

THE SECOND EUROPEAN SHAKUHACHI SUMMER SCHOOL - a report by Véronique Piron and Jim Franklin -

The Second European Shakuhachi Summer School took place in Munster, a typical small town in Alsace, a territory in East of France at the French-German and Swiss border, especially known for its storks and its famous cheese known by the same name ("munster"). It lies at the foot of the Vosges mountains. The participants gathered at the Grand Hotel near the station and in front of a big park: this is an old building from the end of the 18th century, belonging to the historical patrimony, and adding a traditional and rustic touch in an alsatian way



MUNSTER (photo V.Piron)



(photo A.Natalis)

to this Summer School of the Japanese bamboo flute, resulting in a real meeting of 2 distant words, and which will leave a rather nostalgic taste for some of the people. Individual or collective rooms had been allocated to the participants, allowing most of the people the possibility of socializing: exchanging, sharing, and communicating (in many languages). Especially those who shared time or rooms with the Japanese participants will retain the experience in their minds for long afterwards, as will the Japanese participants themselves.

The Summer School activities alternated between different venues from day to day and moment to moment. The town of Munster was thus infiltrated by the sound of the bamboo flute in its different public places: the music school during one day, the Grand Hotel for some of the activities, the town hall and the protestant church for different concerts, and for most of the lessons "La Maison du Kleebach" at the entrance of Munster, up in the hills. This last place is accustomed to receiving groups of singers and musicians, and offers appropriate teaching spaces. The daily schedule was somewhat frenetic, with a dense program and multiple venues, meaning that we spread wildly throughout the town of Munster, although it had initially been intended to organize the entire event (except the largest public concert) and the accommodation in only one place, "La Maison du Kleebach" mentioned before. We were forced to re-organize at short notice as the house had suffered a major delay to renovation work.

Therefore while the event was progressing a feeling was slowly unfolding, a real sense of three worlds gathering (here we can understand the real meaning of the word "Rencontre" used in French to translate the English word "Summer-school"): a small quiet town in Alsace, a mixed group of different people blown in on the four winds of the planet, and the sounds of a flute –in bamboo- coming from a very distant country,...almost surrealistic, in fact extraordinary, but yes...we did it and we were there!



morning ROBUKI
"La Maison du Kleebach", (photo V.Piron)

So here we should thank warmly all the people who participated simply and with generosity to the final organization of this event: Denis Klein, the director of "La Maison du Kleeback"; Denis Stutzmann, the manager of the Grand Hôtel; the director of the Music School; the association "Les Amis des Orgues" and Denis Monhardt for the protestant church, and the Munster Town Hall.

All of this organization was the result of a lot of work with many changes at the last moment and even during the Summer School itself. But this was simply one more challenge to be taken up, as it reminded us that the Shakuhachi road is at the best of times especially long and difficult, but possible. So many thanks to all the participants and the teachers, for their understanding, kindness, and help during their stay.

PARTICIPANTS

The Summer School gathered 51 participants from different countries in Europe and Japan; this figure was close to the one from the first Summer School in London in July 2006:

Germany (20 people),
France (13 people),
Japan (5 people),
United Kingdom
(4 people: 2 English, 1 Welsh, 1 Irish),
Switzerland (3 people),
Netherlands (3 people),
Belgium (2 people),
Czech Republic (1 person),



Student Concert (photo: A.Natalis)

2 more persons can be added to this figure but who unfortunately had to cancel their attendance at the last moment: 1 Swedish, 1 Czech.

This is a consistent and significant figure, which would have even been greater if the event could have been programmed a week later in accordance with the usual summer holidays schedule; the period of 4th-7th July was just a little bit early in the year, but was the only possible choice when the decision was made to organize the second Summer School one year after the first one (in 2006).

These participants were joined by the invited teachers: from Japan, FURUYA Teruo and KAKIZAKAI Kaoru (Kokusai Shakuhachi Kenshukan, the school, of YOKOYAMA Katsuya and primary focus of the 2007 Summer School); from Europe: KARIYA Sōzan Chiaki assisted by Jean-François Lagrost (Shin-Tozan school, Paris) and Véronique Piron (France) and Jim Franklin (Germany) who, in addition to being the primary organizers, taught KSK and modern music.

The general standard was quite high, which was a pleasant surprise while receiving the application forms, and the Japanese teachers indicated many times that they really received an unexpected and pleasant surprise. They finally decided while teaching to make the programme move more rapidly, especially in the Sankyoku classes. This provided a good opportunity for FURUYA-sensei to show his natural and usual enthusiasm and generosity, which brought joy to the all the participants. The group was well-balanced, consisting of 20 beginners (with a practice of a minimum of several months, so that an introductory course wasn't necessary), 20 intermediate participants and 11 advanced participants, some of them teachers in their own right.

The majority were students of the invited teachers and organizers of the event as well as of Daniel Lifermann ("Bamboo Way" Association, Paris), Jean François Lagrost (Shin-Tozan school,

Paris), Kees Kort (Dutch Shakuhachi Society), who were participants as well as performer/teachers at the Summer School, and of Andreas Gutzwiler (Music Academy in Basel, Switzerland) who participated as a lecturer. Also present were students of other teachers from Europe, Japan and elsewhere.

THE EVENTS

As a Summer School (in contrast to a festival), the activities were balanced between teaching and concerts. As mentioned before, the original intention was that all events except for the main concert would take place at La Maison du Kleebach. In fact, due to the incomplete renovations there, only the teaching took place there, except for the Friday, when it was not possible to use that venue, and we retreated to the Music School in Munster. The concerts (one each evening) were held elsewhere.

As may be expected, several strands of teaching always ran simultaneously, usually with a balance of different styles and levels: beginners, intermediate and advanced, Sankyoku and Honkyoku, and classes in modern music and improvisation. In keeping with the principles established for the European Shakuhachi Society in 2006, three different schools were represented, at least in the planning: Kokusai Shakuhachi Kenshukan (the school of YOKOYAMA Katsuya), Tozan, and Kinko. Due to circumstances beyond his control Gunnar Jinmei Linder, who was to teach Kinko, was unable to attend. Accordingly, the planned Kinko Sankyoku pieces were taught mainly by FURUYA-sensei. Jim Franklin taught pieces from the Chikuho and KSK Honkyoku repertoires that corresponded to the planned Kinko pieces. So, despite this setback, we were nevertheless able to offer a diverse range of material. The Kinko school was nevertheless a presence at the Summer School, through two of the participants, Wolfgang Hessler and Andrea Hofer, both certified Kinko teachers and students of Prof. Andreas Gutzwiler. On the final day Prof. Gutzwiler himself contributed a musicological lecture about his fascinating insights into the tonal structure of Jiuta Sōkyoku. Apart from that specific lecture, other participants made musicological contributions focussing on the notation systems of different schools, and on composition for shakuhachi.

In addition to the immediate efforts of the shakuhachi teachers, an important contribution was made by OONISHI Mizuka and WATANABE Haruko, the two strings players who came as guests. They were ever-present in Sankyoku classes, providing the opportunity for participants to gain experience of playing the pieces with koto and shamisen. They were also willing to give generously of their time outside of formal classes, so that students could play though pieces with them in a less formal setting.



Munster Town Hall

(photo: A.Natalis)

THE CONCERTS

In addition to the workshops and classes, four concerts were held. The first of these, after dinner on the first evening, was highly informal, in the relaxed atmosphere of the dining room of the Grand Hotel. As an “open mic” concert, all participants were free to take part as they wished, and the programme, compiled as the evening went on, revealed a broad spectrum of interests: from traditional pieces, through to free improvisation. In fact, it was a microcosm of the range of interests and standards of the participants. The concert was punctuated by desert, coffee, and a “surprise”: Kugelhopf (a kind of cake typical of the region), served at the end.

Two teachers’ concerts were organized as part of the Summer School. The first took place on the Thursday evening in the Town Hall, and was open primarily to participants and their families and friends. The second was staged in the Protestant Church, and was open to the general public. There had been substantial advance publicity for this concert: it was included and advertised as part of the Church’s regular summer concert series.

The first concert was of high standard, but its atmosphere was nevertheless friendly and somewhat informal, allowing for direct contact between the musicians and the participants, clustered around a small stage set up for the purpose. This atmosphere also helped us feel warm, as the weather at the start of July was particularly dismal, moist and cold. The performances focussed more on solo pieces, and demonstrated particularly to the participants what the shakuhachi can do; a highlight of this concert was FURUYA-sensei’s performance of *Tsuru no sugomori* (“Nesting of Cranes”).



FURUYA-sensei

(photos: A.Natalis, A.Nederbragt)

The Protestant Church of Munster, in the neo-romanesque style of the 19th century, has an austere atmosphere with warm lighting, and was particularly well suited to the spirit of the shakuhachi. It has a capacity of 350 seats, and for the public concert on 6th July, 170 people gathered there, including 120 who were not participants at the Summer School. This is a significant number, given the potential of the town of Munster and a concert of little-known music. People came from throughout the surrounding region, and even from Strasbourg, which meant a one-hour drive.

The programme was shaped with pieces being chosen according to the atmosphere of the church and the transparent, reverberant acoustics of the space: Honkyoku pieces (the repertoire originally associated with Zen-Buddhism), Jiuta (the so-called classical music: voice, shamisen and shakuhachi), Shinkyoku with the composer MIYAGI Michio (music from the mid-20th century), Gendaikyoku (composers from the second half of the 20th century) with KINEYA Seihō and MINORU Miki, and improvisation. This allowed the audience, many of them inexperienced with Japanese music, to discover not only the full sonic palette of the Shakuhachi, but also the koto, the shamisen and the traditional classical voice.

This rather copious programme left only a small place for a short verbal presentation, and thus generated a lot of questions during the interval, which revealed the clear interest and astonishment of the audience. In fact, the journalist from the local newspaper (“Dernières Nouvelles d’Alsace”) was very moved, almost in shock, and decided to sit next to the pulpit for the second half, to be as close as possible to the stage and musicians in order to be totally impregnated with the music.



Munster Church (photo V.Piron)

Highlights of this concert were KAKIZAKAI-sensei’s performance of *Kokū* (“Empty Sky”), and KAKIZAKAI-sensei and FURAYA-sensei performing *Shika no tōne* (“Call of the Deer”), making full use of the space. Another high point of the evening was Jim Franklin’s piece “Takeshin 5.1”, especially composed for the occasion and gathering five shakuhachi players in the space together with the especially famous organ of the church, which was played by the composer. The piece was repeated without organ but with six shakuhachi as an encore to the concert. It must be noted that this particular church had a close association with organist, musicologist, medical doctor and theologian Albert Schweizer, so it was appropriate that the organ should make an appearance on our programme.

These two concerts were truly the fruit of the moment lived fully in the present by the musicians: the tight schedule of the Summer School didn’t really leave time for rehearsals and rest, so the atmosphere backstage was even more on the boil and nevertheless extremely concentrated at the same time: a moment of being truly alive.

The final concert, again held in the Town Hall, was the student concert, and in one sense the most important of the events, as it provided the opportunity for the participants to show what they had learned and to play for one another. The programme for this was also a work-in-progress, but the flow of the concert was maintained admirably (and bilingually) by Katja Kornetzky. As may be expected, the standard of the performances reflected the diverse standards of the participants. Nevertheless, the general standard in the concert, as well as in the entire Summer School, was pleasingly high. The pieces ranged from traditional Honkyoku and Sankyoku through to more unusual material, such as Irish music led by Philip Horan, and Jim Franklin’s improvisation class performing a piece based on the riff from John Coltrane’s *A Love Supreme*. In addition several students, including some of the Japanese participants, performed solo pieces. This concert, just as much as the teachers’ concerts, demonstrated the versatility of the shakuhachi!

THE ESS GENERAL MEETING

On Friday, immediately before lunch, the annual general meeting of the European Shakuhachi Society was held. An encouraging sign for the ESS was the fact that the vast majority of participants at the Summer School signed up as members of ESS as well. This meant that we had a good attendance at the meeting – far more than the necessary quorum! Up to the meeting, the ESS had had an interim steering committee, and the first task at the meeting was to take a vote to establish the regular committee for 2007-08. Jim Franklin, who chaired the meeting, suggested that in this period of foundation and consolidation of the ESS, it would be sensible for the interim committee to continue in their roles and become the regular committee. He also explained that the ESS constitution contains built-in safeguards to prevent committee members from becoming entrenched for the long-term, thus avoiding the problem of an ESS

“dynasty”. All members of the interim committee made themselves available for election, and no other nominations were received. There were no dissenting voices, so the committee was deemed elected unopposed. This means that the ESS now has a properly-elected committee, which will continue to steer the society through the establishment process in 2007-08. (At present, we are still waiting for word from the UK Charities Commission concerning our application for registration as a charity.) The committee members are: Jim Franklin (chairperson), Véronique Piron (secretary), Michael Coxall (treasurer), Kiku Day (media officer) and Stephanie Hiller (publications officer).

Following the election, the meeting was given over to discussion of the role and function of ESS and of future events. It was clarified that the ESS understands itself not as a school of shakuhachi, but as a collective and umbrella organization for interchange and dissemination of teaching and support for all active shakuhachi teachers, performers, students and interested parties in Europe, who choose to be affiliated with it. This mission statement met with broad acceptance. Regarding future activities, Jim Franklin suggested that it would be best to avoid a major Summer School in 2008, as this would conflict with the World Shakuhachi Festival in Sydney in July 2008. Instead, the idea was put forward of smaller, country- and school-specific events spread throughout the year. This also met with general acceptance. (In the meantime, a number of such events are in the planning stages, and announcements will be made soon on the ESS website and Euroshak forum.)

THE LIGHTER SIDE

The circumstances of the Summer School – having to change teaching, accommodation and concert venues at the last moment – made life quite difficult at times, particularly for the organizers. Nevertheless, by far the overwhelming majority of participants accepted the situation without complaint, and contributed to making the event a resounding success despite the difficulties. As organizers, we are deeply indebted to the participants, who took it all in their stride!



the fire alarm (photo V.Piron)

Scattered throughout the difficulties were some lighter moments, particularly when looked at in retrospect. Herewith a couple of images:

- the sight of the director of La Maison du Kleebach, Denis Klein, attempting to silence a wayward fire alarm which went off while he was welcoming the group. This proved the ineffectiveness of a t-shirt as a sound insulator.
- the look of disbelief on the face of the young waiter at the Grand Hotel as he passed his master key to the hotel to Jim Franklin on the final evening. It was midnight, the hotel was locked, with the participants outside (or in the only bar in town that was still open), and their keys dutifully hung inside on the pegboard next to the reception. The poor fellow really didn't appreciate being rung on an emergency number by Jean-François Lagrost at that hour.
- the sight of a wandering, huge, rolled-up, red carpet being carried across the church square at around midnight, back to the Town Hall after the second teachers' concert in the Protestant Church. Probably not an everyday occurrence in Munster.

There were no doubt other amusing things that happened, but one can't be everywhere at once, although we made a good attempt at it.

THANKS



(photo: A.Natalis)

A round of thanks and deep appreciation goes to: Stéphane Belijar, Dominique Houlet, Ichikawa Toshihide, Fujiwara Kenji, Alain Natalis, Albert Helm, Yolande Fonseca and Annie Piron for their kindness towards the Japanese people and for the time they spent with them, giving them a chance to visit Paris, Strasbourg and Alsace, most of them traveling in Europe for the very first time: they discovered the locks system on the canals with great interest, the French architecture with its especial taste for the restoration of the old buildings, and much more besides.

CONCLUSION

The Second European Shakuhachi Summer School, following the first one in London, was a great success. It reinforced the participants' passion for the shakuhachi and a stronger wish to learn and exchange, and created even closer relationships between the already existing local associations or schools represented at the Summer School. We are thus already talking about the next major event in 2009, for which a few propositions concerning host countries and groups have already been made.

In particular the participants this year were impressed by the generosity, the humanity and also the humility of the invited teachers, who, returning to Japan with the consciousness that the shakuhachi in Europe already has a long history, expressed the desire to return some day in order to continue with the adventure. Such in any event were the observations and expressions of thanks made at the end of the long journey several weeks later at the Kokusai Shakuhachi Kenshukan 20-year jubilee Festival in Japan, to which Véronique Piron and Jim Franklin traveled in their turn.

At the close, a heartfelt vote of thanks goes once more to all those who helped make this event happen as well as it did in spite of all the difficulties: the teachers, the volunteer helpers, and not least to the participants, without whose presence and goodwill the event would not have been the success that it was.



Concert Eglise Munster (photo A.Nederbragt)

Véronique Piron, Jim Franklin
September 2007