
ALMA KARLIN'S MUSICAL
MINIATURES: JAPANESE
MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS
FROM THE COLLECTION OF
ALMA M. KARLIN AND THEIR
RELATION TO RELIGIOUS
MUSIC

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“... the silence was from time to time broken only by a long and solemn hit of the temple gong, which afterwards died out.”¹

Karlin as a collector of Japanese musical instruments

According to the inventory of the Alma Karlin collection², with objects which were from the years of 1957 to 1960 presented to Celje Regional Museum by Karlin's friend Thea Schreiber Gammelin, Karlin brought home from her eight-year-long voyage some instruments. Some of them are small miniature instruments, souvenir musical instruments, such as a 17-centimetre-long miniature of horizontal

¹ Alma M. Karlin, *Samotno potovanje* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1969), 168.

² The objects from the collection, inventoried by Milena Moškon in the year of 1964, were revised in 2014/2016 by B. Trnovec and N. Šmid. The inventory book itself was prepared by Barbara Trnovec in 2016. Most of Karlin's objects discussed in the paper are from the collection held by the Celje Regional Museum, while there is also an important collection with 840 items in the Celje Museum of Recent History, and a collection containing her manuscripts, etc., at the NUK (National and University Library) National Manuscript Collection. *Collection of Alma Karlin (Inventory book)* (Celje: Celje Regional Museum Archives, 2006); “Alma Karlin Collections in Slovenia,” *Alma M. Karlin Virtual Home*, accessed July 25, 2019, https://www.culture.si/en/Alma_M._Karlin_Virtual_Home.

plucked chordophone, probably a 7-string *koto*; an 11-centimetre-long model of a *shamisen* made from rope and wood with a small plectrum; an 11.5-centimetre-long Japanese bridgeless zither with two strings – a two-string *koto* or *yakumo-koto*, made from wood, rope and plastic; and the Chinese instrument *yue qin* or ‘moon lute’ commonly used in Japan and called a *gekkin*. From the natural size instruments there is a pellet drum, *den-den daiko*, types of which are found in Tibet, Mongolia, India, China, Taiwan and Korea, and elsewhere. Besides instruments themselves, there are many indirect objects related to music or musical instruments: small size coloured and framed prints with portraits of Japanese traditional theatre *kabuki* players, postcards depicting a woman figure with a *shamisen*, and another postcard with a similar motif in a small coloured print, and other postcards and her own photographs with the instrument motifs, which we can find in Karlin’s postcard collection. From Karlin’s *ukiyo-e* collection we can find prints with the *koto* and other instrument iconography, and we should not forget as well a miniature bronze *tengu* mask. Those objects, directly and indirectly related to Japanese musical culture, form an interesting mozaic which may help us discover her relation to Japanese music and its iconography, or more specifically, to musical instruments that might show her relation as well to religious practices significant for Japan.

Besides the analysis of music/religion related objects from Karlin’s collection, another insight into her stance regarding the topic will be taken into consideration, her writings. One to start with would be the first part of her travel trilogy, *Einsame Weltreise: Die Tragödie einer Frau* (first edition, Minden in Westfalen: Wilhelm Köhler, 1929), translated in English as *The Odyssey of a Lonely Woman* (London: V. Gollancz, 1933); documented writings on her travelling (24 November 1919 to January 1928³), which was translated in Slovenian only in 1969 as *Samotno potovanje* (Lonely Travel), and again, in an expanded version and with a different editor in 2006. A short introduction to Japanese religious music, or better, a short classification and description of religious instruments belonging to Shinto and Buddhist tradition will be provided at the beginning, to present an overview of the subject and

³ Jerneja Jezernik, “Afterward,” in *Japanese Novels* (Celje: Celjska Mohorjeva družba, 2006), 76.

provide the frame in which Karlin's encounter with the music could be explicated.

Literal "mirror" of Karlin's actual stay in Japan
versus her musical objects?

Alma Karlin's travelogue, known in Slovenian translation as *Samotno potovanje*, was already popular forty years ago in Germany.⁴ In around 350 pages it provides an overview of her independent travel, which started on 24 November 1919: from Trieste to Genova, Peru, Panama, California, Hawaii, and from there finally to Japan, which was actually her primary destination. She reached Yokohama at the beginning of June 1922, and stayed in Tokyo until the beginning of July 1923 when she left for Korea, during her stay visiting places such as Kamakura, Nikko, Odawa, Fuji, Nara, Kyoto, Osaka, Kobe, Hokkaido and Kyushu.⁵ She mainly stayed in Tokyo in two locations, first in a Russian pension at Yūrakuchō Sanchōme 1, close to Ginza, and afterwards at her student's and his family traditional Japanese house close to Hongō.⁶ From Korea, she journeyed to Manduria, China, Australia and New Zealand; in the year 1926 to Indonesia, Thailand and Burma, to India, back to Trieste and finally her hometown of Celje.⁷ While staying in Japan, she obtained various jobs; she gave language courses at Meiji University in Tokyo, worked as a correspondent for Asahi Shimbun,⁸ one of Japan's oldest national daily newspapers; but her most significant work was at the German embassy, which brought her economical security, as well facilitating her encounters with "many interesting and sophisticated people – especially Japanese artists attracted her attention"⁹,

⁴ Read more in "On the Author," in *Samotno potovanje v daljne dežele: tragedija ženske* (Celje: Celjska Mohorjeva družba, 2006).

⁵ Barbara Trnovec, *Kolumbova hči: življenje in delo Alme M. Karlin* (Celje: Pokrajinski muzej Celje, 2015), 33.

⁶ Jezernik, "Afterward," 81.

⁷ Cvetka Terezija Kovačič, "Short Bibliography on Alma M. Karlin (1889-1951)," in *Doživeti svet* (Celje: Celjska Mohorjeva družba, 2006), 252.

⁸ Trnovec, *Kolumbova hči*, 33.

⁹ Sources also suggest it was probably in Japan that she had enough money to buy a photo camera. Trnovec, *Kolumbova hči*, 33.

who no doubt aided her in her study of Japan. Relative to the other countries she visited in eight years, her stay in Japan was quite long, and that is reflected in the good impression she had of its people and culture. She dedicated some 40 pages to her living within and encountering Japanese culture, the beginning of the section entitled “In the Far East”, consisting of short essays.

Her writing provides glimpses of some places she stayed, people she met, her work at the embassy in Tokyo. Most of all, she focused on cultural matters that attracted her interest. What most stands out from her time in Japan are the influential people she mentions in the text (despite the fact that she usually identified people she wrote about only with initials). In the story “Travelling to Nikko” she mentioned E. Speight (short for Ernest Edwin Speight), a writer, poet and English professor, who taught English at the University of Tokyo (at that time Tōkyō Imperial University) for fifteen years¹⁰; in “September’s Salon” she mentions the Japanese writer and critic Tadaichi Okada. “My most beautiful experience during this time was a meeting with Japanese artists at Tadaichi Okada’s. Here I met the court actress Suzuki, many modern painters - some high official dignitaries, men and women who were widely open-minded and who could discuss many different matters.”¹¹ Thanks to him she also encountered the actor Fukuko Suzuki. Also of import was Dr. Wilhelm Soft, German ambassador to Japan, who respected Karlin and helped her even in organizing presentations on her travels and her literary works in Germany.¹²

We know that Alma Karlin had entered the Japanese world rather deeply, even without knowledge of the language (as she put it herself, she only knew two words in Japanese, *thank you* and *excuse me*¹³). From her writings, her unusual travelogue, and perhaps more so in her novels, she evidently had a “a bright and talented sense for observing the dif-

¹⁰ Ernest Edwin Speight, “Introduction,” in *Indian masters of English: An Anthology of English Prose by Indian Writers* (Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., 1934), xii.

¹¹ Karlin, *Samotno potovanje*, 173.

¹² Jerneja Jezernik, *Alma M. Karlin, državljanka sveta: življenje in delo Alme Maximiliane Karlin (1889-1950)*, (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 2009), 73.

¹³ Karlin, *Samotno potovanje*, 161.

ferences and full appreciation of Japanese mentality”¹⁴, with which she depicted with a certain depth, in particular, Japanese mythology, supernatural beings and gods, traditional celebrations, fables, superstitions, aesthetics and ideals in Japanese art. The main point which the author would like to explore is whether Karlin’s writings offer a sense of her musical and religious interest in Japan, whether she was attracted to the aesthetics of Shinto and Buddhism in the form of their music.

Short prologue to instruments used in Shinto
and Karlin’s miniatures

What could be considered religious music in Japan may be divided largely into Shinto and Buddhist music. Of primary importance in developing the topic is the close relation between Shinto and Buddhist music (not to mention the religions themselves); in many cases, when played in folk festivals, it is hard to tell the two apart, as they sometimes actually share the same music, incorporating the subtlest of changes. Malm emphasises this point to an extent, saying that “any categorical discussion of religious music in Japan is a semi-artificial organizational device and does not always represent actual musical or historical distinctions”¹⁵. And the second important fact regarding the music is that there are many new religions and sects born nowadays which use a mix of different styles of music or instruments derived from both practices.

¹⁴ Jezernik, “Afterward,” 85.

¹⁵ William P. Malm, *Traditional Japanese Music and Musical Instruments* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2001), 48.



Figure 1: Calling the gods with the taiko drum, Meiji Shinto Shrine, Yoyogi Park, Tokyo, June 2014 (Source: Hubert Golle).

Shinto (or “the way to the gods/deities”), as a Japanese indigenous religion, with its practices first recorded in the written records *Kojiki* (“Records of Ancient Matters”) and *Nihon Shoki* (“The Chronicles of Japan”) in the 8th century, focuses on ritual practices related to the worship of various gods (*kami*), crucial in harvest, spring, and other festivals. It is not an organized religion, is without a founder, priest (only a ritualist), as well without sacred scriptures; but each Shinto shrine has its collections of prayers. The primary concern of its practices has remained the same; taking care of or purification of a certain place or thing, which can be done by any individual or a priest. As a symbol of purification, “pieces of bamboo, spring of *sasaki*, or rice-straw rope to which paper and flax pendants are attached”¹⁶ are prepared and hanged at the purified places. The most common form related to Shinto cer-

¹⁶ Sokyō Ono, *Shinto: The Kami Way* (Tokyo: Charles Tuttle Company, 1999), 52.



Figure 2: Gong in Naoraiden Hall and sacred millennial cedar tree, Kasuga Taisha Shinto Shrine, Nara, June 2014 (Source: Hubert Golle).

emonies which includes music is *kagura*, which serves as the generic name for all Shintō music and dances, with at least a thousand years of tradition. Broadly speaking, it is used in rites where purification followed by prayer offering takes place; and it appears in theatrical form tied to Japanese mythology.¹⁷ We could literally translate it as “god music,” or as Hughes puts it “performances entertaining native deities to grant prosperity and long life”¹⁸. Malm proposes that *kagura* can be divided into three: *mikagura* or formalized *kagura*, adopted during the Heian period, featured with little change at the imperial palace¹⁹,

¹⁷ Naoko Terauchi, “Ancient and Early Medieval Performing Arts,” in *A History of Japanese Theater*, ed. Jonah Salz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 9.

¹⁸ David W. Hughes, “Folk Music: From Local to National to Global,” in *The Ashagata Research Companion to Japanese music*, eds. Alison Tokita and David Hughes (Aldershot: Ashagata Publishing Limited, 2008), 296–297.

¹⁹ David Petersen, “Super Kagura: The Dramatic Rebirth of Shinto Performance in Japan’s Midwest,” *Kyoto Journal* 58 (2004): 39.

okagura or *kagura* at national shrines, and *satokagura* of many different styles for local shrine events.

Kagura is connected to dance through the origins of Shintō music: derived from the myth of origin when Ama no Uzume with her famous dance convinced the sun Goddess (Ama-terasu-ō-mikami) to come out from a cave and bring the sun back to earth. Alma Karlin provided her own explanation of the mythology in the work *Samotno potovanje* and drew a line from the first (Jimmu Tenno) to the current emperor.

In ancient times, when God put his sword into the mud, he pulled Japan to the surface, but since the mud was still dripping from it, small islands were made, which make it difficult to approach Japan. Later, Amaterasu-o-kami (the Sun) sent her sun children Izanagi and Izanami to Japan to finish shaping the islands.²⁰

Each festival takes its own particular form with its accompaniment of music. Instruments related to Shinto ceremonies, processions or dances in relation to court mikagura singing are the flute *kagurabue* or *yamatobue*, which can sometimes be replaced by *ryūteki* (an instrument used in court music ensemble) or *nōkan* (usually used in nō theatre), and another, double reed flute *hichiriki*; a 6-string zither *wagon* or *yamatogoto*, “one of the few completely indigenous instruments of Japan”²¹; a set of wooden clappers, *shakubyōshi*, which are also used for keeping the rhythm in some vocal forms of Japanese court or *gagaku* music, as well as in *kabuki* as an offstage instrument.²² The larger shrine accompaniment for *kagura* consist of the *wagon*, *kagurabue*, *hichiriki*, and a few drums, some of them again borrowed from court music, while for *mikomai* or dance performed by a female Shinto officiant *miko*, the small tree of bells called *suzu* can be used. Significant for festivals or *matsuri*, usually in relation to seasonal change, harvesting and the like, music for local *kagura* which takes place during such events, has each its own small band of musicians called *hayashi*, “a generic term for percussion ensembles, with or without melodic instruments”²³, mostly

²⁰ Karlin, *Samotno potovanje*, 166–67.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

²² Malm, *Traditional Japanese Music*, 51, 249, 113.

²³ *Ibid.*, 56.

consisting of drums (one big drum or *ōdaiko*, and two smaller *taiko*, played with a slimmer cypress drumstick or *bachi*²⁴), a hand brass gong called an *atarigane*, and a simple bamboo pipe flute with six or seven holes called *takebue* or *shinobue*. The characteristics, as well as the way of playing on those instruments may vary, depending on the group of players.

Miniature of two-string *koto* or *yakumo-koto*

Alma Karlin could probably hear some kind of *hayashi*, as Asakusa was one of the early visits she wrote about. She refers to it as a “Kwamon temple”²⁵ (actually Kwannon or Asakusa Kannon, or Sensō-ji), dedicated to Kannon Bosatsu, the Bodhisattva of compassion, the largest temple in Asakusa and the oldest in the city, one of the most important venues for festivals, as “its Shinto shrine and Buddhist Kannon Temple have been the locus of festivals and fairs for many centuries”²⁶. The area around was very rich with entertainment places and traditional theatres, as she mentions: “Outside, around the temple there are numerous theatre sheds and bars, and behind them is the forbidden city of Yoshiwara, where you can walk to.”²⁷ She continues with her story from Yoshiwara, a theme which she later in her writings liked to come back to; but unfortunately, there is no other mention of music or festivals and the *hayashi* she heard.²⁸

To Shinto religion we can tie one of Karlin's object, an 11.5-centimetre Japanese bridgeless zither with two strings, the two-string *koto* (*yakumogoto* (八雲琴), or, more commonly, *yakumo-koto* or *yagumo-*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

²⁵ Karlin, *Samotno potovanje*, 169.

²⁶ Bonnie C. Wade, *Thinking Musically: Experiencing Music, Experiencing Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 61.

²⁷ Karlin, *Samotno potovanje*, 170.

²⁸ One of the most important significant festivals, which she could have visited was the Sanja festival (三社祭, literally “Three Shrine Festival”), significant for the portable shrines and *hayashi* consisting of five members, playing on flute, small metal gong, and three drums. Another Shinto instrument, the *binzasara*, can be heard in the *binzasara* dance, bringing forward a prayer for prosperity and a good harvest. Its prominent parades revolve around three *mikoshi* (portable shrines referenced in the festival's name), as well as traditional music and dancing. Wade, *Thinking Musically*, 62.

koto), inventorized as a “plucked instrument with two strings”²⁹. The word *koto* or *kin* was originally the word generically used for all string instruments.³⁰ *Yakumo-koto*, or eight cloud zither, is generally, according to Piggott, 3 feet 7 inches long (around 109 cm) and 4.5 inches (around 12 cm) wide, with 2 strings tuned in unison to F sharp, usually played placed on a low table with cylindrical picks.³¹ One good example of the instrument dating from 1917 can be seen at the online collection of the Grassi Museum für Volkenkunde Leipzig, under the name *Yakumo Koto*.³²

It is a religious musical instrument, with an interesting history and applications. Its appearance can be traced back to the blind musician Nakayama Danjō (or Nakayama Kotonushi (1803-1880)), who created the instrument and in 1920 proposed to use it in the offertory music at the Izumo Taisha Grand Shrine,³³ the oldest and most important shrine, today a national treasure. At the beginning it was even called *izumo goto*.³⁴ It is based on a myth, the story of Susano-o-no-mikoto, brother of the Sun Goddess, and his wife Kushinada-hime-no-mikoto. He rescued her from an eight-tailed dragon and afterwards married her; they were happily married, she would often play music for him “by plucking on a bowstring with an arrowhead. She also fastened the bowstring to the bottom of a wooden tub and beat it with a stick.”³⁵

²⁹ K143, *Collection of Alma Karlin*, 34–44.

³⁰ Malm, *Traditional Japanese Music*, 193.

³¹ Francis Taylor Piggott, *The Music and Musical Instruments of Japan* (Yokohama: Kelly and Walsh, 1909), 116–117.

³² “Yakumo Koto,” *Online Collection*, Grassi Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig, accessed July 19, 2019, <https://skd-online-collection.skd.museum/Details/Index/1604490>.

³³ Robert C. Provine, J. Lawrence Witzleben and Yosihiko Tokumaru, eds. *The Garland Encyclopaedia of World Music: East Asia: China, Japan, and Korea* (Routledge: 2001), 609.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Bill Roberts, “Utamatsuri,” *Oomoto*, accessed July 16, 2019, <http://www.oomoto.or.jp/English/enVisitor/enBill11.html>.



Figure 3: Miniature which features the Japanese instrument yakumo-koto, today related to the Shinto sect Ōmoto-kyō. We can find its iconography in ukiyo-e, such as Chikanobu Toyohara's works *Current Beauties*, *Moon from the Ocean Pavilion*, *Evening Concerts*, and others. (Collection of Alma Karlin (K143), Celje Regional Museum Archives).

Some researchers even point out its relation to the Izumo cult and mention its relation to the Japanese intellectual movement *kokugaku*, translated as *native studies* or *nativism*, which turn to basic Shinto tradition and Japan's ancient literature.³⁶ Nowadays it is used in the Ōmotokyō (大本教) or Ōmoto (大本) Shinto sect, founded in 1892, during their processions and ritual practices. One of the important is a traditional poetry festival *Utamatsuri*, where they gather to recite or chant poems, and as well play a two string *yakumo-koto*, referring to the

³⁶ Fabio Rambelli, ed. *The Sea and the Sacred in Japan: Aspects of Maritime Religion* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 53–63.

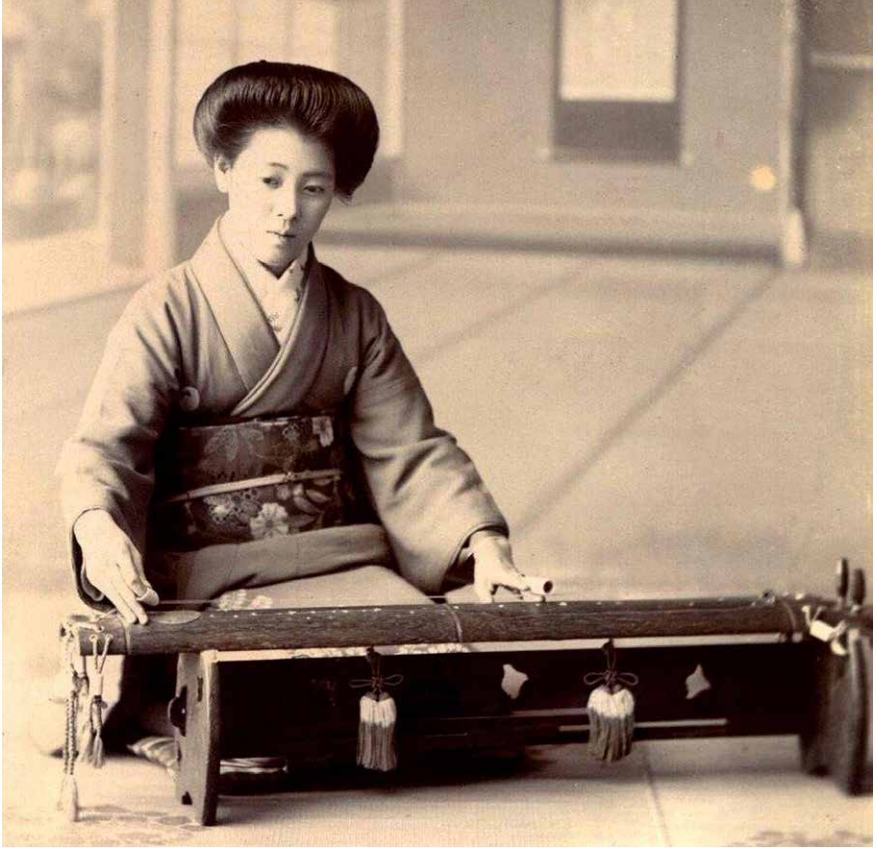


Figure 4: Yakumo-koto as played, using a low table and cylindrical picks (“Geisha playing on a yakumogoto” by Okinawa Soba (Rob) is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0).

above mentioned myth.³⁷ The members of the sect and their spiritual leader believe that performing the arts is a religious practice, and they engage in such traditional arts as the tea ceremony, weaving, ceramics, nō, poetry, and martial arts. One of their main stances was in opposition to militarism from the start. Just before Alma Karlin came to Japan,

³⁷ *Ibid.*

in the year of 1921, they were first persecuted by the state, all its shrines and facilities burned down due to their failure to respect the authority of the Japanese Emperor.³⁸ The instrument was designated as an Intangible Cultural property of Japan (as municipal cultural property, under the category of performing arts) in Nara prefecture in the year of 2015, preserved under the Asuka Sound Preservation Society (明日香の響保存会).³⁹

Karlin's miniature could as well be related to the *yakumo-koto* predecessor, *Azuma nigenkin* or *Azuma-ryū nigenkin* (東流二弦琴) often just referred to as the *nigenkin* (二弦琴). Sometimes the names *nigenkin* and *yakumo-koto* are used interchangeably, but actually they are not the same instruments.

"The *nigenkin* is an extremely rare two-string zither found only in the Asakusa suburb of Tokyo. The *nigenkin* is a fairly recent instrument adapted from the *yakumo-goto*, a two-string zither used exclusively in Shinto shrines. In the early Meiji Period (1868-1912), Tosha Rosen, a *yakumo-koto* player, started to use the instrument to perform the popular secular music of the time (*hauta* and *zokkyoku*), and as a result was asked to sever his association with the Shinto Shrine and was forbidden to play the *yakumo-koto*. He therefore created the *Azuma nigenkin*, with only subtle differences from its predecessor, notably an open back and less ornamentation."⁴⁰

The *nigenkin* is played with a plastic or ivory pick and a large slide called a *rokan*, which is slid along the strings. Besides classical there is as well a popular song repertoire, while among the main preservers and performers of the instrument is a Canadian composer, performer and improviser, Randy Raine-Reusch.⁴¹

³⁸ "Oomoto Japan's Religion of Peace," You Tube Video, 6:35, Oomoto Believers Association, July 29, 2007, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iIho17Y3i_s.

³⁹ "Yagumo-goto nitsuite (八雲琴について, On yagumo-goto)," Asuka Mura denshō geinō hozonkai (明日香村伝承芸能保存会, Preservation Society of the Traditional Performing Arts of Asuka Village), accessed July 13, 2019, <https://densyo.asuka.co/yagumo-goto/>.

⁴⁰ "Nigenkin," World Instrument Gallery, accessed July 9, 2019, <http://www.asza.com/Instruments/inigen.shtml>.

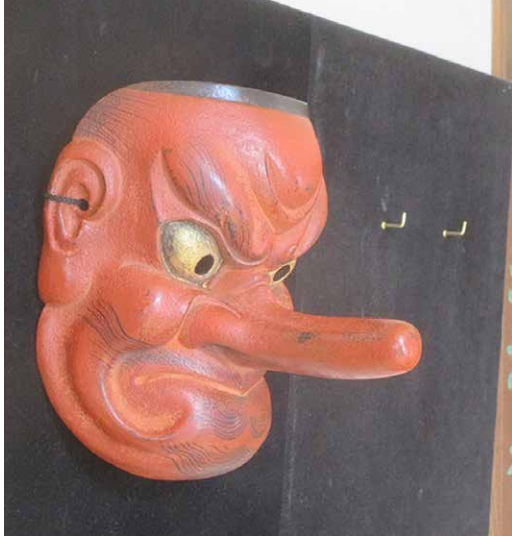
⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Small bronze *tengu* mask with *tokin* headware

Another object from Karlin's collection we could link to the Shinto religion is a small *tengu* (天狗, 天 stands for heaven and 狗 for dog, or heavenly dog) mask, which is in Shinto considered as *kami* or *yōkai* (supernatural being), a bird-like mystical creature, which can take part in *kagura* performances, and is often used for a theme in a comic monologue called a *rakugo*. Its significant features, a long nose protruding from a red painted face, were inspired by the Japanese mythological figure Saruta Hikononikoto (猿田彦命).



Figure 5: Small miniature of *tengu* mask (bronze, 6.6 x 4.1 cm), black and in some parts coloured in red and gold, with a small box *tokin* (兜巾) on the top of its forehead, representing a hat or a drinking cup, headwear associated with mountain monks *yamabushi*, whose form they often assume. It could be used as a wall hanging, as it is said that the hanging of Japanese traditional masks can bring happiness. (Collection of Alma Karlin (K24), Celje Regional Museum Archives).



Figures 6 and 7: Actual size of *tengu nō* mask, made by the mask carver Hideta Kitazawa (Source: Hideta Kitazawa).

It is usually pictured as taking the shape of some sort of priest as it became associated with the mountain ascetics called *yamabushi*, who practice Shugendō, a syncretic religion dating back to the Heian period; a combination of influences from local folk-religious practices, pre-Buddhist mountain worship, Shinto, Taoism and Vajrayan. According to Hideta Kitazawa, a woodcarving artist specialized in masks and Shinto shrines, its appearance is characteristic of the *Edo sato kagura* (江戸里神楽), a pre-modern Shinto theatrical performed at shrine festivals in the Tokyo area since the Tokugawa period.⁴² It is also used in the kagura *Sanjin* (山神), purification of the stage after day's programme, where rice cakes (mochi) are passed out to visitors. There are Shinto shrines worshipping *tengu* all around the country, but the closest to Tokyo and one of the most famous for its *tengu* is at Mt. Takao, at the Takaoyama Yakuōin (高尾山薬王院).

We know Karlin mentions in her travelogue that you can “sense *tengu*” in Japanese woods, which indicates that she was familiar with its figure and character.

Buddhist narimono depicted in Karlin's travelogue

Buddhism, which arrived, so to speak, in Japan in the Nara period, inspired its own instruments and music, gradually influencing other forms of music and its instruments. Malm points out that Japanese music is based “on two theoretical foundations, the music of ancient China and the music of Buddhism”.⁴³ One of the best examples is the origin of *shōmyō*, the Japanese Buddhist chant, used mainly in the Tendai-shū and Shingon-shū sects, fundamental for all later music in Japan.

Instruments serve or have functions mainly as simple accompaniment for Buddhist chants, signalling or time-marking the actions of monks within their services and daily activities at the temple. In the West most musicologists refer to those as instruments, sound instruments, sound producing instruments, idiophones, while monks themselves classify

⁴² Hideta Kitazawa, E-mail correspondence, 19 July 2019.

⁴³ Malm, *Traditional Japanese Music*, 66.

or relate to those as *narimono* (鳴物, directly best translated as “objects which make sound”) or *hōgu* (法具, ritual implements).⁴⁴

As Karlin attended a Buddhist ceremony at the Tendai temple in Asakusa⁴⁵, about which she wrote in her travelogue, she would have heard the Buddhist *hanshō* bell, which calls the priests to their services. What distinguishes it from the bells we know is that it is hit with a wooden hammer from the outside, meaning the bell does not have a clapper. Then there is the *kei*, a chime made of bronze, the *uchinarashi* or *kin*, and *rei*, or a small hand bell in the shape of a bowl, which are all used as markers for “certain special moments in the ceremonial movement of the head priest.”⁴⁶ The *kin* is especially very well known in the West, as it is used in Western music, while its shapes are reminiscent of musical healing bowls. Gongs, like the *nyō* and *dora*, signal “major sections of the ceremony”⁴⁷. Other instruments related to Buddhist music are two percussive instruments: the *mokugyo* or “wooden fish”, which bears the shape of a bent fish or a bird in a backward position⁴⁸, and is struck with a padded stick, used in the Jōdō and Nichiren sects, and a frame drum called an *uchiwadaiko*, significant for the Nichiren sect. Buddhist ceremonies and services are accompanied as well by large drums called *ōdaiko*, while in some cases as well in court music *gagaku* instruments are added.⁴⁹ There are numerous sound-producing instruments used in zen Buddhism temples, such as we can read about in Suzuki’s *The Training of the Zen Buddhist Monk*, an illustrated transcription on twenty five sound instruments, which call monks to certain times or events.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ For a more detailed classification, see Sōkyū Gen’yū, *Zendera monogatari* (Tokyo: Shinjūsha, 2012).

⁴⁵ The mention of the instruments are linked to Malm’s visit to the Tendai temple. Malm, *Traditional Japanese Music*, 70–72.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁴⁸ Piggott, *Music and Musical Instruments*, 176.

⁴⁹ Malm, *Traditional Japanese Music*, 73.

⁵⁰ Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *The Training of the Zen Buddhist Monk* (Rutland and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1994), 155–159, <https://terebeck.hu/zen/SuzukiTraining.pdf>.

The sound of *bonshō* and *waniguchi*

In “Travelling to Nikko”, Karlin notes the gongs, writing of this current UNESCO World Heritage site, while discussing the formative myth of Japan, and providing insight into the Shinto shrines (Futarasan Shrine and Tōshō-gū) and Buddhist temple (Rinnō-ji). Nikko had been developed into a mountain resort during the Meiji period, and became particularly popular among foreign visitors. Karlin would spend the night in the Japanese style house of Speight, who lived close by. In the morning, astonished at the calmness of the place, she mentioned the sound of the gong: “... the silence was from time to time broken only by a long and solemn hit of the temple gong, which afterwards died out.”⁵¹ This was probably the sound of the *bonshō* (梵鐘, Buddhist bell), or *ōgane* (大鐘, large bell), also known as *tsurigane* (釣り鐘, hanging bell), the largest bell in the monastery, hung within the separately designed bell house built outside, at the west side of the monastery. Struck with an external wooden bell hammer, its sound is used to mark the gatherings of monks for prayer, as well as to indicate various times. It’s of greatest significance during New Year rituals, when it is stricken 108 times to symbolize the 108 worldly desires, or to expunge the destructive feelings people had over the past the last year.⁵²

A gong also appears in “In Yoshiwara”, at the temple Kwannon or Asakusa Kannon (in the text referred as a “Kwamon”) describing the way people visit the temple and pray to the god: “each [] pulls a rope at a gong, clutches his hands, shares his joy with the deity...”⁵³ Here she probably had in mind the *waniguchi* (鯨口), a gong at the entrance of the shrine. Regarding the actual description of worshiping at the temple, it is unclear whether she actually meant the shrine and not the temple itself.

⁵¹ Karlin, *Samotno potovanje*, 168.

⁵² Read more on the bell in Wei-Yu Lu, “The Performance Practice of Buddhist Baiqi in Contemporary Taiwan” (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 2012), 146–51.

⁵³ Karlin, *Samotno potovanje*, 169.



Figure 8: Ōgane (3.3 x 2.7 meters) and the Daishōrō (Great Bell Tower), Chion-in, Kyoto, Important Cultural Property (Photo: Klara Hrvatin).

Karlin's descriptions of musical instruments with indirect religious connotation: insights into Japanese folklore, iconography and theatre

In general, Karlin does not pay attention to or provide detailed information about, for instance, the sound of events, with the exception of occasions when an object or description of the object is closely related to some instrument to which she pays slight notice or provides some explanation. Such is the case for example, when she describes the *tanuki* or Japanese raccoon dog, which has a reputation as a master of disguise and carries a strong ancient folkloric significance and is often used as a common theme in Japanese art. She mentions the *tanuki*'s stomach in utility of a drum: "he has as well a huge stomach, on which he beats, when he is happy"⁵⁴. This kind of description of *tanuki* is common in Japan. *Tanuki* has a long history in Japanese folklore as a *tanuki yōkai* or some kind of supernatural being, and had been depicted in classics as a creature who can turn into humans and sing songs; in some cases they became as well the subject of rituals. A *tanuki* may be shown with their scrotum depicted at their back like travellers' packs, or used as drums. Most typically, they are depicted as having large bellies, sometimes drumming on their bellies, and as such brought forward in the classic literature, *ukiyo-e*, *netsuke* motif and even depicted on *tsuba*, etc. There is also the phenomenon of the so called *tanuki-bayashi*, presenting a mysterious sound of a drum heard in the middle of the night in Edo, on which the very popular nursery rhyme *Shōjō-ji no Tanuki-bayashi* (証城寺の狸囃子) is based.⁵⁵ We can see them displayed in Buddhist temples throughout the country.

Another passage when she mentions an instrument is when she provides brief insight into the celebration of *setsubun* (which she refers to as "persecution of spirits"); she pictures the sculpture of the goddess Benten, as of Japan's Seven Lucky Gods, representing music, art, literature, performing arts, etc., holding a Japanese lute called a *biwa*⁵⁶.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁵⁵ "Tanuki in Japanese artwork," Japanese Buddhist Statuary, accessed July 2, 2019, <https://www.onmarkproductions.com/html/tanuki.shtml>.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 181.

Here Karlin for the first time gives an explicit name of the instrument in relation to the goddess, but without further information on the instrument itself.



Figure 9: *Kiryu Kannon Benzaiten* 騎龍弁財天 (*Goddess of Music and Good Fortune*)
Seated on a White Dragon (Aoigaoka Keisei, 1832).



Figure 6: *Hyōshigi* (拍子木), a simple percussion instrument Karlin paid special attention to when visiting the theatre. It is very distinctive in kabuki, seen often as well in Shinto festivals, and used in some forms of Buddhist practice, as well as in the new Japanese religion Tenrikyō. (Hyōshigi by ja:User:Miya is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0).

The most interesting part, where she wrote of music a little bit more, is surely on Japanese theatre and dance performances in “In the fishing villages”:⁵⁷

in Japanese theatre, there are musicians on stage and in addition to Japanese instruments, they also use two ‘harmonious wooden blocks’, which play an important role in music, and actors often represent *yorose* from the houses of joy and old knights, or they celebrate, as for example, in the play ‘*Kirare Yosaburo*’, a man who became a hero out of love and pain.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ The title itself presents Asakusa, which used to be a fishing village. Karlin, *Samotno potovanje*, 192.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 192.

The theatre play Alma Karlin actually visited was probably kabuki, regarding the play she mentions *Kirare Yosaburo* (Scarface Yosaburo), which is short for the play *Yowa Nasake Ukina no Yokohushi*, more often shortened to *Kirare Yosa*, a kabuki adaptation of *kōdan*, a traditional form of story-telling with its origin in the 17th century. As it is domestic drama presenting the lives of commoners, and was probably more realistic in style, it belongs to *sewamono*, a genre in contrast to *jidaimono* which features historical plots. The “two harmonic wooden sticks” she mentions are at first hard to define as the use of “harmonious” is rather confusing. What she probably meant or had in mind was the so called *hyōshigi* (拍子木) or simply *ki* (木), a simple percussion instrument well presented in kabuki, made from two hard wood blocks, sometimes translated as “wooden time beaters”⁵⁹. Those are used at first to signal the beginning of the performance, accelerating to produce more rapid sounds until the curtain rises, when they end with a sharp final clack.⁶⁰ In the set it is used as well to indicate a pause before a certain action takes place, a single strike after which some seconds of pause follow.⁶¹ During the play itself, the *tsuke* (付・附), another set of wooden clappers is used, struck on a wooden board, which adds dynamics or reinforces a certain part of the play. Outside the theatre, in the past, they would use them as well for fire-alerting signs, or to attract the public during juggling, athletic or other performances, as well as for night inspection or patrolling of the streets.⁶² We can also find the instrument on the list of those used in zen monasteries, for a time marker of specific events in the life of monks.⁶³ It is also the first instrument to be used in the new religion Tenrikyo. Most often we can see them as a marker for signalling the *omikoshi* or a portable Shinto shrine’s movement and reinforcing and supporting the *akegoe* of the carriers of the *omikoshi*, or to announce the entry in *sumo* tournaments.

⁵⁹ Piggott, *Music and Musical Instruments*, 177.

⁶⁰ Malm, *Traditional Japanese Music*, 247.

⁶¹ Ronald Cavaye, Paul Griffith and Akihiko Senda, *A Guide to the Japanese Stage: From Traditional to Cutting Edge* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2005), 88–89.

⁶² Piggott, *Music and Musical Instruments*, 177.

⁶³ Suzuki, *Training of the Zen*, 155–159.

Conclusion

From the Celje Regional Museum's Collection of Alma M. Karlin we could put in the foreground two objects which relate to Japanese religious music, a small miniature of *yakumo-koto*, nowadays used in a Shinto sect called Ōmoto, and a small bronze miniature of a *tengu nō* mask, used as well in *kagura* plays. Both of these objects show Karlin's preferences for small souvenirs. What would be interesting is to attempt to determine where or how Karlin obtained the objects and what they were used for, especially in the case of the *yakumo-koto*. Moreover, it would be interesting to research the overall collection of Alma Karlin's music-related objects in order to obtain better insight into the subject matter.

The author's search for correlations between Karlin's musical objects from her collection such as *yakumo-koto* and her writing from *Lonely Travel*, focussing especially on the parts depicting her stay in Japan, did not bring about any discoveries of great importance. Unfortunately none of the objects were mentioned in her travelogue. On the other hand, what we can realize from her writings is her stance and insights into music and religion related themes. More than the direct depiction of music and religion related objects and topics, they were part of Karlin's broader context of her windows into Japanese culture.

According to her travelogue, she was particularly fond of or paid attention to the sound of the temple's gongs, and sound producing instruments with symbolic connotation to Shinto or Buddhist figures; such as her *tanuki's* depiction with a drum *taiko*, and a bodhisattva holding a Japanese *biwa*. Attention was drawn as well to *hyōshigi*, an instrument which she could encounter when visiting the theatre, but which is as well widely used in religious-related events. Knowing and spending time with the artists such as the poets, writers, painters and actors, she had good opportunity to be directly introduced to Japanese culture and arts, which is as well evident from her travelogue.

Alma Karlin herself mentions that this was a busy period for her, as she "in a year, spent in Japan, did not write even one literary work, even if she was a correspondent for one of the most important magazines for

textiles in Germany,..."⁶⁴; in another passage she writes "I could write a whole book about Japan, but I had to really try hard to shorten the description..."⁶⁵ What's necessary is to analyse other of Karlin's works that involve Japan, many of which are not yet translated. Among them, particularly, *Singende Blüte: Ein Roman aus dem vorgeschichtlichen Japan* (Singing Blossom: A Novel from Ancient Japan) and an art novel *Im Haus der Menschen: Ein Künstlerroman aus Japan* (In the People's House), which was never published and in regard to which Jerneja Jezernik wrote that Alma said it contains "reflections on Japanese art and philosophy."⁶⁶

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⁶⁴ Karlin, *Samotno potovanje*, 183.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁶⁶ Jerneja Jezernik, *Nisem le napol človek: Alma M. Karlin in njeni moški* (Ljubljana: Sanje, 2016), 116.

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