

On my way from England, waiting for my sixth train of the day at the French station of Colmar, a stranger came towards me and asked me in a wonderful French accent “*Shaku’achi?*”. I was taken by surprise. “*Pardon?*”, I asked nervously. “*Shaku’achi?*”, he repeated. “*Er...yes...how did you know?*”. He pointed to a 2.5 *ji-nashi* behind me, sticking out of the top of my rucksack. Oh! Oh, yes - a bit of a clue! “*Me too!*”, he said. One became two and *Rémi* of Brittany and I continued together on the last leg of our journey to the 2007 European Shakuhachi Society Summer School.

We had arrived quite early at the Grand Hotel in Munster and over the afternoon and evening observed the arrival of *Shakuhachi* players from all over Europe and Japan. This influx was later observed from the comfort of the hotel bar. I noticed that it is possible to recognise a *Shakuhachi* player when they walk into a room, even without their instrument. There was a jovial atmosphere in the bar as more and more people arrived throughout the evening, some knew each other, many new acquaintances. I have never seen so many *Shakuhachi* players!



Furuya & Watanabe Photo by Adrian Bain



Furuya

Photo by Annelies Nederbragt

We were distributed between rooms in the hotel and surrounding cabins; many crept quietly into their new lodgings in the dark, once the bar had closed, with no idea as to who the other occupants were. At breakfast, I was talking to a new acquaintance for half an hour and then realised we had unknowingly slept in the same cabin overnight. Except that he hadn't actually slept much due to the multi-lingual snoring of the four other strangers in the room. He was already arranging to change rooms!

It is thanks to Jim Franklin and Veronique Piron that we were there at all. Only days before they were informed that the place we were to be staying and playing at, the *Maison du Kleebach*, had not completed its renovations and resembled a building site. We could still hold our classes there, but no accommodation would be available. How do you find accommodation for around 60 people, in

only days, near to where we would hold the classes, with transport available and food provided? But Jim and Veronique did it! The Grand Hotel would accommodate and feed everybody.

A pattern formed throughout the week. A problem (not of our making) would arise, Jim and Veronique would rush around, find a solution and, with “clink, clink” on a glass at mealtime to attract everyone’s attention, Jim would announce the latest plans. I cannot imagine Jim or Veronique enjoyed the week as much as everyone else did. Thanks to them, we could.



Trying to quieten the alarm!

Photo by Adrian Bain

Every morning a caravan of cars would leave the Grand Hotel (I don’t think anyone was ever left behind); it streamed to the *Maison du Kleebach*, a beautiful mountain retreat (cum building site). Once the renovation works have been completed, it will be a superb venue for musical residents. While we were there, however, rain made it

precarious walking through the building site mud, navigating between diggers and huge mounds of earth. The building works also introduced a spate of power cuts and fire alarm cacophony to accompany our playing.

We commenced each day with *robuki*. Rooooo. It was difficult to hear which sound was mine and soon realised I must just blow and have confidence in my sound. Over the week, I started to become aware of my sound in a different way, to sense the quality of my *Ro* without necessarily being able to hear my own *Ro* from the many.

After each day’s *robuki*, we would study a piece to be played at the student’s concert, a simplified arrangement by Jim Franklin of “*Yamato Chôshi*”. The piece introduced me to some new and interesting techniques and enabled Jim to introduce some subtleties to us (which might take me



Robuki

Photo by Veronique Piron

another five years to utilise!).

We would then split into (usually) three sessions, offering classes for different abilities with a rotation of teachers, offering a mixture of styles and approaches to teaching. Often, I wanted to attend more than one class simultaneously! Sometimes the planned class would stop on one point: maybe twenty minutes on *meri* or *kan* or correct breathing. I would try and scribble notes in an attempt to record the gems of knowledge being cast to the students so freely. I would film the teacher playing the piece we were studying. I still feel regret at leaving my camera battery charging in my room and realising too late as *Kakizakai* played a stunning “*Yamagoe*” to us.



Kariya Sozan-san
Photo by Alain Natalis

It is impossible to describe how the teachers helped me and inspired my study. Even though seeing and hearing the teachers (and students) made me realise the horizon was much further away from me and that my *Shakuhachi* journey didn't have an end, it did not deter me, but made my resolve stronger. I should not think of the journey, just of each moment when I practice.

So, all I can do (and I hope they will forgive me) is to give a short impression of each teacher.

The teaching of *Furuya Teruo-san* was full of kind, enthusiastic energy. He was always genial and with a contagious smile.

Kakizakai Kaoru-san's teaching was an inspiration, seemingly knowing the solution to a student's problem before they had finished asking the question.

Kariya Sozan-san showed amazing skills and dexterity. He was always the most smartly dressed, no matter what the occasion!

Jim Franklin's teaching was full of energy and clarity. Even with the concerns arising from the summer school, once he was teaching, his focus was total.

Veronique Pirons's teaching was especially helpful in a class where students could ask any



I've forgotten what was being demonstrated!
Photo by Adrian Bain

questions about areas that were troubling them (predictably one topic we all agreed on was achieving *kan* notes). Veronique helped us with foundation skills, demonstrating how to overcome common difficulties.

Throughout the week, *Watanabe Haruko san (Koto)* and *Oonishi Mizuka san (Koto and Shamisen)* accompanied the teachers and students. Many, including myself, found it very special to have an opportunity to play with *Koto* and *Shamisen*, especially with such esteemed players. They both gave immeasurable help and constant encouragement.



Kakizakai Photo by Adrian Bain

Philip Horan, from Ireland, gave a hugely popular lesson on *Shakuhachi* and Irish music, playing beautifully on both *Shakuhachi* and a *Shakalute* (an attachment to a western flute that allows it to be played vertically, like a *Shakuhachi*, but utilising the western flute's keys).



Rooooooo... Photo by Alain Natalis

Daniel Lifermann has a wonderful sound and skill; his calmness and lectures about breathing and spirituality were a valuable contribution to the summer school.

Along with Kees Kort's zest for life blowing through his *Shakuhachi* and the elegant playing of Jean Francois Lagrost, everyone was exposed to hundreds of years of combined *Shakuhachi* study being expressed in individual ways. There were so many beautiful players to listen and to learn from. It's interesting to note how unique everyone's style and tone was. Many players, many styles; each person gave freely of a knowledge that has taken time and determination to acquire.

With such a mix of nationalities, the conversation gravitated towards English, with many people assisting with translations when required. There must have been many language translation combinations between English, French, Dutch, German, Czech, Japanese...probably more.



Students' Concert Photo by Alain Natalis

At lunchtimes, the trail of cars would drive down the mountains, back the Grand hotel for a large lunch, which unfortunately had a soporific effect for the early afternoon sessions.



Furuya-san and Kakizakai-san
Photo by Adrian Bain

After each afternoon session, we would again return to the Grand Hotel for a practice (or snooze) prior to a large dinner. Each night after dinner, we would attend a concert.

The first concert was an open mike session in the Grand Hotel, when anyone could entertain with a piece of their choice. People of all abilities and

experience played, with different length Shakuhachi, with violin, by score, by improvisation, traditional and modern. Even though I have little experience, I decided to play “*Tamuke*”. It is a difficult piece and one I had only been studying for a few weeks, so I knew it would be a flawed performance, but I enjoyed the challenge of playing in front of so many people, especially such prestigious players. My legs were shaking and my knees knocked together, but I do know that giving a live performance is a lesson in itself.

There was very little time to practice or review what we had studied during the day. As a result, there were nightly echoes of *Shakuhachi*, often beyond midnight. The normal residents of the Grand Hotel were not very happy and a curfew on playing at night had to be imposed.

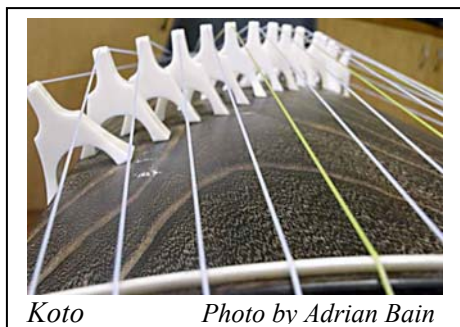
It was sometimes difficult with the damp weather to practice outside, but there were early morning calls to rise from *Shakuhachi* amongst the trees in nearby park. Walking through the park, a careful observer would have been able to spot players lurking behind trees and bushes blowing to the leaves. There were others who chose to perform Tai Chi in preparation for another busy day.



Students' Concert Photo by Adrian Bain

The next evening's concert was given by the teachers in the Town Hall, in preparation for their public concert the following evening. It was my first time to hear most of the teachers play continuously as a player, not as a teacher having to stop to teach us some important point about a

piece. It was a special treat to hear Furuya play “*Tsuru no Sugomori*” (“*The Nesting of the Cranes*”) as Munster is famed for its cranes and we had all seen them on the roofs around.



The teachers’ Concert was held in the impressive church in Munster (with nesting cranes on the roof). The church was full of locals, most of whom I doubt knew what to expect. I expect that every one of them would have been astounded by the elegant traditional costumes, the grace of the performers

and the emotion and passion of their music. “*Shika no Tōne*” was breathtaking, as the first lines echoed from opposite sides of the church, apparently from nowhere, with the audience looking around to see where the sound was coming from. A beautiful piece written by Jim Franklin, “*Takeshin 5.1*”, combined the power of the church organ (played by Jim) and five shakuhachi. It made my hairs stand up on my neck; it was extremely moving. The entire evening was extremely special and I am sure the audience will never forget it.

Learning is always tiring and as the end of the summer school approached and with the arrival of some sunshine, the tempo noticeably slowed. The afternoon before the final concert was perfect for relaxing: some were practicing, some were sleeping in the sun, while others were chatting in groups.



The final concert was given by the students in the Town Hall. The students performed pieces they had studied in the various groups throughout the week. There was a mixture of improvisational, contemporary and traditional pieces. For some students it was their first ever live performance.

Afterwards, we all retired to a small bar for a well-earned drink and a last chat amongst new friends before each of our departures homeward in the morning. After all the hard work and stress experienced by Jim and Veronique, one of life’s true injustices occurred – by the time Jim arrived at the bar it had stopped serving and Jim couldn’t even enjoy a well-deserved drink with us at the end of a difficult week.

The E.S.S. AGM was held during the summer school and it showed that there is a lot of activity going on in establishing the E.S.S. as a valuable society for us all. The E.S.S. is young and it will undoubtedly grow strongly. The next summer school, wherever it will be hosted, will be even better as we learn from each other.

It's fascinating to see the range of ages and professions that attended the summer school; a mix that might not normally meet if it were not for a shared interest in the *Shakuhachi*.

There is so much - too much - to remember and it slips away so quickly. What will I remember the most? I can answer unhesitatingly - the people. The *Shakuhachi* is an instrument of friendship.

Happy Blowing,
Adrian Bain

P.S. Well...in a few weeks, I'm lucky to be going to the Prague Shakuhachi Summer School 2007 in the Czech Republic. I can't believe my good fortune and the patience of my wife! I will let you know how I get on.

Footnotes

There are many photos and small video clips of the summer school. As I opted for quantity over quality, the video clips are not high quality visually, but the sound is good. They capture some of the lessons (useful for study) and excerpts from the concerts. There are over 4GB of files so far, so distribution is an issue.

The new E.S.S. website is under development. It may be that we can put the photos and video files on the site so that people can choose what they want. Until the new site is ready, the E.S.S. website continues to show the 2007 Summer School information. However, please check the *Events* section of the site as new events are being published there.



The European Shakuhachi Society Summer School 2007
Photo by "An innocent bystander"