

## Duo vio-LINK-oto

Ryuko Mizutani and Pia Liptak established their duo in 2002 and were particularly interested in increasing the repertoire for the ensemble by commissioning new works. Pairing Japanese koto with violin in duo combination is relatively recent, and the repertoire of original compositions is still small.

Pia and Ryuko's pioneering and promoting efforts included concert performances, recordings, radio broadcasts, presentations and lectures about their work, music, and instruments. Duo vio-LINK-oto have recorded "Ice Flowers" for Centaur Records, in part sponsored by the Institute for American Music, and Pia and Ryuko also appear together on the CD "Vista, contemporary Koto." They have performed in New York State, Chicago, Hawaii, and more.

The name Duo vio-LINK-oto is formed by letters of the ensemble's two instruments: violin and koto. In addition, "oto" means "sound" in Japanese. Link naturally also refers to the joining of instruments and music of different cultures.

*The koto The koto is one of the oldest Japanese instruments and was originally introduced to Japan from China through the Korean peninsula in the 7th century. According to legend, the shape of the koto originated from that of a crouching dragon and parts of the instrument are named after the dragon. The instrument is roughly six feet long and usually has 13 strings arched over independently moveable bridges that sit on a hollow body of wood. By adjusting these bridges, any thirteen-note scale can be produced, even one with microtonal intervals. In addition to the notes available through the adjustment of the bridges, each pitch can be altered by pushing down the strings with the hand. A 17-stringed bass koto was developed early in the 20th century and this instrument and its younger relative, the 20-string koto, now play an integral role in contemporary ensembles.*

*The koto has traditionally been part of an ensemble, often having an accompanying role. In more recent times, the instrument has also gained status as a solo instrument. Today, there is a varied repertoire of compositions for koto including traditional Japanese pieces as well as works blending Eastern and Western musical styles and instruments. It's versatility and variety of sounds create an unlimited range of possibilities for adapting music from many genres and time periods. Along with the wide range of the koto's playing techniques, providing a wonderful palette of sound textures, this exciting variety of repertoire makes the koto appealing to audiences all over the world.*

*Ryuko Mizutani graduated from the Japanese National Broadcasting Company's School for Performers of Traditional Japanese Instruments in 1987. She then studied both classical and modern koto music under the koto masters Tadao and Kazue Sawai. In 1999, she received a fellowship from the Japanese Government overseas Study Program for Artists, studying at the Wesleyan University in Connecticut. Ryuko continuously explored new musical possibilities for the koto by collaborating with western musicians and artists of other genres including improvisational and experimental music. Ryuko premiered an impressive number of new works dedicated to her by composers from around the world. She regularly taught in Japan and the US and performed worldwide. She toured with the Sawai Koto Ensemble and the Tesu Saito Improvisation Group, was a member of the international group IIZ+, an ensemble featuring three zithers (Korean, Japanese, and Chinese) and Korean Percussion. Ryuko joined the koto quartet, Koto Vortex, in 2005, and the contemporary music group, Koto Phase, in 2002. Throughout the illness that she endured during the final years of her life, Ryuko maintained her active schedule of performing and teaching. Ryuko Mizutani died in 2008 at the age of 44.*