

The process of creating
the first Pan-European Shakuhachi Summer School
with Koto and Shamisen
SOAS, University of London 19th-22nd July 2006
From an organiser's viewpoint. By Kiku Day



Photo: Christiane Werner

The Shakuhachi Summer School with Koto and Shamisen was part of the SOAS World Music Summer Schools series. SOAS was a perfect environment for this first attempt at a large *shakuhachi* event, and I feel strongly that many forces came together and made this year a perfect time for this important first *shakuhachi* event to happen at SOAS.

I contacted the music department at SOAS regarding hosting a *shakuhachi* summer school for the first time in September 2002 after having participated in the World Shakuhachi Festival in Tokyo and Klezfest (one week of klezmer music classes and events). However, SOAS still didn't have a Music Summer School yet. I graduated from SOAS with a BA in ethnomusicology in 2003 and left England to do a Master degree in performance in California, USA.

When I returned and registered in September 2005 the following came together like a natural force:

- SOAS has one of the leading departments in ethnomusicology in Europe and is in possession of six *koto* and five *shamisen*.
- SOAS had had two successful Music Summer Schools and was therefore in a much better position than earlier to host such an event.
- Michael Coxall, a Yamaguchi Goro student and excellent *shakuhachi* performer, who teaches at SOAS was very enthusiastic and willing to co-organise this crazy project.
- An active Japanese Music Society was created and led by Arisawa Shino in Sept. 2004, any many Japanese music aficionados were assembled at SOAS. The members later showed to be indispensable for the success of running the Summer School over the four days, as they were all used to working together.
- The Music Department Head was Dr. David Hughes, a *min'yō* scholar and a person full of energy. This was his last year as head.
- The Summer School organiser, Sareata Ginda, was very enthusiastic from the first moment I spoke to her on the first day of my registration as a Ph.D. student in September 2005.
- Ken LaCrosse kindly provided us with *shakuhachi* for the beginners to borrow and perhaps buy for a very reasonable price.
- I suppose it would be fair to mention the fact that I returned to SOAS this year as a Ph.D. student (luckily first year) and was naïve and enthusiastic enough to go ahead and do this project.



Sankyoku at the Student Concert. Photo: Joe Brown

Thus the ball began rolling late September 2005. Not only did SOAS come together, but it felt like Europe was ready:

- Véronique Piron was getting well established in France and was full of energy for *shakuhachi* projects, coming up with very good suggestions from the beginning.

- Dr. Jim Franklin had moved to Germany and very generously offered his help and expertise from his experience in Australia where a *shakuhachi* society is already established and running.
- Gunnar Jinmei Linder had moved back to Sweden and came up with good suggestions.

All were indispensable to the success of the project – as were many more people who helped later.

One thing the ‘London Team’ (consisting of Michael Coxall and myself) agreed on from the beginning was no favouritism of school or style, it had to be an inclusive event (although a guarantee of teaching quality had to be met) and most of all: The participants and their learning process and performance experience were to be in focus. This was not to be an event where the performance of the teachers occupied the most important space. Therefore, we decided to have running classes that participants could follow for four days, with the gala concert at the end being the students’ concert.



Brian Ritchie’s class. Photo: Joe Brown

The Shakuhachi Summer School began with a four-week beginners course twice a week in the evenings from 19 June to 17 July 2006. There were five students—two of whom had played for a little while on their own before attending the course.

The following material was covered: first students learned how to produce a sound; thereafter correct embouchure positioning, reading skills and elementary pieces were

taught. They were provided with CDs to help them understand the differences in *shakuhachi* styles and schools and approaches to *shakuhachi* music and the instrument itself. Some of the matter covered was taught to the group as a whole; however, each student was given personal attention when necessary in order to correct embouchure and other techniques. The method used was that developed by Iwamoto Yoshikazu in order to teach groups of beginners. It provides a systematic approach to the learning process, but is very restrictive with respect to explanations. The teachers (Michael Coxall and myself) felt that this method, despite newer elements such as its systematic approach, would give the student a view of how traditional Japanese music has been taught for centuries, where listening and imitating are the norm.



Okuda Atsuya. Photo: Christiane Werner

The main Shakuhachi Summer School with Koto and Shamisen was held at between 19 and 22 July 2006 and attracted a total of 48 students. Fourteen classes were offered, ranging from those in *honkyoku* in *Kinko* (Yamaguchi Goro branch), *Zensabô* (Okuda Atsuya's school) and KSK (*Kokusai Shakuhachi Kenshûkai* (Yokoyama Katsuya's school) styles, a *shakuhachi* novice class, *min'yô* (folk song), *koto* and *shamisen* classes, *sankyoku* classes with *koto* and *shamisen*, *shinkyoku* and *gendaikyoku* classes (some accompanied by *koto*), a novice class, and finally *shakuhachi* in jazz and rock. Most classes were divided according to different levels of proficiency, and all these classes worked towards participation in the students' concert on our last day. As we had several courses running simultaneously, we structured the classes so that the students after two days could change from one to another to gain a taste of another style or genre of music. Where possible, classes were therefore structured in blocks of two days.

The string instruments, *koto* and *shamisen*, constitute a vital part of the extended *shakuhachi* repertoire. In order to promote these instruments in Europe, where they are not that well known, we thought it important to incorporate them into the Summer School and provide instruction, rather than merely employing them as accompaniment to the *shakuhachi*. The lack of knowledge about these instruments in Europe, along with the difficulty in purchasing them and the lack of teachers, probably affects their popularity. Thus only seven students attended these classes. Be that as it may, we believe that exposing people to these instruments has made a difference. The quality of the teachers was very high, including the third and fourth heirs to the head of the *Seiha ikuta ryû*. Not only did the string players contribute to the Summer School by enabling *shakuhachi* players to play in *sankyoku* ensembles, but they also provided the concert audience with the opportunity to experience another type of sound from Japan over and above that of the *honkyoku* tradition of *shakuhachi*. Indeed, after the concert, Iwamoto Michiko was surrounded by members of the audience keen to ask questions about the *koto* and her training as a musician.



Josephine, Chris Roaf, Okuda Utanoichi, Okuda Masako and Chas.
Photo from Chris Roaf

Five talks and one meeting took place during lunchtime breaks and four concerts after dinner in the evening. The talks added to the diversity already described above. They consisted of:

- Phillip Horan (Ireland) presenting his approach to playing Irish traditional music on the *shakuhachi*.
- John Kaizen Neptune (resident in Japan), by chance, was in the country to play at Queen Elizabeth Hall in the RhythmSticks series. He was kind enough to agree to participate and gave a talk on how to practice in order to gain maximum improvement.
- Tilo Burdach (Germany) gave a talk on the *Meian* school of *shakuhachi* as taught by Nishimura Kokû.
- Richard Stagg (UK) demonstrated how to maintain and repair a *shakuhachi*.
- Dr. Jim Franklin (Germany) demonstrated breathing techniques.
- The last day saw a meeting about the creating of a European Shakuhachi Society.

These talks were well attended and gave the participants a chance to see and hear about other approaches and ideas, and receive advice on techniques etc.

The following concerts were given:

1. A closed first-night open mic evening where everybody had the chance to go up and perform. The evening ended with a jam session by the two jazz players, John Kaizan Neptune and Brian Tairaku Ritchie.
2. The first public concert by teachers was held the second evening in the Khalili Lecture Theatre at SOAS. The hall was full and some attendees had to stand along the wall. The theme this evening was mainly contemporary music and improvisation, although *honkyoku* was also performed. Contemporary compositions for *koto* and *shamisen* were also performed, as well as *sankyoku* pieces.
3. The second public concert was held the third evening in the Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre at SOAS. This evening's theme was mainly traditional music, including *honkyoku*, *sankyoku*, *min'yō* (sung by Dr. David Hughes), and a world premiere of a piece by the Australian composer Bruce Crossman. About 150 people attended this concert.
4. The gala night was reserved for the participants in the Summer School. The students had worked throughout the courses with their teachers for this concert. We had a wonderful evening of very good quality music from our *shakuhachi*, *koto*, and *shamisen* students. The pieces performed included *honkyoku*, *sankyoku*, *min'yō*, jazz, improvisation, contemporary music and compositions by students. An extraordinary end to four intensive days of music study!



John Kaizan Neptune and Brian Tairaku Ritchie. Photo: Christiane Werner

I found the students' concert very moving and inspiring, indeed. There were participants that had only picked up the *shakuhachi* at the Summer School, and after four days of

intensive study, they played a solo on stage supported by the others in the group playing a drone. It was one of my top *shakuhachi* experiences!



Student Concert. Photo: Joe Brown

The student body of the *Shakuhachi* Summer School was very diverse. We managed to attract players from many corners of Europe, and even from outside the continent. The *shakuhachi* students were residents of:

UK:	23
Germany:	6
US:	2
Belgium:	1
Finland:	1
Ireland:	1
Japan:	1
Netherlands:	1
Norway:	1
Poland:	1
Spain:	1
Sweden:	1
Switzerland:	1

All the seven *koto* and *shamisen* players are residents of the UK.

One of the most amazing experience, organising an event like this, was the people I acquainted. There are many people in all corners of Europe teaching, playing and loving the *shakuhachi*. These 'new' contacts will surely be very important for future *Shakuhachii* Summer Schools. There are plans to host the next *Shakuhachi* Summer School in France next year. London was so hot in July, that I wished for a summer

school in winter. However, summer is when most working people can take time off work. We surely hope this will come true as both Michael Coxall and myself are in Japan next summer and we will not be able to host it again at SOAS.

The creation of the European Shakuhachi Society is just around the corner. Thus the future of the *shakuhachi* and *koto / shamisen* seems very bright here in Europe. The Summer School has been a very vital step in consolidating the European *shakuhachi* community and increasing cultural exchange with Japan, and we are sure that it constitutes the beginning of great developments in the future.



Okuda Atsuya, Keven Frith, Joe Brown, Kiku Day. Photo from Joe Brown

Let me finally use this opportunity to thank everybody that helped in any form, whether it being giving suggestions, help with the actual planning or helping out during the four days.

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Iwamoto Gayue, Véronique Piron, Okuda Masako
Photo: Chris Roaf