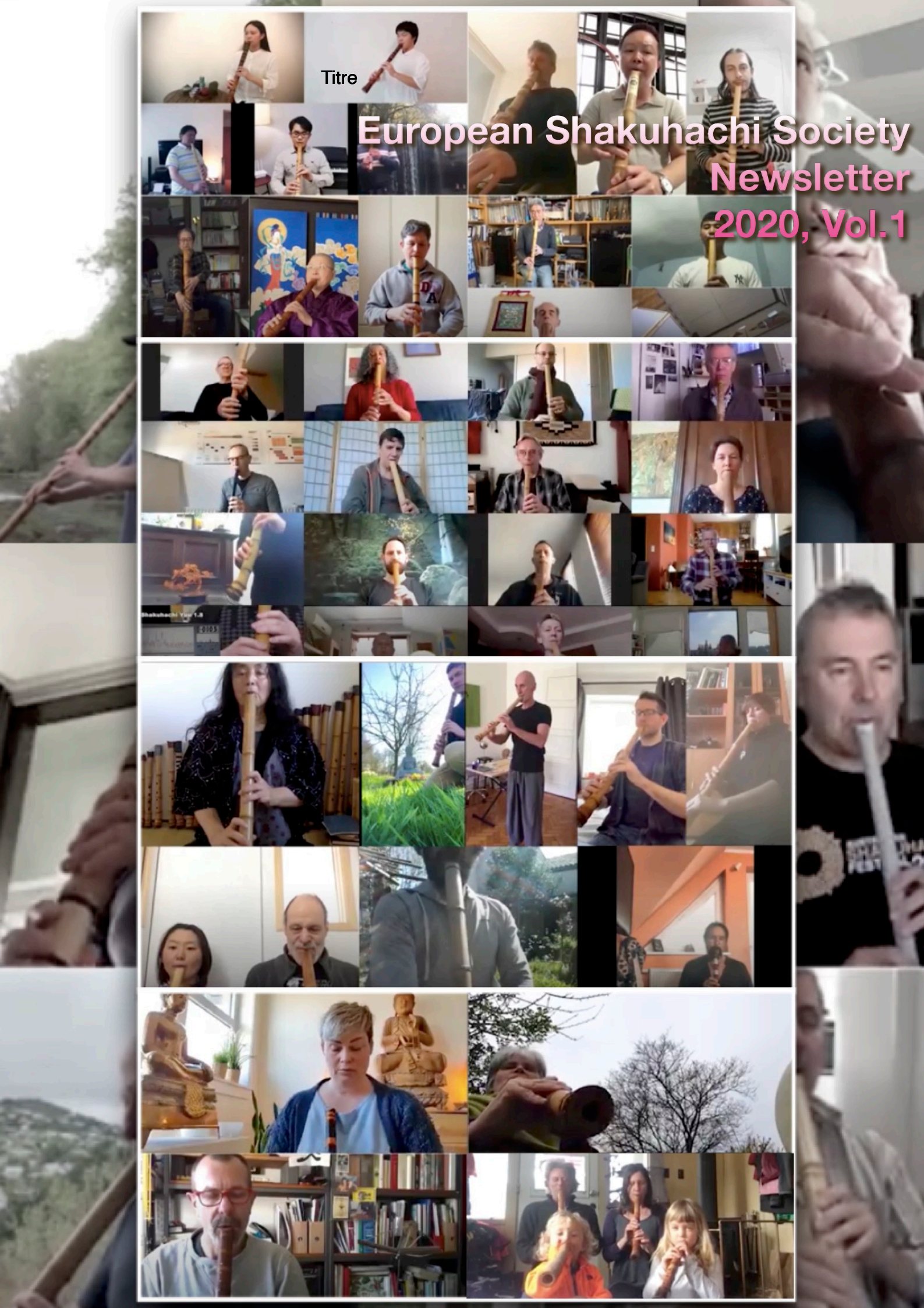


Titre

European Shakuhachi Society Newsletter 2020, Vol.1



Cover picture : "Robuki-Wave at the time of Covid-19",
screen shots of shakuhachi players from the video made by the
WSF22 team

Grateful thanks in this number :

- for the pictures to Clive Bell, Michael Hartley
- for the English to Mike McInerney
- for translation into English to Michael Coxall, Fuu Miyatani French,
Galina Sgonnik

2020 Vol.1

Publication officers:

Véronique Piron and Jose Vargas-Zuñiga

Dear shakuhachi friends

We hope you are faring well, and that shakuhachi has proved to be a friend of good help, keeping you more calm in yourself and more focused, in these strange and uncertain times.

We are glad to present another number of the ESS newsletter ; this will be the latest for us as mandated publication officers, so we hope that you will like it. In this edition, prepared at a time when those of us, after a long period of lockdown, had to spend energy on reorganizing their lives, you will find two relevant articles : an assessment of the situation on the shakuhachi in Japan "Shakuhachi in crisis?" written by shakuhachi player Clive Bell, and a set of feedbacks from all kind of players around the world and their relationship to shakuhachi in a very concrete and urgent ritual : "Robuki-Wave in the Time of Covid-19".

You'll also find a couple of interviews : with Japanese shakuhachi player Mizuno Kohmei and jinashi maker and player Kodama Hiroyuki.

Like everything else, shakuhachi activities are being affected by the Covid. The Summer School in Dublin has been postponed to next year, and most live events have been suspended.

But, always looking on the bright side, the situation opens the gates to new opportunities, with several shakuhachi activities planned on the Internet.

Of course, there is nothing like face-to-face meetings, but these activities will bring the chance to many people anywhere in the world to participate, especially those with low budget, and hopefully this will help to expand the shakuhachi community.

Therefore we're looking forward to the first ESS online Festival, announced at the start of this edition, starting very soon.

We hope to meet you there virtually!

With our best and warm wishes to you all,
Véronique Piron & Jose Vargas-Zuñiga

Dear ESS members and shakuhachi enthusiasts

Last past months have been hard to us all in an unprecedented way due to the global Covid-19 pandemic. I hope this Newsletter find you well and that the shakuhachi was (and still is) a source of comfort during these hard times.

Also hope that the summer that has finally arrive to the norther hemisphere, brings with it good tidings and some relieve to all of us.

We are meeting once more on these pages to share much about shakuhachi thanks to

the efforts of our editors Jose and Veronique on their last number, they had made a great job during their time in office and I deeply thank them for their contribution to all of us.

You surely already know that the pandemic has cause for our Dublin 2020 Summer School to be postpone to 2021 with our Athens' one, luckily moved to 2022.

In any case, you don't need to worry about not being able to see the people you usually meet during the Summer Schools or to learn some new things or listen to new teachers. Our own NowHere2020 will be with us soon and Thorsten, Jim, Christophe and Markus have put together such a great program that even if it is not meeting eye to eye, it will be a great way to meet considering the current global scenario.

A final important point to mention is the transfer of our association from UK to France. We have put together a group that has been working on adapting our statutes to the French law of associations. Things are at their final stages and we will be needing to vote on many aspects of it at our next AGM.

Next AGM will be a very important one to which your attendance (or your proxy vote) will be key. It will be hosted through the same system as the NowHere2020 event (zoom) and will take place on August 8 th at 15:30 CEST. All our members should have

received the detail information to attend (please contact us if this is not the case).

As usual there is much to be done and your ideas of what you would like to see happen (and help) are very much welcome, so please do write to us at [europeanshakuhachi@gmail.com](mailto: europeanshakuhachi@gmail.com), or to myself at [shakuhachi.es@gmail.com](mailto: shakuhachi.es@gmail.com).

I hope you enjoy your reading.

With my warmest regards

Horacio Curti
ESS Chairperson



Nowhere2020 – The 1st ESS Online Festival

Dates: two week-ends, August 1-2 and August 8-9, 2020

Technology used : Zoom

ESS is happy to officially announce its 2020 online festival! In keeping with the tradition of the ESS Summer Schools, but bearing in mind the current pandemic situation, this will be an online event of 12 sessions over 4 days, each session 45 minutes in length, with a Robuki and Tricks and Tips session each morning prior to the first teaching session.

Teachers :

- Special guest teacher from Japan: Kurahashi Yodo II (Mujuan)
- Non-European guest teachers: Riley Lee (composition), Alcvin Ramos (KSK)
- European teachers:
Horacio Curti (Robuki, tip of the day) Véronique Piron (Breathing),
Gunnar Linder (Kinko/Chikumeisha), Kiku Day (Zensabo),
Jean-François Lagrost (Tozan), Fiore De Mattia (Hijirikai),
Thorsten Knaub (Jiari Making), Marek Matvija (Kifukai),
Jose Vargas (Bamboo and Shakuhachi).
Some of these teachers may also have assistants in their sessions.

Registration Fee for the whole event:

€60 for non-ESS members

€50 for ESS members

<http://nowhere2020.shakuhachisociety.eu>

Shakuhachi in crisis?

by *Clive Bell*

In 1977 I lived in a suburb of Tokyo, sharing the quiet residential back streets with silent cyclists and many cats. Occasionally at weekends a Chindonya duo – saxophone and percussion, both men dressed as geisha – would wander the streets, noisily advertising a new local “food centre”. A ten minute walk took me to a tofu shop where I could buy a little blue plastic bag, holding water and a slab of pure white tofu. While waiting for customers, the tofuya-san lay on his back on the tatami, lazily blowing a shakuhachi as you might strum a guitar while sitting on a porch. A keen shakuhachi student myself, I was delighted.

Fast forward to 2020 and this seems an increasingly unlikely scene, even in Japan’s rapidly depopulating countryside. Where are these casual amateur shakuhachi players? In the 1970s Japan’s traditional music scene was even more inward-looking than it is now, and some shakuhachi teachers were reluctant to engage with the trickle of eccentric westerners who wanted urgently to learn. Secretive and factional, no one then would have said traditional music was in particularly rude health, but at least there were a dozen major players active. Watazumido died in 1992, Katsuya Yokoyama in 2010. If they were the summit of the pyramid, the base was thousands of amateur players. Around 1990 I



visited Mejiro (a specialist Tokyo shop dealing in shakuhachi), and saw the whole top floor occupied by a workshop for eager shakuhachi makers.

In both 2018 and 2019 I visited Japan. I played shakuhachi informally – a sort of teatime entertainment – for several days, in a ceramics gallery in Fukuoka that was displaying my potter friend’s work. Later I played several times at the vast new Lush shop in Shinjuku – Lush is a British company offering a dizzying range of bathtime products – in the company of violinist Midori Komachi.

On both occasions I met people who said they were especially pleased to hear me because, “It’s the first time I’ve ever seen anyone play this instrument.” Another response was, “My grandfather used to play,” and indeed while we were in Shinjuku, Midori herself heard for the first time that her grandfather had played shakuhachi. I went back to Mejiro, where the shop has halved in size. The whole ground floor is now a bar, painted in cerise pink, named Panier De Légumes. Upstairs the owner was as helpful as ever, but finding it difficult to conceal her gloom about Japan’s steeply declining interest in the shakuhachi. Few young players are coming forward and the business is propped up by non-Japanese enthusiasm.



And that enthusiasm is explosive. In the past two decades shakuhachi playing of every hue has taken off outside the instrument’s home country. Non-Japanese players tend to be evangelical: sharing on social media, teaching via internet, attending international festivals designed to impress the outside world with the instrument’s range – unburdened by Japanese caution, decorum or a heavy sense of inheritance from the lineage, they cast wabi-sabi to the winds in an informal, backslapping free-for-all.

Even though Australia and America probably lead the way in sheer numbers of teachers and players, it’s the European Shakuhachi Society that sets the pace online, with a regular newsletter, occasional journal, website, forum and a Facebook page that just seethes!

One example of who’s playing these days: my friend Shabaka Hutchings, a leading saxophonist on London’s new jazz scene, has bought a decent instrument. While in Japan for the 2019 Fuji Rock festival, he astonished the Mejiro shop staff by walking over from Shibuya in the height of the summer heat.

A lot has been written, including academic studies, about these newcomers to the shakuhachi and how they see things. Far less has been said about how no one in Japan can barely be bothered to pick the thing up. As if my tofuya-san preferred to stare at his phone, his flute left on the shelf.

Of course there are brilliant exceptions. Dozan Fujiwara, now 48, teaches a dozen students at Geidai (Tokyo University Of The Arts), and talks in an interview of “an increasing number of women studying it today...There are active shakuhachi teachers all around the country today.” Although in fact several of his Geidai students are from overseas. Meanwhile Japanese women have had to defy centuries of hard prejudice to even begin to play; of these perhaps the most impressive is Mamino Yorita (aged 30). I love her uninhibited style, combined with a poise that absolutely refuses to hurry.

I would agree that Japan still has a number of skilled players at the highest level, but they are surrounded by a culture that is less and less interested. Perhaps Japan is now paying the price for failing to support

education in traditional music since 1871, for deciding that the true meaning of ‘modern’ is ‘western’. Moreover, here are five reasons why you would not think of taking up the instrument:

1. It has a reputation for difficulty. The one thing we all know about the shakuhachi is “kubi-furi sannen”. If it takes three years to move your neck correctly, playing my favourite anime theme may take decades.
2. It’s expensive. The bamboo costs more and more. Then there’s the compulsory tickets for the teacher’s concerts.
3. It’s old fashioned (my grandfather liked it. And the koto sounds like a posh restaurant).
4. There’s no context. It’s hard to know what was the context in which my tofuya-san played, but when you study an instrument you need some life support system around you: perhaps your teacher’s other pupils, your friends’ mild interest, a club, a drinking party where you are invited to play. Without that you’re on your own.
5. Some hangover from the war, when traditional music became associated with Japanese nationalism. After 1936, the CIB (Cabinet Information Bureau or Naikaku Johokyoku) controlled all mass media, including music and theatre. Foreign songs were out; shakuhachi, koto, shamisen and military marches were in. In an ominous echo of Soviet cultural policy, the CIB stated: “Apart from its political nature, culture does not exist.”

I sought the opinion of Robin Thompson, an expert on Ryukyu Islands music, currently living in Okinawa. He points out the importance of family transmission: “The shakuhachi is perhaps the Japanese instrument least encumbered by family heritage, meaning that it’s more or less open to anyone who wants to learn it. I suppose this is both an advantage and a disadvantage, the latter in the sense that no one is forced to take up the instrument because it goes down in the family from father to son or from mother to daughter. Without the background of family transmission I suspect there would be far fewer players of the koto and the shamisen too.”



Surveying today's shakuhachi landscape, it appears that non-Japanese players have taken ownership of the instrument and subjected it to globalisation. Possibly that means we should be cautious, and aware of our effect on the tradition. Always remembering that musical traditions are constantly changing, and the shakuhachi was by no means preserved in aspic when the foreign devils arrived. On the plus side, western players have arguably reinvigorated and liberated the instrument. The shakuhachi is now free to be surprising, to tackle almost any musical job; and Japan could adopt this new template to encourage young people to engage with their traditional musics. And might there be a down side?



One clear change in the shakuhachi agenda is the trend outside Japan to playing and making jinashi flutes (no lacquer). The coating of the flute bore in lacquer, boosting volume, was a recent development in shakuhachi history, and the call to return to raw bamboo is a revivalist, back to basics move. A leading jinashi player in Japan is Atsuya Okuda, himself previously a jazz trumpeter. Okuda's influence on non-Japanese players has been considerable, and their favouring of raw bamboo has fed back into Japanese thinking. Okuda's student, Katsuya Nonaka, has made a documentary film titled *Future Is Primitive*, an eloquent plea for a return to roots in both shakuhachi and skateboarding, two areas that Nonaka sees as threatened by the bulldozers of contemporary capitalism.

Another voice: Rei Jin, like Dozan Fujiwara, is another youngish professional player teaching at Geidai University. I was able to ask Jin sensei his opinion via his pupil, the Japan based British composer Francesca Le Lohé. Jin is less pessimistic, and recalls the hundreds of company-based shakuhachi clubs after WWII: "In Japan, it seems the greatest numbers of people playing shakuhachi as a hobby was just after the war, during the period of high economic growth, and when companies had social clubs. In comparison, there doesn't seem to be another time before or after that 'baby boom' when there was such a great number of enthusiasts. If you think of it like this, it could be easy to feel pessimistic by comparing the decreased number of enthusiasts to a time when there were many - however, it might be better to keep in mind that there weren't that many enthusiasts in the first place. In general, it seems that among those things described as 'traditional', a lot were actually created in recent times." In other words, my arrival in Japan (1976) maybe coincided with a golden age for amateur shakuhachi, an unexpected side effect of Japan's economic miracle.

I've spoken to Japanese musicians who are impressed by the west's enthusiastic adoption of the shakuhachi, and wish some of that outgoing pizzazz could rub off on the Japanese. I would say be careful what you wish for. Look at the didgeridoo, pilfered from Australian tribes and warmly embraced by buskers across the globe. And look at Daoism, look at Zen, maybe not quite what they were a hundred years ago. Have we transformed Asian religions into an inane mental gym workout? (see self-help book *Ten To Zen* by Owen O'Kane for one grim example). In the awesome words of urbandictionary.com, "Can you pass the Zen, please?"

We should also beware of our selective memory of what the shakuhachi is. We like to recall Zen monks and wandering, basket-hatted komuso priests, that all-male cast of our favourite period drama. We risk overlooking the messier history of amateurs playing popular songs at parties, some costumed for fun as komuso, and hundreds of women playing in geisha houses and restaurants. And tofu makers lying on their backs to play a tune.

I always saw the shakuhachi as an extremely Japanese instrument, an important part of the Japanese cultural jigsaw, and I would be saddened if the Japanese lost control of its future. Neither would I like rootless cosmopolitan composers to co-opt it as a "sound source", devoid of any cultural baggage. I moved to Tokyo because I believed that if you study an instrument in its context you will understand it, and therefore yourself, more deeply. The tootling tofuya-san was another piece of that jigsaw.

Clive Bell

This essay was originally written for <https://www.thewire.co.uk/>

LINKS:

Kohachiro Miyata, Clive Bell's teacher:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4e38PTbTHmE>

European Shakuhachi Society Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/156126251071128/>

Watazumido:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2V0F0IRkf8&feature=context-cha>

Atsuya Okuda:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6fhDXwslZVk>

Mamino Yorita:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HwY4MYJZ-Zg>

Mejiro shakuhachi shop:

<https://www.mejiro-japan.com/en/top>

Katsuya Nonaka visits Hong Kong during protests:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DldfJ9ohVpg>

Robuki WAVE in the time of Covid-19

Introduction by Véronique Piron, feedbacks of shakuhachi players :
Brian Ritchie, Alf Bartholdy, Masaaki Shibata, Suto Shuho, Fuu Miyatani French, Damon Rawnsley, Hélène Seiyu Codjo, Tamara Rogozina



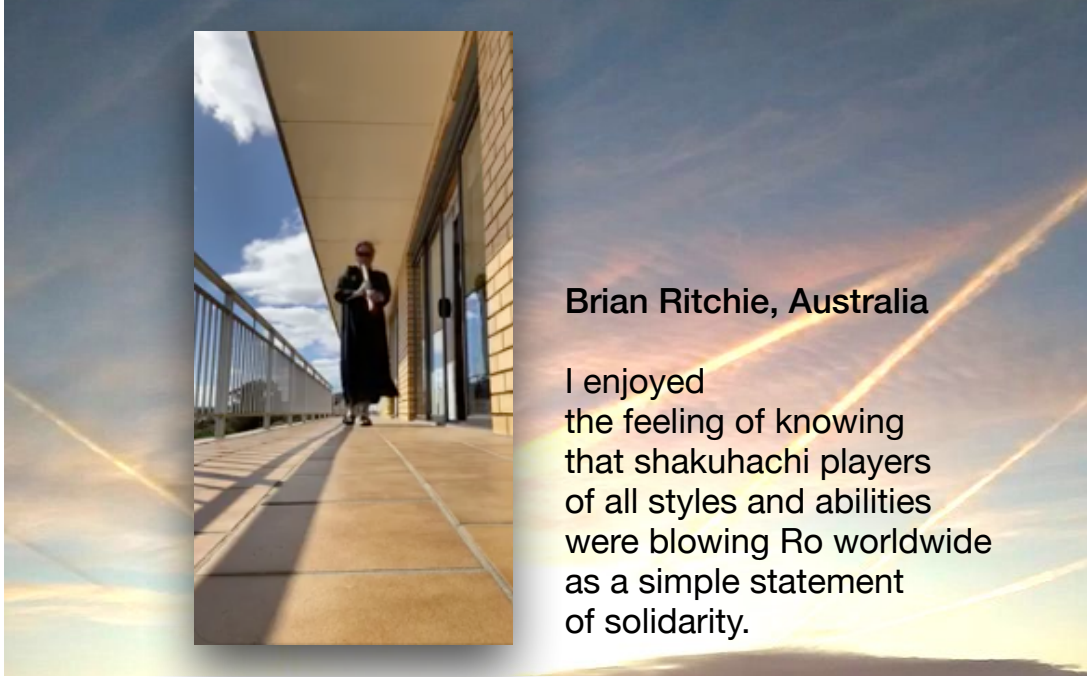
CO - cum - "with/together" in Latin ; VID, "empty/emptiness" in French
 "Together in emptiness" and the tradition of ROBUKI, blowing an empty tube

On March 23rd a global Robuki Wave was started via Facebook when Covid-19 was declared a global pandemic : one single note, being played by shakuhachi players from all around the world, all together, at noon, at anyone's local time. 13 time zones starting in New Zealand, finishing in Hawaii, to make the sound rotate around the planet; individuals and groups, all connected to get a sense of unity, in empathy for victims, families, friends of victims, to heal the world.

Around 800 persons were reached by the first posts (Facebook counting, non-exhaustive as many are non FB members), at least 28 countries participated and individual videos of the players have been collected until April 6th. On April 20th, a compilation generously made by the WSF22 Team (World Shakuhachi Festival 2022 Team) and introduced by Kiku Day and myself, was uploaded onto Youtube, showing players from the different continents merging in a big collective sound. During May we've been collecting a few feedbacks from people of different countries, different approaches and feelings, which are presented here together in their native language and English.

More than 17 weeks after the start, at least 300 people (non-exhaustive) are still following the event online, shakuhachi players are still participating, blowing, deeply concerned by the state of the whole planet, ...still today, you're welcome to join.

[Link to the FB page](#) - [Link to the VIDEO on Youtube](#)



Brian Ritchie, Australia

I enjoyed the feeling of knowing that shakuhachi players of all styles and abilities were blowing Ro worldwide as a simple statement of solidarity.



Alf Bartholdy, Germany

For me, as a monk in the Rinzai Zen tradition, playing shakuhachi is part of my Buddhist path. I dedicate my play to the wellbeing of all sentient beings. And then Corona came. And with that, fear, despair and suffering. With my playing I wanted to set an opposite pole here.

Due to my age and my health history, I belong to the risk group and because of my job as a nurse I can take little account of it. I was fine all the time. Others have suffered, still suffer, are afraid and have died.

Everything in the world arises and is interdependent. Everything I do willingly, in thought, word and deed, has an effect.

My playing was my chance to resonate with this situation. And just as it has an effect when many people pray or meditate together, so it has an effect when many people play Shakuhachi together in one mind.

Für mich, als Mönch in der Tradition des Rinzai-Zen, ist das Spielen der Shakuhachi Bestandteil meines buddhistischen Weges. Ich widme mein Spielen dem Wohl aller fühlenden Wesen. Und dann kam Corona. Und damit, Angst, Verzweiflung und Leid.

Mit meinem Spielen wollte ich hier einen Gegenpol setzen.

Durch mein Alter und meine gesundheitliche Vorgeschichte gehöre ich zur Risikogruppe und durch meinen Beruf als Krankenpfleger kann ich da wenig Rücksicht darauf nehmen.



Mir ging es die ganze Zeit gut. Andere haben gelitten, leiden bis heute, haben Angst und sind gestorben.

Alles auf der Welt entsteht und besteht in gegenseitiger

Abhängigkeit. Alles was ich willentlich tue, in Gedanken, Worten und Taten, hat eine Wirkung.

Mein Spielen war meine Möglichkeit, mit dieser Situation in Resonanz zu gehen. Und so wie es eine Wirkung hat, wenn viele Menschen zusammen beten oder meditieren, so hat es auch eine Wirkung, wenn viele Menschen zusammen, in einem Geist, Shakuhachi spielen.



Masaaki Shibata, Japan

Jodo Buddhist monk, Komyo-ji, Amagasaki City, Hyogo Prefecture

Mr. Tamami Kono, a shakuhachi maker in Japan, said, "the natural pattern of shakuhachi is that when bacteria grows or a wound happens in the process of a growing bamboo, Bamboo/Nature itself heals the damaged area : it will be stronger in that place".

We, who have been hurt by the new Corona virus, want to grow up with humans who are one size bigger and have a good taste (spirit/health) and who can live their lives deeply.

日本の尺八製管師である河野玉水先生が「尺八の天然の模様は、竹の成長過程にバクテリアが付いたり、傷ついた場所を竹自身が治して行く時に模様と成って、他の【竹】より強くなる」と言われました。

新型コロナによって傷ついた私達も、人間としてひと回り大きく、味わいのある、人生を深く生きることが出来る人間と育って行きたいものです。



Suto Shuho, Japan

Shingon Buddhist nun in Koya-san, Wakayama prefecture



A notion of Robuki

In March of this year, when I received an email from Kiku Day urging me to participate in the "Robuki Wave", I was very pleased that I was shown a spiritual way in which I could, here and now, follow during the Covid-19 global pandemic.

I had an image in my mind of the sound of the shakuhachi played by shakuhachi lovers moving across the planet from point to point one after another as if the light of the world was lit up.

It was a picture of quiet prayer healing the earth. Since coming to Koya-san, I have become more and more convinced that prayer transcends time and space.

To me, a shakuhachi is a vessel for the Dharma before it is a musical instrument, as I am a student of the Nezasa-ha branch of Kinpu-ryu shakuhachi of the Fuke-shu sect. It was a very meaningful experience for me to reflect on the fundamental nature of the shakuhachi.

Thank you very much for this experience.

日本、高野山 須藤脩鵬, 吹きROBUKI考

今年3月、Kiku Dayさんからメールを頂き「Robuki WAVE」への参加を促された時、新型コロナウイルス世界パンデミックに対して、今、ここで、私ができることをお示し頂いたように感じ、大変嬉しく思いました。

尺八を愛するそれぞれが吹く尺八の響きが地球の上に灯を点すが如く、点々と繋がっていく様が鮮やかに脳裏に浮かびました。それはまさに静かなる祈りが地球を癒やしていく姿でした。

『祈り』は時間も空間も超える、高野山に来て益々確信を深めております。普化宗根笹派錦風流尺八を学ぶ私にとって、尺八は楽器である以前に法の器です。その根本的な有り様に立ち返らせてもらえた大変意義深い体験でした。ありがとうございました。



Fuu Miyatani French, Japan

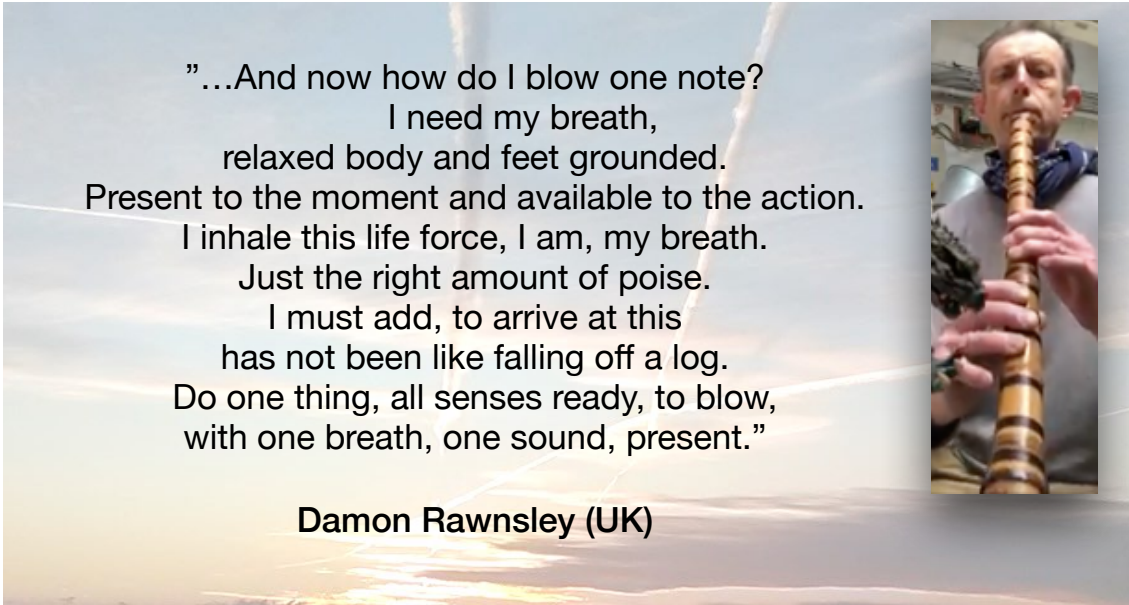
My name is Fuu G.D. Miyatani French, I am an American living in Japan. I am a Lin Ji Chan Buddhist priest, the Chinese lineage of Rinzai Zen. I am also a practicing Komuso with the Myoanji temple in Kyoto. As such it is my dharma practice to do what I feel is a musical healing via Shakuhachi music.



Sound is healing, music is healing, it is also sharing Chi (Ki). It is also part of my practice as a Chinese Martial art teacher to do healing, sometimes with motion, sometimes with Chi (ki) and breath. The Shakuhachi is a combination of both. When I heard about the Robuki wave, I immediately joined, it was another extension to me of my Chan, Kung Fu and Komuso philosophy, vows

and practice to help however I can to those suffering. Now instead of just playing for those who hear me in the streets of Japan and at various temples, I played for those who could not hear via ear, but through the heart, the spirit. It is the way of Cha'n to touch others heart to heart not with just words. I felt in some way my small offering of "Chi" to the world was a benefit, if only in my mind and spirit. It

was fully in keeping with the Chan (Zen) philosophy of heart to heart transmission and sharing the dharma. There is power in numbers and with so many others focused on this healing transmission on some level it will help. Same as a mass meditation, or a group Tai Chi and Qi Gong gathering to help heal, sort of a musical Reiki treatment for the world. Amitoufo. May all being be free from suffering and the world heal from this plague.



"...And now how do I blow one note?
 I need my breath,
 relaxed body and feet grounded.
 Present to the moment and available to the action.
 I inhale this life force, I am, my breath.
 Just the right amount of poise.
 I must add, to arrive at this
 has not been like falling off a log.
 Do one thing, all senses ready, to blow,
 with one breath, one sound, present."

Damon Rawnsley (UK)



Hélène Seiyu Codjo, Netherlands

When everything stopped suddenly and the lockdown began in March 2020, it was a big shock for me. Not because I didn't feel safe anymore, but especially because the direct way to connect to others was broken. Then, I received the message about a Robuki-wave across the planet everyday at noon, local time. I forwarded it to all my students and some shakuhachi friends. Their enthusiastic reactions gave me the idea to transform a lonely Robuki at home into a Zoom moment of blowing together. From March 23 to April 24, I came online every day at noon. Even if the sound quality was not good, the fact of blowing together, seeing each other faces and big smiles at the end, waving at each other and saying "see you tomorrow", all these connections brought so much peace in my heart. The negative emotions caused by the pandemic - stress, frustration, anxiety, etc. - were transformed during this moment into an offering of long breaths against the virus, a prayer for healing in the world, and a feeling of unity and solidarity.

As it went on, I sent the information to more people, and eventually, our sessions reached 20 participants from 5 countries (The Netherlands, Belgium, France, Italy and Germany). We were aware of being part of something bigger than us, a link in

a worldwide chain of shakuhachi players, connected by our breath and sounds, crossing the borders when all countries were closed. If I learned something from this pandemic, it is that we are all connected.

For agenda reasons, I stopped the daily meeting after one month, leaving everyone to their own practice. But it inspired me to start something that I wanted to do already for a long time : a shakuhachi meditation online group. Every Wednesday evening we meet up again, meditate, and blow Ro together in solidarity with the world.



Lorsque soudainement tout s'arrêta et que le confinement général commença en mars 2020, ce fut un grand choc pour moi. Non pas que je ne me sente plus en sécurité, mais surtout parce que le contact direct avec les autres étaient brutalement rompu.

A ce moment-là, je reçus le message de l'idée d'une vague de Robuki autour du monde, tous les jours à midi. J'ai fait suivre immédiatement ce message à tous mes élèves et quelques amis du shakuhachi. Leurs réactions enthousiastes m'ont donné l'idée de transformer un Robuki solitaire chez soi en un moment sur Zoom pour souffler ensemble. Du 23 mars au 24 avril, je me suis connectée tous les jours à midi. Bien que la qualité du son ne soit pas bonne, le fait de souffler ensemble, de se voir, se saluer, se sourire, se dire "à demain", tous les jours, tous ces rendez-vous réguliers m'ont apporté une paix profonde. Les émotions négatives causées par la pandémie - stress, frustration, anxiété, etc. - se sont retrouvées transformées pendant ces séances en une offrande de longs souffles contre le virus, une prière pour la guérison dans le monde, et un sentiment d'unité et de solidarité.

Comme cela se poursuivait, j'ai envoyé l'information à plus de monde, et finalement, nos sessions ont atteint 20 personnes issues de 5 pays (Pays-Bas, Belgique, France, Italie et Allemagne). Nous avons conscience de faire partie d'un mouvement nous dépassant, maillons d'une chaîne reliant des joueurs de shakuhachi du monde entier par leurs souffles et leurs sons, traversant les frontières physiques de pays fermés sur eux-mêmes. Si j'ai appris quelque chose de cette pandémie, c'est que nous sommes tous connectés.

Pour des raisons de contraintes d'agenda, j'ai arrêté ces rendez-vous au bout d'un mois, laissant chacun à sa propre pratique. Mais cela m'a permis de lancer une chose à laquelle je réfléchissais déjà depuis longtemps : un groupe de méditation avec le shakuhachi, en ligne. Tous les mercredis soirs, nous nous retrouvons à nouveau, pour méditer et souffler RO ensemble, en solidarité avec le monde.

**Tamara Rogozina, Ukraine**

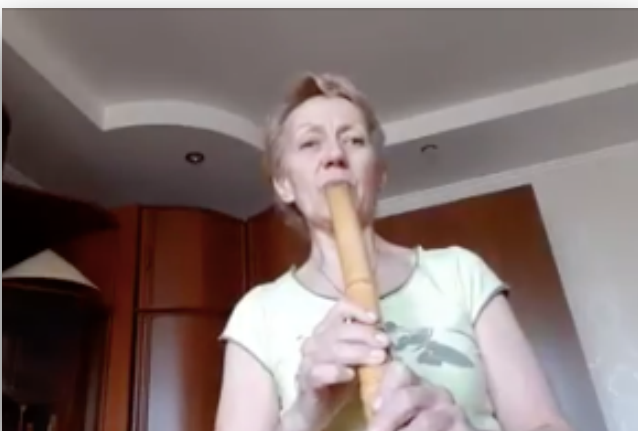
Analyzing now COVID-19-related things I can tell that all that happened has put us closer to each other. We - all people - go through the challenges that force us to think about the ultimate, about greater purposes, about The Eternal. What can I, one living human being as I perceive myself, do to help, to stop the pandemic, to heal our beautiful planet? At this very moment I got it in mind to unite friends, to come closer to my loved ones, to grasp deeper insight into the value and specialness of human consciousness, and uniqueness of all living things on Earth.

In the beginning of quarantine in Ukraine, when I saw the proposal about the Robuki Wave, I was glad to hit on this idea of an integrating and healing that goes around the globe. This unceasing Wave of sound that goes and goes for 2.5 months around the Universe for the good of the whole creation is amazing, unique! Gradually I started seeing in my social network the ideas and ideals that were planted during the Robuki : people demonstrated more compassion, emotional warmth, developed more openness and empathy.

I changed too. My heart bleeds knowing that people in the world are starving, dying in wars and bombings. This is the reality of my homeland now. Thinking about it all gave me the power to keep playing my Robuki, merging with the big Robuki Wave for Peace, Happiness, Healing!

Playing my daily Robuki I felt myself belonging to contemporary history and realized myself as part of something bigger, filling each day and each moment with love, sense, some higher idea! Just stop and see that the beauty is around you. It embraces you and you fill your thoughts, feelings, deeds, all the space with this beauty!

This is so amazing! And I am so happy because of that! It gives the hope for better life and better world!



*Тамара Рогозина,
Анализируя происходящие события,
связанные с коронавирусом, сейчас
могу сказать, что все ,что случилось,
приблизило нас друг к другу. Эти
испытания, которые проходим все мы,
люди, действительно, заставляют нас
задуматься о смыслах, о целях, о
Вечном. И о том, что же я , живой
человек, каким я себя считаю, могу
сделать, чтобы помочь остановить
пандемию, чтобы исцелить всю нашу
прекрасную планету. В этот момент*

*появилось желание объединить друзей,
стать ближе к моим близким, родным,
а так же еще глубже осознать ценность
человеческого разума, его уникальность
и неповторимость всего живого на Земле.*

В начале периода карантина здесь в Украине, когда я увидела предложение о Волне РОБУКИ, с радостью подхватила эту идею объединения и исцеления, охватывающую весь земной шар. Это такая удивительная, уникальная, непрерывная Волна звука, которая вот уже 2.5 месяца разносится во Вселенной во благо всего живого!

Те идеи и те мысли, которые были заложены во время Робуки, я стала видеть в моем окружении. Люди стали проявлять большее сострадание, душевное тепло, стали быть более открытыми, более чуткими.

И я сама, вместе с ними, стала другой. Меня до глубины души трогает то, что есть люди на земле, которые голодают, гибнут от войн, бомбежек. Такое есть и у меня на Родине. Мысли об этом мне давали силы продолжать свое Робуки, сливаясь с Волной Робуки во имя Мира, Счастья, Исцеления!

Играя Робуки каждый день, я чувствовала себя причастной к современной истории и понимала, осознавала себя частичкой всеобщего целого, наполняя каждый свой день, каждый миг своей жизни любовью, смыслом, высокой идеей! Остановиться и увидеть, что прекрасное рядом. Оно вокруг тебя и ты сам наполняешь этим прекрасным и мысли, и чувства, и поступки, и все окружающее пространство!

И это так прекрасно! И я так счастлива от этого! И это дает надежду на лучшую жизнь и лучший мир!



The maker's corner

Alone

On your own

at the small place at home

sit on the floor

root to the ground

breath deep

aim high

see and feel

the miracle of being

listen the bamboo call

just like you

another nature's son

out of none

it comes the unknown

no you anymore

so just the sound

not doing is done

you think

it's gone



Jose Vargas-Zuñiga

Interview with Mizuno Kohmei

by Yerasimos Dimovasilis

Mizuno Kohmei is the present head of Kinko Ryū group Chikumeisha and Kokubunji Sankyoku Society. He is a board member of the Kinko Ryū Society and the auditor of Japan Sankyoku Society.

He was born in Hirakata-shi, Osaka in 1945. Mizuno Kohmei began studying with Yamaguchi Goro in January 1968, obtained his shihan in 1980 and became Yamaguchi's substitute teacher at the NHK Cultural Center. He has performed widely in Japan as well as in Europe and USA.



- Can you tell us about your first encounter with the shakuhachi? What made you start studying it?

I saw some shakuhachi demonstrated at the university festival in autumn 1967, and I was interested in playing shakuhachi. I joined the shakuhachi circle at the university. Yamaguchi Goro was visiting the club once a week and taught to the member students. I started shakuhachi only for fun, and had no intention to keep doing shakuhachi for such a long time. But it turned out to be more than 50 years in spite of what I thought at the beginning.

- Would you like to share some memories or stories of Yamaguchi Goro as a teacher?

I learned shakuhachi with Yamaguchi Goro for 30 years. Therefore I have a lot of memories and stories. When I learned from him for the first time in the afternoon of July 1968, he was back from the US teaching at Wesleyan University for a year. My colleagues told me that Yamaguchi Goro is a great player, but at the first lesson I felt he is not as great as they say. Yes, he is an excellent player, but I thought I can come to his level within a few years.

That was what I felt at the first lesson. Year by year I came to notice that he stands at a place far away from me. Many years later, after being qualified to Shihan (master), a person asked me "why do you have to get lessons from Yamaguchi Goro despite playing so well yourself?" At that time I had the feeling that he stands further and further away according to time.

- What are your activities relating to the shakuhachi?

I had been busy while I worked for a university. I am an engineer, and I taught and researched fluid mechanics on tunnel ventilation and others. After retiring from the university in March 2015, I came to spend more time on shakuhachi. In 2018 I became head of Chikumeisha group, and in 2019 I became a board member of Nihon Sankyoku Kyoukai, a group of koto, shamisen and shakuhachi players from all over Japan.

It means I have to spend more time on management, while playing shakuhachi. I want to spread the musical art of Yamaguchi Goro to the whole world outside Japan, and I am happy to contribute through this job.

- Tell us a few things about Chikumeisha. How has it changed during the years from the time of Yamaguchi Shiro until today?

Yamaguchi Shiro era: I do not know Yamaguchi Shiro, because I started learning shakuhachi a few years after his death. But I was lucky that I could talk with his wife (Yamaguchi Goro's mother) and heard a lot of things about Shiro. Yamaguchi Goro era: When I started shakuhachi in 1968 Yamaguchi Goro was 35. He was young, but he was extremely famous in the Japanese classical music community. I learnt from him until he died in 1999.

After Goro's death: Chikumeisha is managed by the board instead of by an Iemoto*. We are a strong shakuhachi group (guild) among the many groups that exist.

- What are the activities of Chikumeisha today?

Teaching, concerts, ensemble playing? with koto and shamisen. We hold a board meeting several times a year and a general assembly once a year.

- Do you have any shakuhachi recordings? I am only aware of the cd "Zen shakuhachi duets" with John Singer and your participation in Yamaguchi Tomoko's "Kachofugetsu". Do you intend to record more in the future?

I am in a situation to be able to record my playing onto CD in various ways. I will be doing that.

- The Kinko Ryu repertoire is an old one. What is your attitude towards preserving it and towards change?

Our main attitude is to preserve old music, honkyoku and sankyoku. But many of us are also interested in contemporary music. But we are not interested in playing Mozart or Vivaldi with shakuhachi. They are much better played on Western instruments.

- What is the most important thing for you in playing the shakuhachi?

Keeping the feeling of the piece. For Jiuta genre, recognizing the meaning of the song is important, play in the feeling of the song.

- Do you have any plans for the future?

Plans? Not especially : I am old now. So long as I can contribute to the shakuhachi world, I am happy to do so, in playing on stage, teaching and managing all related matters.

* Iemoto : head of a guild, normally, but not always, inherited from the previous leader in a blood lineage.



Auteur

Robuki WAVE in the time of Covid-19 From Japan_ Akisako
Kohmei Mizuno_Robuki + more



Interview with Kodama Hiroyuki

by Jose Vargas-Zuñiga

Note. As the words are key in the text, they need some explanation. Shakuhachi flutes can be jinashi (just raw bamboo, with nothing added inside), jiari (the bore is covered with a putty, called ji, and the shape of the bore is opened with a rasp according to a formula, and then polished). Some flutes have some added ji in some spots of the bore. They are also called jinashi but they could be better called jimori (little ji).

Kodama Hiroyuki plays and makes jinashi shakuhachi. He is an outstanding player of koten honkyoku, usually in very long jinashi flutes. He has been to Europe several times, participating in Festivals, both playing in concerts and directing jinashi making workshops.

JV - Could you tell us how you started playing shakuhachi?

KH - I was in Varanasi (India), and I listened to a flute sound. I still don't know which kind of flute, but then I thought it could be a shakuhachi. When I returned to Japan, I decided to start learning the instrument. My wife Keiko knew Okuda Atsuya sensei, and she visited the Zensabo school from time to time, so I began receiving lessons from him in 1989.

At the same time, I started with yoga and taichi, and, in the beginning, though I liked the music, I was more interested in breathing, and meditation. I found it interesting that all the teachers, of shakuhachi, yoga, and taichi kept very similar lips position and face expression.

JV - Which was your first instrument? Did you buy a shakuhachi?

KH - At that time Okuda sensei recommended starting with a jiari shakuhachi, so I bought a jiari 1.8 from Murai Eigoro. I learnt the basics on that instrument.



JV – And why and how did you become a maker?

KH – Why? (he pauses) Maybe because shakuhachi are very expensive instruments! (We laugh)

JV – Yes, it was one of the main reasons why I started making too.

JV – And how did you begin making shakuhachi?

KH – The Zensabo school organized a making workshop led by Murai Eigoro; I started there.

JV- Do you remember the first shakuhachi you made? Which length?

KH – I think it was a 2.5.

KH – Zensabo began organizing yearly making workshops and bamboo harvesting trips. I started there, and also I visited Murai Eigoro several times to learn more about jinashi making. He and Okuda sensei were my only jinashi making teachers.

JV – You didn't learn jiari making?

KH – Later, I started learning jiari making with Tom san...

JV – Tom Deaver, the American maker, he was your neighbour, he lived higher at the same road in Nagano mountains, he was your jiari teacher.

KH – Yes, I started, but I developed urushi allergy, so I had to quit. Maybe I was lucky, and Heaven or something said: "You are going to be an only jinashi maker "

JV- And also you play only jinashi flutes, why?

KH – Some people can play different instruments, for me they are genius. I feel able to play only one. Maybe Heaven said also: "You play only jinashi shakuhachi"

When I play honkyoku on shakuhachi, sometimes I go into meditation states, it's like a trip, and there are images that come to my mind. And every piece gives different images. Every time is different, as breathing changes, so does the mind. Those things happen to me better with jinashi instruments, I don't know why, but I feel more related to jinashi. It's something mysterious... it's difficult to talk about those things.

JV- I know, thank you.

KH – Jiari or jinashi, breathing is the most important, even if the sound is not so good, if breathing is good, I'm happy.

JV – Yes, you have to develop your breathing for playing shakuhachi, and that brings on many changes. Also, the sound of shakuhachi doesn't start in the bamboo, it comes from somewhere down in the body. Everything happening along the air column changes the sound.

KH – Good talk! Energy changes things directly.

JV - Could you tell something about jinashi making?

KH - Comparing to jiari, jinashi making is easy! In jiari making you have many difficult techniques, there is the joint, the utaguchi inlay, applying the ji, urushi etc. You need to be very skillful. But jinashi flutes are simple instruments. The most important and difficult step is finding a good bamboo.

JV - I agree, when you find a good bamboo, everything goes smoothly, but you cannot tell about bamboo beforehand. Many times there are problems, and to solve them it's often difficult, as there is very little control in the process. It is true that jiari techniques are complicated, and it's much easier making a jinashi, but making a good one is not easy, unless you are very lucky. In jinashi making, there is no formula, no exact calculation, no control.

KH - For me, bamboo is alive, and I make the flute, and I play it, and the bamboo grows, and I grow with it, and playing and making are not separate, they are same.



JV - Yes, playing the flute is the only way to know the problems and playing the flute tells you how to solve them. It's more about feeling than about thinking, again the mystery...

There are not many jinashi makers in Japan, are there?

KH - Now, many jiari makers also make jinashi.

JV - That's true, but most of them do jimori flutes, did you try that?

KH - Yes, I made something with Murai sensei, but I'm not doing it anymore. When you add something inside, the tone changes are not of my like.

JV - A question of personal taste, once again.

KH - Yes, that's it.

JV - You are living here, in the mountains : do you keep contact with the shakuhachi scene?

KH - Not much, sometimes I go to Tokyo, I still receive lessons from Okuda sensei.

JV - But you receive people here, who come for playing and making lessons, or harvesting bamboo, also you give Internet lessons, and sell your flutes, what about your students and customers, are they Japanese?

KH- Customers, around one fourth of them, most are non-Japanese. And all my students are from outside Japan.

JV – Finally, there is something else you would like to say?

(He thinks)

JV – Maybe, just shut up and play your shakuhachi... (We laugh)

KH - Quiet breathing, a bit longer and deeper than normal, soothes our tensions, and calms us. Breath control also has consequences at physical level, not only emotional. Besides, it is known from ancient times the effects of good breathing on nervous system control, and in health overall.

The komuso monks' ancient repertory, normally for solo shakuhachi, is known as Koten Honkyoku. Most of the pieces' origins are unknown, we don't know who the composers were, or when they were composed.

Today, these songs are not a local cultural form anymore, and they are recognized as jewels of the human spirit by an increasing number of people from many different countries, and Honkyoku understanding is increasing. Also, there are people who play different styles of music with shakuhachi, so the repertory is growing and getting enriched.

I hope the world of sounds expressed through natural bamboo and breathing culture continues expanding in the future.

JV - Many thanks, always a pleasure talking with you.

The ESS Guidelines for Contributors

The aim of the ESS 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, therefore, includes, among others, a diverse range of topics and new ideas, information, knowledge, materials and reflections on shakuhachi and the people who shape the musical scene.

As far as is practical, the articles will be translated into some of the main languages used in the European shakuhachi context. All this is accomplished by the selfless effort of the authors, translators and editors.

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 articles' will be issued and a deadline for submission 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:

1. Please feel free to contact us on the topic you would like to write about beforehand and keep in mind that the ESS Newsletter does not publish information on future events (except those organised by the ESS), instead ESS calendar updates will be sent out periodically. These will aim to include all upcoming events across Europe.
2. 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.
3. Article length: the Newsletter includes articles of different lengths up to approximately 2,000 words.
4. 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.
5. Please use as many multi-media materials as possible including pictures and external links.
6. Please send the pictures or other multi-media materials separately (contact the editors if the size of the files makes them difficult to be sent by e-mail).
7. Please send your pictures in jpg, png or tiff format with a minimum resolution of 150 dpi.
8. Please provide acknowledgement/credit for the use of any other author's material.
9. Please avoid self-promotion

After submission, the articles will be proofread and edited, if necessary, with permission of the authors when practically possible. Editors will always try their best to find agreement with the authors but you should note that eventually the Editors' decision will be final. The articles will then be translated when possible and the issue formatted.

This Newsletter exists thanks to the authors, translators and illustrators who so generously offer their knowledge, time and energy to provide materials. Please, be one of them.

ESS publications office

ESS Membership

The European Shakuhachi Society is a non-profit organisation and a registered UK charity 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 discounts at www.shakuhachi.com and also fee reductions for the annual European Shakuhachi Summer Schools (discounts that are generally greater than the cost of the membership fee itself). The annual membership fee is €20.

To join the ESS:

- 1) Visit the membership page on the ESS website and choose the membership subscription which suits you.
- 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.

Ways to get in touch

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