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JIM FRANKLIN, VÉRONIQUE PIRON

ESS 20 YEARS!

AKIHITO OBAMA, MIZUNO KOHMEI
TERUHISA FUKUDA, MAEKAWA KOUGETSU

BAMBOO

Spring/Summer 2026

Newsletter of the European Shakuhachi Society



IGNITION COMMISSION
SUIZAN LAGROST

ATHENS 2026

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In Search of the Void
April 2026
Sumi-e on rice paper
21 × 29.7 cm (A4)



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Photos: Penny Simpson, Nick Bellando, Ruth Garner, Thorsten Knaub, José Vargas, Daniel Ribble, Christof Zürn
Ukiyo-e: Hannspeter Kunz Collection
BAMBOO – The Newsletter of the European Shakuhachi Society – Spring / Summer 2026
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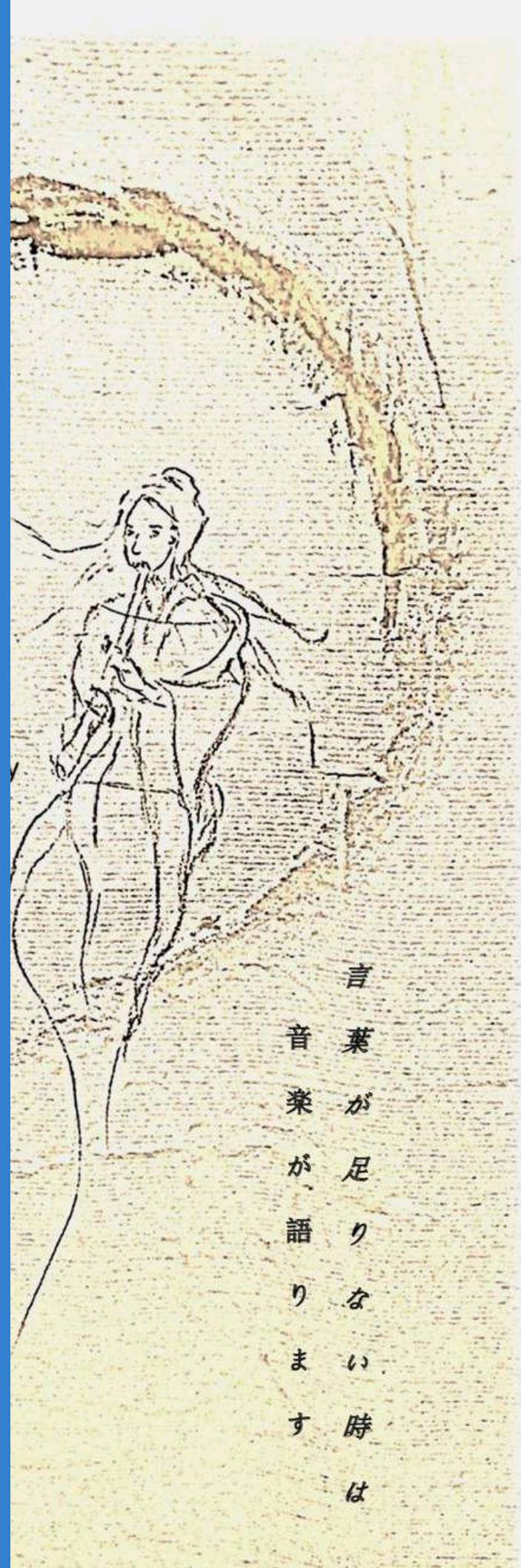
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Clive Bell and Ramon Humet doing hard work in the Bodega Quimet, Barcelona, April 2026
(Photo: Penny Simpson)



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A Deep Breath, Relax... A Word From Your Chairperson

Dear ESS Members and shakuhachi friends,

Hope you are all well!

Let me welcome you to the spring/summer edition of *BAMBOO*! This is the first of the issues illuminating our anniversary year of 2026 and even more than usual we have a large spectrum of shakuhachi stories brought to us through articles, reports, interviews and historical research. And of course we have some reflections from the co-founders of the ESS, as well as voices from Japan sending us good wishes and support.

As we continue our efforts to bring people together and to foster a community around the shakuhachi, our main event is now less than two months away. The ESS Summer School, first staged in London in July 2006, and ever since the core activity of our society, takes place at the **New York College in Athens** in Greece this year. **The dates are Thursday 23. to Sunday 26. July 2026.**

Since last autumn we have been working with local organiser, Yerasimos Dimovasilis, on the details of this summer's event. We feel we created a programme more than worthy of marking the first 20 years.

As usually we will have a wide array of schools and styles represented – from Japan we welcome **Ashigaki Kōmei** from the Kinko-ryū Chikumeisha school, as well as **Jin Rei**, grandson of Jin Nyodo, representing the Jin Nyodo lineage. Other teachers (in alphabetic order) will be Horacio Curti, Kiku Day, Yerasimos Dimovasilis, Jim Franklin, Philip Horan, Gunnar Jinmei Linder, Véronique Piron, Emmanuelle Rouaud and myself. And our **special guest** for koto/shamisen is **Fumie Hihara**. New shakuhachi music by Ramon Humet – **the Athens 2026 ESS Commission** – will be performed together by teachers and participants at one of the main concerts.

Talking about the concerts, we will gather for the **Gala Opening Concert – 20th anniversary ESS 2006-2026** at the **Japanese Embassy** in Athens on Thursday evening, the Friday and Saturday evening concerts will take place in the beautiful Central Hall at the **Parnassos Literary Society** in central Athens, known for its excellent acoustics. There will be a few World Premieres too! Naturally we have open mic and the participants' concerts too. Many more things to mention.... probably best to visit the Athens 2026 website for more details & registration process:

<https://summerschool.shakuhachisociety.eu>

Don't miss it! See you in Athens!

As always any comments or suggestions please contact us on info@shakuhachisociety.eu

Best wishes

Thorsten Knaub, ESS Chairperson

And Breathe... A Word From Your Editors

The shakuhachi is often seen as an instrument close to the heart of Japanese culture. But Kakizakai Kaoru pointed out it's also possible to view it as a migrating instrument, perhaps from somewhere in the Middle East, via China, and eventually to Japan. In Jim Franklin's words (p15), in Japanese a migratory bird is *watari-dori*, so the shakuhachi can be a *watari-gakki*, or migratory instrument.

This issue of *Bamboo* celebrates two decades of the European Shakuhachi Society (ESS). Multiple summer schools, online teaching, an international network and this very magazine are all the result of ESS activity. And amongst the congratulations and fond memories in these pages you can find news of future summer schools and workshops in Athens and Brazil.

When *Bamboo* co-editor Clive Bell arrived in Tokyo in the 1970s, keen to find a shakuhachi teacher, there was a sturdy amateur scene of shakuhachi players. Clive's local tofu maker passed the time lying on his back on the *tatami*, serenading his quiet residential street on a bamboo flute. Such a sight seems less likely now. Where are the young Japanese players of today? As we hear from Emmanuelle Rouaud (p80), they may well be playing their favourite tunes from *anime* series. *Anime* have also become completely international.

Another twentieth anniversary is in Shikoku, where Daniel Ribble (p86) has lived for four decades. The *Myoan rensaikai* is a get-together of shakuhachi players at the pilgrimage temples of Shikoku. They perform *honkyoku* in front of the temples, whether or not a storm is raging, and Daniel gives us the inside story.

We also have major articles on shakuhachi making: Thorsten Knaub's account of learning the craft from Miura Ryuho (p44), and the second part of Ramon Humet's interview with Spanish maker José Vargas (p64).

Our regular features continue: this issue's *Ignition Commission* is a new piece by Suizan Lagrost (p74), while our *Rear View Mirror* reflects on Watazumi (p78).

Enjoy reading!

The Editors

Organised by



20th Anniversary ESS 2006-2026

Nominal support



ESS SUMMER SCHOOL ATHENS 23 - 26 JULY 2026



108 hours of WORKSHOPS
3 EVENING CONCERTS
4 OPEN MIC CONCERTS
PARTICIPANTS' CONCERT

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HORACIO CURTI

KIKU DAY

YERASIMOS DIMOYASILIS

JIM FRANKLIN

PHILIP SUIMEI HORAN

THORSTEN KNAUB

GUNNAR JINMEI LINDER

VÉRONIQUE PIRON

EMMANUELLE ROUAUD

ESS COMMISSION: RAMON HUMET

KOTO & SHAMISEN: FUMIE HIHARA

KINKO-RYŪ
CHIKUMEISHA

JIN NYODO

KOKUSAI SHAKUHACHI KENSHŪKAN

TOZAN-RYŪ

MYŌAN

CHIKUHŌ

MINYŌ

ZENSABŌ

CONTEMPORARY

SOKYOKU

SHINKYOKU

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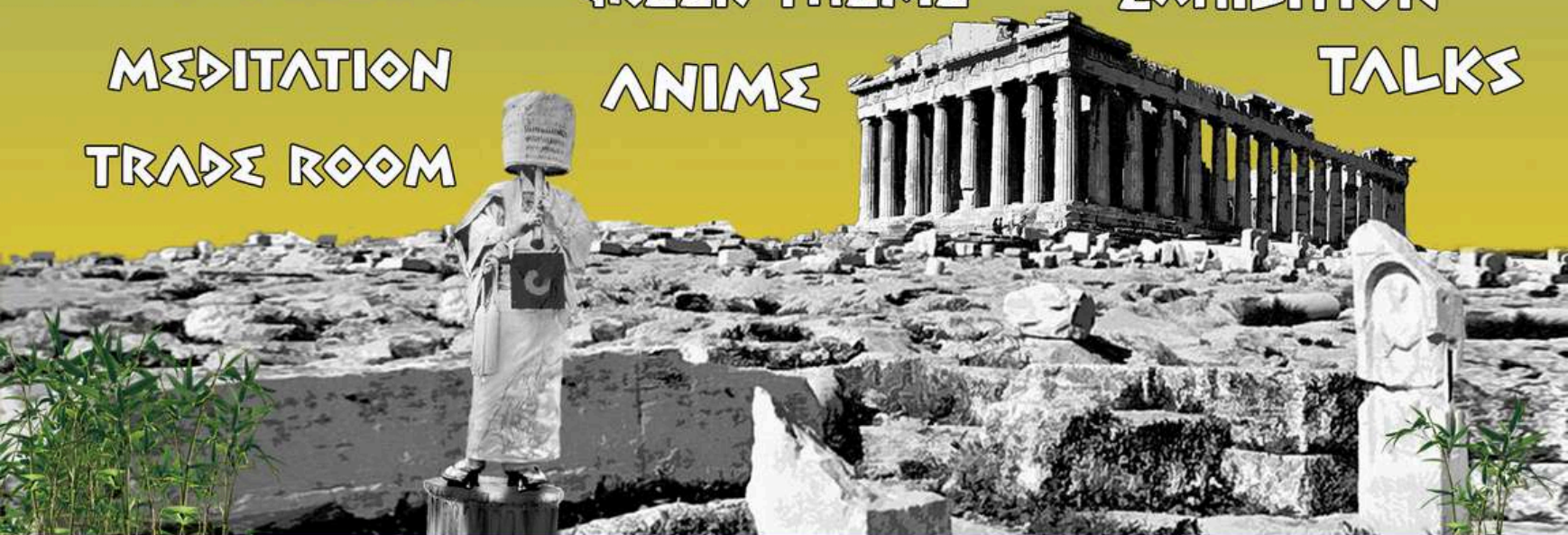
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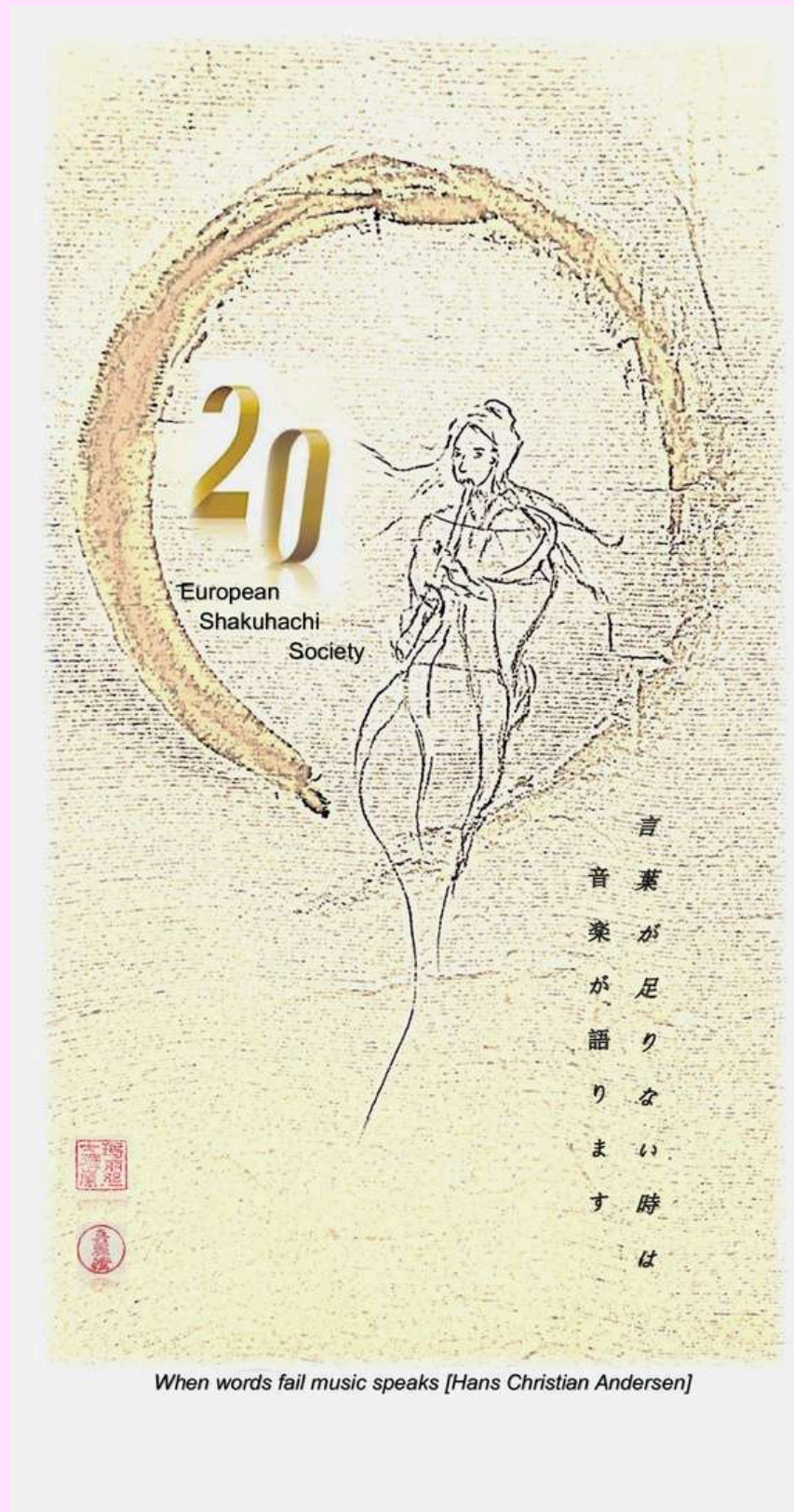
ANIME

TALKS

TRADE ROOM



REGISTRATION & MORE INFO : summerschool.shakuhachisociety.eu



When words fail music speaks [Hans Christian Andersen]

Hawwa Morales: sumi-e celebration artwork (2026)

20 YEARS OF ESS!

The 20th Anniversary of the ESS

In 2006, Kiku Day and I had an idea. I was teaching in SOAS and Kiku was doing her PhD there. For some years, together with Arisawa Shino (*shamisen*) who was also a SOAS PhD student and Kitamura Keiko (*koto* and *shamisen*) we had been organizing and teaching the 'Sankyoku Music Society' in SOAS to promote shakuhachi and ensemble music practice, and we wondered how we could extend this into something bigger? Aware of the narrow focus of most *ryu-ha*'s in Japan and beyond, we thought, 'How about holding an event and inviting some shakuhachi teachers from Japan and elsewhere from very different lineages to teach a variety of styles and pieces so everyone can learn something new?' The result was a 4-day Shakuhachi Summer School held in SOAS in 2006 open to everyone to learn shakuhachi, *koto* and *shamisen*. It was a resounding success.

Kiku and I had already discussed at length how we could use this event as a platform for something more solid and proposed to the participants the idea of creating a society which would embrace the whole of Europe and all styles and genres. The idea was eagerly endorsed and a committee consisting of Kiku, Jim Franklin, Veronique Piron, Stephanie Hiller and myself was elected to take the idea forward. Wishing to establish the Society on a legal footing, we drew up a Constitution, applied to the UK Charity Commission to create it as an educational charity for the promotion of the shakuhachi and appreciation of the diversity of Japanese music, and set up a bank account. Thus, the ESS was established. A website was then created to promote ESS activities and Summer Schools and help put students in contact with potential teachers across Europe, and so it all began, and as they say, ...

'The rest is history'!

-Michael Soumei Coxall
ESS Co-Founder



It is hard to believe 20 years have passed since the first Summer School. The shakuhachi community in Europe is leading the world in how to connect, respect and support each other! Congratulations to us – all shakuhachi players!

The idea of creating the European Shakuhachi Society (ESS) came while I was living in the US, as a Masters student at Mills College 2003-2005. I observed a dream scenario of many shakuhachi players and several good teachers – something we didn't have in Europe at the time – or at least we didn't know of each other. However, I also observed how little contact there was among the teachers of different *ryūha*, and very little respect for each other's playing styles and work. I therefore decided when I returned to London (to begin my PhD in ethnomusicology and performance at SOAS, University of London), I would create the European Shakuhachi Society and something similar to the Rocky Mountain Shakuhachi Camp.

The big differences should be: 1) The event should move to different locations in Europe. 2) No fixed staff to teach each year. 3) The local organisers should be the main organisers, and thereby have their influence on the focus of the event. All this is not possible alone. I was so lucky: at SOAS there was a fantastic shakuhachi player on the staff, Michael Soumei Coxall from *Kinko-ryū*, *Chikumeisha*. Together we began to organize the first Shakuhachi Summer School. The reason for the name was that it was organised as an event within the SOAS Music Summer School.

We had no idea how many shakuhachi players were in Europe and how to reach them – apart from contacting the people we knew. So especially Jim Franklin in Germany and Véronique Piron in France helped us spreading the word. My own teacher, Okuda Atsuya, came at his own expense, and brought his family: his wife Okuda Masako, the heir of Seiha Ikuta-ryū, his son Okuda Utanoichi, and also Iwamoto Michiko. Which meant we could really make the Summer School a whole experience of various genres, including *sankyoku* and contemporary music with *koto* and *shamisen*. Fifty two participants enrolled, and they blew our minds. We had the Founding General Meeting for the ESS during the Summer School. And the rest is history. Apart from the years when there is a World Shakuhachi Festival (and no pandemic) we have met each summer in many countries and cities in Europe!

The best thing about being one of the founding members of the ESS is that it continues without those of us who founded it. Passionate people take over and work hard to keep it going and develop it further. The ESS has taught me a lot, including how to listen to other *ryūha* and have respect for them. I learned that if you learn a little, you realise the particular aesthetic of the style.

Once again: Congratulations for 20 years to the ESS and to all of us shakuhachi aficionados! May we keep up the good spirits in the future!



-Kiku Day
ESS Co-Founder

'It was twenty years ago today...'

One evening at the ESS Summer School 2007 in Alsace, the first to be run under the name of ESS, a spontaneous 'mini-party' took place. The 'partygoers' were Véronique Piron and myself (the Summer School organisers), and Furuya Teruo and Kakizakai Kaoru (visiting teachers from Japan). Over food and drink which we had conjured from somewhere, Kakizakai-sensei remarked that rather than wishing to view the shakuhachi as a Japanese instrument, he preferred to see it as an instrument which has always been migrating: its predecessors came from the Middle East via China, eventually reaching Japan. He commented that he was interested to see where the continuing migration would take the instrument. In effect, just as a migratory bird is called 'wataridori' in Japanese, so one might also call the shakuhachi a 'watarigakki' (migratory instrument).' (My neologism, not Kakizakai's.)

I was overjoyed to hear this from Kakizakai-sensei, as it coincided with my fundamental thoughts when we were formulating the charter of the ESS in 2006 and 2007: that in addition to recognising the Japanese roots and traditions of the instrument, it is crucial to allow it to wander and blossom outside of Japan, in ways that might be unexpected and surprising to the Japanese – through encounters and transculturations with diverse musical genres, composers, improvisers and so on.

From 2006 to 2009, it was my privilege and responsibility to help steer the young ESS in the direction of the 'watarigakki': through events, concerts and publications and so forth which reflected both the Japanese roots and the non-Japanese branchings and flowerings. After I stepped down as chairperson, this direction continued, reaching something of a high point in the World Shakuhachi Festival 2018 in London. It is, of course, highly gratifying to see that the attitude of diversity has been maintained since then. I wish the ESS and all its members good fortune for the future, and hope that the ESS will still be helping the shakuhachi to migrate, long after I am no longer alive to see and hear the evolution.

*'...that the ESS began to play'**

** with apologies to John Lennon and Paul McCartney*

-Jim Franklin
ESS Co-Founder



ESS, 20 Years Already

The seeds of the idea for a project like 'ESS' date back to August 2002, from encounters made during the World Shakuhachi Festival in Tôkyô: first with Kiku Day, then with Jim Franklin (by pure coincidence on the return flight to Europe). Meanwhile, the idea took root...

ESS was founded with the idea of bringing people together—first: we, the isolated players across Europe at that time, to gather; and then to bring together all the existing practitioners around us.

From the very first 2006 edition of the Summer Schools—now the ESS's flagship event—the die was cast with the number of participants, over 50, that would remain largely the same year after year, regardless of the host location: quite strong for a start, creating such an entity was indeed on the horizon. It became a center of gravity, shifting geographically from year to year, expanding as it moves forward, all the way to the borders of Europe: reaching the far north of Finland in 2024, and this year, 2026, in Athens, marking a step toward the gates of the East.

The main goal has been to bring together the existing styles, starting with those found in Europe and later including new ones. This could be achieved only with an open, inclusive and tolerant spirit—from the ESS board, all the teachers, guests and masters from Japan and elsewhere, as well as the participants. A mind that is still expanding in its own way with the online events since 2020. This is a great opportunity for all of us, and a great chance for those who are starting, being able to meet all and make the choice of their style.

Let's be proud! The ESS is quite a success on this side of the planet, a space of pure democracy—such a timely topic. And all this for the love of a piece of bamboo! A simple flute with five playing holes, five basic notes that take us back to the origins of music, played not only in Asia, Japan and elsewhere, but in fact throughout the world's musical traditions: the shared heritage of our humanity...and to be blown, the essential to us, humans.

-Veronique Piron
ESS Co-Founder



Thanks to your deep love of and passion for the shakuhachi, shakuhachi music has continued to expand throughout Europe. The great success of the WSF in 2018 stands as a clear symbol of this, and I was deeply inspired to have taken part in it.

Over the past twenty years, the shakuhachi has spread further across the world, and since the COVID-19 pandemic, exchanges through online platforms have accelerated as well. The ESS continues to offer online workshops and concerts even today, and through these efforts I feel strongly the growing enthusiasm for the shakuhachi, as well as the increasing appeal of the ESS as a group year by year.

I believe that we are now entering an era in which enthusiasts around the world join hands to build the future of the shakuhachi together. In this context, the ESS is truly one of the leading organisations promoting the future of the shakuhachi.

I sincerely hope that the ESS will continue to develop, sharing the fascination of the shakuhachi not only across Europe but throughout the world, and that its wonderful events will continue for many years to come.

I very much look forward to meeting you all again.

-Akihito Obama

ESS設立20周年、誠におめでとうございます。皆様の尺八への深い愛情と情熱によって、尺八音楽は欧州で広がり続けています。2018年のWSFの大成功はその象徴であり、参加した私自身も大きな刺激を受けました。この20年で尺八はより世界に広がり、コロナ禍以降はオンラインを通じた交流も加速しました。ESSは現在でもオンライン講習会やコンサートを継続されており、その尺八熱の高まりを感じるとともに、年々団体の魅力が深まっているように思います。これからは、世界中の愛好家が手を取り合い、尺八の未来を築いていく時代になると私は考えています。その中でESSは、まさに尺八の未来を推進する団体の筆頭です。今後もESSが発展し、欧州のみならず世界に尺八の魅力を伝え、素晴らしいイベントが継続していくことを心より願っています。また皆様にお会いできる日を楽しみにしています!

小濱明人



Many congratulations on the ESS's 20th Anniversary!

It is so valuable that many shakuhachi enthusiasts in Europe have been working together, and trying to share and spread the fascination of the shakuhachi. In particular, the way in which many players from various shakuhachi schools run the organisation together and also play music together has been great and very inspiring.

As my daughter lives in France, I have visited France and other European countries on several occasions, and have had opportunities to take part in workshops and perform in concerts around Paris. It will be excellent if such exchanges continue in the future.

I wish the ESS its continued prosperity!

Mizuno Kohmei
Head of Chikumei-sha

この度はESS創立20周年おめでとうございます。ヨーロッパのたくさんの尺八愛好家が力を合わせて尺八の魅力を共有し、広めていこうと努力されていることはとても貴重なことだと思っています。とりわけ、さまざまな流派の方々が一緒になって組織を運営したり演奏したりされていることはとても大切に頼もしく思っています。私は、娘がフランスに住んでいる関係もあり、ときどきフランスやその他のヨーロッパに出かけていて、これまでに何回かパリの近郊でワークショップやコンサートを開いたりして、交流をしています。今後も続けていければと思っています。ESSの益々のご発展を願っております。

竹盟社理事長
水野香盟



For the ESS's 20th Anniversary, I would like to send my heartfelt praise to all of you who love shakuhachi.

Since the Meiji Government officially recognised the shakuhachi again in the early modern period, as the basis of the Fuke Zen spirit, it has been related to various music styles up to now for approximately 143 years. Its expression was represented in Miyagi Michio's "Haru No Umi" (The Sea In Spring) and Yamada Kōsaku's "Kuro Funer" (Black Ships) based on a Western opera in the 1930s; and then the idiom and spirituality of koten shakuhachi became connected to modern Western music in the 1960s to create Moroi Makoto's "Chikurai Go-shō" (Five Pieces For Shakuhachi Chikurai) and Takemitsu Tōru's "November Steps", which tried to meet and fuse various ethnic musics. Then in the 1990s, a trend of 'Hōgaku Populism' developed in Japanese music. In many ways, the sound of the shakuhachi has been shining everywhere and continues to fascinate us all.

I look forward to seeing how the ESS will evolve in the future.

-Teruhisa Fukuda

ESS 様

設立20周年、皆様の尺八愛に心より賞賛をお送りいたします。
近代初頭尺八は明治政府より再び公認され普化禅精神を根底に今日に至るまで様々な音楽形態と係ること約143年、その表現は1930年代における宮城道雄「春の海」山田耕筰オペラ「黒船」などにおける西洋音楽に立脚した作品、1960年代西洋現代音楽は古典尺八の持つidiomや精神性とも結びつき、諸井誠「竹籟五章」武満徹「ノベンバーステップス」など民族音楽との邂逅融合を目指す作品の時代でもあった。そして1990年代にはポピュリズム邦楽の流れも加速、いずれにせよ尺八の音は十方を照らし我々を惹きつけている。将来のESSどのように進展するのでしょうか。楽しみです
ね。

福田輝久



KOMUSŌ (虚無僧) HONKYOKU AND TECHNIQUES OF PLAYING ANTIQUE (KOKAN 古管) SHAKUHACHI

by Maekawa Kougetsu, The Third Chairperson of the Meian Sōryu Association

In the Edo era in Japan, there were approximately 140 *komusō* temples at its height, and each temple in the Tohoku, Kanto, Kansai and Kyushu regions performed different musical pieces and used differently shaped *komusō* shakuhachi.

Today, professional shakuhachi players perform *komusō honkyoku* pieces using their modern shakuhachi which were, unfortunately, reworked in the Meiji era in order to be played with *koto* and *shamisen*. Therefore, they are not truly *komusō* shakuhachi but can be called modern shakuhachi which were tuned to the musical scales of *koto* and *shamisen*. When a *komusō honkyoku* is played with such modern shakuhachi, it would be more appropriate to refer to it as a 'modern *komusō honkyoku*'. When a *komusō honkyoku* is played using a *kokan* shakuhachi of that particular region, it is possible to hear the genuine authentic *komusō honkyoku*.

The most distinctive difference between Edo-period shakuhachi and modern shakuhachi lies in the technique of making the sound. Modern shakuhachi are played forcefully across the blowing edge, whereas the so-called *kokan* shakuhachi are to be played by gently blowing the air into the shakuhachi in order to generate the natural tonal characteristics of various bamboo materials. With the modern technique of blowing hard across the blowing edge, all we can tell is how loudly the sound is generated.

In the Meiji era, Jinbo Masanosuke (神保政之輔), who was reputed to have approximately 100 disciples in Fukushima prefecture in the Tohoku region, used to light a candle right in front of the blowing edge of his shakuhachi in front of his disciples and played a piece without the flame going out. However, when his disciples played in front of the lit candle, it was immediately extinguished. It was said that not a single disciple could copy Jinbo Masanosuke. This is what I would say is the secret of the playing technique of *jinashi* (地無し) shakuhachi.

At the age of eighteen, I became a student of the Kinko school and studied *sankyoku* ensemble and Kinko-ryu *honkyoku* music. However, there was no guidance on the techniques of playing shakuhachi at all. I received a teaching certificate from the head of the Kinko school at the age of twenty-five, but by then, my interest in Kinko-ryu shakuhachi had diminished.

When I was twenty-eight, one of the senior *Kinko* school members asked me whether I was also interested in becoming a student of a *komusō honkyoku* teacher who lived in Yokohama city. In October of that year, I visited the teacher, Okamoto Chikugai (岡本竹外), and became his student. My first task was to obtain a 2-shaku 3-sun *jinashi* shakuhachi for practice. Monden Tekiku (門田笛空), who was a disciple of Sakurai Muteki (桜井無笛) who in fact was the teacher of Okamoto Chikugai, was a *jinashi* shakuhachi maker in Osaka, and I ordered a shakuhachi from him.

Around that time, Okamoto Chikugai gave lessons on three Sundays a month. I was told by him that it takes five years to learn 130 pieces of *komuso honkyoku* and Tsugaru Kinpu-ryu *honkyoku*. Although a number of professional shakuhachi performers who wrote in their CVs that they had studied classical *honkyoku* under Okamoto Chikugai, they in fact quit after 2 or 3 years and learned only a part of the repertoire. It took me 5 years to complete all the 130 pieces without missing a single lesson.

Out of his approximately 100 disciples, I was the only one who managed to inherit the playing technique of *jinashi* shakuhachi using the reverse abdominal *tanden* respiration method (逆腹式丹田呼吸法). Nevertheless, it had been a physically demanding task to master this method. About seven years after I joined the school, one of my *Kinko-ryu* friends asked me to play a *komuso honkyoku* with a *jinashi* shakuhachi and I recorded seven pieces. Twenty years later, I had the chance to listen to the recording and realised that at that time I was used to the *Kinko-ryu* style of blowing across the blowing edge. I only fully mastered to play 3-shaku shakuhachi using the reverse abdominal *tanden* respiration method in the February of my 50th year in front of my teacher, Okamoto Chikugai, who died in April of the same year.

When the reverse abdominal *tanden* respiration method is used to play shakuhachi, the sound is not audible at the blowing edge, but through the bottom of the shakuhachi. This is one of the major differences from modern shakuhachi techniques. When a *kokan* shakuhachi which was made in the Edo era is played using the reverse abdominal *tanden* respiration method, one can enjoy the innate sound of bamboo unique to each *kokan* shakuhachi. On the other hand, it is impossible for modern shakuhachi to generate this sound from the root end of the instrument.

I teach my students the reverse abdominal *tanden* respiration method, but it takes a minimum of five years to correct the habits of those who had for a long time already studied *Kinko-ryu*, *Tozan-ryu* or *Ueda-ryu* using their blowing edge techniques. Only then does the real beginning of learning my method start. Even when the sound finally becomes audible not from the blowing edge but from the root end of the shakuhachi, if the *tanden* does not have enough strength, all the notes sound lifeless. At that point, one realises how difficult it is to produce a lively sound through pushing the breath with abdominal muscular strength.

From Okamoto Chikugai, I also inherited the technique of playing difficult shakuhachi. This means a practice where shakuhachi are placed side by side from those with wide bores to those with narrow bores and are played one by one in descending order. He told me that, to do this, the lips should not be stiff, but stay very soft. In my lessons at home, students firstly place long shakuhachi (2-shaku 3-sun to 3-shaku) and short shakuhachi (1-shaku 6-sun and 1-shaku 8-sun) side by side, and then start making sounds one by one. Only after the sounds come out smoothly, can the practice of a *honkyoku* using a 2-shaku 3-sun shakuhachi start.

Up to now, I have made about a thousand *jinashi* shakuhachi. After Okamoto Chikugai passed away, I inherited 15 *jinashi* shakuhachi including some Edo-era ones which used to belong to him, as well as those made by *jinashi* shakuhachi masters such as Sakurai Muteki (桜井無笛) and Monden Tekiku (門田笛空). Now, I make more than 50 *jinashi* shakuhachi every year which are modelled on these *kokan* instruments.

These days, many shakuhachi players perform *komusō honkyoku* by using YouTube, recordings or printed scores, but it seems as if they simply gather floating leaves on the surface of the water, without realising that the real material is hiding elsewhere. The true masters of the past have handed down to us through an oral transmission that what is important, in fact, lies deep in the water.

I hope that young people seeking to learn an authentic way of shakuhachi will emerge. 🍵



虚無僧の本曲と古管尺八の奏法について

明暗蒼龍会三代目会長。前川耕月

日本には、江戸時代に虚無僧寺は多い時は140ヶ寺くらいありましたが、東北地方から、関東、関西、九州地方と、それぞれ曲も異なれば、虚無僧尺八の形も違っていました。現代、プロの尺八演奏家が虚無僧本曲を演奏していますが、残念ながら、現代の尺八は、明治時代に、お琴や三味線音楽に合わせるために改造された、いわば虚無僧尺八ではなく、お琴や三味線音階に合わせるための尺八です。その尺八で虚無僧本曲を演奏しても、それは現代虚無僧本曲と言うのが正しいでしょう。江戸時代から残されてきました、それぞれの地方の虚無僧が使用してきた尺八、その古管尺八で、その地方の虚無僧本曲を演奏すれば、本物の姿を見ることができます。また、江戸時代の尺八と現代尺八の大きな違いは奏法にもあります。古管と言われる尺八は、現代尺八のように、力まかせに歌口を強く吹いて鳴らすものではなく、おだやかな息を尺八に入れることにより、それぞれの竹質の違う尺八本来の音味を出すことです。現代のように、歌口を強く吹く奏法では大きな音が、どれだけ出せるかの違いしか分かりません。明治時代に東北地方、福島県で100名くらいの弟子がいたと言われていす、名人・神保政之輔は、弟子たちの前で、尺八の歌口の前にローソクを立てて、尺八を吹いても、ローソクの火は消えなかったと言われていす。しかし弟子たちが尺八を吹けば、たちまちローソクは消えてしまったと。弟子たちは、神保政之輔の真似が誰一人出来なかったと言われていす。

これが、地無し尺八の奏法の秘伝と言うべき技でしょうか。私は18歳の時に、琴古流尺八の先生に入門して三曲合奏や琴古流本曲を学びましたが、尺八の奏法については、先生から指導は全くありませんでした。25歳で琴古流宗家から師範免状をもらいましたが、その頃は、琴古流尺八の興味も薄れていす。28歳になって、琴古流尺八の先輩から、虚無僧本曲の先生が横浜市にいすから、あなたも入門したらどうかと言われました。28歳の10月に、横浜市在住の岡本竹外先生を訪問して、入門をしました。まずは、稽古に使用する地無し尺八の2尺3寸管を入手することでした。大阪に岡本竹外先生の師匠である、桜井無笛先生門下の門田笛空氏が、地無し尺八を製作していすので、注文をしました。その当時、岡本竹外先生の稽古は毎月、日曜日が3回でした。岡本竹外先生の虚無僧本曲と津軽錦風流本曲、130曲を全部習うには5年間かかると言われました。プロの尺八演奏家の方々が、竹歴に岡本竹外先生に古典本曲を師事したと書いていすますが、みなさん2年や3年で辞めて、ほんの一部の曲を習っただけです。私が130曲を習い終えたのは、一度も稽古を休まずに5年かかりました。しかしながら、もっと大切な地無し尺八を、逆腹式丹田呼吸法で鳴らす奏法を受け継いだのは100名くらいの弟子の中で私一人だけです。しかし、その奏法を体で覚えるのは大変なことでした。私が入門して7年が過ぎた頃に、琴古流の友達から虚無僧本曲を地無し尺八で吹いてほしいと頼まれて、7曲ばかり録音をしました。それから、20年が過ぎたころに、その録音を聞くことが出来ました。

しかしながら、この演奏は琴古流式の歌口を吹く奏法であることがわかりました。私が逆腹式丹田呼吸法で3尺管を鳴らすことが完成したのは、50歳の時の2月で、岡本竹外先生に聞いてもらいました。しかし、この年の4月に岡本竹外先生は亡くなりました。逆腹式丹田呼吸法で尺八を鳴らせば、歌口からは、全く音が聞こえず、尺八の管尻の先から、音が聞こえるようになります。これが現代尺八の奏法との大きな違いです。江戸時代の古管尺八を逆腹式丹田呼吸法で鳴らせば、それぞれの古管尺八の竹の響きを楽しむことができます。現代尺八では残念ながら管尻の先で音を出すことは不可能です。私の弟子たちに、逆腹式丹田呼吸法による尺八を指導していますが、長年、琴古流や、都山流、上田流の歌口を吹く奏法が体にしみこんだ方々、それを修正するのに最低5年はかかります。それからがスタートです。歌口からの音を出さず、管尻から音が出るようになって、丹田の力不足で、曲のすべての音が死んだように聞こえます。いかに、腹の力で息を押し出して生きた音を出すことが難しい技であるかがわかります。また、岡本竹外先生から難管鳴らしの技を受け継ぎました。それは、口径の太い尺八から、細い尺八までならべて、それを順番に鳴らすこと。それには、唇が固まらずに柔らかくすることが大切だと。私の自宅で弟子の方々の稽古は、まず太い長管(2尺3寸~3尺管)から細身の短管(1尺8寸や1尺6寸管)尺八をならべて、音出しがスムーズにいくようになってから、2尺3寸管による本曲の稽古がスタートします。これまで製作しました地無し尺八は1000本くらいですが、岡本竹外先生が亡くなった後、遺品の江戸時代の古管から、地無し尺八の名人、桜井無笛師や門田笛空師作の地無し尺八を15本ばかり受け継ぎました。今では、その古管尺八をモデルに年間、50本以上の地無し尺八を製作しています。今の時代、虚無僧本曲もユーチューブやレコード、楽譜を参考に演奏する尺八家が多いですが、それは水面に浮かぶ落ち葉を集めただけ、本物は水中に沈んでいます。昔の名人から、口伝で伝えられた大切なことは、水中にあります。これから本物を学ぶような、若者が出て来ることを期待して、私の話は終わります。



The true essence lies submerged beneath. The vital knowledge passed down orally by the masters of old resides in those depths.

—Hawwa Morales



Authentic



Oral transmission

NO SOUND IS ALSO SOUND

by Vincent Yūsui van Gerven Oei

The shakuhachi found me in the fall of 2017.

My current shakuhachi teacher, since 2019, is Bill Shinsui 心水 Schultz. Bill-sensei had passed his *kaidenshiki* 皆伝式 (Ceremony of Complete Transmission) in 2011 and was back then one of the very few non-Japanese people who had received the *dōshū* 導主 title, the only Meian Taizan-ha teacher practising outside Japan.

I remember arriving at his studio, having prepared “Chōshi” 調子, paradoxically the capstone and most advanced piece of the repertoire but also the first, ‘easy’ piece that is usually taught. As I played the first notes, proud that I was able to keep a relatively steady tone, he paused me and corrected my posture. “It is better to learn the correct posture from the beginning, because unlearning a bad posture is difficult,” Bill-sensei commented. The effect of his intervention, however, was that the shakuhachi now rested on my chin at a slightly different angle. I started over, but my flute no longer produced any tone, I had lost it. I felt like crying. “Don’t worry about it,” Bill-sensei reassured me, “your sound will come back. No sound is also sound, let’s play ‘Chōshi’ together.”

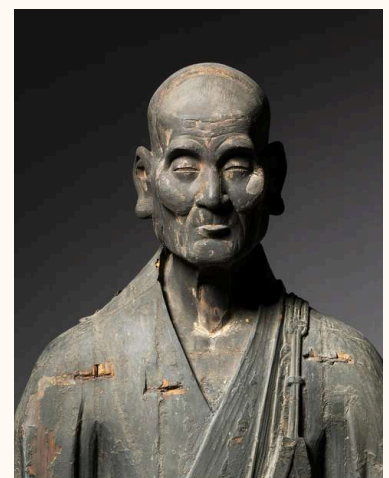
No sound is also sound.

Three years later, in 2022, I received the *nyūmon* 入門 (entering the gate) certificate, marking the official start of my curriculum as a student of Meian Taizan-ha shakuhachi. And as I progress through the repertoire, chant the Heart Sutra, and deepen my knowledge about the relations between Zen and shakuhachi playing, this first lesson of Bill-sensei - *no sound is also sound* - has continued to resonate inside of me ever so strongly.

So, let’s practice some more.

Translator’s Note: Last year I started to prepare an English translation of Meian shakuhachi tsūkai 明暗尺八通解 (A Commentary on Meian Shakuhachi) by Tomimori Kyozan 富森虚山, published after his death in 1979. This is one of the few treatises on the history and playing technique of Meian Taizan-ha shakuhachi. I hope to be able to continue this work until it is finished, and am also documenting some of this process on my blog, Incomplete Transmissions: <https://incompletetransmissions.substack.com/>

Below is the chapter on Hottō Kokushi (National Teacher Hottō), who introduced the shakuhachi in Japan.



Hottō Enmyō Kokushi

2. Hottō Kokushi

2.1 Origin

He was born in Kambayashi, Shinshū province (present-day Matsumoto, Nagano prefecture) during the early Kamakura period, in the first year of the Jōgen era of Emperor Tsuchimikado (1207). His family name was Tsune or Tsunezumi, his given name Kakushin, his nickname Shinchi, and his pen name Muhon.

He was ordained at Tōdai-ji, studied Vajrayāna at Mount Kōya-san, and went to Zenjō-in in Yamauchi to study Zen under Taikō Gyōyū. Similarly, he was intimately related with Ganshō of Kongōsanmai-in, and later visited eminent monks in various regions. In the second year of the Hōji era (1248), he entered Tōfuku-ji (15 Honmachi, Higashiyama Ward, Kyoto; head temple of the Tōfuku-ji branch of the Rinzai school), serving as *ina*, one of its administrators.

2.2 Travel to Song China

The following year, in March of the first year of the Kenchō era (1249) during the reign of Emperor Go-Fukuhara, Kakushin traveled to Song China with a letter of introduction from Enni Ben'en (Shōichi Kokushi), the founder of Tōfuku-ji, addressed to Zen Master Fojian of Xingzheng Wanshou Zen Temple on Mount Jing (Lin'an, Hangzhou, Zhejiang province). He was 43 years old at the time.

He proceeded toward his destination, but Zen Master Fojian had already passed away. Yearning for the teachings passed down from previous generations, he remained at the temple for two years. Subsequently, he visited famous temples and eminent monks throughout the country. In the fifth year of the Kenchō era (1253), he met the Japanese monk Genshin on Mount Damei in Mingzhou (Ningbo). Under his guidance, he entered the Renwang Huguo temple in Hangzhou, where he began training under Wumen Huikai (Zen Master Foyan). It is reported that at that time he learned to play shakuhachi from Zhang Can, a lay disciple from the same community, on an instrument passed down through the Zhang family.

2.3 Ganshō and Saihō-ji Temple

Ganshō, originally Kazurayama Gorō (Fujiwara no Kagetomo), was a retainer in the employment of shogun Minamoto no Sanetomo. Acting on the orders of Sanetomo, he was on his way to deposit a lock of hair taken from the late Minamoto no Yoritomo at Mount Yanta in Wenzhou, China (Zhejiang Province), when, in February of Kenpō 7 (1216), he received news of the shogun's death at Hakata. Overcome with grief, he ascended Mount Kōya-san, took monastic vows, adopted the name Ganshō, and prayed for the



the shogun's repose. He was appointed head of the Yura district by Hōjō Masako, later known as the "nun shogun". In Antei 1 (1227), two years after Masako's death, he built Saihō-ji temple, later known as Kōkoku-ji, to honor the memory of Sanetomo and Masako.

2.4 Hottō Kokushi and Kōkoku-ji Temple

After moving to Saihō-ji, Hottō Kokushi was summoned by Emperor Kameyama and temporarily relocated to Shōrin-ji (Nanzen-ji) in Kyoto, but he soon returned to Saihō-ji. Later, Fujiwara no Morotsugu, the Minister of the Interior, converted his villa into a Zen temple and established Myōkō-ji in order to honor the memory of his eldest son Tadasue (whose childhood name was Taemitsu). Tadasue had died at a young age. Hottō Kokushi was then invited to become the founding abbot of Myōkō-ji and went there. However, less than a year later he returned to Saihō-ji, built the Shion-an Hermitage on the grounds, and lived there until his death on October 13, Einin 6 (1298) at the age of 92.

He was granted the posthumous name Hottō Zenji by then retired Emperor Kameyama, and in Gentoku 2 (1330), on the 33rd anniversary of his death, he was further honored with the name Hottō Enmyō Kokushi by Emperor Go-Daigo. Ever since, he has been generally known as Hottō Kokushi.

Forty-two years after Kokushi's death, in Kōkoku 1 (1340) under Emperor Murakami of the Southern Court, Saihō-ji was bestowed the name Kōkoku-ji, and since then it has been known primarily as such.

2.5 Hottō Kokushi's Idea of Flute-Blowing Guidance

After Kakushin moved to Saihō-ji, the number of people who, yearning for his noble character, entered to practice under him gradually increased. However, he recommended lay disciples to learn to play the shakuhachi from the Song lay disciples and instructed them by explaining that blowing the flute was a convenient method to help with *zazen* and an excellent method for seated meditation and attaining enlightenment. This idea of guidance gave rise to the lay shakuhachi, developed into flute-blowing Zen, and later became the fount for the mendicant wandering of Fuke and *komusō* monks. Eventually this evolved into the *komusō* sect of the lay shakuhachi school, turning later during the mid-Edo period into the influential Fuke Zen sect. Though the sect's lineage was severed with its abolition in Meiji 4 (1871), the shakuhachi is currently seeing increasing popularity. At present, the shakuhachi is widely used in a variety of musical performing arts, but the way of playing of Meian shakuhachi is deeply rooted in Kokushi's idea of guidance. 🍵

Previous page: Portrait of Hottō Enmyō Kokushi, c. 1295–1315. Japan, Kamakura period (1185–1333). Hinoki cypress wood with lacquer, metal staples and fittings; overall: 91.4 cm (36 in.). The Cleveland Museum of Art, Leonard C. Hanna Jr. Fund 1970.67

HITUYOGIRI, PART III: KAMIYA JUNTEI

by Nick Bellando



Classical pieces with illustration by Ichi-un

The year is 1818, in Japan's late Edo period. Inou Ichi-un, student of Kamiya Juntei (bamboo name Isshi-an) has been hounded for some time by a publisher to release his teacher's book (the one he had been "carrying around in his kimono sleeve") for publication, and finally agrees. *Shichiku Kokin-shu* (*Strings And Bamboo, Then And Now*), goes to press.

From the publisher's point of view (as written at the end of the book), it almost seems as if the author, Kamiya Juntei, didn't even want to publish his book, entrusting it only to his head student. When we read it, however, we see the story of someone who was eager to breathe new life back into the *hitoyogiri* tradition, which at the time was in danger of extinction. The medieval music theory of the Muromachi era had become increasingly obtuse to modern ears as the newer *miyakobushi* scale pervaded the popular musical landscape, and players were becoming increasingly rare.

Nonetheless, there were still some left in the Sashida-ryu *hitoyogiri* tradition. Sashida-ryu was started by Sashida Ichi-on as a branch of Sosa-ryu shakuhachi, taking Omori Sokun's Kyoto-based work that popularized the flute in the early 1600s and (through his successor Sashida Chikuden) popularizing it in the city of Edo (Tokyo). While the tradition was still mostly intact in Kamiya's time, it was evidently a dying art. His book lacks some of its finer points and nuance; whether these had simply been lost to time or were deliberately omitted in an attempt to make the pieces more accessible is difficult to say.

Regardless, Kamiya (a doctor by profession) learned Sashida-ryu *hitoyogiri* from his uncle Yana Tsugimasa of the Nakazu domain in Kyushu, who may have studied with Maeno Ryotaku or one of his students. Maeno Ryotaku was a physician living in Nakazu. In the early to mid 1700s, he was encouraged by his adoptive father to study and preserve the *hitoyogiri* as it was even then a gradually dying tradition. Kamiya Juntei likewise hoped to preserve it.

Kamiya's book *Shichiku Kokin-shu* begins with an introduction to a smattering of classical Muromachi-era pieces, written to reflect his own style. The phrasing is somewhat unique, differing from earlier Sashida-ryu scores, and the *kaeshi* formulae used to end pieces are often simplified. Detailed explanations as in earlier manuscripts are omitted, with the written caveat that to play them properly, you still need a teacher.

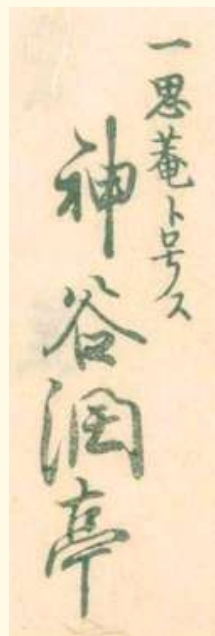
After introducing the classics, he writes to the effect that since these older pieces are difficult to learn for 'modern' people, he has rebranded the *hitoyogiri* as '*kotake*' (little bamboo). He composed new 'classical style' pieces for it, changing the notation, and also wrote down numerous ensemble pieces, including *Rokudan*. His hope was that, "If you are able to [start by] playing these pieces, the elegant pieces of old will perhaps become more accessible to you." These sixteen unique pieces have a *miyakobushi* flavour, and don't follow medieval music theory (or even Fuke shakuhachi conventions, for that matter). After these, he adds several ensemble pieces, including the well-known *Rokudan*, concluding with an explanation of how to match the *hitoyogiri* to standard shamisen tunings.



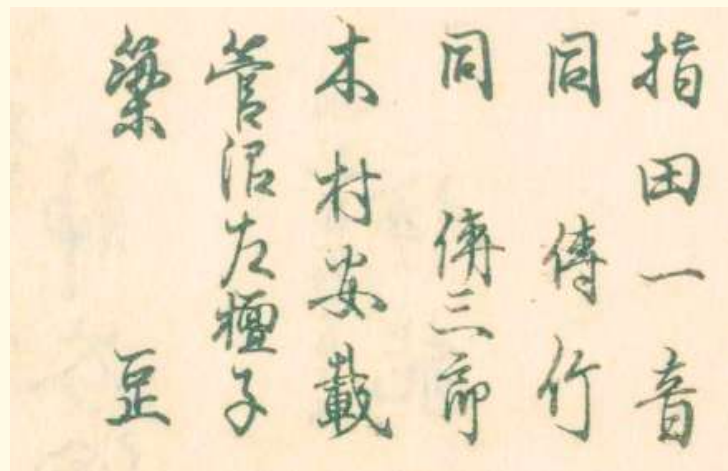
Shukai

Judging from the fact that we still have many copies of this book in existence, it would seem that it was somewhat of a success. Kamiya also published *Shichiku Goshikigai*, comprising nearly a hundred pages of popular (?) pieces transcribed for the *kotake*, along with other books on the history of *hitoyogiri* and the philosophy of *kotake*. In spite of the book's success, in the end the tradition still died out. By the end of the Edo era in the late 1800s, it appears that no one living knew how to play. In fact, many shakuhachi players in the mid to late 1900s mistakenly thought that Kamiya's *Kotake* compositions (*Satori No Kyoku*, *Mushi No Ne*, etc) were actually ancient *hitoyogiri* pieces - if nothing else, this is a testament to *Shichiku Kokin-shu* having been prolific enough to have been relied upon, albeit erroneously, many generations later.

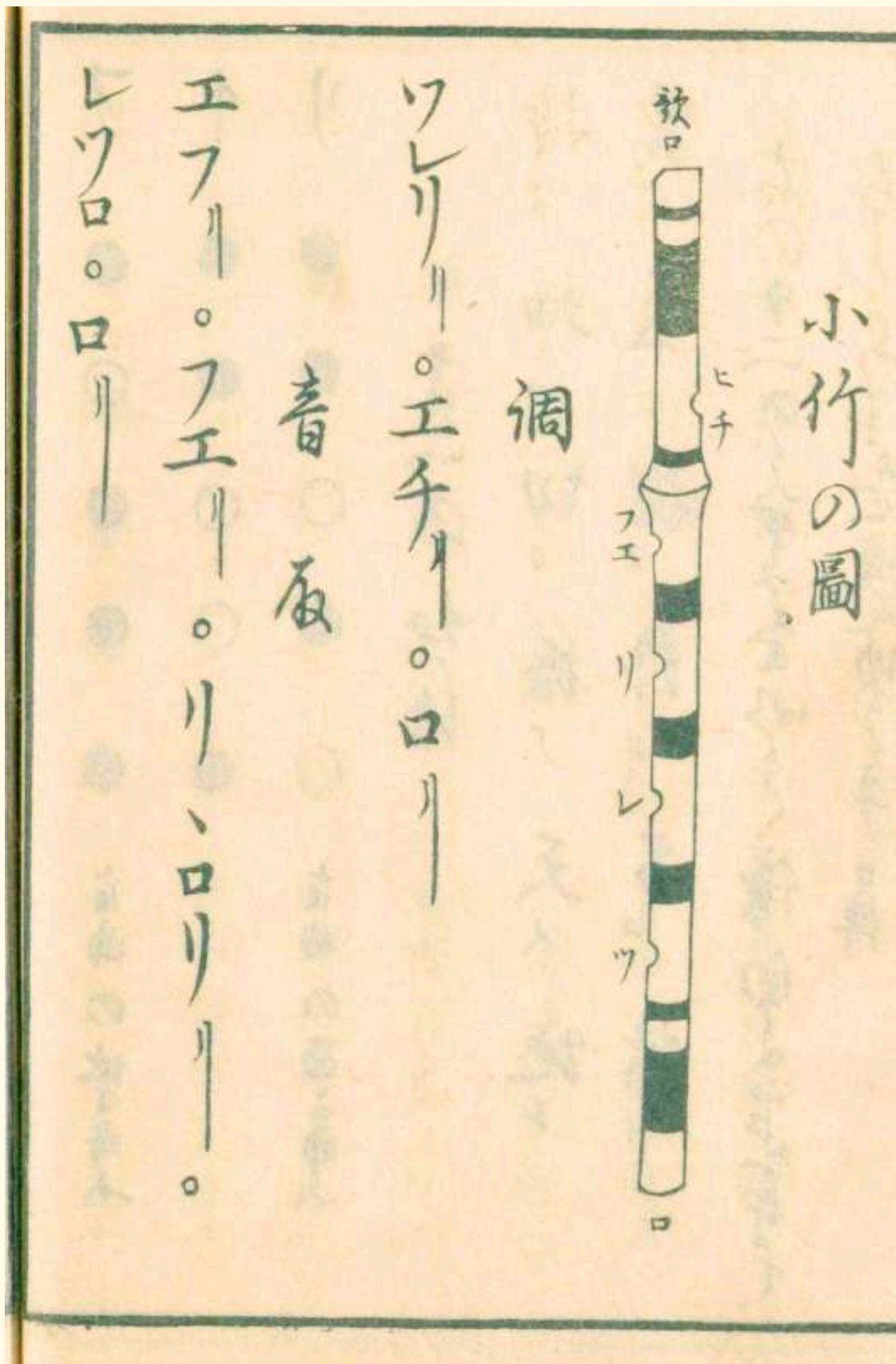
Shichiku Kokin-shu is not the best representation of the classical Sosa-ryu (which branched off into Sashida-ryu) *hitoyogiri* pieces, but because of its simplicity, clarity, and accessibility, it provides a very nice introduction. At the same time, Kamiya's attempt to use 'contemporary' pieces as a way in to the classics, while interesting, was ultimately unsuccessful. The *hitoyogiri* is made for playing medieval pieces, rather than late Edo-era ensemble music. Its tonal simplicity and flexibility make it perfect for playing these elegant predecessors to Fuke shakuhachi, which though differing somewhat in theory contain all of the power of that philosophical/meditative approach that the latter retains. While playing modern pieces, or even *Rokudan*, on a *hitoyogiri* is possible, it feels kind of like hammering in a nail with the butt of a screwdriver. You can do it, but why would you want to when a hammer works so much better?



Kamiya Juntei's name on title page, with bamboo name Isshi-an



Lineage from Sashida Ichi-on to Yana Tsugimasa



Kotake diagram with Shirabe and Netori

Nevertheless, I don't know that anyone could have done better. Muromachi-era *hitoyogiri* pieces are an immersive monophonic expression of the moment, using medieval tonal behaviours shared with Shomyo chant, Gagaku and Noh music. They may not be for everyone, but now that the audience isn't limited to Kyoto or Edo, we can perhaps continue to breathe new life into these old pieces.

If you want to learn these medieval *hitoyogiri* pieces, I lead classes online. All skill levels are welcome - see www.hon-on.com/lessons.html for more info.

For an English translation of *Shichiku Kokin-shu*, see www.hon-on.com/other.html



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Maki-e

The gold *maki-e* characters seem to read *Shu* 秋 (Autumn) *Kai* 海 (Ocean); the additional character by the finger hole appears to be *Yana* 梁. You can also see Kamiya's stamp *Isshi* 一思 in three locations on the flute. The appearance of the name *Yana* suggests that he may have made this flute for his uncle or another family member.

WHEN STRINGS MEET BAMBOO (PART 1)

by John Garner



Cornelius Boots

In September of this year, I will have been studying the violin for 29 years. I've long lived and breathed the instrument and have been lucky enough to make music my profession. I took up the shakuhachi much more recently, in November of 2021, under the tutelage of Cornelius Shinzen Boots. The bamboo journey thus far has been, in many respects, an absolute revelation. My experience as a violinist has laid certain foundations for learning the shakuhachi but, equally, discovering the radically unique world of the shakuhachi has transformed aspects of my approach to the violin, as well as my attitude to music and life in general (a feeling which I know is shared by many in this community).

In this and the December issue of BAMBOO, I would like to consider certain areas in which the two instruments overlap and others in which they diverge. Although as a violinist I have, over the years, been immersed in jazz, improvised, and South Indian music, my training as a child and young adult was largely in the European Classical Tradition (hereafter ECT). The comparisons that follow, therefore, are made from this perspective and are by no means intended as exhaustive or objective. They are my personal observations from my lived experience as a musician.

Origins

Although their earliest origins are subject to conjecture, the spiritual beginnings of the violin and the shakuhachi as we know them today can be traced back approximately to the early 17th century with, respectively, the emergence of archetypal violins built by the likes of Amati, Stradivari, and Guarneri, and the establishment of the Fuke sect of Rinzai Zen Buddhism (Shakuhachi - History and Origins, n.d.). Because of the ways in which the ECT and shakuhachi tradition are commonly characterised and described, it can be easy to miss this coincident, perhaps attributing to the latter an intangible timelessness far exceeding the timeframe inferred from the meticulous hagiographic documentation of the former. Nevertheless, I find the thought of these two disparate universes developing in lockstep somehow thrilling.

The spiritual underpinnings of the shakuhachi are abundantly clear and, indeed, are the reason for which many people, in particular Western practitioners, become interested in the instrument in the first place (Keister, 2004). As Gen'ichi Tsuge puts it, 'the legend [of the Fuke sect of Zen Buddhism] has provided the ethos of contemporary shakuhachi music since the end of the eighteenth century' (Tsuge, 2005, p. 123).

The violin is less typically couched in spiritual terms, existing primarily as a musical tool in multiple traditions, notably the ECT and various folk musics. There are, of course, cultures in which the violin plays a prominent role which serve an explicitly spiritual purpose (Indian classical music, for example), but I would argue that today the violin generally exists within a secularised musical milieu.

This being said, most ECT violinists would likely identify J. S. Bach as the forefather of the tradition, who set the wheels in motion with his *Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin*, completed in 1720, an astounding series of six works which showcase a breathtakingly elaborate, polyphonic, and previously unimagined instrumental language¹. A devoted Lutheran, Bach was a profoundly spiritual man (Herz, 1946). Normal as it was for performers and composers to be in the employ of the church, it was evidently natural territory for Bach, who saw his creative practice as a devotional one.

While the shakuhachi has retained more of the trappings of its religious nascence, and while Zen Buddhism and Christianity differ widely in their philosophical foundations, these instruments both found fertile soil in contemplative practices at around the same time, albeit thousands of miles apart.

Practicalities, repertoire, and practice

The shakuhachi and the violin are very simple instruments (which is, of course, not to say that they are simple to craft). Because of this simplicity of design—in the first case, an open-ended tube with five finger-holes; in the other, four strings, stretched tight over a wooden body, and a horse-hair bow—the sonic and expressive possibilities are innumerable. No keys, frets, pedals. It is unsurprising, therefore, that these instruments have a reputation for being fearsomely challenging to learn (and, in the early stages, rather unpleasant for those within hearing range). Patience and perseverance are, nevertheless, abundantly rewarded. It is perhaps this challenge that has, in part, given rise to the similar cultures of intense practice which each instrument occupies.

¹ Honourable mention should also be given to Telemann for the 12 Fantasias for Solo Violin, which followed a few years later, utilising a not altogether dissimilar approach.

It is here that I must acknowledge the first major difference between these practices. Within the ECT, long and arduous practice is indeed encouraged and, to a certain degree, necessary for realising the levels of technical accomplishment demanded by the standard repertoire. No one could hope to get their fingers around Tchaikovsky's *Violin Concerto*, for example, without thousands and thousands of hours in the woodshed; nor, for that matter, could they hope to hold their own in a symphonic orchestral or chamber music setting. This culture of practice has evolved, therefore, around external expectations and the specific exigencies of the repertoire.

Although the demands of *honkyoku* are not inconsiderable, the relationship between repertoire and practice is flipped on its head in the case of the shakuhachi. Rather than practice being geared towards the achievement of higher levels of technical accomplishment, the *honkyoku* pieces serve as a vehicle for a deepening connection to the practice itself, which in turn serves the purposes of *shugyō*, a Japanese term described by Cristina Moon of Chozen-ji temple as:

‘the deepest possible spiritual discipline... when one is doing *shugyō*, there is nothing in life that isn't training—that is, nothing that cannot be used as a way to approach one's True Self (a phrase which is synonymous in Zen with Enlightenment). But even this, too, is an incomplete understanding. Despite a lot of talk in the 1960s and 1970s about Buddhism, selflessness, and compassion, [temple founder] Tanouye Rotaishi felt that many in the West were missing the means to not just act selfless and compassionate but be selfless and compassionate. *Shugyō*, he felt, was the missing link. It cultivated the kind of strength—physical, psychological, and spiritual—one would need to live up to the ancient meaning of the word “compassion,” derived from the Latin for “with” and “to suffer.” (Moon, 2024, chapter 5)

In its most idealised form, then, the shakuhachi is understood as a tool to cultivate enlightened states, which can help to foster compassion and greater peace in the world. The musical outcome may be beautiful, it may be virtuosic, but it is not the point.

All of this is not to say that the boundaries of these practices are fixed, nor to say that, while the study of the shakuhachi opens one to celestial realms of non-ego, the study of the violin in the ECT is a clinical one rooted in the commodification of musical performance. One could pursue the shakuhachi solely to master its technical feats, while one may well experience spiritual rapture whilst playing a violin sonata. Indeed, my curiosity about the shakuhachi and its Buddhist foundations opened out of my violin practice, which had already become increasingly centred around personal and spiritual development rather than performative accomplishment. Similarly, the shakuhachi exists beyond the contemplative edifice of *honkyoku*, not least in the idiosyncratic musical universe of Shinzen Sensei, whose spiritual connection to the instrument is in no way reduced by his radical pursuit of an instrumental and compositional style which embraces the cultural plurality of the present day.

My point is rather that these two aspects of musical practice—the instrumentalist focus and the contemplative focus—can, and should, inform and enrich each other.

Tone

Perhaps the area in which I have found the clearest overlap is in the focus on the production of tone. As a young violin student, I spent endless hours in the pursuit of a rich, clear, resonant sound, focussing on open strings. This involved both exploring the suggestions of my teachers as well as bringing my attention to bear at increasingly subtle levels, developing a fineness of awareness previously absent in various parts of my body. This sometimes-arduous process was geared towards eventually being able to effortlessly access a formidable tone, utilising the natural capacities of the body in concert with the material conditions of the environment.

My shakuhachi studies have been similarly oriented towards a gradual expansion of tone and a more direct connection with the flute. Shinzen Sensei's approach unfurls from an intense focus on the lower *tan tien*, 'located approximately 3 inches below the navel and 2.5 inches inward from the skin... [it] is the seat of power for wind instrument tone production' (Boots, *Mukyoku: Pieces for Taimu Shakuhachi - Instructional Materials & Level One Pieces*, 2010, p. x). According to Zen teacher and clinical psychologist Mike Sayama, 'one is brought into the state of emptiness through diligent concentration of the power of the whole body at the tanden [*tan tien*] and simultaneously infusing the whole body with the vital energy radiating from there' (Sayama, 1986, p. 128). Shinzen Sensei encourages a honing of this concentration through 'melodic flow [and] forward motion' (Boots, *Breath Wizard Études* [Unpublished manuscript], p. 1). Although the slow exploration of long tones is reminiscent of my violin studies, I have had to bring my attention to many parts of the body that were previously off the radar (face, lips, tongue, oral cavity, throat, etc.). Between this and the violin, my body is much more alive than ever before.

While the dexterity and suppleness in the hands required by the violin have allowed for a smooth transition to the manual aspects of the shakuhachi, the breath-centric focus of the latter has been a boon for my violin playing. With any instrument that can be played without the breath, there is a danger that the musician becomes cut off altogether from their breathing, with serious consequences for the body and mind. Such is the fate of many string players. A grounding in the breath cultivated through several years of shakuhachi playing has seeped into my relationship with the violin, bringing greater ease to my playing, as well as helping to develop practices for my violin students which establish this connection early on.

Conclusion to part 1

In the following issue of BAMBOO, I will continue this instrumental dialectic with a focus on timbre, the role of the natural world in music-making, and communities of practice.

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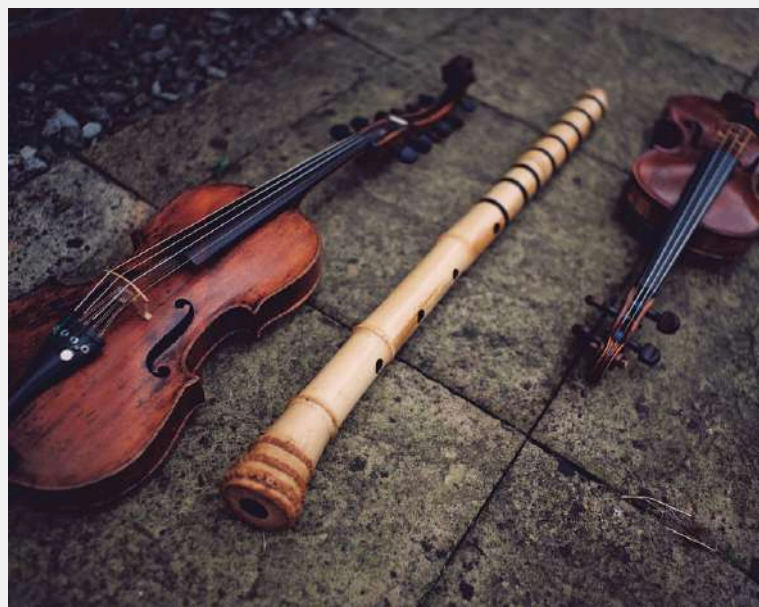


Photo: Ruth Garner

JAPANESE PRINTS WITH MUSIC (III)

by Hannspeter Kunz

The Japanese Woodblock prints of the Edo period (1603-1868) were sold in the streets of Edo (today's Tokyo). In order to sell well they showed what was most fascinating to the *edokko* (people of Edo): The *kabuki* theater with its actors, their outfit, their artistic performance. Kabuki was and still is a mix in dramatic performance with dance and music: *ka* ("sing"), *bu* ("dance") and *ki* ("skill").

All this is reflected in the actor portrait by Kunichika, designed in 1867, shortly before the official opening of the country to the rest of the world. Here we recognize an actor in the role of Soga no Juro, one of two brothers who avenge the death of their father who had been killed eighteen years previously in a private quarrel.



Kunichiga Soga (Collection Hannspeter Kunz)



Soga no Juro is easily recognizable because his kimono is decorated with six birds, *chidori* (plover) which are his personal emblem. His sword and the shakuhachi flute symbolize the integral aspect of the kabuki, namely drama and music.

In these Edo prints we also get to know the realistic luxuriousness of the theater costumes as they were presented on stage. However, a closer inspection reveals that the folds of the garment are done in an “abstract” way, simply as a line that runs over an ornament leaving it so to speak “unfolded”. This practice enhances the flatness of the picture and was - among other things – recognized in the West as the beginning of Modern Art by means of abstraction.

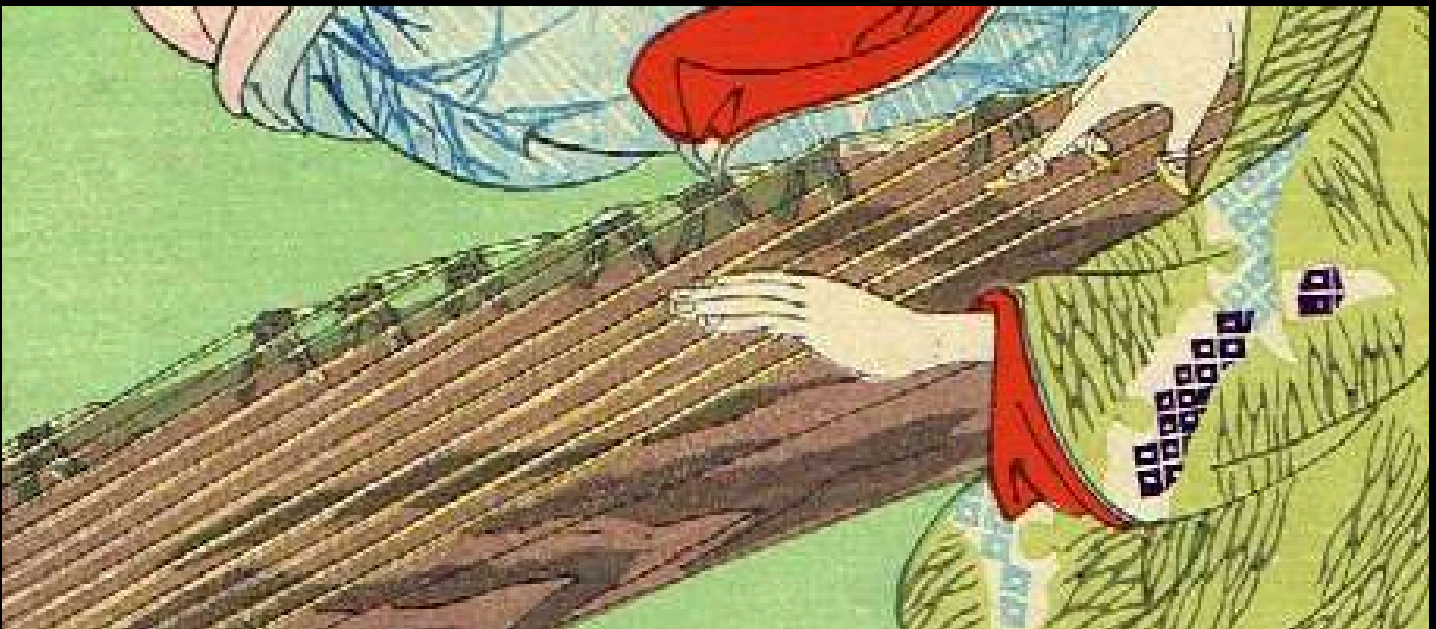
The “shamisen and Kyoto players” designed by Chikanobu in the 1890’s also shows intricately detailed costumes which suggest fabric folds although other print designers of the time created more realistic three-dimensional drapery folds. In addition, Chikanobu also stuck to the eastern tradition preferring the parallel perspective to the western one-point perspective. With the opening of the country in 1868 the western influence threatened to eliminate Japanese cultural traditions. Some of Chikanobu’s series like *Onna reishiki no zu* (Ladies’ Etiquette Pictures) can be seen as a backlash despite his modern color scheme.



Shamisen and koto players (Collection Hanspeter Kunz)



Detail of the shamisen



Detail of the koto

More images can be seen at his website: <https://www.ukiyo-e-gallery.de>

REFLECTIONS ON SHAKUHACHI MAKING AND LEARNING WITH MIURA RYŪHO

by Thorsten Knaub



When I was initially asked last autumn to write about my 'making journey' or 'making experience', there was a plan to also have some input from my making teacher, Miura Ryūho. Due to him passing away rather suddenly in November 2025, this contribution obviously took on another layer of meaning. Besides 'my journey', it also attempts to reflect about Miura Ryūho's shakuhachi making and to ponder upon ideas of what it means to transfer skills, and the inevitable loss of experience and knowledge. To gain some insight beyond my own limited experiences, I also asked my teacher Teruo Furuya, someone who knew Miura Ryūho for 50+ years, to add some of his thoughts here. Many thanks also to Riley Lee for sending me a short philosophical musing.

Furthermore it seems best to define that when I am talking about 'shakuhachi making' in this article, I am talking about *ji-ari* shakuhachi making, ie the ones which usually come in two halves and have a precisely shaped inside bore (though there will also be mention of *jinashi* shakuhachi – see the info/image pages within the text). And, as with making shakuhachi, it always seems best to start at the beginning.

Why make shakuhachi? Cast-bore, resin, plaster, *tonoko* and *urushi*...

Initially I was drawn to making shakuhachi probably in a similar way as many other people – for reasons of availability of instruments in Europe (this was the early 1990s), high costs and the misconception of something being a simple looking instrument – it is just a piece of bamboo – is also something simple to build and not realising its rather challenging construction; and there is actually the need to be able to play the instrument to a certain level. Or, even if one was aware of it, it did not seem to matter – the urge to have and 'play' a shakuhachi was simply greater.

In retrospect I can see three phases to start making, many years apart. This was also due to the circumstances that I was quite busy in the visual arts, and not all the time was spent with shakuhachi in mind in those days.

Anyway, having encountered the shakuhachi a couple of years prior, in 1993 through the invitation of a shakuhachi friend, Frank Genkaizan Schäfer, I found myself at a BBQ (maybe it was a kind of AGM?) of the International Shakuhachi Society (ISS) in the south of England as Dan Mayers, the President of the ISS, was residing there at the time. There were plenty of shakuhachi to ogle, though I could not afford to buy one, and I settled for a piece of *madake* (and a free Watazumido CD to fulfil the cliché of the 'shakuhachi novice' completely). More useful was that I met fellow shakuhachi people there, among others Clive Bell (now our *BAMBOO* co-editor, who was the ISS secretary at the time!); also Richard Stagg, who knew about making - and I was introduced to the theory of Monty Levenson's cast-bore method, as well as hearing the shakuhachi played the whole afternoon, if I'm not mistaken, by Yoshikazu Iwamoto, who positioned himself further away in the back of the garden.

So my first attempts at filling bamboo with epoxy resin started soon after. Knowledge about things like bore profiles, specific diameters, choke and pressure points did not exist and hence did not intervene in the making process. A lot of home made 'long-files' did not help much, and sanding out the rock-hard resin to some kind of consistent bore diameter was not only very difficult, it seemed a sheer impossibility. Nevertheless I even managed to put in something resembling a bone *utaguchi*, following some illustration I found in a book. But only years later - in fact it was at the *ji-mori* shakuhachi making course with John Neptune in Barcelona (2013) - would I witness the actual process of putting in that *utaguchi* at an angle and then cutting it to shape, rather than making the shape first and then placing it in... doh! ...needless to say, it was not a well made or tuned shakuhachi that came out. And I happily abandoned it, as I was able to get an affordable Tom Deaver 1.8 – shaved root end, long crack, many bindings – but I could start learning to play with a real shakuhachi.

About 10+ years later I got the desire to go deeper into the making process, but to my disappointment, workshops and 'making talk' seemed always about *jinashi* making, which actually had very little to do with me wanting to learn making *jiari* shakuhachi. Of course I am not dissing the *jinashi* per se, *jinashi* can also be fascinating and complex instruments, but I was not playing *jinashi*. I was more attracted to the variety of sounds and colours a *jiari* can produce, and how the instrument is used in many settings, from *honkyoku* to modern pieces to contemporary. And the fascination of how a simple bamboo pole can be transformed into this object, which somehow is still that simple pole while also being an instrument capable of so much nuance and expression.

Third time attempting to make shakuhachi

So roughly ten years later, I found myself finally committing more to a school/style of shakuhachi. Having discovered Watazumi's and Yokoyama's *honkyoku* in the 1990s already, it was great to meet Teruo Furuya, who studied, played and performed with Yokoyama for 41 years, and have the options to take more regular playing lessons.

This was also the time to engage with shakuhachi making in a more committed manner. I thought something along these lines: not only does one need a basic knowledge of playing the thing, but pursuing a certain style (aiming for a certain sound and technique) helps of course to focus the making process and study too. Although at this time I had not yet met Miura Ryūho, I had much more access to making materials which I had collected over many years. One day Furuya-sensei asked me to borrow some tools; he wanted to retune and improve an *Ichijo* 1.6. It was an interesting experience – not only did I learn that relatively expensive flutes may still have problems, or that a particular playing approach may need adjustment, but I also saw a process which was already a bit familiar to me, due to my making trials and explorations.

Gathering more making experience meant that my initial piece of bamboo (from the earliest trials) was now cut in two and a *nakatsugi* (middle joint) was attempted. The initial 2.3 shrank to a 2.1, and making my way gradually from resin cast bore, to wood putty plus water, to *tonoko* powder and *seshime urushi* mixtures, my first *jiari* took shape and was... playable. It looked like a monster, due to endless reworking, scratching and experimenting, and finally attempting some artistic lacquering of the bamboo...

Jinashi, Jiari/Jinuri and Jimori? Cast-Bore?

Ji is the name of the mixture made of *urushi*, the sap of the *urushi* tree (*Rhus vernacifera*), and *tonoko* (a kind of stone powder similar to clay) mixed with water. To make the *jiari* shakuhachi (other name *jinuri* shakuhachi), which started to appear around the late 19th century, the resulting paste is then applied with long thin bamboo sticks to build up the bore of the inside of the bamboo. Through a long process of shaping or sanding and measuring the desired diameters are reached as well as the surface of the applied paste becomes smooth. Differences of 1/10mm can change the nature of the sound (colour) or playability (attack, response, balance), so accuracy and the right tools to achieve this is important. The shaping of the bore of course affects pitch too, but position and size of holes are here of more crucial consequence.



Clockwise from top left: Turning *tonoko* clumps into powder; *tonoko* ready to mix; with added raw *urushi* (*seshime / ki*) and little water, the resulting paste; application of *ji* into the bore at Miura's studio in Akita 2019

In contrast a *jinashi* shakuhachi is made without the use of any *ji*. Strictly speaking only the natural bamboo is used for shaping the bore and tuning. Eg the internal bamboo walls can be used to create sections with different diameters to regulate airflow and assist with balancing and tuning. But it is not uncommon that *urushi* is applied to the inside or outside of the bamboo for protection or aesthetics.

And with the *jimori* shakuhachi the making method uses *ji* in some specific places in the bore only. This approach refers back to the theory of certain 'pressure points' or 'places of interest' within the bore which are filled in to balance weak notes. Nowadays, rather than *ji* the more handy mixture of bamboo dust and epoxy may be applied. Either way *jimori* shakuhachi are also known as spot-tuned shakuhachi.

I mentioned the cast-bore approach at the very beginning. The DIY method I tried was just pouring epoxy resin, turning the bamboo slowly to spread the resin evenly and then after it hardens using sticks with sandpaper attached to attain bore diameters. I used the term cast-bore loosely here but this should not be mistaken for Monty Levenson's precision cast bore approach. Levenson developed precision tools and technology like laser guided lathes for the shakuhachi making process he pioneered since the 1970s. You can read a proper description and explanation on his shakuhachi.com website: <https://www.shakuhachi.com/Q-PCBStory.html>

My first encounter with Mr Miura

This was the first flute I brought to Japan, as I was about to be introduced to Miura Ryūho when visiting his Tokyo studio. My actual reason for going there was to pick up 1.8 shakuhachi we ordered from him the previous year. When arriving with Furuya-sensei, we were welcomed with tea and biscuits, before finally being presented with the new 1.8s. Great flutes of course.

Being in the studio felt like being in a treasure trove. Bamboo was everywhere, some seemingly pretty raw, some already worked on a bit. I had the shakuhachi I made still in the bag, and although there was not much time, I decided to show the flute and was hoping to get some insight into some basic making aspects. I think Miura was a bit scared when he saw the 'shakuhachi' I brought with me. As mentioned earlier, it did not look pretty but rather like something just dug up from the mud. So its presence and existence was politely ignored, and it was never touched or blown. Some more tea? Yes, please. *Arigato*.

Soon after, maybe initially out of pity, or just warming up to the whole situation, Miura signalled that if I wanted to watch him working that afternoon, I was welcome to stay. He would start by making *utaguchi*, usually it took him two hours to do one. So we moved over to the workplace in the other room – a cave-like area full of bamboo and tools, with a central spot for Miura to sit.

Although *utaguchi* making was the starter on the menu, it soon became a full course meal of shakuhachi making basics. Yes, now I'll put a quick coat of *urushi* on a joint, one of many, and then put the brush back in the oil, yes, sunflower oil is fine to store the brush.... Here are the gauges I use for measuring the inside, let me mix some *ji* paste to show you how it is applied... and yes cutting the *utaguchi* slot... pencil 0.5 mm, don't forget to put newspaper underneath, it's so much easier to find the tiny corner piece again which you may accidentally slice off (he didn't)... sandpaper #120 then #240... These were the voices in my mind of course, as Miura does not really speak a lot of English, but demonstrations with gestures speak a lot. And above all, clearly there's an enthusiasm and knowledge he has about making which he wanted to share, and although my 'shakuhachi' was clearly a farcical object to him, he nevertheless took me seriously by saying, Well, in case you really want to pursue this further, here are some tips.

It was a big revelation to see these few actions in the studio. From many years of looking at diagrams, bore profiles, reading everything one could find about shakuhachi making, with more information finally appearing on the web, combined with many years of my own experimenting - now to witness these processes performed right in front of me clarified a lot of questions and doubts I had. Basically a lot of pennies dropped. And besides some of the specific insights, there was also the wider lesson of doing precise actions, with no hesitation but no hurry either, being in control and having a plan, having an organised work environment (even if it looked a bit chaotic), which kind of seems obvious but actually, after so many years of shakuhachi playing and 'making' it was my first time seeing the work process for *jiari* from a highly skilled professional in close up.

Meeting Mr Miura again in his home studio (Noshiro, Akita)

This first meeting gave me a lot of energy and direction about making, and soon after I was working on a few shakuhachi. They were also the first I felt confident enough to sell to people and I managed to get them ready for the World Shakuhachi Festival in London in 2018. (I believe some people who bought them are still playing these shakuhachi today).

The next trip to Japan was planned, and this time it was clear to me I have to visit Mr Miura in his home studio to go deeper into the techniques and tools he was using on our first encounter. Miura, being an accomplished player - *honkyoku* as well as *sankyoku* - and being part of the Yokoyama lineage – well indeed, the foremost maker of the flutes played by many people associated with the school — (we'll come back to that), it made sense to contact him to learn more about making shakuhachi.

And, if initially, many years back, it was the urge to make a shakuhachi in order to have a shakuhachi, it felt now much more that the process itself is an important aspect of the wish to study more. There was a growing sense of the importance in whatever even small way to keep skills, knowledge and traditional shakuhachi working methods alive. And knowing details of the building process is also a way to better understand the instrument one is playing.

In summer 2019 I arrived in Noshiro, Akita, with a long wish-list of what I wanted to learn, neatly put into chapters like *utaguchi*, middle joint, rattan, *urushi* etc.... All with a proof-read Japanese translation too. Additionally I brought along again a shakuhachi I made, as I thought, for better or worse, this will say a lot of where my understanding is right now. Miura scanned quickly through the list smiling (it was very comprehensive, maybe a tad optimistic regarding being able to cover all of this during my stay). The list was never mentioned again. But this time he picked up the shakuhachi I made (my first 2.0), and he said something like very nice work at the *utaguchi*, can I try it? Sure. And after a bit of blowing and playing, he seemed content - just maybe one could try to improve the character of *ro* in *otsu* a bit? Yes, sure go ahead. (Incidentally, Furuya-sensei would borrow this 2.0 shakuhachi a few months later, to play a piece in his Paris concert.)

Here was not only my first lesson but also my first sighting of one of the special little super organised tools Miura always seemed to have. Just a small box with adhesive tape neatly pre-cut and categorised in thickness of varying tenths of millimetres and square centimeters. These were placed inside the bore to check spots (pressure points) where improvement is possible. Though it was more a demonstration of principle, as there was no easy solution to push *ro* *otsu* a bit more without losing other pitches. In any case the flute gave enough clues to him, as afterwards he wrote a new list of tasks for the 30-40 hours of lessons I envisioned. After finishing tea and biscuits, the living room became the place to bend and cut bamboo...

Preparing the bamboo

Tamenaoshi: this is the process to shape (correct) the bamboo pole through heat. This involves usually straightening the bamboo or bending the bottom root for aesthetic reasons more upwards. Even bamboo which has been stored for decades still has some moisture and can be worked on in this way.



Clockwise from top left: Heating up the bamboo at specific places with a gas flame to be able to shape it; Pushing down slowly to get the 'correct' shape; power-grinding the root into shape, (see also image to the left). More tricky than it looks... don't try without proper protection; cutting the bamboo into two parts. Akita, Japan.



Learning making with Miura sensei

The basic learning process means making a shakuhachi together with Miura-sensei from start to finish. And although I was eager to hear and see the processes of *utaguchi*, *nakatsugi* making and shaping the bore, the starting point was preparing the bamboo pole. In hindsight this became almost the most important aspect of what I learned, as having a good preparation is really essential to start working.

Although the usual steps are finding the center line of the bamboo, shaping the root part symmetrically, and then finally bending the bamboo into shape, it was the accuracy and awareness of fractions of millimetres already at this stage of making that caught my attention. The first cut at the top would leave a 1.5 mm safety margin, later to be reduced as work progressed, or else the middle cut would need some fraction of mm adjustment. Also, the bamboo Miura chose for our 1.8 needed overall length adjustment to have the best finger hole locations. This kind of bamboo he called 'difficult bamboo', which he said was the best to learn to make at the beginning.

And it's true, having now made maybe 60-70 shakuhachi, bamboo shape or node placement scares me less and less. It just takes more work to make it ready. And once it's all shaped and sized it feels the same to work on as an 'easy' pole; both already hint at their final form and potential quality due to the preparation. After this session at Miura's house I also started to notice that in almost every corner or corridor space there was bamboo — all with shaped root, markings of the holes and marks for any other cuts needed, as well as the rough oblique cut for the eventual *utaguchi*. Ready to go and already feeling like great shakuhachi of the future.

The following days were spent learning about *utaguchi* and *nakatsugi* making. For the *nakatsugi* demonstration, Miura already warned me that this would usually be a 7-hour session, so we need an early start. To cover all aspects and details it cannot be shorter. OK. I think we stayed just under 6h45'.

Although Miura deploys some special little 'tricks' (one is sworn to secrecy), I think the overall process is not much different to other professional makers. Again the main takeaway here is clarity of approach, precise markings — using a 0.3 mm pencil to mark and a 0.3 mm saw to cut means the pencil mark needs to take that into account... movements with the tools when chiselling away the inside of the bamboo for the tenon fit, no hurry, and precise and straight movements applying an even, straightlined pressure to knife or chisel. Similarly with the *utaguchi*, which always shows great perfection on Miura flutes. Besides the experience and learned skill, exact measurements, the right knife and leaving enough bamboo edge before you start cutting are needed. And the aim is always about making the shakuhachi as good as possible, ie the joint closes easy and perfectly even after many years... the *utaguchi* shaping does contribute to enhancing the response, volume and playability in general. It is not about making an 'art object' but a musical instrument.

Utaguchi, nakatsugi making... measuring.... checking



At Miura Ryūho's Akita studio, 2019. Clockwise from top left: Marking the Kinko *utaguchi* dimensions and shape; checking the ivory (fossilized mammoth ivory) insert fits; the shaped and inserted piece; blow-torching the silver wire; the rounded wire is pressed flat under Miura's supervision; the silver rings to be added to the joint part; examining the tenon of the *nakatsugi* (middle joint); checking the center line of the flute.



Asking him a couple of years later in an email about the use of high level Japanese *urushi* lacquer, he said as much: "...Shakuhachi is not an arts and crafts product, so I think basic *urushi* (Chinese) is sufficient. Still, if you can afford it, please use Japanese lacquer."

In general I think Miura was happy to share his approach and enthusiasm as much as possible. I certainly felt welcome and cared for exceedingly well. Every day Miura would come with his car in the morning to collect me and drive me back after the day. Sometime we did excursions, for example to the *sankyoku* group he was part of, so we could join in there too. The teaching he took seriously and was totally committed to my getting the best possible exposure to his working methods. He even bought a translation device to speak into, which was useful if he needed something to be as clear as possible. And maybe it was part of his sense of humour, to choose the voice of a woman with a perfectly polite British accent for the machine to translate.

But of course there are limits. Miura has spent his whole life perfecting his approach, developing tools and exploring the bore of the shakuhachi, so he will not part with this kind of knowledge carelessly. So asking up front, "Can you tell me the exact measurements you are using to make a 2.4 shakuhachi?" would be misreading what it means to learn with him. Transmission is incremental and always reflects the level you find yourself at a moment in time. A good teacher will always understand that and instruct accordingly.

What I found was over the last 5-6 years, where I was writing more or less regularly to him, either just to show some flutes I finished, pointing out certain parts I was happy with and other parts I found challenging, or sometime asking more directly for advice about tools or process, that his answers were more elaborate if I spent more time explaining my thinking, and exploring why I came to this idea or question.

In a sense it was the same approach from him as when I showed him the flutes I made. The first flute received the 'no comment' treatment. The second time Miura sensei made a plan for what and how he should teach me, as he could see what I lacked and where I was not doing so bad.

Tools of the trade

It was similar regarding the tools. Already on the first day in his home in Noshiro, he showed me a set of tools I needed (as usual it was not assembled, just the parts). The measuring gauges were essential, he said. Basically some round metal discs at the end of an aluminium stick. These can be used to create a rough inside diameter but are also crucial to get the exact values measured eventually.

And he also showed me a more pricey set of tools, which I could consider. It was a set of 35 quick-form tapered brass cylinders (again to assemble at home). I was hesitating, as I could not really figure out the need at the time. I am glad I did take them in the end, but it took me several years to use them efficiently, as they also require a high control of the moisture level of the *ji* paste.

Tools, humidity box and 'difficult bamboo'

The “RM TPP/handles” set – a set of 80 tapered metal cylinders with long handles designed by Miura Ryūho. With the attached sandpaper the bore can be shaped to the exact desired measurements. The values of the calculations Miura Ryūho used, partly for easy reference and partly, I suppose, to 'hide' exact values, used a kind of 'coded' system, e.g. number or letter combinations which only he (and his students) knew their actual value behind the “code”. Miura's instructions were something likedisassemble it, assemble it, examine it, understand it.



Image above left: *Urushi* does not 'dry' it 'cures'; hence the lacquered shakuhachi needs to be placed into a 'humidity box', and if exposed to around 24°C and around 75% humidity it 'cures'.

At the very end, pretty much the final working steps, black or red 'finishing' *urushi* is applied with a brush. This will give the smooth, mirror-like surface and protective coating of the inside of the shakuhachi. A different, harder type of *urushi* is used at the joint.



One of the first 1.8 shakuhachi I made after returning from Japan from 'difficult bamboo' provided by Miura. It required two length adjustment cuts, one just below the *utaguchi* and one between hole 1 and 2, to create a well proportioned shakuhachi with suitable finger hole locations. The length adjustment process has no influence on the flute's sound or playability. You can listen to this shakuhachi and many others I made at shakuhachi-atelier.com

There was one more major tool set Miura was speaking about – the tapered cylinders connected to a long handle for inside bore fine shaping – and not surprisingly Miura developed his own set of cylinders some time in the 1990s — the 'RM style TPP'. These tools were precision engineered in a family relative's metal factory, and the complete set was around 80 cylinders; suitable for making 1.3 to 3.1 shakuhachi lengths. He was saying maybe one day I should consider these, though they are very expensive, and only a handful of sets exist at the moment. You have to be ready too, he said; it took him 10 years to be able to use the 'RM' smoothly and efficiently with the other tools in combination.

As an aside – I only waited about five years before asking about the RM TTP. Knowing Miura's waiting times for flutes, I thought it was good to start the conversation early... and to my surprise a student of his retired from making and he happened to have one of the few existing sets and would like to sell it. OK! Typical of Miura's thoroughness and generosity, he said he would check it through and make sure it was all correct, and if needed complete it with any spare parts he might have, so everything was in perfect shape before sending it. Last October the 80-piece 'RM style TPP' set finally arrived from Japan.



Leaving Noshiro, Akita... one more photo... and one last energy drink (I think it was matcha & lemonade)... and it was bye-bye. Thank you Miura sensei!

What was clear here was, even without understanding the exact calculation of how he arrived at the cylinder length and corresponding diameters, that his approach follows a systematic logic and maths. On the one hand that should not be surprising, as we are talking about physics, air, frequencies, pitches — phenomena which have exact definitions - but on the other hand it was kind of eye-opening, as it became clearer how all the different lengths are connected and there is no essential difference in making a 1.6 or 2.4 or whatever. Perhaps, due to me having mainly encountered long *jinashi* type of flutes before, I got a misleading impression of what a long flute was, like more difficult to play and make, with more tuning issues in *kan* or *dai-kan*. Suddenly in Miura's world it was all the same. There's no essential difference about mouthpiece or bore design, just values moving up and down in logic increments. This also makes it relative easy to swap his short and long flutes as there is less embouchure adjustment needed.

But I have to add, although there is a lot of theory and numbers involved, it is not simply making shakuhachi by numbers. It is natural that a professional maker will more and more create tools and approaches. As information gained and mixed with experience creates knowledge, it becomes somehow inevitable to streamline certain processes accordingly. I feel a good set of tools, the necessary knowledge and skill to use the tools and a grasp of underlying principles (numbers/calculation), and a bit of talent, which still needs to be developed too, can bring you close, maybe 90% close, to making a really good flute. But there is that final stretch, where for all existing calculations, a good maker is using intuition gained from experience to just push it that bit more to make it really great.

I think to reach the 100% great flute level there is also the point where one needs to know, “What sound am I actually looking for?” What is that ideal sound, that 'dream of sound' I am pursuing? And where one has to understand clearly one's own playing level to be able to distinguish your own limitations from that of the flute.

Miura Ryūho and Yokoyama Katsuya

As Miura was not only a good player embedded into the Yokoyama school, he was also one of the principal flute makers people playing this style are using. Or he became this over many years, as he refined his making processes. Initially he was introduced to Yokoyama Ranpo in Shimizu City, and studied playing (not making) with him, and subsequently with Ranpo's son Yokoyama Katsuya in Tokyo.

Naturally, having a player like Yokoyama Katsuya (who also knew about making shakuhachi of course) testing and giving feedback about the shakuhachi to him, was one way for Miura to fine tune his ideas and approaches. Yokoyama's powerful playing style demanded instruments of the highest level and certain characteristics inherent to his dynamic interpretation of the classical honkyoku.

Miura Ryūho's working space



Above: Miura Ryūho in his Tokyo studio, April 2017: shakuhachi parts, RM handle tools, *urushi*, and tools, tools... (top right: applying *ji* paste to the inside of the bamboo; bottom right: brushing the first layer of *ki* (*seshime*) *urushi* onto the joint *tenon*.)



Above: 2.4 shakuhachi made by Miura Ryūho; From left: The bamboo had a crack in the root end. The ring, made from artificial ivory, with a silver lining, was set in to avoid the crack progressing further and reaching the inside bore; Perfection. Shaped to a thin edge – the *Kinko utaguchi* insert made from fossilized ivory; Miura's brand-marked *hanko*.

Given the need for eg strong *meri* notes, in particular a strong *dai tsu meri* (*tsu no o meri*), it influenced the placing of hole 1. Of course, this lower *tsu* is not a big secret here, as Miura did ask when ordering a shakuhachi from him: “*Honkyoku tsu* or western (equal temperament) *tsu*?”

In my understanding and observations I think Miura was also favouring a deeper cut *utaguchi* blowing edge, which he also worked on to a razor sharp edge. Which in turn, I suspect, due to the increased response and volume control, helps to facilitate the control and execution of techniques like *kamuri* (a *nayashi* kind of dip, but quickly down a full note and back up again).

Having had the opportunity to compare measurements of some flutes Ranpo Yokoyama made with some Miura Ryūho was making, it seems, although he never studied formally shakuhachi making with Ranpo, he did take inspiration from him. Generally speaking these flutes are not that far apart in overall measurements (narrow point to wide point), but the older flutes tend to have a pretty continuous taper towards the ‘choke point’ (somewhere around node 4) before flaring up again towards the root end. Miura seemed to have refined the bore by contracting certain areas more strongly than others, as well as having slightly more extreme wide and narrow points. And here we come back to the importance of precision, as this kind of a bore, if slightly off, does not work well at all, but if done with Miura’s accuracy, experience and knowledge - it sings.

Take the *ro otsu*, which as many makers find now is prone to jumping the octave if somewhere near the half point the bore diameter is too narrow. Now the much sought after ‘booming ro’ is basically the first harmonic of *ro otsu* accentuated, and the first harmonic being exactly one octave above, we have *ro kan*. Built accurately the *ro kan* harmonic plays simultaneously just within the *ro otsu* (that creamy, booming strong *ro* sound), but built slightly off, we only hear *ro kan*, ie problems playing *ro otsu*.

Legacy and Transmission

As said above, Miura was an accomplished player and understood the sound and nuances of *honkyoku* very well, having studied with Ranpo and Katsuya Yokoyama. He also researched thoroughly many different shakuhachi and other wind instruments (particular his inspiration gained from looking at the saxophone family), developed his own tools and approach, and also worked together with the great Yokoyama Katsuya over many years who, as one can imagine, and as his contemporaries also say, was always looking for a ‘better’ sound, more sound, more colour, more...

I guess ultimately it was this fruitful background, combined with Miura’s curiosity and scientific mind eager to understand details, and his dedication to precise working methods, which explain the special sound he managed to conjure out of the bamboo.

His passing last November was a great shock. And besides the human loss, it also showed the importance of transmission of knowledge before it suddenly disappears. There will be no more new Miura flutes. The good news is there are many flutes Miura made over the last 30-40 years of his making activity so we can enjoy them and understand them still.

The way I feel now about making shakuhachi did change in the light of Miura's absence. What felt like pieces of useful information about making, now feels more like a precious insight into his thinking and experience. Making a shakuhachi now I really cherish the steps of preparation, the measuring and all the small special 'tricks of the trade' he employed and transmitted. It is as if each flute is a 'thank you' and now I want to make it - even more - as good as I possibly can. But of course besides all the tools, tips and calculations, there is that finishing line which you only come closer to through time and experience. In any case, thank you Miura sensei for your time and generosity!



My workshop... trying to keep it organised is a constant effort! Contact: info@shakuhachi-atelier.com

TERUO FURUYA'S THOUGHTS ABOUT MIURA RYŪHO, SHAKUHACHI MAKING AND SHAKUHACHI IN GENERAL

An Interview with Teruo Furuya, by Thorsten Knaub

Thorsten Knaub: Furuya *sensei*, do you remember the first time you met Miura Ryūho?

Teruo Furuya: I believe I first met Mr Ryūho Miura at a Chikushin-kai concert in 1974. At that time, he was not yet primarily engaged in the making of shakuhachi. He was playing *Tsuru No Sugomori*, and I remember being struck by how brilliantly and skilfully he played it.

TK: Do you recall what makers of flutes you played when you first started to play shakuhachi?

TF: I began playing the shakuhachi in 1967. My first shakuhachi was one I bought for ¥10,000 at a traditional Japanese musical instrument shop in Yokosuka. Perhaps it wasn't by an entirely unknown maker, though not especially well known. After that, as my instrument was considered rather poor, I spent some time practising on an instrument lent to me by a senior member of the Koto & Shakuhachi Club. Then in 1970, I became a pupil of Katsuya Yokoyama, and some time later I began using a shakuhachi made by Master Ranpo Yokoyama. Over the course of several years, I purchased instruments in sizes 1.6, 2.4, 2.0 and 2.1, and I recall finally commissioning a 1.8 from him.

TK: Can you tell us something about Yokoyama Katsuya working with Miura Ryūho and how this maybe affected the way Miura Ryūho made his flutes?

TF: Although Katsuya Yokoyama and his students perform contemporary music too, they regard classical *honkyoku* as the most important form of music. I believe that, having interacted with us and our regard for classical *honkyoku*, they would have found it inconceivable that any instrument could fail to adequately reproduce the sounds used in *honkyoku*. I believe that this was the most significant factor influencing him.

TK: People often talk about the 'special' sound of a Miura Ryūho made shakuhachi – what do you think about that special sound or characteristic of his flutes?

TF: I feel that the shakuhachi has two main functions. The first is its function as a standard flute, and the second is its ability to produce the distinctive *meri* notes that form the basis of traditional music. A good shakuhachi (in my view) is one that combines both of these functions.

But it seems difficult to fulfil these two functions simultaneously. Much like a see-saw, if you raise one end, the other falls; it is difficult to achieve both [characteristics] at a high level. I believe the Ryūho-kan is the instrument that has accomplished this to a very high standard. It is from this perspective that many members of the Chikushin-kai sought to acquire a Ryūho-kan.

TK: Do you remember when you started to play flutes made by Miura Ryūho?

TF: I think it was around 1990. Katsuya did not sell shakuhachi under the Katsuya name while his father, Ranpo, was alive. There was a period when Ryūho was doing the preliminary work for Katsuya's shakuhachi, but the relationship between the two was not very good, so I hesitated to use a shakuhachi under the Ryūho name in front of Katsuya.

So, whilst Ryūho was doing the preparatory work, I asked Katsuya to make me a 2.4. Shortly after I received a call from Ryūho saying, "It's finished, I'll bring it over now," then I received a call from Katsuya saying, "It's finished, come and pick it up." The brand mark [signature] is Katsuya, but the maker is still Ryūho. That's my 2.4.

TK: Were there any longer *jiari* shakuhachi (eg 2.4, 2.7 and longer) played at all when you started to learn shakuhachi in the late 1960s?

TF: When I started learning the shakuhachi, I didn't even know that there were different lengths of shakuhachi. The shakuhachi my father bought was a mystery to me since I was little, but it wasn't until I brought it to the Koto & Shakuhachi Club and had a senior member examine it that I learned it was 1.9 long.

I didn't even know that very long shakuhachi existed. I'd heard stories of some wandering monks playing long ones, but I thought it was something completely unrelated to me. Around my fourth year of playing the shakuhachi, a skilled friend I met at the NHK training centre boasted, "I have a concert today, and I'm playing *Hi-Fu-Mi-Hachigaeshi* on a 2.1 shakuhachi. 2.1! Isn't that amazing!"

At that time, 2.1 was generally considered the longest playable shakuhachi. The few shakuhachi trios of that era used 1.6, 1.6, and 2.1 shakuhachi. Therefore, I believe Mr Katsuya Yokoyama was the first person to use a 2.4 shakuhachi in a way that made it recognized as a musical instrument.

TK: What about Miura Ryūho's legacy? Is there a student of Miura who will continue his making workshop and his style of shakuhachi?

TF: I don't know of anyone who has inherited Miura's shakuhachi-making techniques in their entirety. I've heard that he generously passed on his techniques to people who were very skilled and who sought them out. However, I don't know anyone who can be said to be his successor.

TK: Did the shakuhachi change a lot or not that much in the last 50 years in your experience?

TF: The standard of shakuhachi available to the general public has improved remarkably. Shakuhachi with more than adequate functionality for use as practice instruments can now be purchased at a reasonable price. This would have been unthinkable 50 years ago. It is also excellent news that, provided they are carefully crafted according to the internal design plans, it is now possible to produce instruments that can be played properly, at least for initial study. This is a testament to scientific progress.

TK: Did you ever try to make a shakuhachi yourself?

TF: I have never attempted to make a proper shakuhachi. When I first commissioned a 2.4-shaku (Ranpo) instrument, I wanted to get my fingers used to the instrument a little before it was finished. So, I brought home some *mōsō* bamboo [*phyllostachys pubescens*] that I had cut from a bamboo grove near where I was living at the time and left it to dry and made a 3.0 instrument to practise with. I think it turned out pretty well for my first attempt at a *jinashi-nobe-kan*.

Watching people make proper instruments, I realised that they go through a lot of trial and error, struggle, suffer, and require an infinite amount of time in pursuit of the ideal shakuhachi, so I decided to focus on playing instead.



Teruo Furuya playing one of my earliest made shakuhachi, a 2.0, in concert at the Cathédrale Saint-Croix des Arméniens, Paris, 12. March 2020. Premiering *Sho-fu-gin*, for shakuhachi and voice, commissioned from Keisuke Doi. You can listen to an extract here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yR7PFnvqjsM>

TK: And if you can say something about your experience of having played one of the shakuhachi I made in one of your concerts in Paris in 2020? Some advice?

TF: I asked to borrow the 2.0 shakuhachi Thorsten made because, whilst I heard it being used by Emmanuelle [Rouaud] in the shakuhachi trio, I felt it had a very natural sound. The balance between the notes was excellent, and it was well-suited to playing *meri* notes too. I remember it as being an instrument that was easy to handle. Whilst its basic performance was entirely adequate, it still lacked that its individual character—that ‘Thorsten-ness’, in other words.

Forcing individuality will diminish universality, so haste is forbidden, but I want to feel a sense of dream (ideal) in the tone. Individuality and general appeal are difficult to achieve simultaneously, but pursue it while dreaming of what kind of sound you want it to produce.

TK: Do you want to add any other thoughts about shakuhachi?

TF: Well, I was thinking, today’s young Japanese performers are all competing with high-level playing, characterised by high technique and high power, that I could never hope to emulate (and which puts the flute to shame). The mainstream method of shakuhachi construction follows this trend. Emphasis is placed on refining the instrument’s function as a flute, one of the two functions I mentioned earlier. Each note resonates beautifully and is well-balanced, and it is an instrument with fingering that is easy to use. However, it is difficult to produce a *meri* note with a strong presence on this instrument.

Functionally, it is inadequate and insufficient for playing *honkyoku*. Shakuhachi makers are required to think carefully and make choices regarding what kind of shakuhachi to create.

Conversation by email, April 2026.



Riley Lee and Ryūho Miura

Over the past 30 years or so, I had the pleasure of being part of a number of shakuhachi retreats at the International Shakuhachi Training Institute (*Kokusai Shakuhachi Kenshūkan*: the Institute was founded in Bisei, Okayama by Yokoyama Katsuya in 1988).

On a few of these occasions, I spent time with master shakuhachi maker Miura Ryūhō.

We talked about various and sundry and I tried out a number of instruments he had brought with him. Wonderful!

Our discussions centred around the shakuhachi tradition overall, but especially his philosophy on making and playing the shakuhachi instrument.

The main thing I remember was this: How and why we do things are usually more important than the things we are actually doing. Well worth remembering, IMO.

Riley Lee, April 2026

HARVESTING THE HOLLOW: THE ART OF MAKING SHAKUHACHI (PART II)

An Interview with José Vargas, by Ramon Humet

Ramon Humet: Why must a shakuhachi have seven nodes? And if you want to make an extra-long one, say a 3.4, should it have more than seven nodes?

José Vargas: Some schools treat the instrument as *gakki*, a musical instrument, and others as *hōki*, a religious or meditation tool. Some schools insist on seven nodes for symbolic and spiritual reasons. Musically, having eight, nine, seven, six or five nodes doesn't matter. What matters is that the nodes are in the right place, especially the one under the *tsu*, about 2–3 cm. And that nodes don't align with holes. I've seen rootless flutes that sound great and flutes with seven perfect nodes that don't.

RH If a hole aligns with a node, is that aesthetic or does it affect the sound?

JV I've seen traditional instruments with a hole at a node that worked well, where the node was shaved so you couldn't tell it was there. It's mostly aesthetic. A hole at a node makes construction harder, but you can still make a good flute.

RH So the shakuhachi's length might be determined by whether a hole aligns with a node. How do you decide whether to make a 2.7 or a 1.6?

JV First, the width-to-length proportion. Second, the placement of the nodes.

RH Once the length is decided, what's next?

JV The next process is called *tamé*, meaning 'straightening the bamboo'. You can change its shape, straighten it, remove unwanted curves.

RH Do you use fire?

JV Not direct fire, but embers. Heat the node, rotate the bamboo. When it's hot, put it in a device and bend it. You can straighten up to 20 degrees safely. But keep the nodes closed.

RH And for opening the nodes?

JV For internal nodes, I use a *garibou*, a cylindrical file soldered to a rod. I hit it manually. Hitting is better than drilling—it's cleaner. I used a long drill at first, but over time I discovered hitting works best.

RH I never would have guessed hitting is better than drilling!



José Vargas

JV Then comes the *utaguchi*. I make a provisional *utaguchi* to decide whether to tune to Western pitch.

RH Do you cut or file it?

JV Traditionally cut first, then file. Now I use an electric belt sander. I usually work in a series of four to five shakuhachi, alternating instruments so the bamboo doesn't burn; sanders heat the material a lot. But it's very fast.

RH The *utaguchi* must have a specific angle, right?

JV Yes, Mejiro sells a piece as a model for the angle between *utaguchi* and *ikigaeshi*. I have the template, though I rarely use it.

RH But the angle also depends on bamboo thickness?

JV Of course. The *ikigaeshi* angle has to adapt to the player's chin and technique. No fixed rules—it's customized, and especially tricky with thick bamboo.

RH So long flutes...

JV ...are more complicated due to ergonomics.

RH The *utaguchi* has two dimensions: angle and crescent opening. What are these like?

JV Depends on the school. Jinashi schools open little. Reducing two mm is enough. A smaller opening gives less volume but easier *meri* notes. Some modern *jiari* flutes have a slightly rounded deep 'V' instead of a crescent, which gives more volume. In general, deeper *utaguchi*, more volume.



Tools

RH Let's talk about the holes: how do you drill them and tune correctly?

JV Two steps: first calculate the hole placement, second, pray the calculations are right... [laughs] Bamboo is expensive! If you make *jinashi*, you must like strong emotions! That's why *jiari* were invented—to avoid nervous breakdowns... [laughs].

**First calculate the hole placement,
second, pray the calculations are right... [laughs]**

RH Can a mis-tuned hole be corrected?

JV There's some margin. Usually place it slightly low, then adjust by opening towards the *utaguchi* to raise the pitch, or towards the root to lower it.

RH But enlarging the hole also changes the pitch...

JV Yes, bigger hole, the pitch rises, because the air exits more easily. Closing lowers the pitch.

RH You can drill bigger holes. How do you close a hole?

JV Bamboo dust mixed with superglue. Epoxy works too. You can close and re-drill. I recall Teruo Furuya sensei in Paris playing a flute with a hole corrected three times. He said if it sounds good, it doesn't matter.

RH Of course, sound comes first! And why is the third hole smaller than the others?

JV To compensate for the *chi* note, which tends to be sharp.

RH: But why not just move the *chi* hole closer to the root?

JV For finger ergonomics, that hole is hardest to play; better slightly higher and smaller. Avoids hand strain. That's contemporary shakuhachi.

RH What about traditional shakuhachi?

JV The hole spacing was uniform. Some makers still make traditional flutes with *chi* slightly high. Like constructing violins with gut strings for historical practice in Western classical music.

RH The million-dollar question: why are you attracted to *jinashi*?

JV *Jiari* clearly have more volume, easier tuning, and are generally better instruments. Making a good *jinashi* is possible, but tricky, because some factors aren't controllable, like *dai kan*. I like the *jinashi* sound, the turbulence, the less pure bamboo sound...

RH ...and a certain difficulty to make it sound?

JV Yes, though I try to make *jinashi* easier to play. I studied with Kodama and Neptune, very different ways. Traditional *jinashi* doesn't add material to the bore, and the nodes are not completely open. In *jiari* flutes, the nodes are removed and there is *ji* added to all the bore to make it smooth. In Neptune's flutes, the nodes are more open, and some are removed, then, some material is added at pressure points. Generally, more open flutes, fewer nodes, less turbulence, easier response.. My flutes are a balance between these approaches.

RH But you don't build *jimori*, right?

JV Sometimes, when the bamboo gives troubles. I took some lessons on *jiari* making too, but I tried some only. *Jinashi* making is my way, I try to listen to the bamboo's voice, I learnt this from Kodama sensei. Each bamboo is unique. Making a flute is an adventure. Some refuse to sound; others cooperate and become good flutes quickly. When students ask me how to fix problems, I say there's no single solution. But at the final stage, when refining sound and tuning, I play the flute a lot. At some point, the flute 'speaks' to you and tells you what to do.

RH How beautiful! It's as if the bamboo were alive...

JV That's why I love making *jinashi*: contact with living material, mystery. Like *honkyoku*— organic, natural, and transcendent music.



Teaching in a workshop

Next page: José Vargas in his studio



RH Do you work on commission or keep stock?

JV Now, I nearly work by commission only, and teaching construction workshops, almost every year. My first workshop as teacher was in 2010, in Madrid helping Kodama sensei. The next year, the London festival, then Barcelona 2013 assisting John Neptune... Paris 2015 was the first workshop I led, since then, nearly every year ... But I still feel like a student!

RH Great artists always say they have much to learn.

JV If you think you know everything, you'll never learn.

RH Any final thoughts?

JV I would like to thank to all the people who helped in my shakuhachi journey. There were so many, no space to name all of them, but I'd like to add some key ones I didn't mention before, Teruo Furuya, Jim Franklin who introduced me to the world of playing with electronics, Kiku Day, and Keisuke Zenyoji. I find shakuhachi making is a great experience, a perfect complement to playing, and great fun, I recommend people to try it.

RH Thank you very much, José!

JV Thank you! 🍵

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SEED

by Jim Franklin

In 1983, I composed a chamber opera. It has never been, and probably never will be, performed - at least not in its entirety. On the other hand, a small part of this opera forms the basis of 'Seed' Theme and Variations.

A few decades after composing the opera and filing the score away in my archive, I came across it again, and found that one scene commences with a solo passage for alto flute. To my surprise, I realised that the instrument which I really had in mind for this passage, at least unconsciously, was the shakuhachi. At the time of composition, I knew of the shakuhachi and loved its sound, but had not yet started learning it, and never dreamed that it would become the focus of my life, both as a performer and as a composer.

Upon rediscovering this passage, I resolved that one day, I would rework it into a shakuhachi piece. That day came in 2025, and I reshaped the opera passage into a self-contained theme and composed variations on it. The theme is a shakuhachi solo piece, but initially the variations were composed as what I term 'Densokugaku' ('Electric breath music') pieces, for shakuhachi and live-electronics. Nevertheless, as I worked on the pieces, I realised that the shakuhachi parts could also be played as self-contained solo pieces without electronics. At the time, too, I was wondering what I, as founding chairperson of the ESS, could present as an 'offering' to the ESS and its members, to commemorate the 20th birthday of the Society. The answer was obvious: the solo versions of 'Seed' Theme and Variations have become my gift to the ESS and its members, celebrating 20 years of the Society's existence.

In accordance with contemporary learning practice of shakuhachi *honkyoku*, at least within my school (Kokusai Shakuhachi Kenshukan), one studies pieces by a combination of listening and imitation, and score reading, whereby the scores are really a memory aid, rather than fully prescriptive documents. In this sense, I suggest learning the 'Seed'... pieces by referring both to the scores and to the demonstration recordings of the solo versions which I have provided, whereby the aural learning process should take the foreground. (Of course, I can offer face-to-face or Zoom lessons for anyone who wishes to learn the pieces with a teacher.)

The pieces can be played on any length of shakuhachi. The theme and first variation were recorded using a 2.1-length instrument, as this provided the best match with the pitches of the original opera passage. I decided to play the third variation on a 2.0-length instrument; the others were recorded using a 1.8-length shakuhachi. In the set of demonstration recordings, I have provided all the original recordings, and also transposed versions of the theme, first and third variations matching the pitch of a 1.8-length shakuhachi. These transposed recordings are actually the same performances as the original versions, pitch-shifted electronically without altering the timings (using a phase vocoding programme, for those who wish to know), as I liked my original recordings and wanted to preserve their 'feel'.

The level of difficulty of the various pieces is quite varied. The easiest piece is the third variation; this might be a good starting point for beginners. The theme is also not overly difficult. The first and second variations are intermediate-level pieces, and the final two variations are oriented towards intermediate/advanced players. In this way, the work hopefully contains something for everybody.

For those who may be interested in the Densokugaku versions, they may be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLoLnRd8ourhYHCAwzqoLTxKLnHGkzPF7w>

Please enjoy!

Jim Franklin, February 2026

 **Link to the demonstration recordings:**

- [Theme solo original 2.1](#)
- [Theme solo transposed 1.8](#)
- [Variation 1 solo original 1.8](#)
- [Variation 1 solo transposition 2.1](#)
- [Variation 2 solo](#)
- [Variation 3 solo original 2.0](#)
- [Variation 3 solo transposition 1.8](#)
- [Variation 4 solo](#)
- [Variation 5 solo](#)

SEED, Theme & Variations © Jim Franklin 1983/2026 for RA

T H E M E

V A R I A T I O N 1

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑧ ⑨ ⑩ ⑪

VARIA-TION 2

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VARIA-TION 3

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GNOSSIENNE

by Suizan Lagrost

pour un shakuhachi errant

Gnossienne, pour shakuhachi solo est une courte pièce librement inspirée de l'esprit de Satie : une musique sans barre de mesure, au temps suspendu, où la ligne se déploie avec une simplicité apparente, mais toujours avec une touche de mystère, voire d'humour. Le titre évoque à la fois la *gnose* (un savoir intérieur, presque secret) et l'univers légèrement décalé, tendre et ironique qui traverse certaines pages de Satie.

La pièce cherche un équilibre délicat entre deux imaginaires : d'une part, une sensibilité occidentale, dans son goût pour l'aphorisme, la retenue et la suggestion ; d'autre part, une résonance avec la tradition du shakuhachi, son rapport au souffle, au silence et à la fluidité du temps musical. J'ai souhaité, avec cette pièce, offrir un espace simple et poétique, accessible aux débutants, mais que des joueurs plus avancés trouveront aussi, je l'espère, plaisir à jouer.

J'encourage l'interprète à respecter le rythme ternaire et lent qui mettra en valeur le caractère doucement dansant de la *Gnossienne*. Mais s'agissant d'une pièce solo, il reste possible de parfois « oublier le temps », de laisser une valeur longue en suspension, de créer du *ma* 間.

La pièce est entièrement écrite dans le registre *otsu*, à l'exception de quelques *ro kan*, qui pourront être obtenus facilement en débouchant légèrement le 4e trou. Il aurait été dommage de ne pas profiter des couleurs apportées par quelques notes *chū-meri* et *meri* : elles font le charme du shakuhachi mais aussi parfois sa difficulté ; attention donc à leur justesse. Ne pas hésiter à se référer à la notation occidentale en cas de doute sur la hauteur d'une note.

Suizan Lagrost

GNOSSIENNE

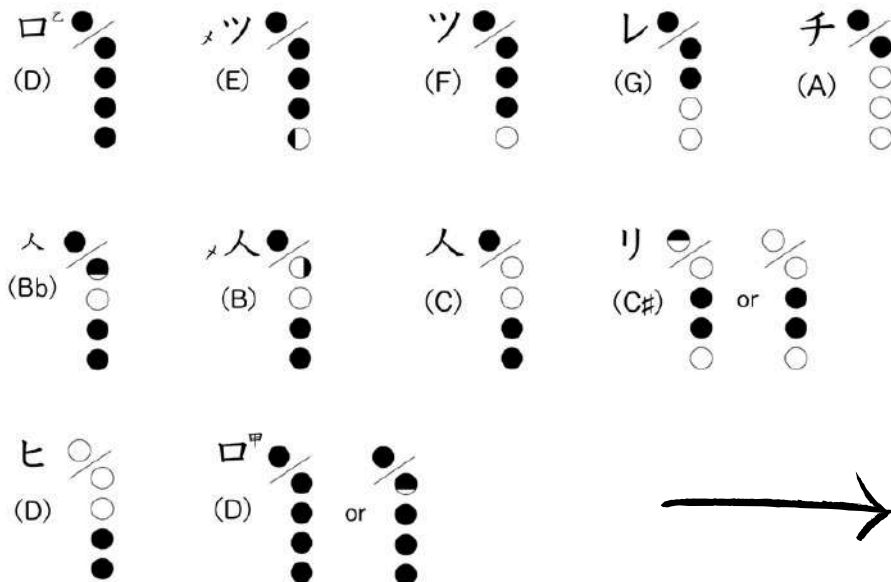
pour un shakuhachi errant
by Suizan Lagrost

Gnossienne, for solo shakuhachi, is a short piece loosely inspired by the spirit of Satie: music without bar lines, suspended in time, in which the melodic line unfolds with apparent simplicity, yet always with a touch of mystery, or even humour. The title refers both to gnosis — an inner, almost secret form of knowledge — and to the slightly offbeat, tender, and ironic world that runs through some of Satie’s pages.

The piece seeks a delicate balance between two imaginaries: on the one hand, a Western sensibility, with its taste for aphorism, restraint, and suggestion; on the other, an echo of the shakuhachi tradition, with its relation to breath, silence, and the fluidity of musical time. With this piece, I wanted to offer a simple and poetic space, accessible to beginners, but one that more advanced players will, I hope, also enjoy performing.

I encourage the performer to respect the slow ternary pulse, which will help bring out the gently dancing character of the *Gnossienne*. But since this is a solo piece, there is also room at times to “forget time,” to let a long note remain in suspension, to create *ma* 間.

The piece is written entirely in the *otsu* register, except for a few *ro kan*, which can be obtained easily by slightly uncovering the 4th hole. It would have been a shame not to take advantage of the colours offered by a few *chū-meri* and *meri* notes: they are part of the beauty of the shakuhachi, but also sometimes of its difficulty; care should therefore be taken with their intonation. Do not hesitate to refer to the Western notation if there is any doubt about pitch.



→ [Audio link](#)

Gnossienne

pour un shakuhachi errant

Suizan Lagrost

Sans hâte, ni certitude (Without haste, nor certainty)

ツレレーチレチツレロツツー ○ ・ ツレレーチレチ人

Humblement, mais pas trop (Humbly — though not excessively so)

人チチ、人々人チチレレー ○ ・ ツレチ人チレツレチ人

Comme si le vent hésitait (As if the wind were unsure of itself)

・ ツレチ人ロ人々人々 ○ ・ 人ロローリロ人々人チ人レ

Résolument souriant (Resolutely smiling)

レチチー、レチ人人ヒ人々チレチ人リリりー、レチ人人ローロツ

En oubliant le temps (Forgetting time)

ツーツツレレチレチツレロロツツツーツ ○ レツツツ・レレロ

Sans regret, ni conclusion (Without regret, nor conclusion)

ロー

Gnossienne

pour un shakuhachi errant

Suizan Lagrost

Sans hâte, ni certitude
(Whithout haste, nor certainty)



Humblement, mais pas trop
(Humbly — though not excessively so)



Comme si le vent hésitait
(As if the wind were unsure of itself)



Résolument souriant
(Resolutly smiling)



En oubliant le temps
(Forgetting time)



Sans regret, ni conclusion
(Without regret, nor conclusion)





REAR VIEW MIRROR

by Clive Bell

Watazumi Dōsō Rōshi
法竹 Hōchiku (1968)

Polydor LP

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZG5iCUoS73k&list=RDZG5iCUoS73k&start_radio=1



The maverick, unique shakuhachi player and Zen monk Watazumi was born in 1911, and studied with several *komusō* nomadic monks in Kyushu before eventually moving to Tokyo. He played flutes but insisted he was not a musician; those flutes were shakuhachi but he said no, they were *hōchiku*. These were flutes that he crafted himself, sometimes from the roughest piece of throwaway bamboo. This aligns him perfectly with the current interest in self-made jinashi flutes of raw bamboo. In his own words: “It’s easy to play well on an instrument that sounds easily. True practice lies in making sound from one that does not.”

Watazumi taught Katsuya Yokoyama, and his influence is enormous, but sometimes I wonder if his principal legacy is the playing of the *honkyoku* repertoire as if you just made it up. His fresh spontaneity is a constant source of wonder, and it’s heard again on this 1968 release, recorded when he was aged 57: *Hōchiku*.

Later on, in the 1980s, Watazumi became a kind of notorious celebrity, a must-see bad-boy Zen artist for western musicians visiting faraway Tokyo. The saxophonist Steve Lacy took two lessons with him, ten years apart, and paid homage in a 1992 interview with Richard Scott in *The Wire*: “This guy is perhaps the greatest improviser I ever heard in my life. The sound is more modern than anybody in jazz.” Even British popsters Eurhythmic made time for Watazumi on their tour schedule. His recordings gradually reached the west, and *Hōchiku* is one of the first, released by Polydor on LP in 1968, and reissued on CD in 2000. Those recordings are not easy to find, and we are indebted to Ben Gerstein for posting many of them on his YouTube channel, in clean audio transfers with sleeve notes photographed and translated.

Via email, Gerstein told me about his discovery of Watazumi, spotting an LP copy of *Mysterious Sounds Of The Japanese Bamboo Flute* twenty years ago in a charity shop in New York: “We are so fortunate to have such examples in life, in music, in art, in martial arts, in meditation, in athletics. They encourage and affirm and support us so profoundly in our life and personal practice, transcending ‘career’ or any of that. Watazumi’s message is one of utter strength and sincerity, such seriousness in the way one devotes oneself to practice, training the body, exercising in nature, practising in nature. How we each realize our true, authentic self, sound, presence, and stance within and without. There is too much I can say about all of this. There could be a deeply immersive university course taught entirely around Watazumi, what’s going on there, and how it branches out into other practices and life.”

The *Hōchiku* album starts with “Saji”, translated as seashore - indeed, in Watazumi’s hectic playing we can hear crashing waves, and his gusts of *muraiki* are like being hit in the face by sea spray. On a more religious level “Saji” refers to the Compassion of Bodhisattva, and its origin was the *komusō* Itchoken temple in Kyushu. The piece lies at the heart of Watazumi’s tradition, and he regarded it as the most challenging, the hardest to transmit from his repertoire. This is his wild, high energy side. Another aspect is the calm at the heart of the album, an eleven minute version of “San-ya” (mountains and valleys). This is an extraordinary performance, unruffled and contemplative. The flute is quite large but Watazumi sits like a spider in its upper octave and finds a steady stillness. Best not to think too hard about the technique and breath control required - it’s athleticism deployed to conceal all effort.

Several short pieces are included: “Suzuru” (nesting cranes) is a virtuoso demonstration of *korokoro* trills, while “Kudariba” (falling leaves) appears in two versions from different parts of Japan. This is high-pitched and pretty, a girl singing in the hills. The thirteen pieces on the record also include brief visits to “Tamuke”, “Hifumi” and “Honchō”. These final two are played on a super-low flute - calm again, but very dark, and there’s that sense of struggle with the instrument that Watazumi likes. To quote the sleeve notes once more: “This is a discipline through which one struggles with the self via the instrument, confronts the self, and ultimately transcends the self to stand face to face with the universe.” 🍵



Naruto / Shippuden Trio

ON TOUR WITH *NARUTO/SHIPPUDEN* ANIME FILM AND ORCHESTRA

by Clive Bell

If it sometimes strikes you that Japanese *anime* are taking over the world, *Variety* magazine sympathises: “Streaming services have been in an anime arms race, with Netflix and HBO Max adding *anime* television series and films in rapid succession. Musicians like Megan Thee Stallion and Lil Nas X flaunt their *anime* obsessions on social media. While *anime* has been on the periphery of pop culture for years, has it cemented a place in conventional entertainment?” And that was written five years ago.

If you happen to be 17 years old, your favourite anime may well be *Naruto/Shippuden*, the adventures of a hyperactive punk boy in a Japanese rural village. Harry Potter attended a school for magicians, and Naruto Uzumaki is training to be a *ninja*. Masashi Kishimoto's *Naruto anime* has been running on Japanese TV since 2007, so a whole generation has grown up watching it. Part 2 (*Shippuden*) has young Naruto slightly older, but still loud and troublesome. Now there's a touring show of *Naruto/Shippuden*, with film screenings accompanied by live singers and a full orchestra, including shakuhachi, *Tsugaru jamisen* and *taiko* drums.

Playing shakuhachi for the European tour (2025/26) is ESS board member Emmanuelle Rouaud. I spoke to her in Paris via a video link, and asked how she got involved.

Emmanuelle Rouaud: During the first European Tour of the original *Naruto Symphonic Experience* in 2023, I was contacted by the producers, Julien Vallespi and Julie Godard, and asked to fill in for one date in Madrid. Then we went to Germany, Belgium and Netherlands. The orchestration by Quentin Benayoun and Julien Vallespi is based on three elements: a classical orchestra, a rock band and traditional Japanese instruments: shakuhachi, *shamisen* and *taiko* drums. The orchestra - *Un Pour Tous* - was created for the occasion with musicians from different backgrounds. In Julien's words, "It is a true troupe of passionate and highly skilled musicians who make this show so unique and memorable for fans".

This was my first time with this type of soundtrack music or cinematic 'spectacle'. I have been practising the shakuhachi for almost 20 years, playing traditional *honkyoku* repertoire (with Teruo Furuya). In the last ten years I've have been working with composer Henri Algadafe to create new music for shakuhachi using electronics and electric guitar. So this was a step into another world for sure.

It was a very steep learning curve. In the initial period there was not much interchange with the composer, as this was the original *Naruto* show and the arrangement had been already performed on tour in France (Jean-François Lagrost played the shakuhachi). But working on the new production, the sequel *Naruto/Shippuden* Part I, it was different. There was more dialogue with the arranger Quentin Benayoun, and I was able to make suggestions on some 'flute' sections and make them more compatible with the shakuhachi.

Naruto, the original show, was an almost 50 piece orchestra, but for *Shippuden* the orchestra is reduced to about 25. I would say now the music allows more feeling of space and ambience, where silence and sound move into each other. So there are more proper solo parts for shakuhachi. *Shippuden* is more exciting for me to perform, there is more sense of adding colour and the character of the shakuhachi - because of having those solos, and as I felt more involved with the shakuhachi arrangements.

Clive Bell: Tell me about the audience - are they dressing up?

ER: The average age is early 30s. There are also quite a few younger people, maybe discovering it because of their parents. Cosplay happens for sure, and the atmosphere is quite amazing. Also thanks to the two singers, who really do a great job of performing those tunes, and really get the audience going. The audience really know the episodes and the characters, as the hissing and booing and ecstatic cheering follow very exactly certain characters appearing. They also applaud our musical solos! Although the 2.5 hour 'film' is cut together from an edit of about 200 episodes, the audience seems to recognise every moment of it.

There was a very special event, before the official premiere in the Paris Dôme: the visit of *Naruto* creator Masashi Kishimoto, at the legendary Grand Rex cinema in Paris. This was totally crazy: 2,500 people in the audience, in ecstasy to see their hero. Masashi Kishimoto played the part of the mysterious genius by never showing his face (wearing a mask). The audience are always super enthusiastic and snap up a lot of memorabilia after the shows, T-shirts and *Naruto* figurines.

These days young people in France read a lot of *manga*. *Naruto* even ended up in the frangipane cake in French shops this year! More seriously, in April 2026, the theme park *Naruto-Konoha Land* opened in the south of France, and the Un Pour Tous orchestra will perform extracts of the show for a special opening event on the 3rd June! Also a major event is being organised on 19 September at the Grand Rex in Paris, where both film concerts will be performed on the same day.

CB: Maybe the audience never heard shakuhachi before, but I guess these traditional instruments fit well into the ancient world of myth where *Naruto* takes place.

ER: The story of the main character is a classic coming of age story. And the challenges are enormous: he is an orphan and bullied. He becomes a *ninja* fighting against all obstacles, but he also has a mischievous side. He is very relatable as a character. The origin of *Naruto* is very much this old world of myths, ghost stories with superhuman, omnipotent creatures. And yes, the shakuhachi with its varied and colorful history - eg the *komuso* with their spiritual reflection on nature and existence, *minyō* and Gagaku tradition - certainly has the resourcefulness to add a certain character to the proceedings.

CB: Have you found shakuhachi students want to play *anime* tunes?

ER: There seems to be no end of YouTube videos of people explaining *anime* tunes or playing them on shakuhachi. For quite a few it's the entrance door to shakuhachi in general. So I guess it's not bad if people discover a new instrument in this way, and are keen enough to learn to play on it too. Of course if shakuhachi music is reduced to only some nice tunes of a video game or *manga*, and people never want to know more about the origins of the instrument, and all the other traditions and music it is actually part of, than yes, maybe that is a problem in the long run in the sense of narrowing the repertoire and the understanding of what this instrument really is.

I suppose it all points to a wider question about social media, attention span and what it means to be a professional musician in the age of the algorithm. We may have to accept parallel worlds here: some will be happy with the reflection on the surface and some will want to dive deeper and explore the nuances of a musical tradition. The *Naruto/Shippuden* shows do something interesting, as they bring together people in a real space, sharing a moment in real time with actual musicians performing on stage. Possibly it's a

contrast with the fragmented and isolating experience of watching or listening on the internet. It's fun not only to watch your favourite TV show with like-minded people, but also have an orchestra playing the music while watching a selection of highlights on a huge screen. The atmosphere is very enthusiastic and positive.



Naruto Shippuden, the Movie - The Will of Fire

CB: The original *Naruto* film concert toured Europe and the US from 2022. Then from 2024 *Naruto/Shippuden* began to tour Europe, and will even arrive in my home country (the UK) in May 2026. Alongside Emmanuelle are Hideaki Tsuji on shamisen - he is a guitarist based in Strasbourg - and *taiko* drums are played by Manon Duchemann, a French percussionist. The orchestra is conducted by Antoine Glatard, and occasionally this year in Portugal by Arthur Bonetto.

Meanwhile in London we've had two sold out runs of *My Neighbour Totoro*, the stage version of Studio Ghibli's hit *anime* movie, produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company. And in summer 2026 there will be fifty performances of *Death Note: The Musical at the Barbican*. *Death Note* is a *manga* comic that has sold over 30 million copies, and has now been reimagined as a live action musical with songs by Frank Wildhorn. The plot hangs on a notebook (Japanese: *note*) with the power over life and death.

Resistance is futile - the *anime* are coming! 🌀

<https://www.emmanuelle-rouaud.com/>

PHOTOCREDIT Julien Vallespi

PHOTO of musicians caption: Taiko: Manon Duchemann. Tsugaru shamisen: Hideaki Tsuji Shakuhachi: Emmanuelle Rouaud

PLAYING JENKINS'S REQUIEM: A COMMUNION ACROSS THE VOID

by Laonikos Psimikakis Chalkokondylis

When Robert Patterson, musical director of the Fulham and Hammersmith Choral Society, invited me to play shakuhachi in Karl Jenkins's *Requiem*, my first thought was of Clive Bell. Clive was my first shakuhachi teacher and had premiered this very work nearly twenty years ago. To be performing it now, as his student, felt like a kind of relay. The concert was on 13 December 2025 at St Gabriel's Church in Pimlico, with a beautiful resonance befitting the shakuhachi. It was arranged for smaller forces: harp, organ, piano, shakuhachi, vocal soloists and choir, and set in a double bill with Fauré's *Requiem*. An intimate setting for two works that are anything but small.

Jenkins's *Requiem* is a strange and ambitious piece, with influences from Mozart to Jenkins's time with Soft Machine. Jenkins interweaves the traditional Latin Mass with Japanese death *haiku*, which capture the moment of departure with a unique lightness and efficiency. The shakuhachi, set as a solo instrument in those movements, carries much of that world into the score.

I had begun preparing the piece in the autumn, and at around the same time I started therapy, partly working through grief around my father's death eighteen years ago, when I was just seventeen. What I hadn't expected was how directly the music would speak to that. Jenkins wrote this Requiem for his own father. I was now performing it for mine.

The five movements I played began to feel less like separate pieces and more like five different rooms in the same house. *III. The Snow Of Yesterday* became the memory of realising he was dying: a simple, circling melody that never quite resolves. *VI. From Deep In My Heart* was the cry into the void, the hopeless reaching, yearning to be heard by the other side. *VIII. Now As A Spirit* was the summers in rural Greece, swimming, carefree, before time ran short. *X. Having Seen The Moon* was something like landing back in the present, the loss still there but with more room around it; and *XII. Farewell* was, well, what it says on the tin. Saying goodbye to this time spent together, for now.



Laonikos Psimikakis Chalkokondylis performing
Karl Jenkins's *Requiem*.

In the performance, *The Snow Of Yesterday* went well and I felt solid, present, settled into the space. Then came *From Deep In My Heart*. The soloist sang her introduction line, I stood, raised the shakuhachi to my lips, and suddenly I was nowhere - not nervous, just absent, as if I had been briefly lifted out of the room and set back down again mid-bar. My fingers moved but in the wrong order, and I stumbled through my first bar, just about fixing it towards the end of the bar. The rest of the movement went fine but not without being hyperfocused to make up for that bar. This movement, the one I had privately named the cry into the void, the reaching out across the silence, snapped back at me.

When I had time to reflect on this later, I felt that it was as if my father was watching from the side. I wanted to make him proud, and some part of me wanted him to notice me. So my subconscious made me stumble, a moment of exposure, to raise the stakes. Live performance contains all of this: the preparation, the lapse, the recovery, the things that happen that you did not plan and cannot repeat. I would not take that first bar back. It felt, in its own way, like exactly what the movement needed.

What stays with me, beyond that moment, is how rare it is to perform music that you have lived inside quite so literally. I've played concerts where I felt technically strong, where everything went to plan, where I walked off stage satisfied. This was different. The preparation had asked something more of me than just learning a piece. It had asked me to sit with loss, to name it, to let it move through the music rather than around it. It produced something I had not experienced before in performance: a sense that the music was doing exactly what music is supposed to do, which is to make the invisible briefly visible, to hold what cannot otherwise be held.

I'm thinking of this as I prepare for upcoming projects and what I want to put into my own music. The shakuhachi has always seemed to me an instrument that rewards exactly this kind of honesty: it is hard to hide behind it, hard to play it at arm's length. If I'm not concentrating, it's in the sound. If I'm a bit under the weather, it's in the sound. The bamboo is uneven, the tone exposes everything. That vulnerability, which can feel like a liability, is also the whole point. My father never heard me play shakuhachi. He died before I picked it up. But on 13 December 2025, in a church in Pimlico, in a stumbled bar of music I had spent weeks preparing, something passed between us. 🌀



Myoan player offering kenteki at Ishite-ji, 2026

TWENTY YEARS OF THE RENSEIKAI - A MYOAN SHAKUHACHI TAIKAI HELD ANNUALLY ON SHIKOKU ISLAND

by Daniel Ribble

This year is the 20th anniversary of the European Shakuhachi Society's founding. We are also approaching the year of the 20th *renseikai*, a shakuhachi event usually held at one of Shikoku's 88 pilgrimage temples annually on the first Sunday of March. The 20th *renseikai*, short for the Shikoku *Soushun Rensei Fuke Myoan Kenso Taikai*, is scheduled to be held next March at Yakuri temple in Kagawa prefecture. This is a milestone: the event, which has rotated each year to a temple in a different prefecture on the island of Shikoku, will finally come to rest at that one temple for the foreseeable future. In this article I would like to give a history of the event and examine what it entails.

Within the Myoan organization there are several types of *taikai*, or gatherings of players, that are held under the direction of Myoan temple. The newest of these is the *renseikai*, an event first held in the year 2000. This event is considered a local *taikai* as it usually takes place at one of the 88 pilgrimage temples in Shikoku associated with the monk Kukai (posthumously known as Kobo Daishi), the founder of the sect of Shingon Buddhism. It was not always possible to hold the event at one of the 88 pilgrimage temples. Sometimes the event has taken place at Buddhist temples off the pilgrimage route, but usually near to one or more of the 88 temples, giving players the opportunity to perform *kenteki* - making an offering of *honkyoku* - playing one or more *honkyoku* in front of the Buddhist halls at one of the 88 pilgrimage temples the day before the event. The idea of the *renseikai* came about in the year 2000, from Genshin Sakai, a teacher of the Myoan style of playing. Today he is known as Genshin Seian, and he is the current *kansu* or leader of shakuhachi related activities at Myoan-ji in Kyoto.

To understand the origins of the event one should know there are two groups of Myoan players based in Kagawa prefecture: the Shikoku Myoan group and the Bochikukai. The group with the longer history is Shikoku Myoan, which started in the 1930s under Sozan Myochin (1886-1949), a student of Shizan Kobayashi, the 36th *kansu* of Myoan-ji. According to players from Kagawa prefecture (Oka Soue and Doi Sousei, March 2018) Sozan was also a possible candidate for the leadership role at Kyoto's Myoan-ji. Sozan Myochin taught shakuhachi to his son Sobin Myochin (1929-1991), a player and maker of shakuhachi who went on to lead the Shikoku Myoan group, but also to Soshin Yoshimura (1903-1998), who would eventually become the 39th *kansu* of Myoan-ji, and the first leader of Myoan-ji from Shikoku.

The other group of Myoan players is the Bochikukai, founded by the students of Yoshimura Soshin in 1976, when Yoshimura became the 39th *kansu* and became known as Yoshimura Fuan. According to Yoshimura's student, Genshin Seian, these two groups were rivals in the second half of the 20th century, but they made amends and joined together at the 6th autumn *Doshukai* held at Honnenji temple in Kagawa prefecture. It was here that the Bochikukai leader Genshin Sakai came up with the idea of the *renseikai*, inspired by the words of an Osaka Myoan player, Yao Byakuren - who stressed the idea of learning the *honkyoku* by heart. Genshin Sakai was then joined by Bochikukai member Oka Soue, his student Doi Sousei, and Shikoku-Myoan leader Fujisawa Soryu, and plans were set for the first *renseikai*, to be held in March, 2000 at Ishite-ji in Ehime prefecture.

According to Genshin Seian, the term *renseikai* refers to a disciplined training of the mind and body and by holding this event the first weekend in March when the weather in Shikoku is usually still cold, participants are required to do *gaman* (put forth strong effort). Each participant must perform a solo *honkyoku* from memory in front of a Buddhist altar at one of the 88 pilgrimage temples. At other Myoan *taikai* the decision to play a *honkyoku* from memory is optional, so this is one of the main differences between the *renseikai* and other Myoan *taikai*; another being that the *renseikai* rotated to a different temple in a different prefecture in Shikoku each year, whereas most other Myoan *taikai* are held in the same location annually. According to Genshin Seian, moving from temple to temple and playing a *honkyoku* as a *kenteki* (offering), also reflects back to the original idea of the *komuso* playing *honkyoku* on their journeys from temple to temple in the Edo Period.

I was fortunate to be able to join the *renseikai* from the 11th event on, and would like to describe what goes on at the usual *taikai*. In the afternoon before the day of the event, various participants arrive, and sometimes individually perform *takuhatsu* at nearby temples, wearing *tengai* in full *komuso* gear.



Dinner party

A few players walk some distance dressed as komuso to arrive at the designated location (though this practice has decreased in recent years). The day before the taikai we would gather and perform *kenteki* at nearby temples (not in komuso garb). As an example, while staying at Senyu-ji in March 2015, our group visited a nearby temple in the evening in quite heavy winds and rain, and performed Choshi and Kyorei from memory in front of the main temple halls.

The night before the event there is always a dinner party, often at the temple where we are staying. The players introduce themselves and note their personal shakuhachi history and their current or past membership in other *ryu*. Sometimes the dinner has been at a temple where players stay overnight, on other occasions at a restaurant (specializing in local cuisine) or an inn in a nearby city. There is also usually a *nijikai* (second party) in one of the players' rooms, which is more informal. Most players retire early as the *taikai* always starts early next morning. The first event following breakfast the following day is an introduction to the temple, usually given by the *jushoku* (resident priest), and then a chanting in unison of the *Hannya Shingyo* or Heart Sutra. This chant is either led by a resident priest or in recent years by the current priest of Itchoken temple in Fukuoka, Iso Genmyo. Iso has joined the event since 2014, and he usually accompanies his chanting by hitting a *mokugyo* (wooden slit drum in the shape of a fish) and small Buddhist bowl shaped bells. The reciting of the Heart Sutra is always followed by the reciting of the Myoan *Shidanoge* three times. The *Shidanoge* is the proverb or *gatha* attributed to Fuke, an eccentric Chinese monk of the 9th century. Fuke is said to have rung a bell while repeating the *Shidanoge*, and this was said to have been the inspiration for the creation of the first shakuhachi. A more recent translation of the Myoan *Shidanoge* is as follows:

*Come bright, and I'm bright
Come dark, and I'm dark
Come from all sides and I'm a whirlwind
Come empty and free, and I strike like a flail*

(Translation by Nick Bellando)

At the 17th *renseikai*, at Anraku-ji in Tokushima prefecture, Fujisawa Soryu, one of the officiating members of the event, led the *Shidanoge* with the ringing of an ancient bronze clapper bell. He directed the Myoan players to the *Shidanoge*, always displayed on a large banner to the right of the Buddhist altar. This banner is always present for those who may not remember the chant, though most of the participants seem to know both the *Hannya Shingyo* and the *Shidanoge* by heart. These starting events take place in the Hondo or main hall of whichever temple we are in. After the *Shidanoge* all players perform the *honkyoku Choshi* in unison, under the direction of the *kansu*. In several of the *renseikai* I have attended, the participants have left the main temple hall for another hall where the *taikai* is then held, but in some cases we have continued in the *Hondo*. This year at Ishite-ji in Ehime prefecture the Hondo was quite dark and cold, and while we were playing we could hear the continual clink of coins being thrown into the offertory box behind us by pilgrims.

Next page: Myoan players in komuso attire, 2024



At each *renseikai*, organizers of the event sit at low tables checking the names of the players and pieces to be played. The main repertoire for the event is Myoan *honkyoku*, which consists of the current 33 official *honkyoku*. There are a number of unofficial *honkyoku* and other pieces that are also performed. Several months before the event the organizers provide a program with the schedule of pieces to be played, including names of players and the order of pieces. The event and number of participants is decided in the first week of January. Non-participants, such as people visiting the temple, are sometimes able to attend the event depending on the size of the hall. After each piece is finished, one of the Myoan officials turns the page on a *mekuri-dai*, a kind of scroll fixed on a wooden stand placed in front and to the side of the Buddhist altar, where the names of pieces to be played are written in calligraphy. During the piece right before one's own performance one has to sit either cross legged or in *seiza* in a designated spot, either a cushion or a chair behind the player who is performing in front of the Buddhist altar. If you are a Myoan player it is customary to wear semi-formal attire such as a suit or kimono, the *kesa* (Buddhist stole), and to rest your shakuhachi perpendicularly in front of you on a large red and white fan called a *shusen*. You also wear a Buddhist bracelet or *juzu* on your left wrist. Some players wear full kimono, but many wear Western clothing covered by a full length Buddhist black robe.

Both before and after playing a piece, each participant pays his or her respects to the Buddha or other deities at the altar in several bows, which were learned and rehearsed, in my case from my sensei, some weeks before my first *renseikai*. At several of the first *renseikai* I attended, the first morning piece was performed by Kojima Hoan, at that time the *kansu* of Myoan-ji. In recent years the final *honkyoku* of the afternoon is performed by Genshin Seian. After a morning of playing, from about 8 am, there is a short break for lunch - usually a simple *bento* - although in some cases there is no official lunch break and one just takes a short break from the *Hondo*. The event starts up again, usually finishing by mid or late afternoon, depending on the number of players involved. In 2026 we had 29 participants, and the previous year at Chikurinji in Kochi there were 36. The event with the largest number of participants was held at Senyu-ji in Ehime in 2015, with 46.



Old map of Shikoku

At the end of each *renseikai*, following the final piece played by the Myoan *kansu*, players are thanked for their contribution to the *taikai*, and told to begin thinking what piece they would like to memorize for the next annual *renseikai*. According to Genshin Seian the *renseikai* started out as a strictly Myoan event, but after a few years players from other *ryu* were allowed to join. During the *renseikai* I have attended there have been participants from other *ryu* such as Kinko, Tozan, and Chikuho. Kyoto shakuhachi master Kurahashi Yodo was a participant in 2025, playing the *honkyoku Jimbo Sanya* just before Genshin performed the final piece of the event. The pieces played are generally Myoan *honkyoku*, but one can sometimes hear a minyo piece or even an original *honkyoku*. Players from all over Japan join in, arriving from Okinawa and elsewhere, all the way up to Hokkaido; though Kyushu, Kansai, Chugoku and Shikoku tend to contribute more players than Kanto and parts north. Myoan players associated with Myoan-ji tend to perform their pieces on 1.8 *jinashi* flutes but there are exceptions, and one group of players led by an ex-Chikuho player and shakuhachi maker from Kobe tends to favor long *nobekan*, often 2.9 or 3.0 *jinashi*. In recent years a few more non-Japanese players have joined, including several other students of Genshin Seian - Jared Stanford (New Zealand) and Kiku Day (Denmark, 2019), Eric Strong (Canada, 2024), and Tassos Tataroglou (Switzerland, 2025). Women shakuhachi players in Japan are very few relative to the general shakuhachi population, but the *renseikai* usually has two or three women who are regular participants out of a total of 25-45 players. In this event and other Myoan *taikai* such as the *Hosankai*, a bi-annual Myoan event held since the 1950s, there seems to be more openness about permitting the playing of pieces from other shakuhachi schools, and players from other schools tend to play the *honkyoku* of their own *ryu*.

The *renseikai* has not been held every year since 2000. One reason is that the founder of the event was working outside Japan for several years and another is that some planned *taikai* were cancelled due to Covid-19. According to Genshin Seian, there were several years when the event was held without his participation, and the only founding member to actually officiate at all 19 events has been Doi Sousei, a student of event co-founder Oka Soue. The latter unfortunately passed away several years ago. Other players officiating at the event, such as Shikoku Myoan leader Fujisawa Soryu, are getting on in years and have not always been able to attend. Some participants who have been hosts in various prefectures have passed on, such as shakuhachi maker Takahashi Soushu, who hosted in Kochi in 2021. I was happy to be able to host the event here in Kochi in 2025 at Chikurinji with Genshin's assistance. (I was also grateful for my wife's help in writing three speeches in Japanese for the event!) According to Genshin Seian, in past years it has taken a lot of time to visit various temples in person and get permission to hold this event. I experienced this myself in autumn 2024, accompanying Genshin Seian and Doi Sousei to Chikurinji in Kochi to meet with the priest and ask permission to hold the event there the following year. Not all temples are amenable to holding such an event and temples that have agreed to to host in the past have often been asked to host the *renseikai* again.

Next page: 1. Some of the participants at the 13th Renseikai, Sekkai-ji, Kochi 2. With rensaikai co-founder Fujisawa Soryu 3. Renseikai members arriving at Ishite-ji, March, 2026 4. Participant before the Buddhist altar of Ishite-ji, March, 2026



Due to various factors, in particular the ageing and passing on of some of those officiating at the event over the last two decades it has been decided that the *renseikai*, which for its first 20 years went from one temple and prefecture to another, will continue at just one location from the year 2027. The 20th anniversary event to be held next year will feature special events referred to by Seian Genshin as *komuso no oneri* - in this case a *komuso* hike up to the top of the mountain where temple 85 is situated. The *komuso* will play *Choshi* on their walk up the mountain. If anyone plans to be in Shikoku next spring at the time of the *renseikai* and would be interested, please contact me at ribbled@gmail.com.

The following is a list of the temples that have hosted the *renseikai* over the last several decades and of additional temples where participants performed *kenteki* the day or evening before the *taikai*. The temples that are part of the 88 pilgrimage route are listed with their number.

<u>Renseikei #</u>	<u>Year of event</u>	<u>Temple</u>	<u>88 temple #</u>	<u>Additional kenteki</u>	<u>Temple #</u>
1st	2000	Ishite-ji	51		
2nd	2001	Tenpuku-ji		Okubo-ji	88
3rd	2002	Chikurin-ji	31		
4th	2003	Sonko-ji		Kirihata-ji	10
5th	2004	Kosho-ji		Sairin-ji, Sanzoin Jodo-ji Hanta-ji	48-50
6th	2005	Zentsu-ji	75		
7th	2007	Honraku-ji			
8th	2008	Kioka-ji		Yashima Temple	84
9th	2010	Kingou-ji		Yakuriji, Shindo-ji	85-86
10th	2013	Anraku-ji	6		
11th	2014	Sekkei-ji	33		
12th	2015	Senyu-ji	58	Eifuku-ji	57
13th	2016	Kioka-ji		Yakuriji, Shimo-ji	85-86
14th	2018	Anraku-ji	6		
15th	2019	Sekkei-ji	33		
16th	2023	Yakuriji	85		
17th	2024	Anraku-ji	6	Jyuraku-ji	7
18th	2025	Chikurin-ji	31		
19th	2026	Ishite-ji	51		
20th	2027	Yakuri-ji	85	(in planning)	

Sources: Conversations with Oka Soue and Fujisawa Soryu at Anraku-ji, March 2018. Interview with Genshin Seian, April 19, 2026

Further reading: For anyone who would like to know more about the main Myoan taikai or gatherings of Myoan players, I would recommend Chris Mau's dissertation: *Situating The Myoan Kyokai: A Study Of Suzan And The Fuke Shaku-hachi* (2014). This describes the typical Myoan taikai in great detail.

Daniel 'Ryugen' Ribble is a Myoan player who has lived in Kochi, Shikoku, for the last 40 years. 🍵

THREE SHAKUHACHI MOMENTS AND A PODCAST

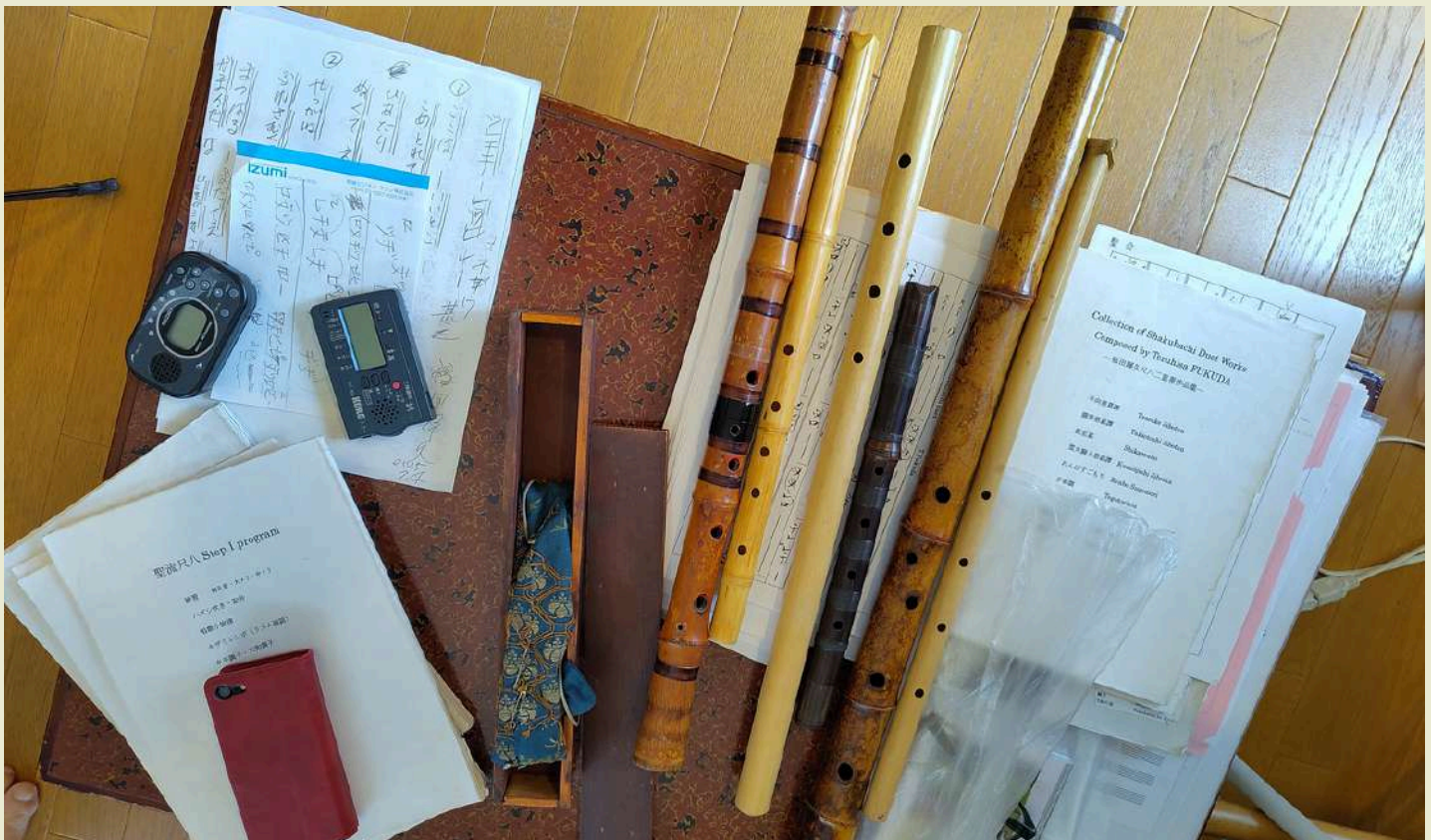
by Christof Zürn

I don't know exactly when I first heard the Shakuhachi, but I was intrigued by its sound. It might even have been in a pop song. Many years later, by chance, I realised that I could take lessons in the town where I live, Nijmegen in the Netherlands. I started lessons with H el ene Seiyu Codjo (Hijiri School - school of Sages) just a few years ago.

Last year in July, I went on my first trip to Japan, and the Shakuhachi was my guide. I had three memorable Shakuhachi moments on my trip.

Teruhisa Fukuda and the Hijirikai school, Tokyo

Through my teacher H el ene, I could arrange two lessons with the master and founder of the Hijirikai school, Fukuda Teruhisa. It was a one-of-a-kind experience over two three-hour sessions: drinking cold green tea, talking about contemporary and traditional music, learning about different kinds of flutes, playing duets, and working on *Koku*. I was overwhelmed by his friendliness, humble personality, and extraordinarily beautiful sound. A great start to my trip. Unfortunately, I don't have a picture with Fukuda Sensei, but I did take one while he explained different flutes from his collection to me.



Flutes

The Society for the Study of Classical Shakuhachi, Osaka



Osaka shakuhachi group

I also had the chance to join a group in Osaka. A few months earlier I had connected with Fuu Miyatani French (a registered *Komuso* Monk) on Instagram, and he said I would be very welcome to join them for their monthly gathering. This was my first experience with a wide-bore *jinashi* (2.5 *sun*) shakuhachi, and I was overwhelmed by its softness, low volume and many subtle details.

The group's mission is to preserve and transmit the playing style and repertoire of Master Monden Tekikū (the Myōan-ji repertoire). After a group run-through of the basic scale in two octaves, we played *Choshi* (*Honte* and *Yamato*) together, then listened to a recording of the late master, and played through the piece *Ajikan*, repeating and tuning in to several details. Everyone had to play a short solo; then we played *Honte Choshi* again, before food and drinks came to the table, with many more shakuhachi in between. At first, it was a bit of a stretch to play a 2.5 for the first time and a notation I did not know yet, but everyone made me feel a part of the group. I am grateful to have been part of this and to have experienced the group's welcoming, friendly, communal vibe and soft, spiritual sound.

Walking and listening with Jonen in Nara

Via Fuu, I could make an appointment with Jonen a few days later. Jonen is a Jodō Shū priest in Nara, and we went for a walk through the city on a very hot day. I also took my field recorder and recorded our walk-and-talk about playing shakuhachi, being a monk and more.

Jonen is a former *komuso* monk who has studied the instrument for over a quarter of a century. During our walk, we explored the beautiful Japanese concept of *kuuki wo yomu* - reading the air and sensing the mood of the environment.



Reading the air

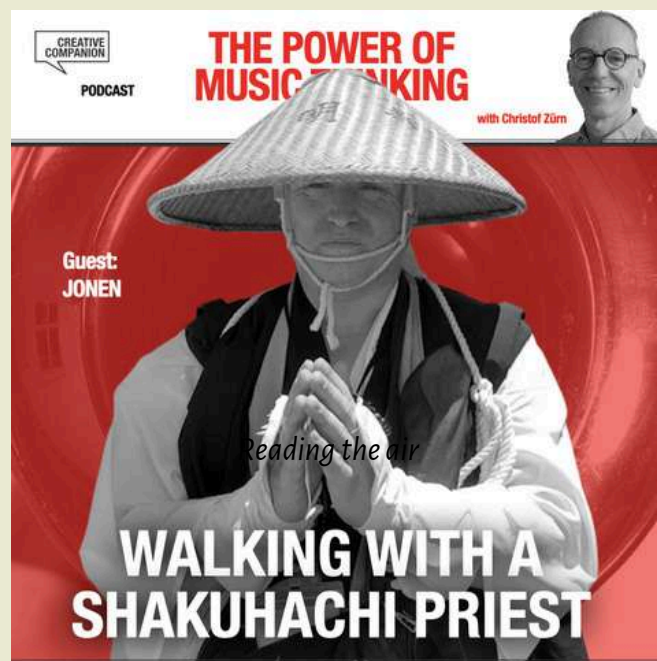
We sat in front of a wooden house in the middle of the woods, entering a sound meditation while the local cicadas sang intensely around us. When the distant sounds of election cars with loudspeakers suddenly bled into the forest, the cicadas changed, and Jonen explained that he does not see modern noise as an interruption. To him, everything is nature, and the true challenge is trying to harmonise his shakuhachi playing with the ambient sound. By adopting a soft, 'thin-style calligraphy' approach, he meshes with the environment rather than dominating it, creating a profound practice of 'meditation in the midst'.

To hear the difference between his expensive, master-crafted bamboo flute and my plastic \$100 *Yuu*, and to experience this raw, immersive field recording for yourself, you will have to tune in to the podcast.

These three encounters in Japan, guided by the different experiences of the shakuhachi, were the leitmotif, if you like, of my first trip to Japan.

The Power of Music Thinking

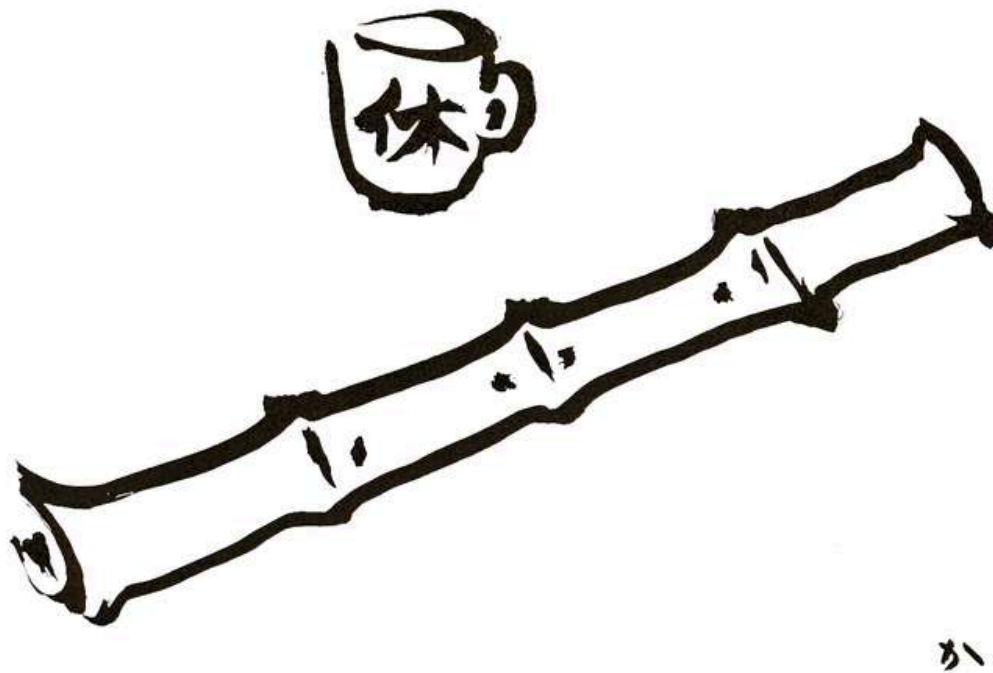
Five years ago, I started my podcast with the goal to find stories, insights, and tools from the big world of music to inspire leaders and followers to listen, tune, play and perform. I speak with people around the world who do something special and are also musicians. In the more than 70 episodes I have recorded, Japan has naturally emerged as a recurring theme. My guests have included a communication expert who bridges German and Japanese companies (who also happens to be a guitarist), and a violinist and former head of education at the Royal Opera House in London, who has also been fortunate to receive the patronage of Her Royal Highness the Empress Michiko. There is an episode featuring my shakuhachi teacher, H el ene Seiyu Codjo; a special episode on audio postcards from my Japan trip; and, lastly, this remarkable sound walk with Jonen. I hope many people fall in love with the shakuhachi and start playing it.  



Link to the episode: <https://musicthinking.com/walking-with-a-shakuhachi-priest/>

Tired lips, Silence
The after taste of bamboo
Ah, happy neighbors

-Lydia Snyder
Kent State University
Ethnomusicology Faculty



Sumi-e: Kazuko Hohki

In the sound of bamboo,
I hear the sadness in the gathering.

竹の音に
悲しみを聴く
宴かな

Take no ne ni,
kanashimi o kiku,
utage kana

-Kazuko Hohki

Next page:
Tamara Rogozina
"Shaku_hachi - 2", 2021
Watercolor, paper 30x40





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ESS MEMBERS AREA

HOW TO BECOME AN ESS MEMBER

The European Shakuhachi Society is a non-profit organisation devoted to the dissemination of the shakuhachi in all its different aspects throughout Europe through a wide variety of events, publications and other activities.

All board members and helpers work on a volunteer basis and receive no financial benefit but the Society needs money for organising a range of events, such as the annual summer schools. This comes from the membership fees.

Membership of the ESS is open to any person, both players or non-players, interested in the music of the shakuhachi in all its forms. Since the ESS is not affiliated with any particular school or aesthetic direction, its members represent a broad cross-section of styles and genres of shakuhachi. Supporting the ESS through joining is a means of helping maintain a coordinating 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 (discounts that are generally greater than the cost of the membership fee itself).

Furthermore there is the ESS Members' Area at members.shakuhachisociety.eu, which consists of exclusive online resources, eg concert and lesson recordings of past Summer Schools and online events, previous Summer School notations and the ESS Newsletter back-issues.

Once you have a valid membership subscription, our secretary will issue you with the relevant information on how you can access the online content.

The annual membership subscription fee is €20 or for a one-off payment of € 300 you can obtain Lifetime membership.

To join the ESS:

1) Visit the membership page on the ESS website and choose the membership subscription which suits you.
<http://shakuhachisociety.eu/about-the-ess/ess-membership/>

2) Please send an email to member@shakuhachisociety.eu or info@shakuhachisociety.eu, giving your name and contact details, and if you wish, a little information about your interest in and experience with the shakuhachi.

3) If you cannot make payment using PayPal, please send an email to member@shakuhachisociety.eu and we will find a way to help you.

We are looking forward to welcome you!



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You can find our website at www.shakuhachisociety.eu
There you will find information about shakuhachi, the ESS structure as well as past events and the ESS calendar of upcoming shakuhachi events in Europe.
General enquiries: info@shakuhachisociety.eu
Online events enquiries: online-events@shakuhachisociety.eu
For questions about membership: member@shakuhachisociety.eu
ESS newsletter: newsletter@shakuhachisociety.eu
The ESS will endeavour to respond quickly to any query.

ESS MEMBERS' AREA (MEMBERS' WEBSITE)

Resources like video, audio and notation for registered ESS members : members.shakuhachisociety.eu

ESS YouTube CHANNEL

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The ESS YouTube channel is where you can find the latest announcement videos, some old trailers and videos from the ESS archive. More to be added soon.

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Visit the ESS Facebook page run by the ESS Board to get all the latest ESS news and re-discover items of the ESS archive or simply to ask a question or advice on shakuhachi.

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Visit the community group looked after by ex-Board members and volunteers and join the discussions and benefit from the connections worldwide.



ESS BAMBOO NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTOR'S GUIDELINES

The aim of the ESS *Bamboo* Newsletter is to create a platform for members and non-members to further develop an understanding of shakuhachi and place it in a wider context than just their own individual study and experience. It includes a diverse range of topics and new ideas, information, knowledge, materials and reflections on shakuhachi and the people who shape the musical scene.

We encourage everyone to send in ideas for articles you would like to write or topics you would like to read about to the publications office by email at: newsletter@shakuhachisociety.eu

Before each new number, a 'call for contributions' will be issued and a deadline for submission will be set, but please feel free to send us your ideas on possible articles any time you want.

In order to assist the authors in their task and to ensure some consistency, the following brief guidelines have been drawn up:

Article length: The newsletter includes articles of different lengths up to approximately 2,000 words. In special cases, longer articles focusing on specific topics or issues, which require a more in-depth analysis may also be considered.

Text format: Please send your text in a text document (doc, docx, rtf). You can use any font and format since the text will be adjusted to the newsletter format.

Audiovisual materials/external links: We encourage the authors to include links to audiovisual materials that can enhance the experience of the reader in terms of material specifically and directly relating to the analysis or review of the topic of the article and avoiding self promotion.

Please send the pictures or other multi-media materials separately and contact the editors beforehand. If the size of the files makes them difficult to be sent by e-mail please use services like wettransfer.com.

Picture format: Please send your pictures in jpg, png or tiff format with a minimum resolution of 150dpi.

Reviews: Should you wish for any shakuhachi material to be reviewed in the newsletter (recordings, books, etc.), please contact us with the particulars and the editors will get back to you.

Reviews of materials, such as books and CD's, will appear in the first available issue of the newsletter after being received by the editors. Reviews of events, such as summer schools, workshops, master classes and concerts, need to be submitted by the deadline for the next edition of the newsletter, i.e. within a maximum of 6 months after the event.

Please provide acknowledgement/credit for the use of any other author's material.

Please avoid self-promotion.



The newsletter includes announcements on non-ESS events. Should you want your event's information to be included, please note that these events should take place after the publication of the respective newsletter edition (please consult the editors for exact dates of issue) and you should send the following information:

Date / Period
Description of your event
Venue
Cost
Contact information
Picture (may be edited to fit the needs of the NL format)

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