

Hikaru 飛香流 Japan

Meet the Artists

Hikaru is a group of well-trained and studied musicians from different prefectures of Japan (similar to “states” in the United States). Each member of Hikaru has studied the deep traditions of their instruments and styles: the shamisen, shinobue flute, and taiko drums (see page 2).



Nobuto Yamanaka

Nobuto Yamanaka started playing the Tsugaru Shamisen when he was only 15 years old. He trained as an apprentice of the famous Tsugaru Shamisen player, Chisato Yamada in the Aomori prefecture. Yamanaka has played in 36 countries and is a nationally-recognized ambassador of the Tsugaru Shamisen.



Tomoko Takeda

Tomoko Takeda studied the shinobue flute under Yukihiro Isso, a famous Japanese musician well-known for his research and dedication to the instrument. Like the other members in Hikaru, Takeda studied with her teacher, Yukihiro Isso, for a long and focused period of time.



Takemi Kakizaki

Takemi Kakizaki is a highly respected performer of traditional folk songs, known as *min'yō*, from the Akita prefecture. She trained under master teacher and singer, Umewaka Asano, and is currently Japan’s leading performer of Japanese folk songs. She has won numerous Japanese folk song competitions and travels the world as a performer and cultural ambassador.



Toen Hibiki

Toen Hibiki has performed as a solo drummer in Japan and all around the world since 1995. Hibiki trained extensively under Matsunaga, a highly respected master taiko teacher and stage director in Japan. He has been a member of Kodo, a famous taiko ensemble on Sado Island, and is known for honoring the traditional style of performing taiko.

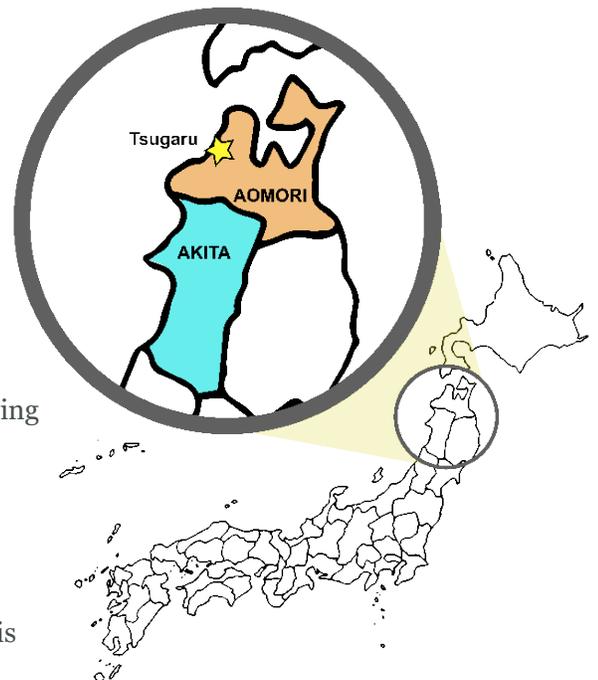
About the Music

Tsugaru-shamisen

Tsugaru-shamisen is a genre of shamisen music originating in the Aomori prefecture in the northernmost area of the Japanese island of Honshū. This style of music is popular throughout the entire country of Japan, although associations with the Tsugaru area of Aomori remains strong. This style requires a large shamisen (also called the Tsugaru shamisen) that has thicker strings than normal, and a small *bachi*, or pick, to pluck the strings. Tsugaru-shamisen is easy to recognize by its percussive quality: the pick strikes the body of the instrument with each stroke, creating a loud “smack!” The rhythms of Tsugaru-shamisen have a lilting quality to them, which creates interesting motion in the music.

Min'yō

The term *min'yō* refers to traditional Japanese folk songs. *Min'yō* from the Akita prefecture is known for its humorous lyrics, accompanied by instruments like the shamisen and shinobue flute. The verses of Akita *min'yō* use a 7-7-9 beat structure, a system of organizing rhythms that is unique to this particular prefecture.



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Photo of shamisen by Timothy Takemoto. (CC BY NC 2.0)

Shamisen

The word *shamisen* means, “three flavor strings.” It is a traditional Japanese stringed instrument that sounds similar to the American banjo. The shamisen has been used in Japan since the 16th century, and nowadays are played at arts and culture festivals, musical performances, theatre, and dance shows. The shamisen is about the size of a guitar, but its neck is much slimmer and does not have frets. Its drum-like body, known as the *dō*, is rounded, rectangular-shaped, and is covered front and back with a drum skin. The three strings are traditionally made of silk, but nylon is a common and preferred substitute. The shamisen is played with a large weighted pick, or *bachi*, that is made of either ivory, tortoise shell, or wood.

Which of these instruments do you see in Hikaru’s videos?

Shinobue Flute

The side-blow bamboo flute, or *shinobue* flute, is one of the most iconic instruments of traditional Japanese music. The word *shino* refers to a type of bamboo native to Japan, and the instrument is heavily influenced by Buddhist principles. To play the shinobue, one must position the flute to either their left or right side, and blow a focused stream of air to the far edge of the blowhole. The shinobue is used as a part of an ensemble to accompany dance-songs, festivals, and theatre shows.



Photo of 7-hole shinobue by Yasuhiko Sano. (CC BY NC 2.0)

If you could play any of these instruments, which would you choose and why?

Taiko Drum

Taiko has existed for over a thousand years in a variety of forms, as the word *taiko* translates to “fat drum.” In traditional Japanese music and theater, the taiko drum is responsible for providing rhythm and groove to traditional Japanese music, as well as representing various natural elements – like rain and thunder – that occur in storytelling. There are many sizes and types of taiko drums, from small, high-pitched drums to very large drums with deep resonance. Some are even the size of small cars!



Photo of Okedo Daiko by Taiko-Kaiser-Drums (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Additional Resources

Kids Web Japan



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