



Japanese Singers of Tales: Ten Centuries of Performed Narrative (SOAS Musicology Series)

By Alison McQueen Tokita

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Alison McQueen Tokita presents a series of case studies that demonstrate the persistence of Japanese sung narratives in a multiplicity of genres over ten centuries, including the way they flourished and declined, together with factors contributing to development and change in narrative performance. Performed narratives are examples of a shared cultural heritage, which in the past have given people a sense of belonging to a community. Narratives that were continually re-told and recycled in different versions and formats over a long period of time served to build people's sense of a common identity over space (the geographical extent of 'Japan') and time (the enduring power of many specific narratives such as The Tale of the Heike). Much scholarly attention has focused on Japanese pre-modern literature and drama, but the tradition of oral narrative has barely been touched. Tokita argues that it is possible to identify a continuous tradition of performed narrative in Japan from the tenth to the twentieth centuries. The elements of variation and change relate to the move away from oral narrative to text-based performance, and from a simple narrative situation with one performer to complex theatrical narratives with dancers, singers and other musicians. The resulting complexity led to the pre-eminence of the musical aspects in some cases, and of dramatic or dance aspects in others. Tokita includes substantial musical analysis and exploration of theoretical issues, as well as documentation of important performance traditions, all of which are extant.

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Japanese Singers of Tales: Ten Centuries of Performed Narrative (SOAS Musicology Series) By Alison McQueen Tokita Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #3844525 in Books
- Published on: 2015-03-05
- Format: Import
- Original language: English
- Dimensions: 9.50" h x 6.50" w x 1.50" l, 1.65 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 310 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

Winner of the Tanabe Hisao Prize 2015

“*Japanese Singers of Tales: Ten Centuries of Performed Narrative* has just won the Tanabe Hisao Prize for a book on Asian music...This book purviews a wide range of narrative genres including k?shiki sh?my?, heike, n?, puppet j?ruri narrative, kabuki j?ruri narrative (bungo-kei, ?zatsuma). From the musical characteristics of each genre it extrapolates the broad character of Japanese narrative music as a whole. Particularly noteworthy is that, while defining the individual characteristics of each genre, the author provides a framework for analyzing their shared structure, pointing to their commonalities and continuities.” - 33rd Tanabe Hisao Prize

"Tokita's *Japanese Singers of Tales* is an impressive work of scholarship, and it helps to fill a crucial void in our understanding of medieval and early-modern performance traditions... Tokita explores many of the same stories and literary/performance genres as other scholars have, but her attention to the neglected musicological aspects of these things allows her to shed a new important light." - R. Keller Kimbrough, University of Colorado Boulder, *Journal of Japanese Studies*

"Alison McQueen Tokita has produced an encyclopedic study tracing the relationships between the many forms of Japanese sung narrative that constitute a continuous tradition spanning a millennium...Tokita's work will be of great interest to musicologists, and scholars in related fields will also certainly have occasion to consult this substantive study." - Margaret H. Childs, University of Kansas, *Monumenta Nipponica*

About the Author

Alison McQueen Tokita is Professor and Director of the Research Centre for Japanese Traditional Music at the Kyoto City University of Arts, and adjunct Associate Professor in Japanese Studies at Monash University. She has published widely on Japanese narrative music, and is currently working on naniwa-bushi. In recent years she has researched the role of the piano in East Asian musical modernity. She is co-editor of *The Ashgate Research Companion to Japanese Music* (2008), *Complicated Currents: Media Flows, Soft Power and East Asia*, and *Outside Asia: Japanese and Australian Identities and Encounters in Flux*.

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