. This is true of the entire cycle with the sale exception of the three songs in fixed regular meter in which the natural flow of the melody assumes prominence. Dominance of text over musical elements is, perhaps, the most important identifying characteristic of all Japanese vocal forms. Because the Kagura songs of the Imperial Court are the oldest vocal music tradition in. Japan, it is not illogical to assume that an understanding of their principles of construction may be important in the study of later forms of Japanese vocal music.

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On the following pages are music examples 10, 11, and 12. In the examples some attempt has been made to keep the vocal line and the two wind instrument parts rhythmically compatible. This is not feasible for the shakuby6shi and wagon parts and these two instruments have been indicated graphically by their placement on the page. There it is the general placement on the page of the shakubyoshi strokes and the final string of the wagon arpeggios that should indicate where it might most suitably appear in actual performance.

Below are text translations for the three examples. The texts are now a thousand years old and many variants have appeared; moreover, the versions used by the court musicians do not always agree with the standard literary versions. The translations given here should be regarded not as the result of careful literary research but merely as a means of suggesting something of the content of the originals.

Sakaki -Example 10

Sakaki ba no	The fragrant leaves
ki wo kaku	of the Sakaki tree
bashimi	when they are seen
Tome kureba	by the people of Yamato
yasoji bito zo	all shall be joyous
matoi seri keri	together

Niwabi [moto-uta] -Example 11

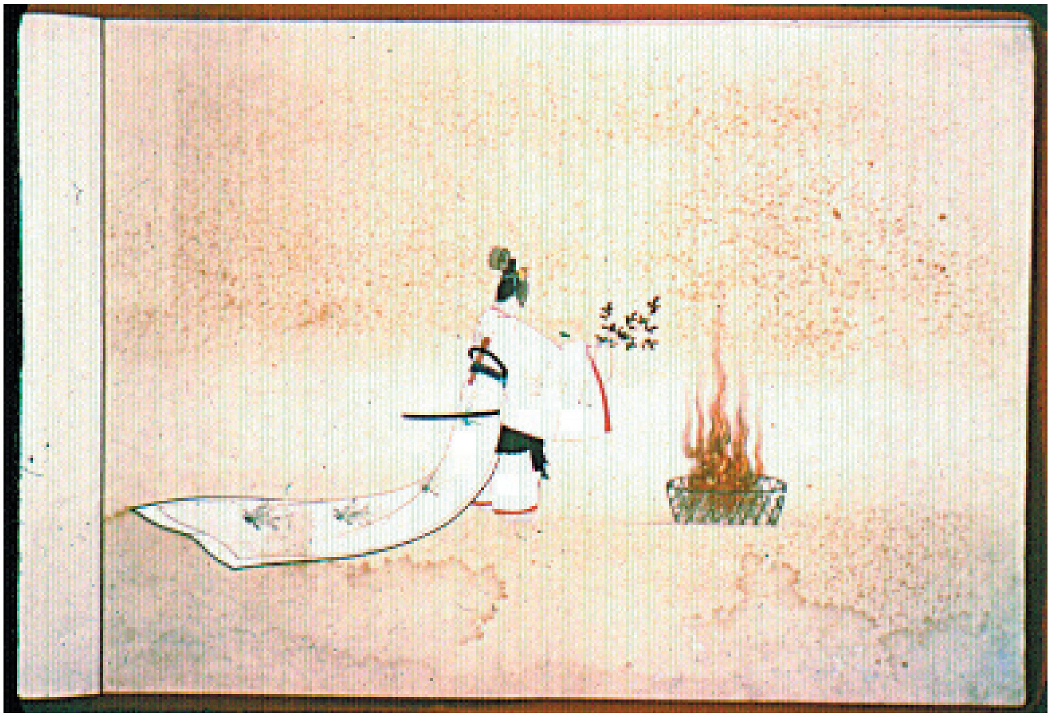
[moto-uta]
Miyama ni wa
arare furu rashi
to yama naru
[sue-uta]
Masaki no kazura
irozuki ni keri

Deep in the mountains
hail seems to fall
and on the last mountain
of the chain
the spindle tree runners
are beginning to color

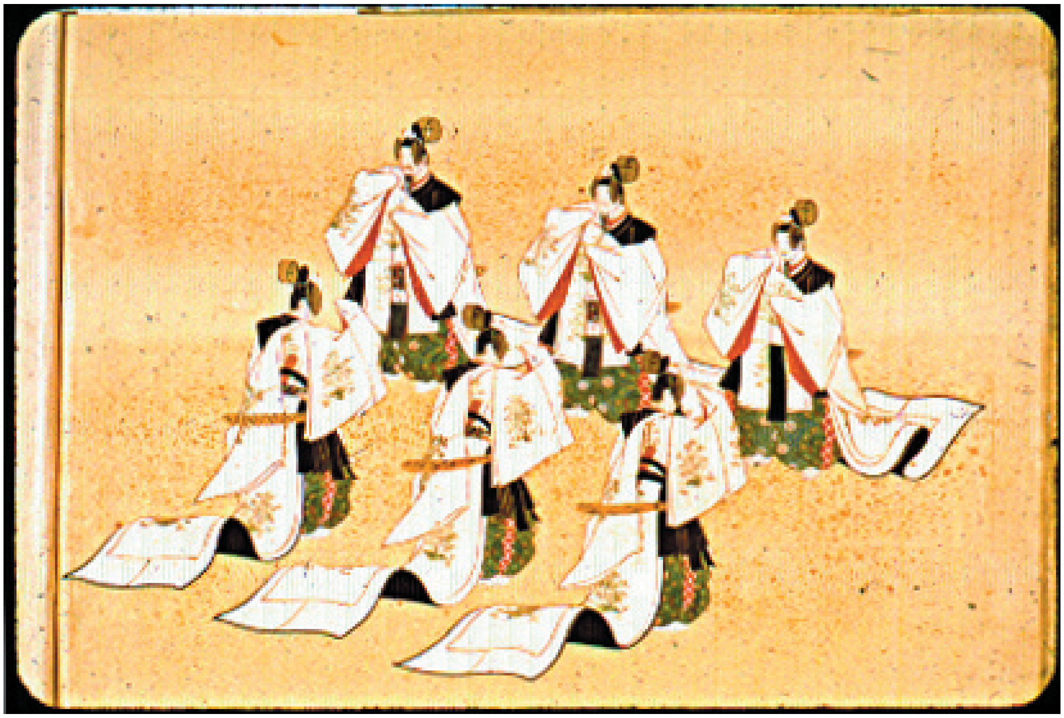
Sonokoma -Example 12

Sonokoma zo ya
ware ni, ware ni
kusa ko
kusa wa tori ka wan
mizu wa tori
kusa wa tori ka wan

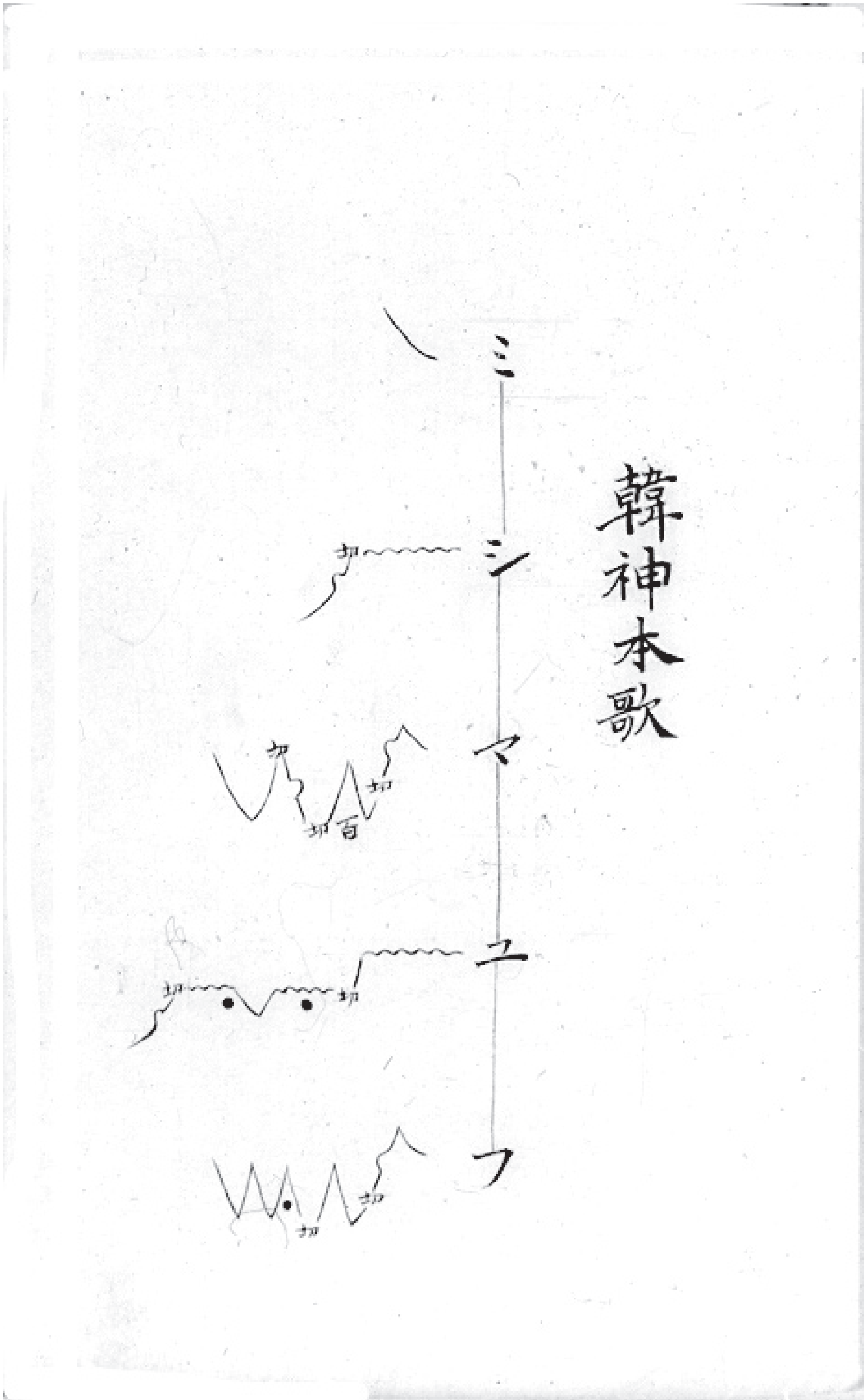
That pony
it asks me for grass
it asks me for water
I will give it grass
I will give it water



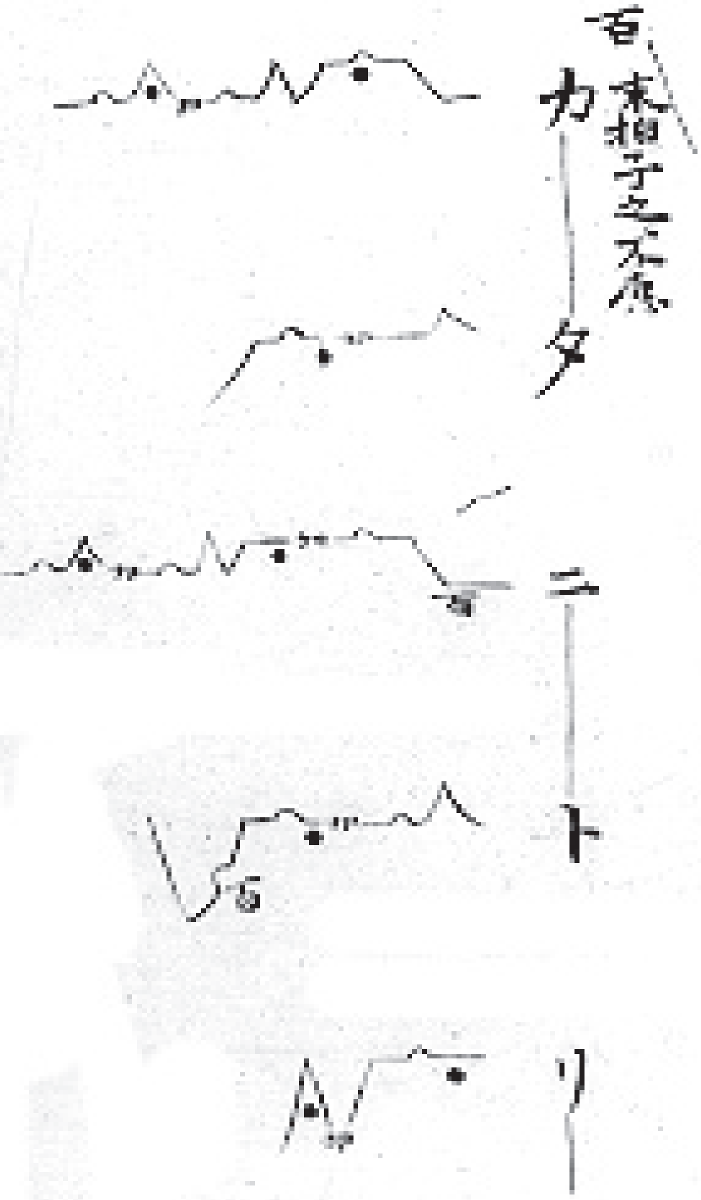
The Ninjo dances before the Niwabi.
From an 18th Century painting



Singers and instrumentalists in the Mikagura.
From an 18th Century painting

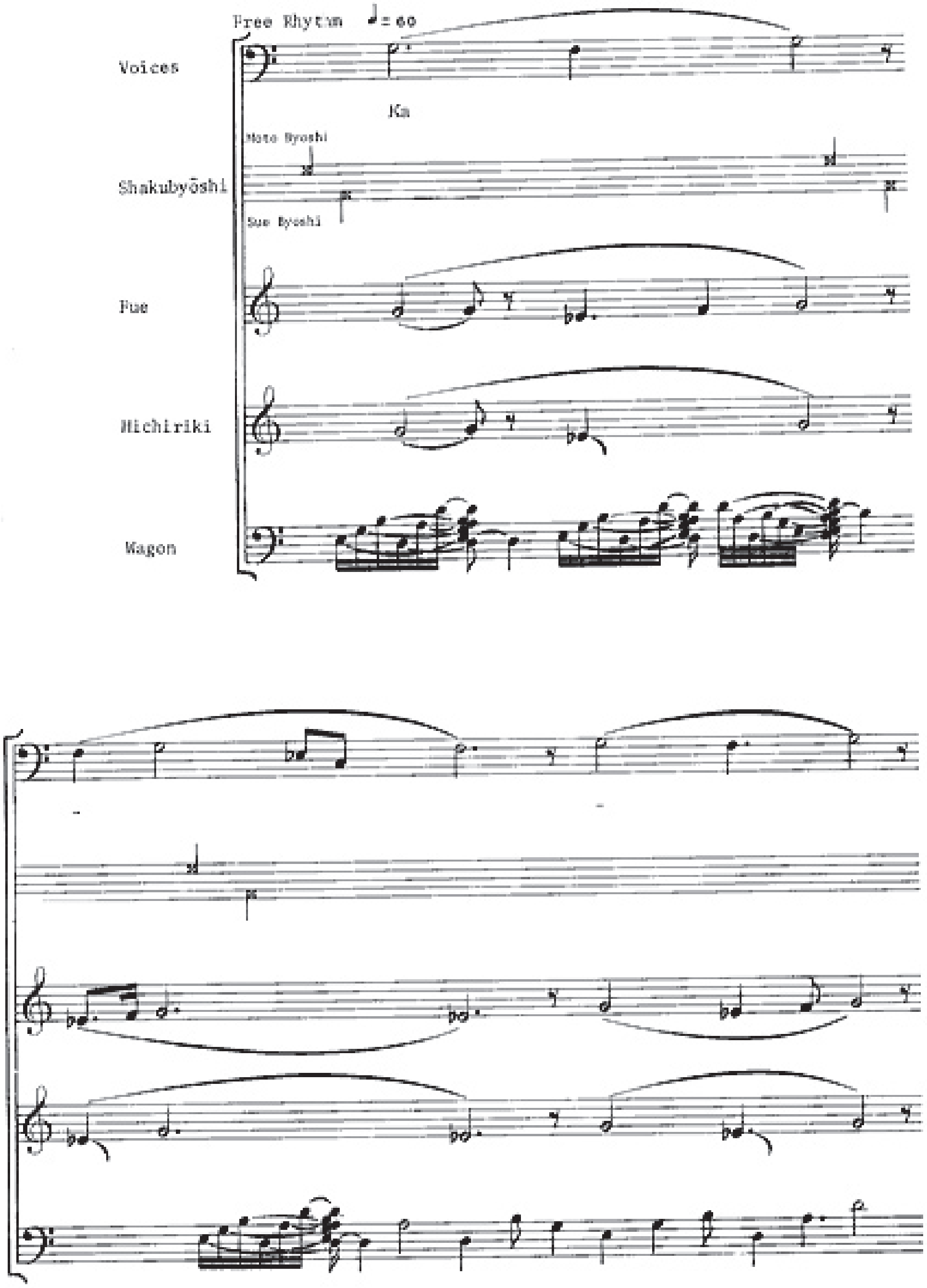

韓神本歌
ミ
シ
マ
ユ
フ
加
百

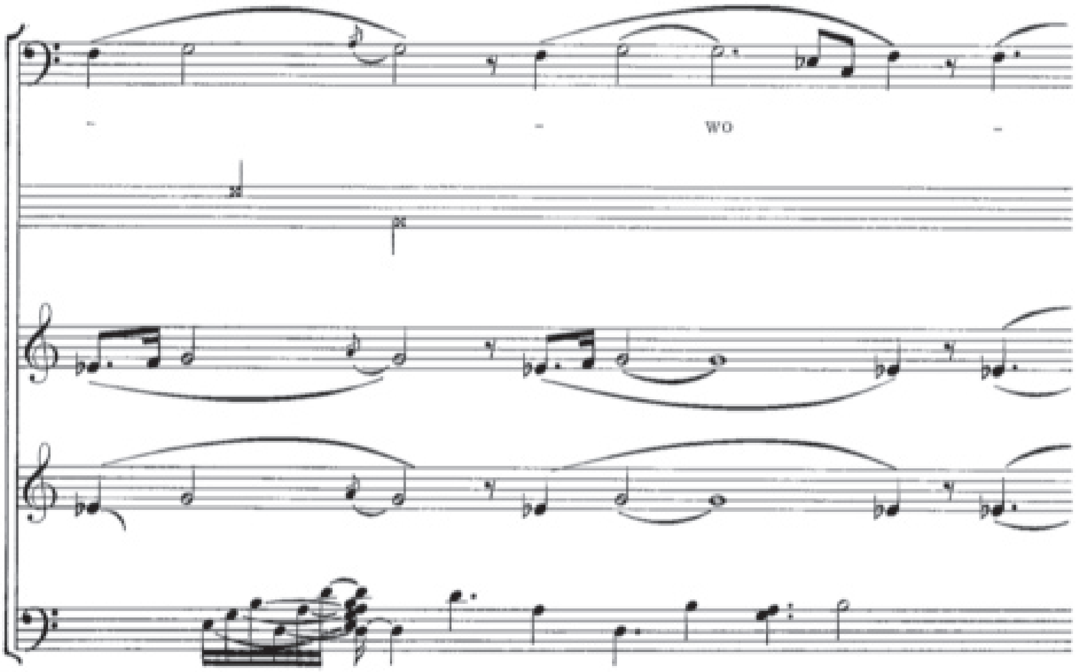
Traditional notation of Mi-kagura. From Karakami

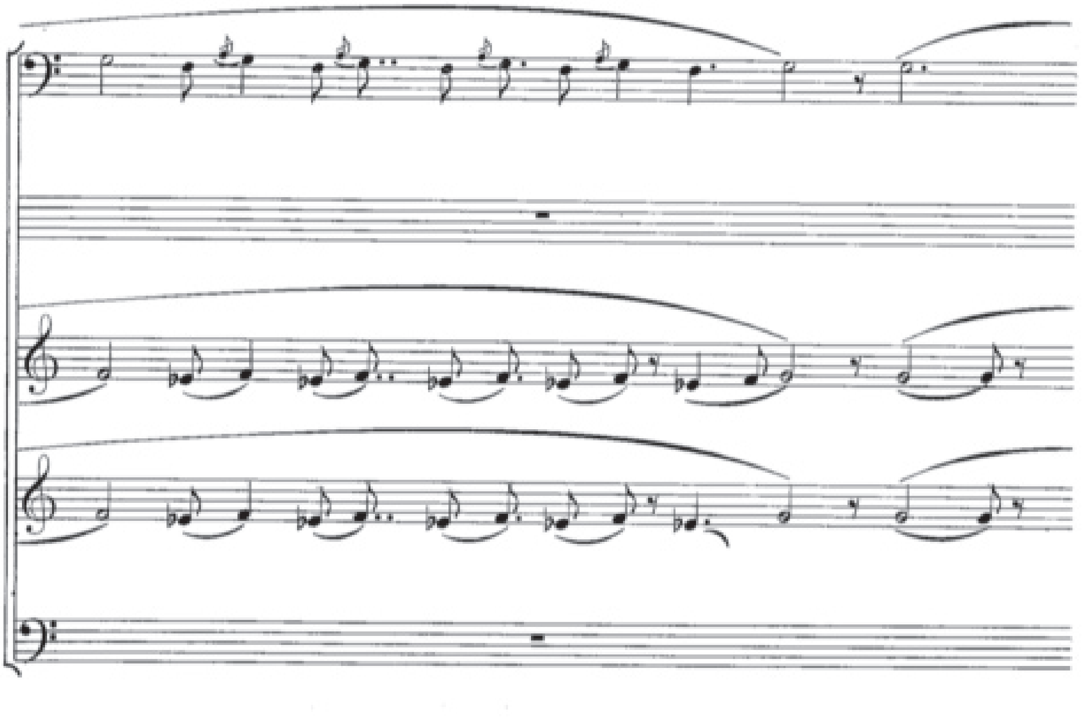

百
末相テ之不底
カ
タ
ニ
ト
リ

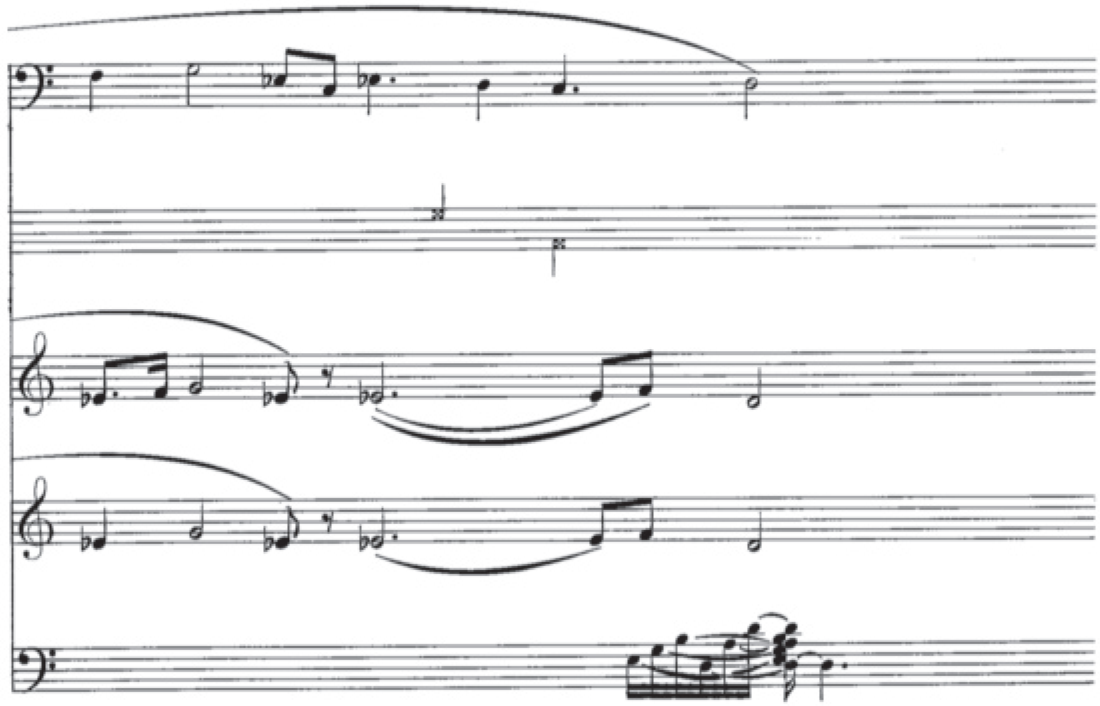
EXAMPLE 10

Sakaki - from Tsukedokoro


Free Rhythm ♩= 60
Voices
Ka
Moto Byoshi
Shakubyōshi
Sue Byoshi
Fue
Hichiriki
Wagon

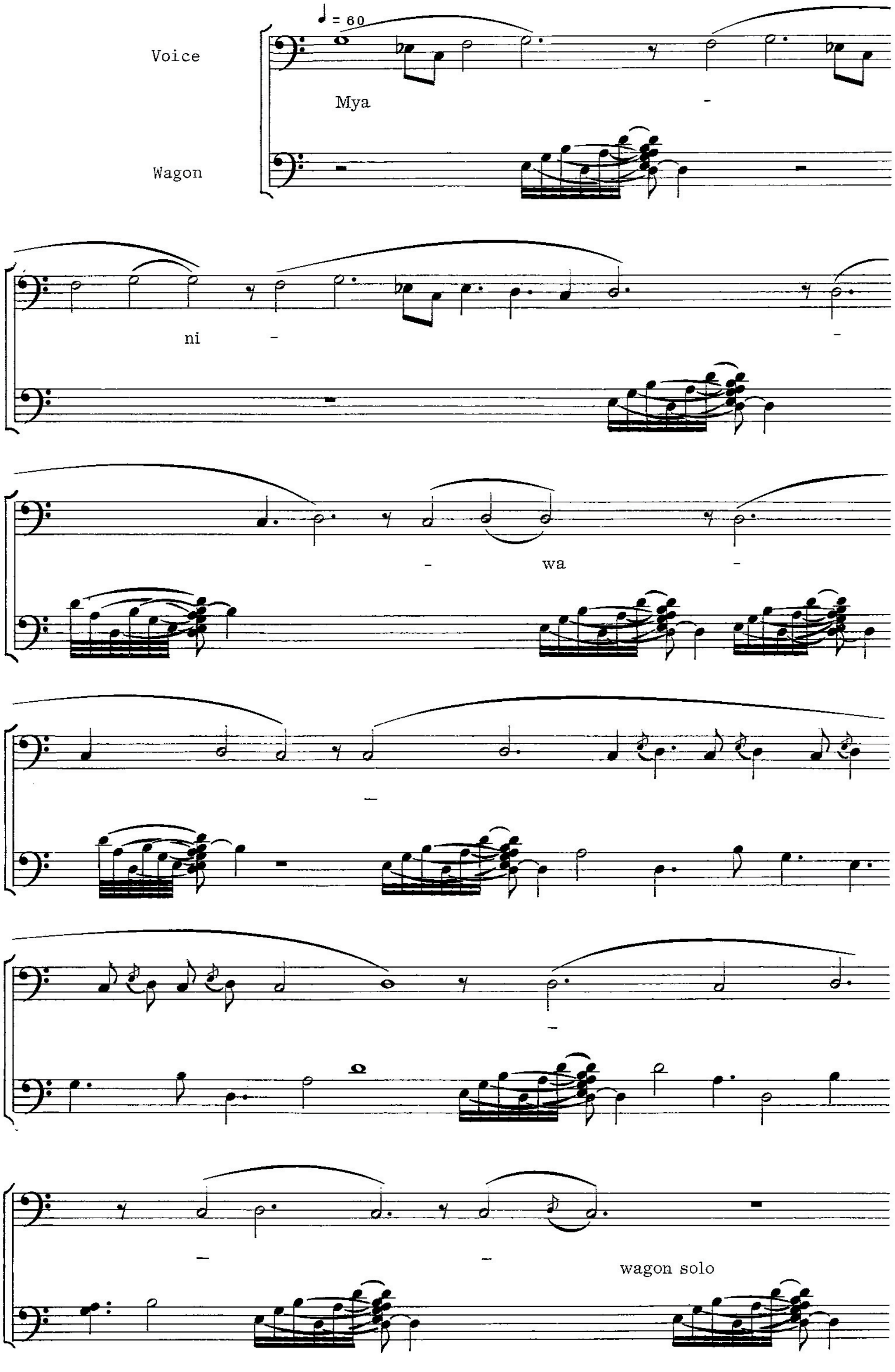

wo



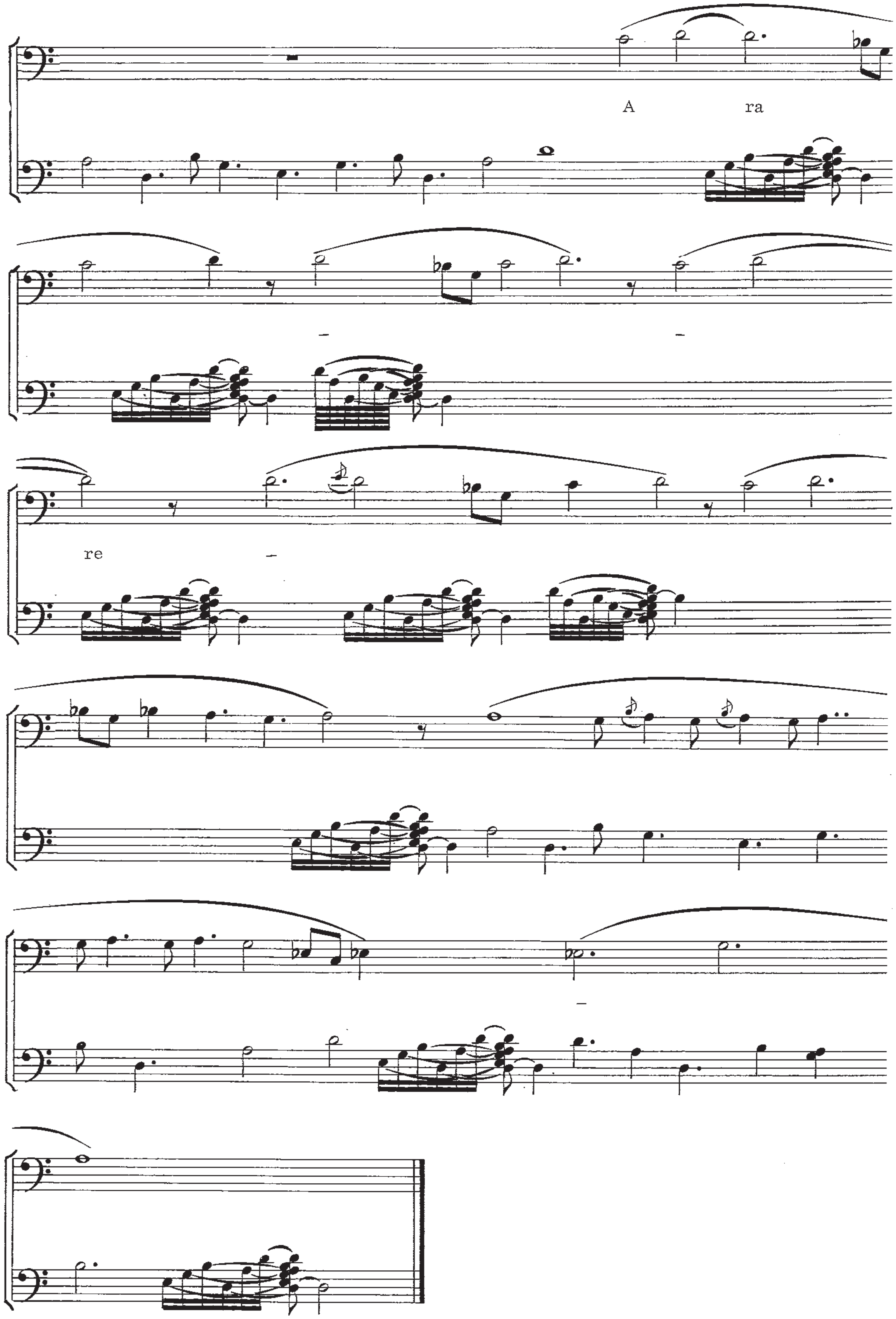


EXAMPLE 11

Niwabi - Moto Uta

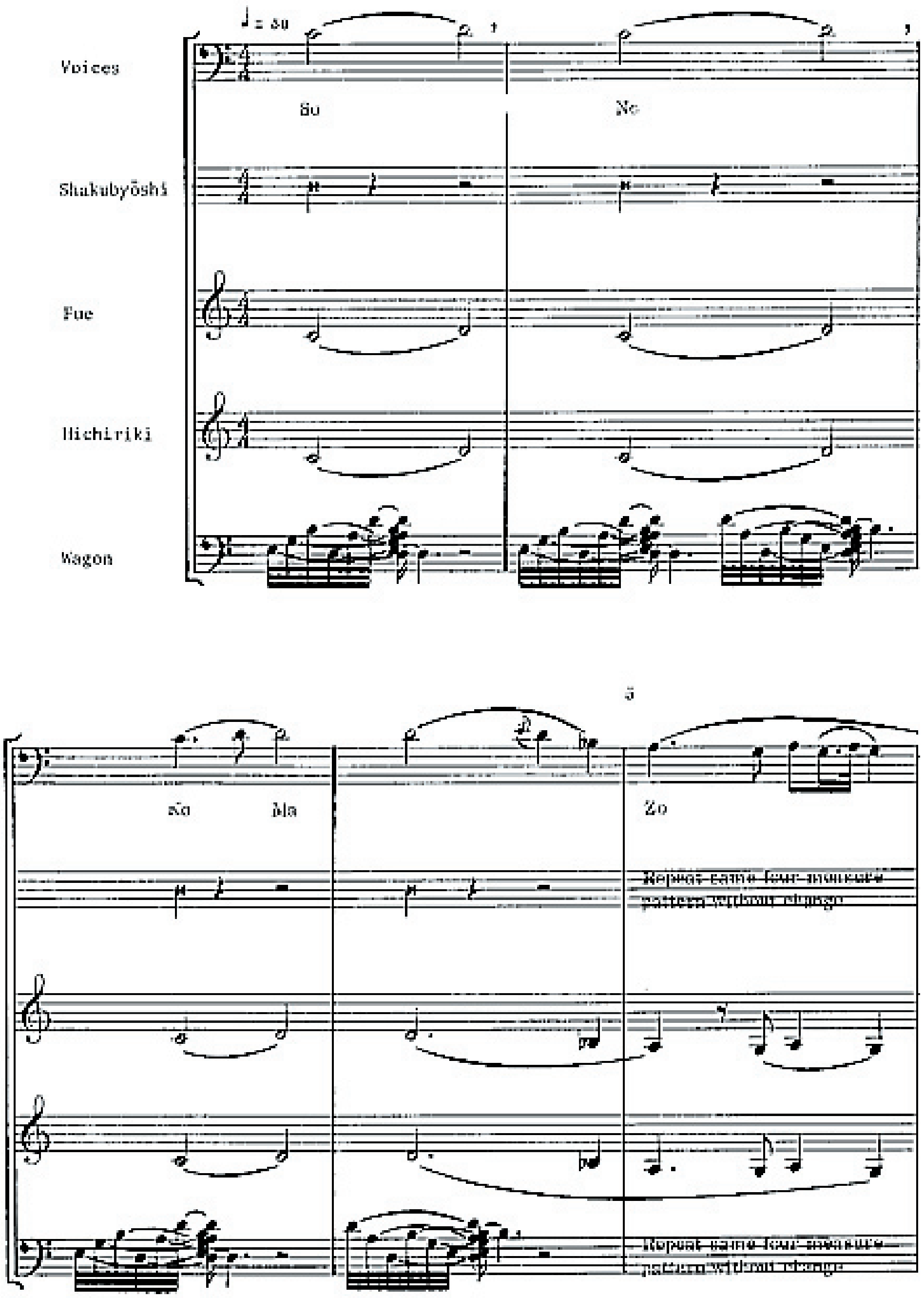


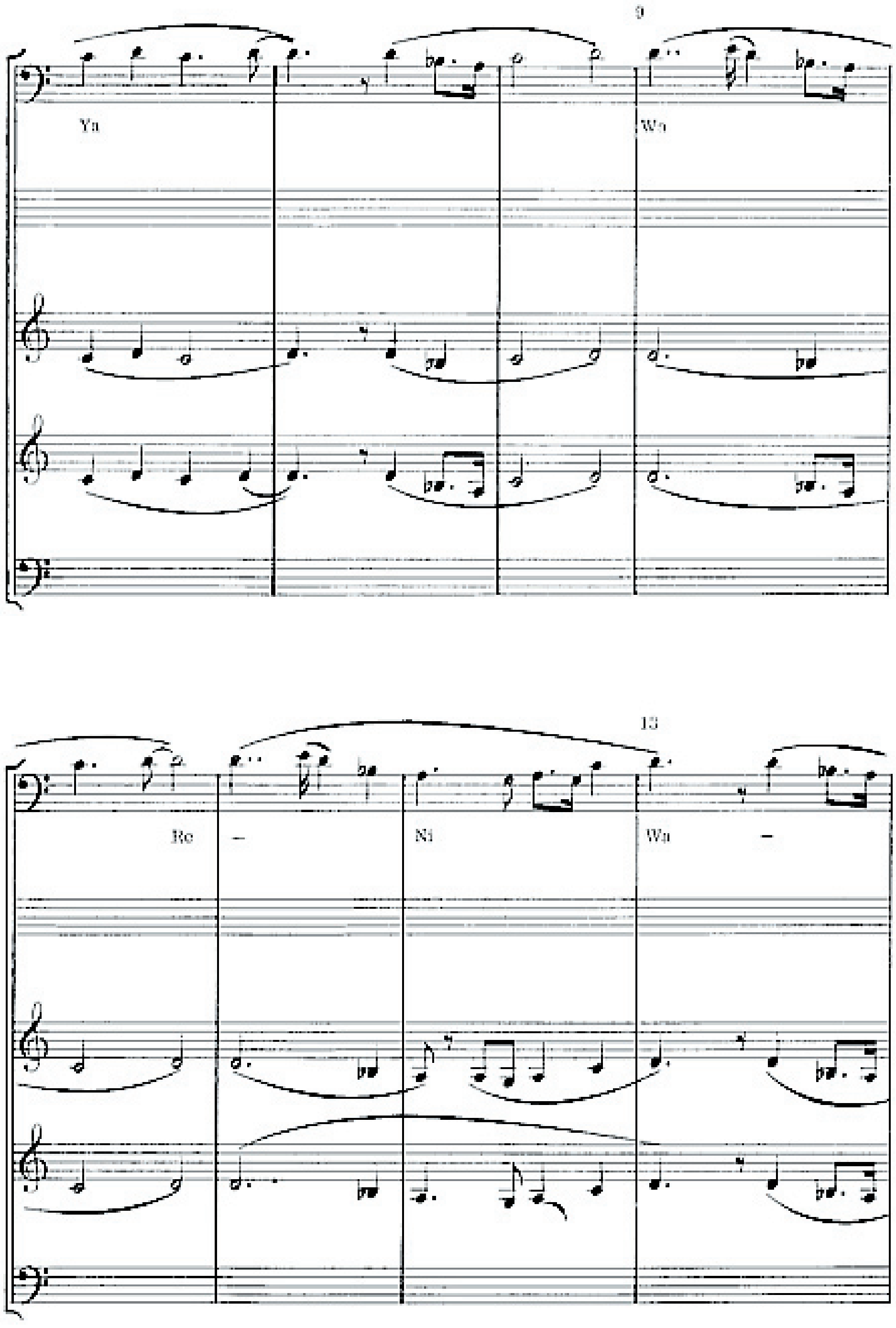
♩ = 60
Voice
Wagon
Mya
-
ni
-
-
wa
-
-
-
-
-
wagon solo

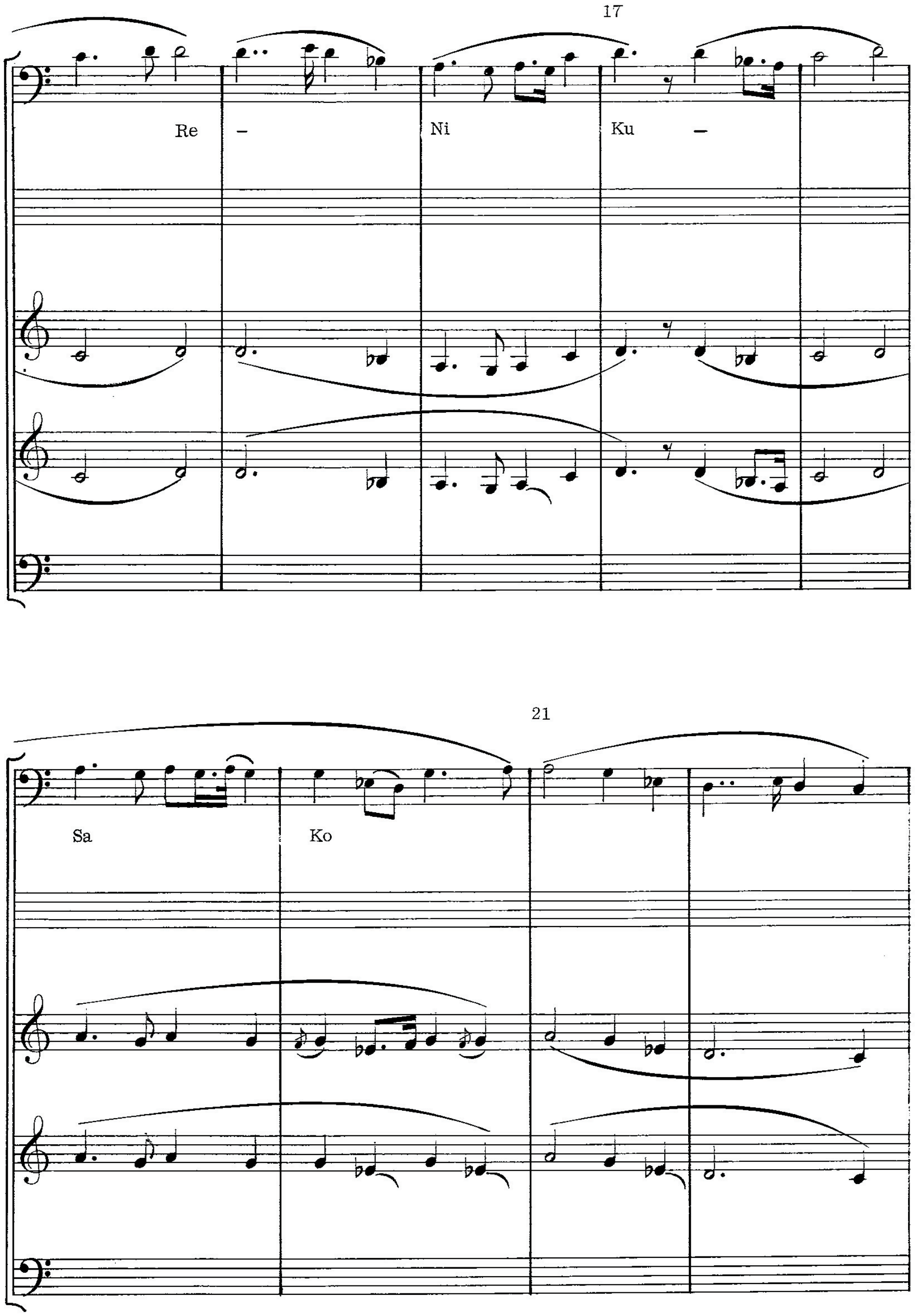

A
ra
–
–
re
–
–

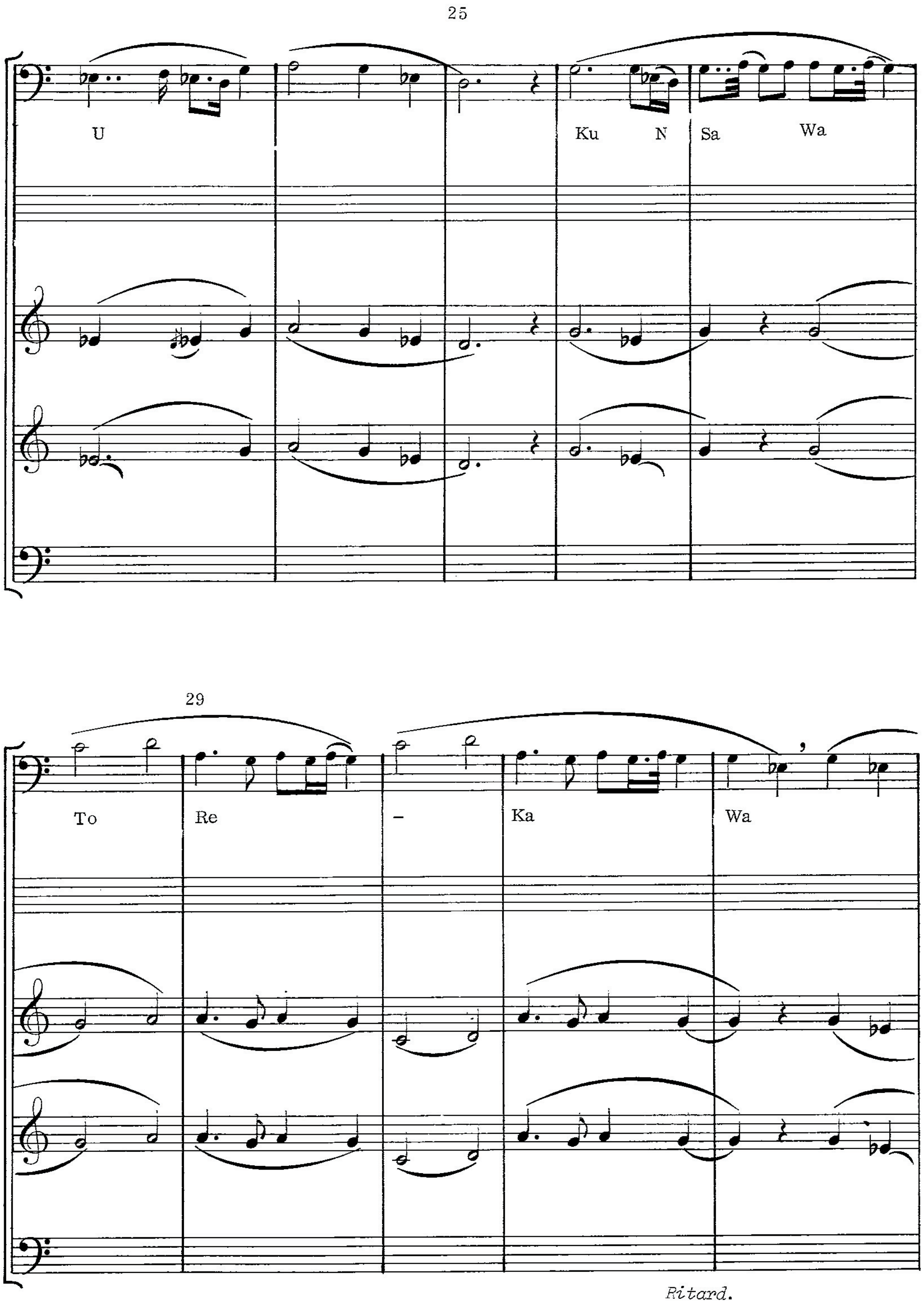
EXAMPLE 12

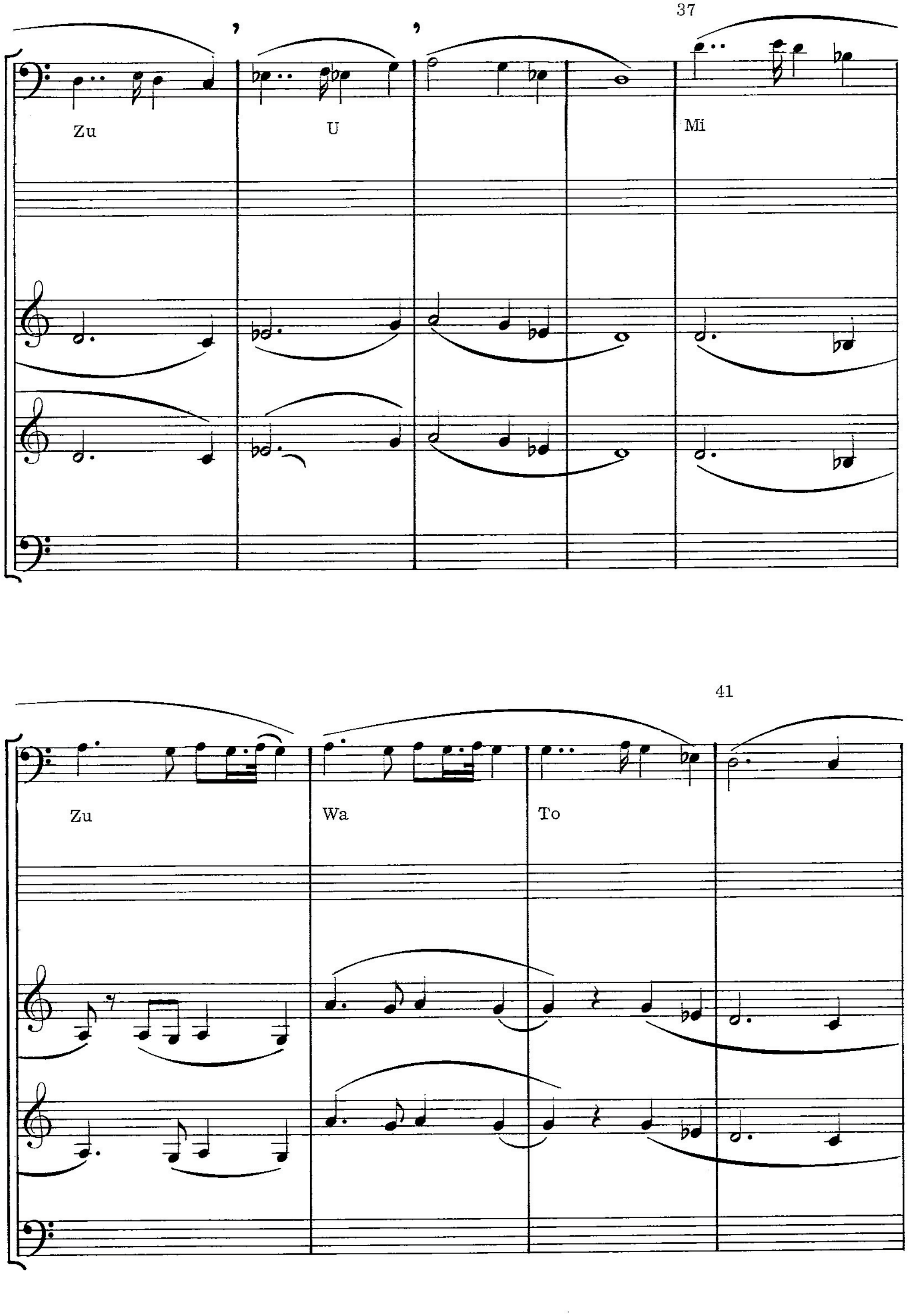
Sonokoma - Age Byōshi

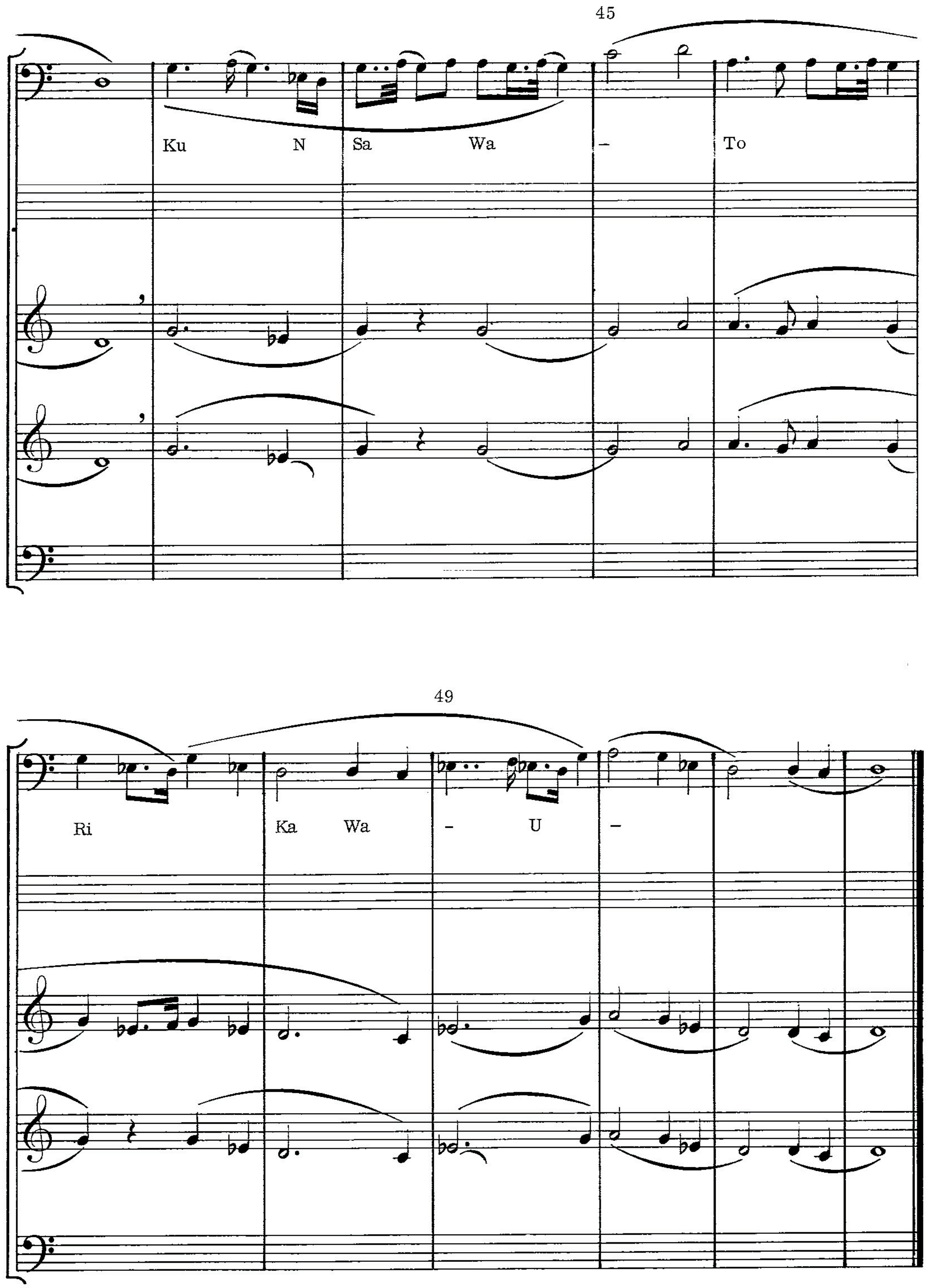

♩ = 80
Voices
Shakubyōshi
Fue
Hichiriki
Wagon
So
No
Ko
Ma
5
Zo
Repeat same four measure pattern without change
Repeat same four measure pattern without change


9
Ya
Wo
13
Re
–
Ni
Wa
–


17
Re
–
Ni
Ku
–
21
Sa
Ko


25
U
Ku
N
Sa
Wa
29
To
Re
–
Ka
Wa
Ritard.


37
Zu
U
Mi
41
Zu
Wa
To


45
Ku
N
Sa
Wa
–
To
49
Ri
Ka
Wa
-
U
-

Originally published in

Selected Reports
Volume 1, No. 2 (1968)
Institute of Ethnomusicology
UCLA