

# WU MAN

## IMMEASURABLE LIGHT

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Produced by Wu Man

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Musical notation transcriptions for tracks 3,5,6,7,10,12,13,14 by Rembrandt F. Wolpert

Liner notes by Rembrandt F. Wolpert

Wu Man – pipa, bowed-pipa, prepared-pipa percussion, vocal, Buddha box Kronos Quartet on track 1 and track 6

All music (except track 1) composed and arranged by Wu Man ©2010 (ASCAP).

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## A note from Wu Man

I always like to explore new ideas in my work, and a few years ago I had the amazing opportunity to work with Professor Rembrandt Wolpert to bring to life, for the first time in *pipa* history, some of the early *pipa* music preserved in notation from the 8th through the 12th century. It took years to think through how I could interpret the historical material and combine it with my own compositions in a way that would call up the ancient Chinese music sprites and, at the same time, allow the listener to discover a new, different *pipa* music in the old. The old tunes and my own pieces are inspired by each other here, and hopefully in a small way this recording both preserves and extends the extraordinary *pipa* repertoire.

## About the music by Rembrandt Wolpert

*Pipa-playing is 'horseback-music'. The body[of the pipa]exemplifies the Three Powers, the strings represent the Four Seasons. Rapidly making a start in the years of the Qin 秦 (221—206 BCE), abundant melodies flowed forth in the days of the Han 漢 (206 BCE — 220 CE). When the Princess went to the Wusun 烏孫, it eased her grief at separation. As Zhaojun 昭君 left the*

*Imperial Palace, it brought comfort in her sorrow at marrying far away. At Golden-valley as he trifled with flowers, Shi Jilin 石季倫 (249—300) played this [the lute] to give him pleasure. At Bamboo-grove as he pledged in wine, Ruan Zhongrong 阮仲容 played it to express his feelings. (Sadayasu Shinnô 貞保新王 (870—924) in Nangû biwa-fu 南宮琵琶譜 (921).)*

These *topoi*, gathered up and handed on as a sanctioned body of knowledge in early technical sources on music as well as in Chinese poetry and song — and here written in the preface to a Sino-Japanese lute-book compiled in Japan in 921, but shortly after the end of the Tang Period 唐朝 (618—907) — place the origins of the *pipa* 琵琶 and its music historically and geographically around the beginning of the first millennium in Central Asia, likely from among Iranised Turco-Mongols in the Kushan realm of that time, acknowledge its rapid adoption and its incorporation in cosmological and music-theoretical discussion in early China itself, and attest to the refinement and emotional power of its early music.

In amongst the manuscript scrolls discovered early in the 20th century in the Mogao Buddhist Caves of the Silk Road oasis Dunhuang 敦煌 in Gansu 甘肅 province, Central Asia, was the now famous *Dunhuang pipa-pu* 敦煌琵琶譜, containing a set of 25 pieces notated in tablature (see “About the musical notation,” below) for *pipa*, most thought to be song-accompaniments or intabulations of song-melodies. The notations, now backing a scroll with a Buddhist sermon preached in 933, are dated to at least the early 10th century; but they are believed to represent an earlier performance practice, that of the late Tang. Another document from this cave-treasury, a fragment (Figure 1), importantly lists the primary tablature signs used for notating melodies for *pipa* and locates these signs on the four strings and four frets of the instrument. And 9th-century Buddhist wall frescoes in Dunhuang caves include *pipa*-type lutes in the heavenly orchestras they depict, orchestras with constitutions and forces much like those famously taken from several Central Asiatic states and employed as exotic components of Banquet Music

*yanyue* 燕樂 for the entertainment of the worldly court in the Tang capital, Chang'an 長安, present-day Xi'an 西安, capital of Shaanxi 陝西 province (track 1). Diplomacy and court reception in the capital embraced entertaining foreign missions, including with these no doubt impressive repertoires of Banquet Music.

As a perhaps not overly startling outcome, then, and from still earlier on than the *Dunhuang pipa-pu*, there are preserved in Japan at the farthest end of the Silk Road, so to speak, lute versions of music actually named as being from Tang, in the *tôgaku* 唐樂 repertoire of orchestral music, and including titles known from the Banquet Music of the Tang court (track 10). These are notated in a system of tablature for the *pipa* (*biwa* in Japanese) (Figure 2) closely related to that of the Dunhuang documents. Instruments, too, survive there, stored since the eighth century in the *Shôsô-in* 正倉院, the treasure house of the temple *Tôdaiji* 東大寺 in Nara 奈良. The collection of the *Shôsô-in* also held the very earliest of all surviving notations for the four-stringed lute, the so-called *Tempyô biwa-fu* 天平琵琶譜, a fragment of tablature for a modal prelude written on the back of a receipt for paper for sutra copying dated 747. The *Gogen-fu* 五絃譜, an extended scroll of notation in a cognate system of tablature for the five-stringed lute, containing 6 modal preludes and 22 pieces (track 5) based on eighth- and ninth-century Chinese sources, comes next in date among Sino-Japanese lute-scores preserved in Japan. And another of Tang date among these scores in Japan is a key technical source, the *Biwa sho-chôshi-hon* 琵琶諸調子品, recording a large set of tunings accompanied by short “tuning-testing” pieces in tablature, personally given to Japanese lutenist Fujiwara no Sadatoshi 藤原貞敏 in 838 at the end of his three weeks of study-abroad master classes at the North-Water-Inn of the Kaiyuan-temple 開元寺 in Yangzhou 揚州, by his Chinese teacher, *pipa* master Lian Chengwu 廉承武. Sadatoshi was a member of the last of the Japanese diplomatic missions to Sui 隋 (581—618) and Tang China, the mission that also included the eminent Buddhist priest Ennin 圓仁 (794—864) (track 6).

This series of tablatures for lute in Japan continues, notably with the *Nangû biwa-fu* of 921, Prince Sadayasu's set of solo pieces and modal preludes gathered together for his pupil Prince Atsumi 敦実新王 (892—967), and with the *Minamoto no Tsunenobu-hitsu biwa-fu* 源經信筆琵琶譜, the 11th-century “performer's score” of both solo preludial items and almost 20 lute versions of Tang Music (*tôgaku*) of Minamoto no Tsunenobu 源經信 (1016—1097) himself. Our major source, however, is the great late 12th-century courtly lute-book, *Sango-yôroku* 三五要録, compiled in about 1180 by Fujiwara no Moronaga 藤原長師 (1137—1192), sometime Prime Minister and the greatest musician of his day. This represents the complete Sino-Japanese repertory for the four-stringed lute. It includes everything we have met so far — tuning pieces, solo pieces, lute versions for the complete Tang Music (*tôgaku*) repertory, and more. And it lays the foundations for posterity: later lute scores, large and small, right on up to the part-books for lute used today, demonstrably look back to its authority. Tracks 5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13 and 14 on this recording are all from this source.

The Sino-Japanese lute legacy, then, continues on from the time of the Tang, to preserve until today, in writing and (partly) in a performance tradition, a small but representative modal repertory of solo lute pieces that in its refinement and sophistication must eventually take its place alongside other great solo modal traditions of early world music, as well as an extensive repertory of lute versions of items originally borrowed (or modelled on those borrowed) from China, from the courtly Banquet Music of the Tang (and even of the Sui before it). It is from this precious Sino-Japanese lute legacy that the older pieces in this CD collection are taken, the specific choices reflecting the Central Asiatic background of the *pipa* and its early music, coupled with Buddhist associations and contexts for much of its specifically Tang Music (*tôgaku*) repertory.

## About the musical notation



Figure 1

The early pieces on this recording have all been transnotated from medieval Sino-Japanese sources which share their notational system with that found in the notations well known from Dunhuang in Central Asia. The musical notation is a tablature, a notation which gives us not the pitches to be produced, but rather how to actually play the instrument: if we follow the tuning and fingering instructions we get the right notes; other indicators will aid our placing these notes in time as intended. Tablatures were also widely used in Europe; the first notations for European lute were tablatures, albeit from more than 500 years later than our earliest Sino-Japanese notations.

In the Far Eastern lute notations originating from Tang China, 20 “primary” tablature signs denote the strings and (fixed) fret- and finger-positions to be used to play the right notes. Figure 1 shows the fret and finger layout noted down on the back of a Buddhist document from Dunhuang. The strings are tuned following a set of instructions asserting unison-, fifth- and octave-relationships between strings. These tuning instructions are at the base of “tuning pieces” which typically precede solo “modal preludes” (*diaozi* 調子) in the musical sources, of which track 13 on this CD is an outstanding example. Within the notation, the size of a sign is relevant, denoting whether the string is to be plucked with the right hand, or to be “added on” to a plucked note, taking its resonance from this initial plucking. The size of tablature signs may also indicate rhythmical subdivision in small metrical units.



“Secondary” tablature signs are used to indicate metrical groupings into longer or shorter time units, and for delimiting groups of fingerings. A third set of signs, not always present, gives us an ostinato of percussion, providing, too, an external framework for the reading of the notation.

Most pieces in *Sango-yōroku* (above), the main source for this recording, are preceded by a small preface (written in Chinese characters), in which the title, the length of the piece, the metrical structure, performance instructions as to repeats and variations in ostinato pattern inform the — obviously expected to be literate — performer. Sometimes a short historical excursion about the background of a piece, of famous players who have performed it, or about early persons responsible for transposing, intabulating, transtabulating, or some such other activity under the rubric of “same piece” (同曲) production, gives us valuable contextual information.

The tablature-notation in Figure 2 (read from top to bottom, right to left) is the beginning of *Qingyun-yue* 慶雲樂, which forms the basis for track 10 on the CD. The notation is especially valuable, since it is from our 12th-century edition of Tang Music in which the main tablature is copiously glossed with alternative versions, running at the side of the “main” columns. These glosses range from simple finger- (or fret-) substitutions, to extensive melodic variants diverging significantly from the “main” version. The glosses are often labelled as coming from certain manuscript traditions, or as attributed to a personality in the tradition.

In transnotating the original tablatures into a system combining Western pitch notation (based on

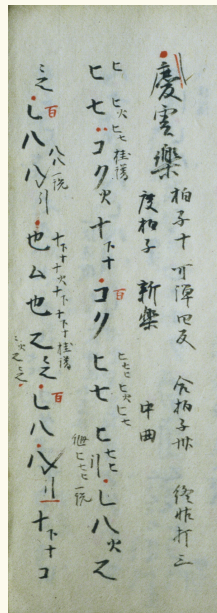


Figure 2

pitches achieved from tunings specified in the manuscripts themselves) and a Western-style lute-tablature specially adapted for the Tang *pipa* with its different fretting (Figure 3), we have relied solely on explicit rules laid down in the manuscripts themselves, in practical handbooks, and in theoretical treatises, as well as on notation-inherent logic for a performer on this lute.

The transnotation example (Figure 3) is our representation of the beginning of the central part of track



Figure 3

13, the modal prelude *Shishang-liuquan* 石上流泉. A printed version re-produced through computer-generation from our transtabulation and transnotation process is shown in Figure 4: systematic reversal of the transnotation process back into an East-Asian printed representation of the original notation has always been a major safeguard in our work.

一 二 下 \ 下 一 二 下 丁 下 \ 下 二 下 \ 下 一 之 上 丁 二 反

Figure 4

## Music from Tang, the present-day performer, and the scholar:

### An approach

In our approach to what is preserved in notation in the early musical manuscript we adhere to the Athens and Venice Charters of the International Council on Monuments. Modern musical reconstruction and revival of old musics of China (and Japan) ought to follow the same principles demanded of reconstruction and conservation in archaeology, architecture, and visual art. All restoration needs to be reversible, and conservation must be suitable in the historical context of the artifact. Article 12 of the Venice Charter should surely apply equally to the reconstruction of music:

Replacements of missing parts must integrate harmoniously with the whole, but at the same time must be distinguishable from the original so that restoration does not falsify the artistic or historic evidence.

With this Article in mind, we approach Sino-Japanese instrumental notations, their performance-interpretations, and their notational representations in transnotations leaning both on Jean-François Lyotard's scepticism toward metanarratives, and on the historical restorers' need to keep even the most convincing reconstruction transparent and reversible. And to this we add our concern for the protection of the Tang Music legacy as the cultural property of its own tradition. Though we do not attempt an "authentic" performance of a Tang piece for *pipa*, whatever that would in reality demand, the "original" as preserved in notation is always there just as intact as it is when there, sparsely-noted but intrinsic, in the densely-noted texture of a present-day performance of *tôgaku* — as the kernel around which the whole is built, as it likely always was. Wu Man and historical ethnomusicologist Rembrandt Wolpert

have worked together for twelve years now. Wu Man takes what Rembrandt gives her as transnotation from a tablature (Figure 3) and/or as a lyrical “base melody” simplified from that tablature according to principles corroborated by surviving notated tune bases, and builds upon these without distorting the intellectual integrity of the musical “original”. And so she enters, and joins, its traditional world of transmission in performance — the world of yet another version of a time-honored, time-tested authority. She joins Rembrandt in acknowledging each piece as the cultural property of all those musicians and listeners who, in their contract of communication, have carried it down this far, carry it in the present, and will continue to carry it on in its many-hundred — and perhaps many thousand (?) — year life.

## Contents

### 1. 太阳圆月亮弯都在天上 **The Round Sun and Crescent Moon in the Sky** arr. Jacob Garchik

Wu Man: *pipa*, vocal

Kronos Quartet: David Harrington (Chinese wood-block, Chinese gong, vocal), John Sherba (Chinese cymbal, vocal), Hank Dutt (Viola), Jeffrey Zeigler (cello)

Wu Man invited the Kronos Quartet to join her in this boisterous, joyful rendition of a wild ancient folk song taken from the repertoire of the shadow puppet theatre of the northern region. In northwest China, the hundreds-year-old shadow-puppetry clings on in poor rural areas of Shaanxi 陕西 province. This piece comes from a village near Hua Mountain 華山 and is often played at temple fairs and ritual ceremonies. The guttural, hoarse singing is accompanied by percussion, fiddle, lute and *shawm*.

### 2. 静夜思 **Night Thoughts** comp. Wu Man

This piece was inspired by a 9th-century Buddhist *pipa* tune and represented for Wu Man a chance to rediscover the *pipa*'s native, regional language. She was particularly drawn to its ancient-tune scale, which is very different from today's mostly pentatonic *pipa* music, and to the peaceful, meditative sound of the *pipa* in the low register.

### 3. 林邑亂序 **Cambodian Free Tune** arr. Wu Man

Certain Buddhist pieces in the Tang Music (*tôgaku*) repertoire preserved in the Sino-Japanese sources were to be preceded, as dancers emerged, say, by a *Linyi-luanxu/Rin'yû ranjô*, a "free-tune" (*luanxu/ranjô*) associated with the Buddhist kingdom of Champa (*Linyi*, present-day Cambodia). A tiny fragment of an "old music" version of such a "free-tune" survives for flute in a 13th-

century Court Music treatise in Japan. Wu Man builds on this fragment in two different places in the collection (tracks 3 and 11), in each case taking up a daring suggestion first put into practice in Cambridge, England, in 1999, namely to borrow from a present-day practice and to present it in canon. In accordance with the notion of a fragment, for both versions, she leaves off with the “free-tune” still hanging in the air, just as the flute leaves off in the original treatise...

For Wu Man the music suggests a flowing mountain stream and a bamboo tree swinging in the wind, and she uses five tracks of *pipa* and adds a shaker to create this effect.

4. 泼墨仙人 **An Immortal Splashes the Ink** comp. Wu Man

Inspired by a Beijing Opera tune, this is a prepared piece that dramatically changes the tone color of the *pipa*. Always looking to experiment with new sound, Wu Man decided to draw out the percussive effects of the *pipa*. She uses her instrument to imitate the sounds of a gong, cymbal and wood block, suggesting a humorous image of a Daoist immortal dancing with ink.

5. 王昭君 **Wang Zhao Jun** arr. Wu Man

The “Lady Wang” comforted by the *pipa* in our opening *topoi*, refers to a Chinese Lady of the harem of the Han Emperor Yuandi 漢元帝 (75 BC — 33 BC), who, for political reasons, had to marry a ruler of the Xiongnu 匈奴, a nomadic Central Asiatic tribe. Her lament in the steppes, her *pipa*-playing, and her beauty and political influence there became legendary. Two versions of the melody are preserved in the early sources, a “minor” version in *Pingdiao*/Hyôjô mode on E, and a “major” version in the Central Asiatic “Tajik Mode” *Dashidiao*/*Taishiki-chô* 太食調, also on E. A very early notation from *Gogen-fu* (ca. 842) and a notation from *Sango-yôroku* (ca. 1180) have been consulted for this version. Here Wu Man strikingly “bends” the “leaning notes” of the notated *appoggiatura*-ornaments, and plucks the notes of the notated *mordent*-like embellishments.

6. 南無阿彌陀 *Namu Amida*: Homage to the Buddha of Immeasurable Light arr. Wu Man & Kronos Quartet

Wu Man: pipa, voice, wind-bell, Buddha box

Kronos Quartet: David Harrington (temple gong, wood-block), John Sherba (violin), Hank Dutt (viola), Jeffrey Zeigler (cello)

Set to the melody “Bird(s) of the Qin River”, *Qinhe niao* 沁河鳥, which is a piece associated with extensive canal development carried out under the Sui Emperor Yang 隋煬帝 (569--618), involving the Qin River and the replacement in 605 of the ancient “Wild Goose Canal” by a new Bian canal. (The bird in the title has been identified as the migratory Bean Goose.) The instrumental piece “Birds of the Qin River” was known very early on in Japan: it was performed in 752 at the Eye Opening Ceremony of the Great Buddha at *Tôdaiji* Temple, Nara. Later, but still during the Tang, the Japanese priest Ennin who traveled to China to study Buddhism is reported to have intoned a *Namu Amida* prayer to the melody at the *Zhulin Temple* 竹林寺.

“Birds of the Qin River” is in *Shatuodiao/Sada-chô* 沙陀調, a Lydian mode on D, in early sources equated with the so-called “First Kuchean Mode” *Sādhārṇita*. *Namu, namu Amida* was set to its melody following text-underlays of other Buddhist texts by Elizabeth Markham. Wu Man underpins both her singing of this setting and her version of the instrumental *Qinhe niao* by a mantra-like incantation.

Wu Man first heard her grandmother sing a *Namu Amida* invocation when she was 10 and, although she did not understand the meaning of the words, its haunting melody stayed with her. She begins the piece by accompanying her chanting with a Buddha box, then transitions to the next instrumental section with temple bells, which finally fade, with the Buddha box, at the end.

The image she has in mind is of a monk holding a temple bell and walking toward the listener, and then slowly walking away until he disappears into the mountains.

7. 鳥 **Tori** arr. Wu Man

“The Bird”, *Niao/Tori* 鳥, also known as *Kalingpin/Karyôbin* 迦陵頻, is a dance-suite with Buddhist associations, performed by wing-bearing virgin boys, clapping cymbals. Although not officially listed in Tang Chinese sources, it is known in Japan as part of the imported Tang Music (*tôgaku*) repertory at least since its performance at the Eye-Opening Ceremony of the Great Buddha in *Tôdaiji* Temple, Nara, in 752. Three standard movements of the Tang suite-form, *Daqu* 大曲, are preserved in the Sino-Japanese musical sources: a “Prelude” (*Xu/Jo* 序), a “Broaching” (*Po/Ha* 破), and a “Quick” (*Ji/Kyû* 急). The tune of the “Quick” is held to have been derived as a contrafactum of the cuckoo-like calls of the *Dicirurus paradiseus*, known as one of the most beautiful song birds in the East and associated with the *Kalavinka*, the mythical bird that sings the Buddha’s praise in paradise. Indeed, the alternative title of the suite, *Kalingpin/Karyôbin* 迦陵頻, reveals the little male dancers as *Kalavinka* themselves. Wu Man plays all three movements in versions closely following those in *Sango-yôroku*.

8. 夕阳钟楼 **Mountain Temple Bell at Sunset** comp. Wu Man

For Wu Man this music evokes memories of her hometown Hangzhou 杭州, its temples, mountains, and the West Lake, where she was born and raised. In creating this piece, she prepared the *pipa* to make sound effects, much as composers like John Cage had done for the piano, here attaching paper plates, paper clips and pencils to the strings to simulate the sound of a temple bell.



9. 杨花九月飞 *Leaves Flying in Autumn* comp. Wu Man

Wu Man composed this improvisational collage a few years ago with inspiration from the classical martial style of *pipa works* and a nod to rock n' roll.

10. 慶雲樂 “Auspicious-Clouds Music” arr. Wu Man

This prestigious title, the first item of Banquet Music at the Tang Court in the time of the Taizong Emperor 太宗 (599—649), was linked with an appearance of brightly colored clouds of good omen. It was transmitted to Japan, where it was also performed in a Buddhist context associated with the belief in the Amida Buddha's avowed coming on a purple cloud with a heavenly multitude of musicians and dancers to welcome the dying believer to his wondrous Paradise in the West. The piece is in the Dorian mode on E, *Pingdiao/Hyôjô* 平調. Wu Man prefaces her realization of “Auspicious Clouds”, a slow version over which she works a sonic “Central Asiatic embroidery”, by a version of a formalized tuning and of a short tuning-testing typically included early on in the sets of solo items preceding the actual modal preludes in the manuscripts. She uses special effects on the *pipa* to imitate the sound and style of the *qin* 琴, an ancient Chinese seven-string zither she loves that is the only instrument with a low-register sound in China.

11. 东山烟雨 *Misty Rain on the Eastern Mountain* comp. Wu Man

This original composition was inspired by the Cambodian Free Tune (track 3). Wu Man uses the bowed *pipa* here to extend the suggestion of a flowing mountain stream and bamboo tree swaying in the wind.

12. 三臺 “The Three Terraces” arr. Wu Man

This is a suite mentioned in the “Conservatory Records”, *Jiaofangji* 教坊記 (ca. 749), of the Impe-

rial Music Academy located within the Tang Palace in Chang'an. Wu Man performs two movements: the *Po* 破, a musical term meaning “broken”, and related to the Turkic musical term *kırık*, and the fast movement *Ji* 急. This suite was often used for setting both secular and Buddhist texts. The tune of the “Quick” is used in contrafacta for Japanese Buddhist hymns of Pure Land belief. The suite is in *Pingdiao*/*Hyôjô*, Dorian mode on E. Wu Man’s version again adheres closely to the original from *Sango-yôroku*.

13. 石上流泉 A Spring Flowing Over Stones arr. Wu Man

*Shishang Liuquan*, “A spring flowing over stones”, sometimes suggested as a place name for an oasis in Central Asia, is a modal prelude for solo lute in which the lutenist, having tuned her instrument in the “deviant fragrance of the wind tuning” (*Fan Fengxiangdiao* 返風香調), and most likely having played through some preparatory solo items, such as the one played on this track, to “get the feel of the mode under her fingers”, now makes an authoritative statement of her mode in a piece explicitly designed for this purpose. (Figure 3 is an extract in transnotation of this prelude.) It is held to have been brought from Tang China to Japan where it became known as one of the three “secret melodies”, closely guarded, and transmitted only to one disciple per master. Two versions of this precious prelude survive and underpin Wu Man’s playing: the main version follows *Sango-yôroku*, while that in the upper-register is based on Minamoto no Tsunenobu’s 11th-century “performer’s score”, *Minamoto no Tsunenobu-hitsu biwa-fu*.

14. 輪臺與青海波 Luntai and The Waves of Lake Kokonor arr. Wu Man

*Luntai* (“Bügür” in Uighur) is a place name in Central Asia, in present-day Xinjiang 新疆 province, going back as an important location in Sino-Turkic relations to Emperor Wudi of the Han dynasty 漢武帝 (156 BCE — 87 BCE). A tune *Qinghai po*, “The Waves of [Lake] Kokonor” 青海波,

is known to have been a favorite of the Tang poet Li Bai 李白 (701--62). Li Bai was born in Central Asia, although his family moved early on in his life first to Gansu province, and then on to Sichuan 四川. Lake Kokonor (*Qinghai*), meaning “Blue Lake”, is China’s greatest lake, situated in the high (10,515 feet/3205m above sea level) desert lands of present-day Qinghai 青海 province. Li Bai’s Turkic page Cinnabar would perform the dance-tune for Li Bai when the poet was (as so often) inebriated.

The Sino-Japanese musical sources tell us that the melodically related “Luntai” and “The Waves of Lake Kokonor” were played together as here. Both pieces are in *Banshediao/Banshiki-chô* 盤涉調, Dorian on B, equated in early Chinese sources with the early Indian mode *Pañcama*. Wu Man works with the two as lyrical base melodies extracted from their lute versions in *Sango-yôroku*, in their straightforwardness perhaps approaching how, as the modal prelude (track 13) rises from its exploratory modal prefacing, they might have been ultimately stated at the culmination of a suite of movements built upon the materials they now express in condensed form. She uses two *pipas* playing different melodies in higher and lower octaves, as well as a drum and coin shaker, to draw out the poetic rhythm and dance elements of the piece.