

JAPAN

GROEMER, GERALD. *The Spirit of Tsugaru: Blind Musicians, Tsugaru-jamisen, and the Folk Music of Northern Japan*. With the Autobiography of Takahashi Chikuzan. Detroit Studies in Musicology/Studies in Music, No. 24. Warren MI: Harmonie Park Press, 1999. xxi + 321 pages. Figures, maps, tables, music examples, glossary, bibliography, selected discography, index. Paper US\$37.50; ISBN 89990-095-2

This book comprises two parts. The second of the two parts is a reprint of the author's translation of the autobiography of the late Takahashi Chikuzan, one of the best-known performers of the Japanese folk-music genre known as *Tsugaru-jamisen*. The first part of the book is a scholarly introduction, centered on blind Japanese folk musicians and the culture of the Tsugaru region in general, and the music of *Tsugaru-jamisen* in particular. Since this lengthy first part has replaced the very short introduction that prefaced the original translation, and since the translation itself has reappeared almost unaltered, let us address the translation first.

Tsugaru refers to the northern tip of the main Japanese island of Honshu, and *Tsugaru-jamisen* to a type of folk music (songs accompanied by *shamisen*, and instrumental *shamisen* music) from this region. Takahashi Chikuzan (1910–1998), who spent a large part of his life as a blind itinerant beggar-musician, was one of the major figures in the modern development of this music. Groemer's translation of Takahashi's story originally appeared as *The Autobiography of Takahashi Chikuzan: Adventures of a Tsugaru-jamisen Musician* (GROEMER 1991); this title has been reincarnated here as the title of Part 2. Groemer chose to translate Takahashi's Tsugaru dialect into an easygoing, spoken idiom of modern English, and this was a wise choice. The translation itself is excellent, and Groemer's style flows along naturally and unobtrusively: as a result, we are led directly into Takahashi's story, almost with the feeling that we are listening to the man himself speak. The translator's notes, without being so numerous or extensive as to overwhelm the casual reader, give the necessary explanations and background information.

Takahashi's story itself is fascinating, and is worth reading even just for fun. As a first-hand account, of course, it should be taken with more than a grain of ethnographic salt. But if anyone still suffers from the delusion that the "folk" led (or lead) some sort of honest, romantic, idyllic, rural existence, they need only follow Takahashi through the dirt and squalor of his lice-infested childhood, his frequent hunger as a beggar-apprentice and later on his own, and his constant efforts to make some money, when the *shamisen* was not bringing in enough, by carrying advertising banners, making "medicine" or candy (spitting on his hands to stretch it out into sticks!), or even taking up the *shakuhachi* instead. For the ethnomusicologist or folklorist, there is much of interest in Takahashi's account of how he learned and developed his art, and in his comments on modern styles of performance (including what I like to think of as the "heavy-metal" style of *Tsugaru-jamisen*). This material will be useful to anyone interested in the folklore or traditional music of Japan and its modern development, and should have broad application for teachers of courses on folklore and folk music in general.

The first edition of this translation was prefaced by a tantalizingly short introduction (approximately ten pages of text, plus musical examples, a pair of maps, and an illustration); this hinted at a much greater knowledge of the subject, and left many readers, including myself, wishing for more. The author and publishers have obliged to such an extent that, as the new title of this book suggests, the four chapters of Part 1 now quite outweigh the trans-

lation itself. While Takahashi appears to have been relegated somewhat toward the back of the bus, we must be grateful for the appearance of the first major study to deal concretely with the historical and musical substance of *Tsugaru-jamisen*.

The chapter titles of Part 1 are, in order, as follows: “Blind Musicians in Japan: A Brief Overview”; “Tsugaru: Geography, Society, and Musical Culture”; “*Tsugaru-jamisen*: Origins and Development”; and “*Tsugaru-jamisen*: Genealogy of a Style.” Overall, these have been conceived, according to the author, as “a series of concentric circles, gradually drawing closer to Chikuzan’s own narrative” (xvi). The first chapter presents a short historical overview, from the medieval period through to the early twentieth century, not so much of all blind musicians in Japan, but of poor, itinerant blind musicians outside the realms of “art” music and (in the Edo period) the official organization for the blind, the *Tōdō-za*. The second chapter, despite its ambitious title, is a brief, mainly historical introduction, focused on the Edo period, to the general musical culture of Tsugaru. If you wonder what climate and geography have to do with this, it is because, as Groemer argues, they did not give birth to *Tsugaru-jamisen* straight out of the soil, as some modern romantic interpretations might have it, but they did (along with a rather unequal distribution of wealth) create an environment of poverty and hardship, which encouraged both blindness and the profession of begging. Structurally, it might have been better if these first two chapters had been combined into one introductory chapter, since the following two are much longer; in any case, they clearly present the historical and cultural context that preceded the rise of *Tsugaru-jamisen*.

The third and fourth chapters, on the history and music of *Tsugaru-jamisen*, are the protein and carbohydrates of this book. Chapter 3 takes us on a tour of the origins and development of *Tsugaru-jamisen*, from Tsugaru beggars in the early part of the Edo period, through important musical personages of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, up to the new practice (borrowed from the mainstream traditional arts) of giving “names” to students. Particularly important here are the growing influences of what we can call the “music business” (privately-sponsored songfests and tours, radio, the recording industry, and newspaper-sponsored competitions), and the effects of social and political change after the war. This chapter finishes with an interesting discussion of “Ideologies of *Tsugaru-jamisen*”: my only complaint here would be that this last section probably deserves a more prominent place in this book than the end of a middle chapter. Chapter 4 deals with the music of *Tsugaru-jamisen*. Here, Groemer shows that it developed musically and structurally from Tsugaru folk song, and he gives a “genealogy” of the current repertoire (74–75). This is important because the impression is often conveyed that *Tsugaru-jamisen* consists only of solo instrumental music. This chapter includes discussion of the general characteristics of Tsugaru folk music, as well as more detailed analyses of pieces in the *Tsugaru-jamisen* repertoire, including comparison of different versions of a piece. There are numerous musical examples given in Western notation, with references to the original commercial recordings. (These are all transcribed from older records and tapes, which are undoubtedly no longer commercially available; unfortunately, it is not clear whether any of these pieces are on the compact discs listed in the discography). This chapter is to be particularly commended for two things: for its concrete musical analysis and examples, and for its historical orientation. Both are too often missing in contemporary ethnomusicology, where the “context” excludes the past, and there is not much at all about the thing (i.e., music) supposedly lying within.

If I were to make a minor complaint about Part 1 of this book, as a whole, it would be to say that it goes far beyond being an introduction, yet it is still tied—both structurally, and in character—to the role of an introduction. One often feels that the author wanted to say—and could have said—much more; in other words, this book suffers somewhat from the inevitable constraints arising from its hybrid nature.

My only major criticism of this book has to be directed, not at the author, but at the editor and publishers. When I first started reading this book, I thought my eyes had gone bad. Then, when I realized that there was nothing wrong with my eyes, I began to worry that they would go bad if I continued reading. Why? Because the fonts keep changing size! It is unbelievable, but apparently someone decided, in the process of preparing the book for publication, to fit in minor textual revisions by making the fonts smaller. Sometimes this happens for whole paragraphs, but often just for one or two lines. As a reader, this is tiring and disturbing. As a reviewer, it is embarrassing to see, and to have to mention—although I am surely not as embarrassed as the publishers ought to be. The original edition of the translation did not suffer such a fate, and to have this happen in this new and expanded volume is a disservice to the author, as well as to the reader.

One other minor criticism that must be laid at the door of the editor and publishers, is that Part 2 has endnotes, rather than footnotes. I would not mention this, if it were not for the fact that Part 1 does indeed have footnotes! Since the original 1991 translation had endnotes, one can only imagine that someone wanted, for some reason, to leave them as they were. However, since many readers will want to consult Groemer's notes while reading Takahashi's story, having them at the bottom of the same page would have been useful.

But do not let these things deter you from reading this book. Get a good reading light, make sure you give your eyes a rest from time to time, and enjoy both Takahashi's story, and Groemer's substantial contribution to the literature on a little-known genre of folk music.

REFERENCE CITED

GROEMER, Gerald.

1991 *The Autobiography of Takahashi Chikuzan: Adventures of a Tsugaru-jamisen Musician*. Warren, MI: Harmonie Park Press.

Patrick HALLIWELL
Koganei, Tokyo

HARDACRE, HELEN, Editor. *The Postwar Developments of Japanese Studies in the United States*. Brill's Japanese Studies Library, vol. 8. Leiden: Brill, 1998. xxviii + 423 pages. Bibliographies, index. Cloth \$112.00; ISBN 90-04-10981-1.

If Japanese studies in America were in its infancy at the end of World War II, it is currently in a state of late adolescence, with all the possibilities and uncertainties that adolescence offers. The number of academic publications on Japan and their sophistication today as compared to sixty years ago certainly show that studies on Japan have matured; but what role Japan as an object of research is to play in the larger academic world of the humanities and social sciences is still far from certain. *The Postwar Developments of Japanese Studies in the United States* illustrates how Japanese studies in America has grown up since 1945 and points to where it might be headed by "presenting essays chronicling its historical development in each discipline or significant subfield, and reflecting upon the continuing task of strengthening the field's impact within the disciplines" (vii).

The book consists of an introduction and twelve essays written by twelve different eminent scholars. The introduction by the editor "provides a synthesis of this volume's findings, followed by an overview of the separate essays" (viii). The first and the last essays frame the ten intermediary essays. The first essay "Sizing up (and breaking down) Japan" by John Dower (who won the Pulitzer Prize in 2000 for his book *Embracing Defeat*) takes a general inventory of Japanese studies scholarship produced in America since 1945. Complementing