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*Note: This article was edited. To view the article in full, please visit [http://www.komuso.cz](http://www.komuso.cz)*

### Cover-work by Thorsten Knaub

Knaub is a contemporary artist working with video, sound, performance and photography. His practice often concerns itself with ideas around technology, data or information systems and how these may mediate our experiences and presence in the world. He lives and works in London, UK.

In the early 1990s, he started to play the shakuhachi after being introduced to the instrument by a chance meeting with two Japanese musicians in a small village in India. Excited by the wide ranging possibilities to produce sounds, its’ portability and simple construction, he has occupied himself ever since to learn the shakuhachi. Initially he studied with Michael Coxall and more recently with Clive Bell.

[http://www.thorstenknaub.com](http://www.thorstenknaub.com)
Letter from the new ESS Chairperson, Kiku Day

To ESS members,

Firstly, I would like to thank the ESS members at the AGM in Leiden for voting me into the role as a Chairperson for the ESS. Secondly, I would like to thank the two members of the committee who have stepped down. Our Chairperson during the first years, Jim Franklin, whose experience in dealing with organisations and organising events proved to be extremely valuable during the foundation period and Stephanie Hiller, who was the Publications Officer and took good care of our Newsletter. I would also like to welcome the two new members of the committee Adrian Bain (UK), the Media and Communication Officer and Philip Horan (Ireland), the Publications Officer.

In March 2008, the ESS was accepted and registered as an educational charity organisation by the British Charity Commission. The aim of the ESS is to provide a platform for shakuhachi players of all schools and genres. We have chosen to make the annual ESS event, the Pan-European Summer School, a ‘traveling’ event that would take place at different locations in Europe. The reason for not being centralised in one place is that we would like to avoid the focus of one school such a centralisation would entail. The hope is that shakuhachi aficionados in Europe, affiliated with different schools, would host the annual event with the support of the ESS. This way, we hope that shakuhachi players in Europe have the opportunity to be exposed to many different players, genres and schools of shakuhachi.

In the short history of the ESS three large Summer Schools have taken place; London 2006, Munster 2007 and Leiden 2009. The first in 2006 was organised by Michael Coxall and I, 2007 was by Jim Franklin and Véronique Piron, and 2009 was organised and hosted by the local shakuhachi group, ‘Kaito’ led by Kees Kort in Leiden, Netherlands. The ESS have now had the experience of two types of Summer Schools; one organised by ESS committee members and another organised by a local shakuhachi group. Based on this experience, the committee members are therefore in the midst of trying to find a way to efficiently be the platform it aims to be and how to give adequately support to the local event organisers. This means we have to create a clearer manual of what organising a large scale event requires - both in terms of the expectations from local people and the support the ESS may provide. We clearly also need to think about fundraising so that the ESS would have the means to invite different players from Japan and other countries to inspire us with their music.
Our Media Officer is in collaboration with the rest of the committee working on making a new website where we hope to share more information about what’s happening in the world of shakuhachi in Europe.

The ESS is your shakuhachi group in Europe. Please, do let us know if you have ideas of what the ESS could be to you and to the shakuhachi in Europe. Please do email us if you would like to be more active in ESS’ work at this address: info@shakuhachisociety.eu.

Membership costs €20/£20 and for students and unemployed €10/£10. Please print out the final membership page and give to other shakuhachi players and those interested in shakuhachi. Have a look at our website: www.shakuhachisociety.eu

We communicate most of the time through Euroshak: http://launch.groups.yahoo.com/group/Euroshak/

The ESS committee members are now:

Kiku Day (UK): Chairperson
Véronique Piron (France): Secretary
Michael Coxall (UK): Treasurer
Adrian Bain (UK): Media and Communication Officer
Philip Horan (Ireland): Publication Officer

Note: As we are presently registered as a Charity Organisation in Britain, 3 of 5 committee members need to be living in England.

I hope that together the shakuhachi players of Europe can create a society focusing on the instrument and music we love, that embraces differences in playing styles, schools and genres. I hope we can have a lively communication about how to reach our goals.

All the best and blow in peace,
Kiku.
Hi everyone,

As the new publications officer of the European Shakuhachi Society (ESS), I'd like to thank Stephanie and translators for their amazing work over the last few years.

For those whom I have not met, I am an Irish shakuhachi player, teacher and maker. We have an ever-increasing and enthusiastic shakuhachi community in Ireland. If anyone is visiting Dublin, don't hesitate to get in touch.

Many thanks to all the contributors who have made this issue a bumper issue. I decided to follow the theme of “Improvisation and Shakuhachi” as this was a central theme of the European Shakuhachi Summer School in Leiden (Netherlands) this summer. We also have a fascinating interview with Justin Senryu, an English performer and maker living in Japan.

We are always looking for translators to French and German so anyone who thinks they could contribute in future issues, contact me at phil@shakuhachizen.com.

Philip Horan.
The Dutch Shakuhachi organization, KAITO, in association with the European Shakuhachi Society organised the European Shakuhachi Summer School on 23, 24, 25 and 26 July 2009 in Het Leidse Volkshuis, library and centre for art and culture. The opening took place on Wednesday evening 22 July 2009 in the Sieboldthuis in Leiden. This house is a museum, where Siebold showed his collection of Japanese objects and artifacts to visitors up to 1837.

The Summer School offered an excellent possibility to play on the shakuhachi in different ways. There were a lot of teachers so all the students could experiment with a lot of styles. Steve Cohn forced you not to be bound by the rules of music but jump in the deep to an improvised world of experimenting with each other’s sounds, accompanied by his virtuosity on the piano. On the other hand there was the precision of the explanations of Gunnar Linder. His CD and written text explanations will form an enormous basis for future study.

Yoshio Kurahashi is known in the Netherlands for his workshops for the membership of Kaito, and for his shows. He gave lessons in a style all his own as a pleasant man with interesting background information of the pieces and nice anecdotes. He presented the music as a computer printout in which the text is well accessible and understandable. Once he brought his laptop to a workshop and hilariously played a very old version of “Tsuru no Sugomori”, reading from his computer! Teachers gave frequent superb performances to the students.

Peter Hill added something to my shakuhachi career. In one private lesson, he explained briefly and to the point, issues around embouchure over which I stumbled for 3 years. Through this explanation and a technique learned from my own teacher, Kees Kort, I suddenly blew RO with the sound of a trumpet. Peter added something to my bad technique at the correct moment and I am most grateful to him. However afterwards, I must completely change my embouchure!

And then - between the hectic world of running from one workshop to another, from home to school, selecting and running to good lunches or dinners - there was the inspiring rest for mind and body while blowing on the “Kyotaku van Tilo Burdach”. Disappearing into one tone with a long deep breath, I travelled to a level in which I only arrive by means of my own meditation. Playing
Kyorei on the Kyotaku brings you to a total other and deeper dimension. The sale of a 2.5 had been decided very quickly! Afterwards, Tilo found it a large compliment that I was falling down asleep during his performance in the concert. How relaxing music can be!

Of course it is not possible to follow all the workshops such as those of Vlastislav Matousek, Kees Kort and Frans Mussault. The bass clarinet player, Mussault is known for his concerts with shakuhachi player Ray Jin from Japan.

Concerning the organisation of the programme, it can be spoken only in terms of compliments. During the opening, the teachers offered the students a list of their pieces of music, subdivided into several level of difficulty. Every day existed in 4 block-systems where in one block-system the students can choose from 4 or 5 teachers. It was amazing that the schedule was prepared and given day by day, with big thanks to Kees Kort for this difficult job. It is known that even in the Kaito workshops teachers will give the program only a few days before. During the summer school, the teachers sometimes changed the content of workshop to adapt to the pupils’ needs.

Beside the workshops, the following lectures were given:
- Vlastislav Matousek spoke about the music of the komuso, and the honkyoku “Kyorei”.
- Frans Moussault explained the possibilities of playing together with the bass clarinet: “Where changing one sound smoothly to the other, how is it possible that you still hear the velvet sounds, whereas silence has entered already?”
- Matthi Forrer told a lot about the lives of the komuso.
- Yoshio Kurahashi and Peter Hill collaborated on a talk in the Seaboldhause (Ed.: about the development of historical shakuhachi). I was not there because of a workshop.

Concerts took place every evening by the teachers and on Sunday by the students. After the closing event we had a last minute concert with a Taiko group, while ‘trespassing’ Leiden on their way to Japan, concluding a very successful summer school.

See also: http://www.shakuhachi.nl/shakuhachi/shakESS09.html
European Shakuhachi Summer School: Leiden 2009 by Marek Matvija

I participated in a number of shakuhachi events around Europe in recent years. I also helped organize three such events in Prague, Czech Republic. Each and every shakuhachi event helped improve my motivation and technique. They have broadened my view of shakuhachi as I could observe the different styles and approaches of the invited master players. The European Shakuhachi Summer School in Leiden has been no exception.

Peter Hill, Tilo Burdach, Gunnar Linder and Yoshio Kurahashi after the honkyoku concert.

It featured traditional players like Yoshio Kurahashi, Tilo Burdach and Gunnar Linder. It also included players and composers such as Vlastislav Matoušek, Steve Cohn, Kees Kort and Peter Hill. However, the most rewarding experiences were seeing and hearing the shakuhachi in the improvisations of Steve Cohn and other performances of contemporary music. This included other instruments and the compositions of Vlastislav Matoušek. I realized shakuhachi is a unique and wonderful tool offering a seemingly infinite spectrum of sounds and noises and their multiple combinations. It allows the player not only to work with sounds and approaches that are familiar to the audience, be it Japanese or Western music, but also to work with new sounds and concepts. The shakuhachi can shock, disrupt the normal, change the world and challenge our unifying, over self-confident and self-centered culture. This is something we need in these times.

It appeared that the entire event revolved around the theme of improvisation. The event’s organizer, Kees Kort, pointed out several times that it is necessary to deal with things as they come and to enjoy doing so. Yes, there were many wonderful surprises and many unfulfilled expectations, but I feel having good faith was all that was needed to enjoy this event. Understandably, such a concept of an event is more demanding of its participants. But, I have good faith and will remain supportive of the upcoming events in Leiden.

Finally, as a player, I would like to point out that intensive shakuhachi workshops are a wonderful thing. It does not matter whether you have a regular teacher or not; the stimulus for one’s playing is just immense. As an organizer, I would like to say that none of the organizers in Europe, as far as I know, is doing this on a professional level. We invest our time, money and resources into making something for the European shakuhachi community. Seeing that people come to these events makes it all worthwhile. These events help the participants become stronger players and are a way to bring attention of the wider public to the shakuhachi, who will form the future generations of players.
After taking the 100 bus from the airport to its terminal, changing to the metro and exiting at Karlovo Namesti (Charles Square) and diagonally crossing the square in a northern direction, one cannot miss the monumental New Town Hall and its tower. That is where the Prague Shakuhachi Summer School took place last August, as it did last year.

This year’s edition offered some special features. One thing immediately noticeable on entering the Town Hall was the exhibition ‘New Media Art + Shakuhachi’, an event carried over from Prague’s Chemistry Gallery where, during four days preceding the Summer School, a creative workshop was organised exploring a crossover between shakuhachi playing and electronic/digital art. This included ‘Glitch’, an art form using what is essentially a malfunction in digital programming to create distortions/alterations in electronic graphics. Two of the teachers at the Shakuhachi School, Jim Franklin and Christopher Blasdel were also present during the New Media + Shakuhachi workshop and part of the events was a performance by Jim Franklin who linked his shakuhachi to electronic equipment, generating images projected on a large screen in sync with the music. It should be mentioned that the Prague Shakuhachi Summer School organisers are successfully aiming for a connection between various art forms; in 2008 modern dance and Indian percussion music were integrated into performances featuring the shakuhachi, and a calligraphy-art exhibition by Japanese artist Izan Ogawa was mounted within the framework of
the Summer School. Another example of crossover was the performance during the opening festivities by Christopher Blasdel and Data-Live, integrating shakuhachi and electronic music.

The actual shakuhachi workshops offered a nice variety of pieces taught by very fine teachers. An extremely attractive feature was the presence of koto player Haruko Watanabe. Students attending the lessons on the sankyoku piece 'Chidorī no Kyoku' had the precious opportunity to learn the piece, taught by Christopher Yohmei Blasdel, to koto accompaniment, or maybe we should say learn shakuhachi accompaniment to the koto/shamisen/vocal piece.... A bonus was Haruka Watanabe offering koto instruction to several interested students, two of whom were courageous enough to even perform on koto in an ensemble setting during the students concert, despite one of them being bothered by the minor drawback of having to secure the plectra to his somewhat stubby fingers with adhesive tape. Other pieces taught were Kinko Chikumeisha honkyoku ‘Taki Otochi’, also by Christopher Blasdel, KSK ‘Daha’ and ‘Yamato Choshi’ by Jim Franklin, ‘Ordo Ordinis’ and ‘Calligraphies’ by Vlastislav Matoušek and Nezasa Ha ‘Shirabe’ and ‘Sagariha’ by Keisuke Zen yoji. A compliment to the students was the fact that Keisuke Zenyoji, a very accomplished player in the Jin Nyodo tradition, felt that the two pieces planned to be taught were picked up so quickly that he added a third, Fudaiji ‘Mukaiji’. Attention was certainly also given to beginning students. Beginners’ pieces were taught apart from the main group-lessons at a reduced registration cost and all teachers were available for personal advice on details that might not have become clear during the workshops. On occasion, Kees Kort, who organised the Leiden Shakuhachi Summer School in the Netherlands just a few weeks earlier, could be found in the courtyard giving free basic instruction to a few interested passers-by.

Before morning and afternoon classes, lectures were presented with subjects such as: meri technique, exercising scales, physical exercises benefitting tone and shakuhachi and electronics. Vlastislav Matoušek illustrated the history and development of shakuhachi as an instrument by showing and commenting on a large number of flutes, from a simple no-holes end-blown reed to hitoyogiri and komuso flute to modern jiari shakuhachi. He encouraged the audience to try
out the instruments. The author's mind was quite blown when he very briefly played a 19th century Myoan nishaku.

The evening concerts were fine and varied. An evening of contemporary music included, beside the shakuhachi teachers and koto player Haruko Watanabe, guest appearances by vocalists Noa Higano and Klára Matoušková. The main Sunday night concert in the large New Town Hall consisted of Kinko-school repertoire and honkyoku, presented as solo shakuhachi, shakuhachi duet and koto/shakuhachi performances. “Zen Sound and Silence” was the title of the third evening. Traditional solo honkyoku were played by Christopher Yohmei Blasdel, Keisuke Zenyoji, Jim Franklin and Vlastislav Matoušek with an especially impressive guest appearance by Zen monk Ejun Yechika playing the Myoan version of ‘Tsuru no Sugomori’. The final evening’s students concert was a little bit more informal although fine music could of course be heard.

---Coffee break---

Fine coffee could be had just across the street from the Town Hall gate at MamaCoffee. They use Fair Trade coffee, good for your conscience. A little ways further down the street in a modern courtyard is a café with a very friendly owner serving well prepared Illy coffee, very acceptable as well. Just as long as one stays away from those wasteful Nespresso tins by that arrogant multinational. Beer is everywhere. Try a Staropramen or Krušovice! No need to mention, but I'll do it all the same, that Prague is a fine agreeable city.

A useful addition to this year's festival was the bar in the Town Hall itself where refreshments could be had during the evening concerts' intermission and afterwards, and where recordings by the performers were available. What remains is a sincere thank you to principal organiser and 'man in charge’ Marek Matvija and those of his friends who helped set up and run the show.

Please visit www.komuso.cz for details of past Prague Shakuhachi Summer Schools and announcements of future events.

Kees de Fouw, from the Netherlands, has been practicing shakuhachi for about three years.
Flute Improvisation by Steve Cohn

From the top of the flute,  
comes out the music,  
down to the bottom.

Singing into the flute,  
five notes at once.  
I hear Warne Marsh.  
I hear Eric Dolphy.  
I hear Evan Parker.

I made up an idea called 'infinite tonality'.  
You can modulate AND you can have progressions in any key.  
But every instrument's limits creates a very specific music.  
The keys are infinite because...  
with the overtone series the most abstract sound is born  
...from the same place as the most fundamental sound  
and live together in the tribe.

Your music is what you listen to as well as what you hear within.  
To develop your music and your ability to improvise,  
you must do both a lot.  
Your experience will add to your greatness,  
so play all the time.  
Watch the energy that people have around you when you play,  
including animals, cats, dogs, etc.  
Experience your breath reaching,  
like a stretch that has been pushed to its limit.

Sound and instruments can easily fall prey to traditions.  
Even if you choose to be a traditionalist,  
ever and I mean NEVER think of sound or instruments as anything other then a vehicle of expression with possibilities to be challenged.

And ABOVE ALL, remember we are making music using sound and pulse.  
When we are judged it should be for the experience one has with your music,  
ot its academic contribution.
Virtuosity by Steve Cohn

Would you rather have muscles or flexibility?
Which is more likely and advantageous to the human form?
A little muscle, a little flexibility.

The flute is melodic, but an Artist must project excitement, drama, joy, hallucination, bitterness, sweetness, like a circus acrobat: strong, lean, agile and flexible.

Every instrument and every medium is unique. And may as well be treated uniquely by the Artist.
The potential of an instrument based on speed, sound beauty and communication is questionable once certain parameters have been discovered.
A musician that plays jazz may not have studied pop.

What is required to be a virtuoso and of what are you a virtuoso of?
Is it your ability to construct melodic content? Form?
Composition?
Is it the quality of your tone? The speed of execution?
Or the longevity of your stamina in any of these areas? Is virtuosity strictly a physical quality?

What obligation do we have to the parameters of any instrument in order to be considered virtuosic?

Have you ever made a beautiful tone or series of tones?
Have you ever played really fast and it all made sense?
Have you ever conveyed a feeling that was beyond your control?

The music of pianist and shakuhachi player Steve Cohn has continually and dramatically evolved. A native of San Francisco, he performed as a blues pianist in Los Angeles, where he began studying the shakuhachi flute at UCLA. He then spent two years in Japan, returning to study at San Francisco State University where he worked with Pulitzer Prize Winner, Wayne Peterson, and also appeared as a jazz pianist performing with musicians such as Eddie Henderson, and Sonny Simmons. Ultimately he moved to New York where he has devoted himself to totally improvised music, combining unconventional use of non-western winds and percussion with a unique piano style. His recordings are available from his website.

http://www.thestevecohn.com
In March 2008, the shakuhachi player Kizan Daiyoshi was invited to a four-day festival of Japanese arts in New York, at a venue called Drom. Recently, I heard that he will play in November 2009 with a friend of mine, London-based jazz pianist Taeko Kunishima, at a jazz club in Yokohama called Airegin. I was keen to hear what Daiyoshi sounds like. Fortunately, Drom have put a couple of his solos on their website (see link below). The first one is “Kojo No Tsuki” (The moon over the castle), a popular chunk of melancholy written by Rentaro Taki in 1901. Daiyoshi takes a very free hand to the tune and makes it clear right from the start that he is improvising in his own time. The minor-key melody makes a good vehicle for jazz. In fact, it might be a Japanese answer to “Autumn Leaves”, were it not written four decades earlier. Unaccompanied, Daiyoshi moves in and out of the tune, eventually almost completely departing from the scale with a display of over-blowing and breathy pyrotechnics.

He brings a similarly muscular assurance to the folk song “Itsuki No Komoriuta”, another very familiar melody. Here the mode is more Japanese, with no clear root key-note, and semitones that show off the shakuhachi’s distinctive tone colours. Daiyoshi cleverly alternates his folk phrases with the jazz standard “It Don’t Mean A Thing If It Ain’t Got That Swing”, which shares a turn of phrase with “Itsuki”. This is confident and robust improvising, clearly in a jazz manner but informed by study of traditional playing. The player I am most reminded of is Brian Tairaku Ritchie, whose excellent group record Ryoanji also contains a version of “Kojo No Tsuki”. The models for Ritchie are Albert Ayler and John Coltrane, and (by email from Tokyo) Daiyoshi tells me Coltrane is his first love, and “My Favourite Things” is his, er, favourite album.

The saxophone brought to jazz a radical flexibility of timbre, an ability to experiment with raw sound itself that is fundamental to jazz and alien to classical music, with its constant search for purity. Arguably, the shakuhachi offers a wider tonal range than the Western flute which is inbuilt in the traditional honkyoku. There are no gust-of-wind muraiki effects in Handel, nor Stravinsky for that matter. So the shakuhachi should be well suited to jazz in some respects. But in practice the difficulty of handling chromatic passages acts as a deterrent, at least to a shakuhachi player following bebop models. But jazz can be persuaded to operate on the shakuhachi’s terms, by working modally rather than chromatically for example, and by creating a meditative rather than a hectic atmosphere. Hozan Yamamoto’s 1970 album Gin-Kai (Silver World) is a great example of this approach.

As a Coltrane footnote, at his final recording session before his death in 1967, Coltrane’s own interest in flute gave rise to “To Be” (from the album Expression), a sixteen minute flute and piccolo feature. And of course there is that photo of Coltrane – aboard a
bus? – blowing a shakuhachi. Surely this was a present received during a Japanese tour?

Kizan Daiyoshi never played saxophone. He studied the traditional repertoire with his teacher, Seizan Kato, and then, inspired by love of Coltrane’s music, plunged into jazz. During his 2008 trip to New York he formed a duo with Kiyoshi Fujikawa, called Fujin-Raijin, featuring shakuhachi and djembe drum, and he hopes we will soon be listening to them on MySpace. Daiyoshi: “Our music is improvisation based on jazz, Japan-trad, World Music and New Age music.”

Recently he’s been listening to New Age synth-maestro Kitaro. Here too there’s a Coltrane link: one of his last projects was a duo with drummer Rashied Ali, issued in 1974 as Interstellar Space. So how many shakuhachi players are there in Japan like Kizan Daiyoshi? My guess would be very few. The traditional teaching doesn’t encourage improvisation, and Japanese models for how it might be done are few and far between. Hozan Yamamoto continues to improvise on albums hard to hear outside Japan: 2006’s Bamboo Suite looks intriguing, 2007’s Standard Bossa maybe less so. Daiyoshi comes over as a jazz player rather than an avant garde free improviser, but he is broadminded enough to keep some weird company. In the early 90s, he contributed to an album by the free jazz ensemble Shibusashirazu Orchestra (who played at Glastonbury in 2002). And shortly after that he participated in a Butch Morris “Conduction” project, resulting in a 1995 album in Morris’s Testament series. “Conduction” was an international project: Morris went from country to country assembling orchestras of free improvisers, who then performed under his very precise direction. In the UK there was a Contemporary Music Network tour, and the resultant LIO (London Improvisers Orchestra) performs regularly to this day. The Japanese incarnation of the project included the cream of Japan’s improvising community, among them Yukihiro Issho (nohkan), Michihiro Sato (Tsugaru shamisen), Otomo Yoshihide (turntables and CD player) and two Butoh dancers, plus Daiyoshi himself.

Kizan Daiyoshi: 
Taeko Kunishima: 
http://www.taeko.co.uk/index.html
Kiyoshi Fujikawa: 
http://www.myspace.com/kiyoshifujikawa
Recently, I performed in several concerts with Indian musicians and Irish musicians of Indian instruments. The first performance was a jam session with a group of ten musicians at the 'Festival of World Cultures', an annual event in Dublin. We had no real rehearsal but managed to entertain as we all understood the language of Indian music. I have played the bansuri or Indian bamboo flute for many years.

The second performance was with two outstanding 17-year old Indian musicians, Utsav Lal (known as the 'Raga Pianist') and Rohan Kapadia on tabla as well as mridangam player, Koushik Chandrashekar. The concert was in a more formal setting so we needed at least some preparation! We only had a week so we decided to follow the example of the collaboration of two great musicians, Ravi Shankar and Yamamoto Hozan. They recorded the classic album "Towards the Rising Sun" in 1996 (it also appears on the double album "Vision of Peace"). We used their "Improvisation on the Theme of Rokudan" as the basis of our performance. Tim Hoffman is a shakuhachi player who explores the connection between shakuhachi and Indian music and produced a tutor (in Japanese) and the excellent CD "Integral Asia".

Indian music is largely improvisational. It is based around the framework of raga, tala and rasa. Each raga (of which there are around 100 performed today), is based in a particular scale. There are ten main scales in North Indian music. Each raga is characterised by a set of melodic ideas. The tala is a rhythmic cycle that can range from 3 to 108 beats. A performance of a raga may use one or more tala. This score is based in a cycle of 16 beats called Tintal. The rasa is the unique emotion or meaning each raga contains: e.g. the raga Bhupali is based on the themes of heroism and distant love. This piece is close to the scale Bhairavi but is ultimately based on the sankyoku 'Rokudan'.

A raga usually consists of the following sections:

- **Alaap**: This is a 'warming up' section which explores the essence of the raga through long tones and ornamentation. This has no steady beat like in many honkyoku.
- **Gat**: This is a composition of usually 16 bars. I did not use 16 bars but the 4 bars adapted from "Rokudan".
- **Improvisation**: The improvisation is based loosely on the gat melody. The score is just one improvisation and can be adapted or made longer as one wishes.
- **Jhala**: This is the final section of the raga and sometimes contains a composition based on the original gat and distinctive thrice-repeated patterns.

The music is underpinned by the drone of the tampura. I begin on a 2.4 and change to a 1.8 for the gat. The score included is one example of a typical improvisation. I have included a sound file without my playing with only the tabla and tampura for you to enjoy improvising your own ideas.

**Links and sound files:**

- The 'Raga Pianist' Utsav Lal: [http://www.ustavlal.com](http://www.ustavlal.com)
- The tabla player Rohan Kapadia [http://www.rohan.org.uk](http://www.rohan.org.uk)
- [http://www.shakuhachizen.com/mp3s.html](http://www.shakuhachizen.com/mp3s.html) (backing track)
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An interview with Justin Senryu by Brian Purdy
(http://www.floridashakuhachi.com/)

-How long have you been playing shakuhachi?

About 5 years.

-How did you discover the shakuhachi?

My brother had an LP of Yamaguchi Goro’s honkyoku. That was the first time I heard the shakuhachi. Something about it, the tone colour I think, captivated me and remained with me until about a year later, when I saw the instrument for the first time while I was living in India. I had previously stayed in Thailand training in meditation in the monasteries there, and during that time I had experiences which connected me to bamboo, giving me a feeling of appreciation and wonder. So, finally seeing the beauty of the instrument whose sound had left such an impression on me, this wonderful natural bamboo, doubly impressed me.

My friend whose shakuhachi it was, then explained to me how this instrument was that of wandering Buddhist monks, who would travel across Japan, homeless and on a perpetual pilgrimage through the valleys and forests. My friend was a great story teller. Like any great story teller, the line between fact and fiction was a grey but pleasant one. Anyway, I felt a lot of resonance with this story, as I myself was quite fitting to that description. It was not for several more years that I started studying shakuhachi, but it was from this time that I carried the intention to learn.

-What aspects of the shakuhachi most appealed to you when you first discovered it?

I think this is mostly answered above. The decisive factor really was the nature of the music. I had dedicated myself to spiritual practice, and in our tradition music played very little part. Before I met my master I had spent a lot of time singing and playing devotional music in India. For me this is a very fulfilling activity. There is no audience. We are all devotees, whether brahmin, beggar, priest, mother or child. And all celebrating God. Together. For me this is the best kind of music.

My master was Buddhist, and our training is generally neither social nor creative, as such. For me it is the best training, and is very efficient for transforming the mind. So much of my time was spent alone, at times I would go to study or attend teachings, and rarely in other activities. However, as the years went by, I realised that I missed the creativity of the devotional singing and music making I used to do with my Hindu brothers and sisters, which had now become only a rare treat. There seems to be a creative fire in me, and the most healthy thing seemed to be to allow that, and even nurture it.

I realised I wanted to study an instrument deeply. And shakuhachi seemed to be the
most suitable instrument for me, having a music which is designed on a non-egotistical basis. Much music is based on "self" expression. As with devotional music, the shakuhachi honkyoku is also a kind of "self-less" expression. Whether or not that is actualized or not is, of course, up to the individual. But as a basis, this gives a very good foundation for the music, and makes it very suitable for a potentially spiritual practice. Also technically, I find that shakuhachi honkyoku requires both strong concentration and relaxation. This is precisely the combination of elements required in meditation. This is an important reason as to why or how shakuhachi honkyoku is complimentory to meditation practice. I say complimentory, because I believe it cannot be a replacement for meditation practice.

-Who were your main influences and what style initially appealed to you most in the beginning?

In answer to the question of main influences, and your next question of teachers' impact, certainly my Buddhist master has been my main influence and guiding force. This provides the meaning and basis of my music.

In terms of styles - when I started studying, I had no idea about the different styles and genres. I never asked my teacher, Michael Coxall of Kinko-ryu Chikumeisha, to teach me anything in particular. I just asked to study, and learned anything he would teach me. Perhaps this is from my Buddhist training, for which we generally do not ask to be taught this or that. It is the teacher who knows what the student should be taught. All I knew was that I wanted to study, and Michael was an excellent teacher.

After several months of study, I borrowed some CDs from Michael. I had already been studying the different genres Michael teaches, of sankyoku, honkyoku and shinkyoku. But the CDs gave me a chance to hear a wider variety of music. The music I most loved from that, was the honkyoku of Yokoyama Katsuya's school. It was then that I realised I would have to go to Japan to learn more about the shakuhachi world.

-What teachers do you feel have had the biggest impact on your playing and conceptions of the flute?

I have really appreciated all of the teachers who have taught me. I have studied a variety of styles, so each teacher has made a big impact for me on each of their respective styles. Furuya Teruo has a great understanding of music, and outstanding mastery of technique. He has been a great influence on me as one of my main teachers. Yokoyama Katsuya of course has been a great influence for me, both through Furuya Teruo (his student) and directly while studying with him. Both of these teachers have not only been my guide for their repertoire but also for deepening my understanding of music in general.

Araki Kodo V, another of my main teachers, has a very different style and approach to Yokoyama and Furuya. His is the oldest tradition of Kinko-ryu honkyoku and sankyoku, and also for me the most refined and fitting to my tastes. But his influence has also extended to my whole approach to the instrument, especially in his mastery of tone colour. It was for this reason that Yokoyama encouraged me to study with him.

With Kurahashi Yoshio I studied about 20 pieces, 12 of which were honkyoku. Although it was early in my shakuhachi studies, this gave me an appreciation for and inquisitive-ness towards the older roots of the honkyoku repertoire, and simpler ways of playing. This has led me to researching further into the
history of the music, and so has had a continuing influence.

Fujiyoshi Etsuzan has been a great influence both through his vast repertoire and wealth of knowledge, really broadening my understanding of the historical developments of shakuhachi music, and encouraging my passion and love for study and research both in playing and in terms of history. Again, his approach is different from my other teachers which helps to broaden my understanding and playing ability further.

Iwata Ritsuen has been another important teacher for me, as one of the very few masters of Seien-ryu. The honkyoku of this school are the original honkyoku of Fudaiji temple. These honkyoku have become some of the most popular honkyoku today through Higuchi Taizan, who arranged them into new versions and included them as the basis for his school, Taizan-ha, also known as Myoan-ryu or Meian-ryu. From his lineage they spread across Japan. Jin Nyodo also studied these pieces and made his own arrangements so they also exist in his school. To study them in the original Seien-ryu style from which they came has been very valuable for me, both for playing them in that older style, and also to deepen my understanding of the arrangements of these pieces which I have already studied from the other lineages.

These have been the main influences on my playing. Concerning my "conceptions of the flute", to this I would also add that studying from books and shakuhachi experts has been very important for me. Some of my friends here in Japan have spent up to 60 years or more studying shakuhachi playing and history. They have been an invaluable source of knowledge. And, sharing the passion and love for the instrument is also what brings this aspect alive and makes it so enjoyable.

-When did you decide to begin making shakuhachi and did you have any teachers initially?

Actually the first shakuhachi I made was before my first lesson. I needed a shakuhachi to start studying, so I made one. I had lived in China for a year and while I was there I studied xiao, which shares a common ancestor with shakuhachi. I studied using a professionally made xiao, and had made a couple from plastic for fun. So making a plastic shakuhachi was not so difficult. It was in tune and worked fine for my first months of lessons until I had the chance to buy a professional shakuhachi, which my teacher bought for me on one of his trips to Japan.

On my first trip to Japan I learned some basics of shakuhachi making. After I returned to England, I realised that the only way I could really continue my studies of honkyoku and shakuhachi making was to return to Japan.

-Who has been the biggest influence on your shakuhachi making?

Araki Chikuo (Araki Kodo II). His shakuhachi have been my favourite to play. I have learned several styles of shakuhachi making from teachers living today, and all of these have helped me a lot. Each maker has different ideas and techniques, and different areas of expertise. But the shakuhachi which have most impressed me have been some rare shakuhachi from older makers, and so I have directed much of my efforts to the study of these older instruments. Good old shakuhachi are very rare, as many (most actually) old instruments are quite bad. But some of the older shakuhachi made by master makers are really outstanding, and quite different from modern shakuhachi. As I said my favourite maker is Araki Chikuo, but other outstanding makers who have influenced me are some of Chikuo's students such as his son Araki Kodo...
III and Miura Kindo, and older makers such as Hisamatsu Fuyo and other such Kinko-ryu makers, and also makers of other lineages such as Kokyo for old Myoan-ji style, Murase Chikuo for Fudaiji style and others.

-When did you decide to move to Japan and pursue both playing and making as a full-time venture?

I started studying in England, and came to Japan to see what was here. I wanted to have a wide view of what the shakuhachi world was. When I returned to England, it didn’t take long until I realised I had to come back to Japan to study what I wanted to learn. That was one year since I had started learning.

My original intention was not to live in Japan. I had not even thought of that an option. Japan is an expensive country to stay in. My intention was really to study as intensively as possible for a number of months, and just see how things went. As things turned out, I never had to leave, and have been continuing my studies ever since, as well as now working as a shakuhachi maker and teacher here.

-Did you have experience any bias in being accepted into the shakuhachi culture in Japan?

In the beginning, no not at all. People here are generally very nice, especially shakuhachi people. Only occasionally I have had some troubles. One is that it is not usual for Japanese students to study with more than one teacher. And often, if someone does go to another teacher, first they leave the other teacher and are basically cut off from that school. It is not always like that. But, generally, you only have one teacher. This applies not only to shakuhachi but to Japanese arts in general. Being a foreigner gives you more freedom in this respect and you can be given more freedom, which is lucky, although when you actually live here rather than just visit, you are expected to follow the Japanese way more.

As I have studied with a number of teachers, this has sometimes caused some friction. Some people really think that is bad, and wrong. The irony of it is that many of the most famous teachers, including most of my teachers, have studied with a number of different teachers themselves. Yokoyama Kat-suya for example studied with his father and Fukuda Rando, and also with Watazumi who was from a very different lineage. Watazumi studied with a number of different teachers also. Jin Nyodo studied with shakuhachi players all across Japan. And so on. (For more details see the lineage charts on my website which give some of these details and which I intend to update with more info soon). Also, during the Edo period komuso would travel across Japan and sharing honkyoku on the road was common. It was quite different from the strict world which developed after that period.

So it is important to remember that the culture is different here, and one should always ask permission from one's teacher before studying with another teacher. My teachers are all very open, and have been encouraging towards my studies of different schools. I feel uncomfortable and sad when other students and even some friends view this as "wrong", but there is no way I can see it as wrong when I have the full consent and encouragement of my teachers, and when I consider the reality of the history of honkyoku lineages where it was common to learn from many teachers.

Another problem is jealousy. Most people are very supportive and encouraging, and glad of what I have learned. Also being a foreigner can make them feel proud, proud that the
shakuhachi brings interest from foreign countries. But, occasionally one may encounter jealousy, if someone feels uncomfortable with a newcomer whom they perceive to be good but also young, and on top of that a foreigner. I have to say though that this has been very rare in an otherwise very friendly environment. I have experienced more hostility in the foreign shakuhachi community. Perhaps because it is a smaller community, some people occasionally feel threatened if you know things they don’t or if they feel you are invading their speciality, even if that is not your intention. On the whole though I find shakuhachi people everywhere to be a very nice and welcoming group of people.

-How long have you lived in Japan now?

About 4 years.

-How have your conceptions of the flute most changed now that you have so much more experience in the culture and the instrument?

I don’t think being in the actual culture is very important for shakuhachi study. There are good teachers abroad such as your own teacher Michael Gould who teaches in the traditional way. I don’t think there is any added bonus in being in Japan simply for normal Japanese culture. However, I have chosen to study some particular parts of Japanese culture while I have been here, which I do think have helped me. I studied Satsuma biwa, for which I also had to sing. Satsuma Biwa was played by samurai in Kyushu during the Edo period. Apart from my love of biwa music, I also felt that this would help me in my understanding of some of the auditory environment of the komuso, who were also samurai, and therefore people of both the same class and time as the Satsuma biwa players.

I also studied Kyudo. Though I have not had the opportunity to study in depth, this gave me a deeper understanding of posture and the physiological side of Japanese arts. This side was also very strictly taught by my biwa teacher. This has been useful for shakuhachi.

Other than this of course being here has been invaluable for the teachers, experts and instruments here. One excellent source of information is Riley Lee’s thesis. This is a wealth of information. Riley himself has also helped me a lot with his shining example of playing and scholarship, and kind encouragement. John Singer is another who has not only mastered the shakuhachi but also has a wealth of knowledge. So there are excellent teachers and resources overseas. But I do feel very grateful for being here in Japan. Each time I study a new piece, or hear a new story, it’s like another piece of the puzzle being filled in. I also feel that as I learn more, in terms of both history and playing, it enriches everything I have already learned. One example of this is where one honkyoku has been learned by someone two or three hundred years ago and then incorporated into their lineage, and passed down through time in both lineages and perhaps branching off to another, two more even. For me these are then all parts of one whole. It’s like a whole picture starts to build up, and slowly get clearer and more intriguing.
My understanding of what is a "good shaku-hachi" has also taken a lot of time, and I continue to learn. This has been made possible with the help of people here in Japan sharing their knowledge and opinions with me, and from playing many shakuhachi, sometimes traveling across the country to visit important historic instruments. This has been invaluable for my shakuhachi making and also historical understanding of shakuhachi.

When making flutes do you have a preference for jiari or jinashi flutes?

I love both jiari and jinashi. Personally I usually play jinashi, but not exclusively. Both are a joy to make and to play, and it really depends on what sound I want to make for that particular moment. Also both jiari and jinashi have a great variety. So I make for myself in a variety of different styles of shakuhachi to suit the different music I like to play. Similarly this variety can suit the varying demands of my customers.

Do you find that most of your flutes tend to be more suited toward one school or another?

This again comes down largely to personal taste. Even within one school, individual players have individual tastes. However, there are some general tendencies. Yokoyama Kat-suya’s school of honkyoku (sometimes known in the foreign community as "dokyoku") has very specific techniques which are very demanding on shakuhachi. These are generally impossible to play correctly on old style shakuhachi, and indeed on many modern shakuhachi. So these shakuhachi must be specially made to play this repertoire. That is my main special consideration for Yokoyama’s school.

For jiari I favour the tone colour of traditional Araki-ha instruments, and so I make in this style, whether the instrument will be for Yokoyama’s school or Araki’s. Tone colour is a very personal choice. Yokoyama’s school have always been using Kinko-ryu shakuhachi, and for me Araki-ha shakuhachi are some of the best of these. My main "guide" in shakuhachi making is that I should make what I like. At one stage I was questioning this, and wondering if I should think more about what customers would like. It was my teacher Furuya who strongly encouraged me to follow what I like, and I have taken his advice to heart. The result is an instrument which is suitable for both Kinko-ryu and Yokoyama’s school, the benefit of each giving no detraction from the other. The other schools which I have studied can equally be played well on these instruments. Tozan is a school which I have not studied, and I have no idea whether or not this type of shakuhachi is suitable.

For jinashi, there is much variety. The longer shakuhachi for example, while suitable for Yokoyama’s school and other honkyoku schools, would usually not be used for Kinko-ryu which generally does not use longer than 2.0. Then, some shakuhachi I make in Kansai style which require a gentle breath. The tone of this music is quite different from Yokoyama’s school, and is favoured by many Myoan players. Many players from Yokoyama’s school would find such instruments unsuitable due to the difference in playing style they require. And where Myoan players may find Myoan and Yokoyama styled jinashi suitable, Tani-ha players have their special demands, which Myoan players may find suitable but not all Yokoyama school players.

Some people require shakuhachi with older tunings, and I myself prefer these for certain styles of playing. Most notably "chi" will be much sharper than the modern tuning. Although with much practice it is sometimes possible to control the pitch of these instruments for modern-tuned playing, most people will be unable to do so. In that case
these instruments would be unsuitable for playing modern-tuned music, which includes honkyoku as it is usually played today.

So, while there is cross-over between the different styles of music the instruments are suited to, it is important to consider what repertoires will be played, and what kind of sound or special requirements the customer wants from their instrument.

-What schools of music have you studied and play?

Concerning post-Edo period music, I have studied Fukuda Rando’s music and some shinkyoku (new Japanese music such as that of Miyagi Michio) and gendaikyoku (contemporary music).

Sankyoku (Edo period ensemble music) I have studied under a number of teachers but now focus solely on the Araki-ha style. Incidentally shakuhachi playing in sankyoku is often said to have started after the Edo period since it was officially not allowed for shakuhachi before the Meiji period due to restrictions of the Fuke sect. However Kinko-ryu (and possibly other schools) actually have a long history of shakuhachi playing in sankyoku reaching back well into the Edo period, as evidenced by oral tradition, and old documents and woodblock pictures. So there is quite a deep relationship between the genres of sankyoku and honkyoku, both having influenced each other since very far back in their histories.

Honkyoku has been my main study. Yokoyama’s school (about 22 pieces) and Seien-ryu (11 pieces) are the only ones whose repertoire of honkyoku I have studied in their entirety. My studies of other schools is ongoing and so far includes:

Kinko-ryu Araki-ha: 31 pieces (there are about 40 in total).
Jin Nyodo lineage: 12 pieces.
Kimpu-ryu (Nezasa-ha): not including versions in Yokoyama’s or Jin’s schools, 4 more. (There are 10 in total).
Taizan-ha: not including versions in Seien-ryu, Yokoyama’s or Jin’s schools, 4 more.
Shimpo-ryu: 5 (there are about 70 in total).
Other: 6.

There are some other pieces which I have taught myself from recordings, such as some of the pieces which Watazumi played (some of which he may have created himself). Although I enjoy these, in Japan great importance is put on learning the pieces directly from a teacher, and teaching oneself is not viewed as having "learned" a piece. Genuine lineage is vital, and is the only accepted way for a piece to be transmitted. Although it seemed to me possible to study from recordings, I experience again and again the irreplaceability of studying directly with teachers. There are so many points which I cannot grasp by myself and could never guess, even with a careful ear. With a teacher, we learn the vital points of the pieces, what can be changed, what cannot be, what is the special character of each phrase and technique. For one’s own taste of music, that may not be necessary, but for the genuine transmission of the music as it is embodied by the lineage, the personal teacher-student relationship is vital.

Concerning what I play, most usually I play honkyoku. Of the honkyoku I play it varies with what I am focusing on at the time. These days usually Yokoyama’s school, Kinko-ryu and Seien-ryu, next Taizan-ha and then about equal measures of the rest.

-Do you have one style of music you tend to play more?
It used to be Yokoyama's school as that was my main school, but now as I mentioned above, I am giving equal time also to Kinko-ryu and Seien-ryu.

-As I understand it you have earned your Shihan license. What school or schools have issued you a Shihan license?

My Shihan was given to me by my teachers Furuya Teruo and Yokoyama Katsuya. Yokoyama also gave me my professional name as a shakuhachi maker, Senryu (which translates as "Dragon of the spring", "spring" as in source of water).

-Do you teach very often in Japan or online?

I have been very busy with shakuhachi making and my own studies, as well as other projects and work for my teachers such as publishing the Kinko-ryu honkyoku notation written by Araki Kodo II, which will be ready soon. So I have not had much time to devote to teaching, though I do have a number of students both here in Japan and abroad. I will be coming to Europe to teach next year.

-I noticed pictures of you practicing Kyūdō online. Do you feel there is a connection between playing shakuhachi and practicing Kyūdō?

I studied Tai Chi Chuan quite deeply in England and Hong Kong, so it was natural for me to take the opportunity of studying Kyudo here in Japan which has always attracted me, and also bujutsu. I spoke above about the connection for me in terms of posture, and how to hold ones body in what after all is a samurai art (shakuhachi). Further than that, there is a more direct connection. According to my teacher’s teacher’s teacher, Miyagawa Nyozan, shakuhachi is "teki zen ken". In this case teki (flute) means shakuhachi, and ken (sword) means martial arts. Zen is meditation. "Shakuhachi" should be, or genuinely includes, all 3 of these trainings. This seems to have been the way of the komuso. They were all samurai, and were trained in various martial arts. It seems that they continued that training after joining the Fuke sect. I do not know the details of this, although it would be fascinating to know, such as, did they train together, or individually? Anyway it was suggested to me that there was no specific art that they trained in, but that they trained in whatever martial arts they had trained in before becoming komuso.

Watazumi was devoted to his martial training exercises with stick. Apparently sometimes when expected to play shakuhachi to a paying audience, he would simply do stick exercises, and claim it was the same thing (to the distress of the organisers). Nishimura Koku was another noted martial artist. Nyozan’s student Takahashi Kuzan taught not only shakuhachi, but also zen and martial arts. However, such teaching nowadays is rare and shakuhachi has been almost entirely separated from these other two branches.

Thanks so much to Justin for taking the time to answer these questions and sharing his insights.

You can find Justin’s site and more information on him at his website: http://senryushakuhachi.com/
Membership of the European Shakuhachi Society

Membership of the ESS is open both to players of the shakuhachi and to non-players who are interested in the music of the shakuhachi in all its forms.

Since the ESS is not affiliated with a particular school or aesthetic direction, its members represent a broad cross-section of styles and genres of shakuhachi.

Supporting ESS through joining is a means of helping maintain a co-ordinating resource of the shakuhachi in Europe.

The benefits of membership include access to information about shakuhachi events and tuition throughout Europe and beyond, as well as discounted participation fees at events such as the European Shakuhachi Summer Schools.

The membership fee (for 2009) is £20/€20, with £10/€10 concession (student, unemployed). If you are requesting a concessionary membership, we will require some proof of your concession status (please send an email).

To join the ESS:

- Please send email, giving your name and contact details, and if you wish, a little information about your interest in and experience with the shakuhachi.

- and pay the membership fee by PayPal.
  If you cannot make payment using this method, please send an email to ess-member@shakuhachisociety.eu.

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