
AUSTRALIAN SHAKUHACHI SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Nr. 14 September 2003

ASS P.O Box 63 Woodford NSW 2778



"Sokkan"

Greetings!

Once again it's Spring!

This issue has part of an interesting article on the Shakuhachi in Australia by Riley Lee, a major concert in Melbourne courtesy of Andrew MacGregor and Riley Lee's new CD and the usual sundry other bits and pieces.

Also a long interview of **Kakizakai Sensei** by Tasha Sudan on page 5. Not only that but news of a new **plastic** shakuhachi which shows promise.

LATE BREAKING NEWS!

From John Holmes Treasurer of ASS

You have all been notified of Bronwyn's terrible tragedy, and the response from you all has been overwhelming. I have passed on all your wishes to Bronwyn and she thanks you all for the support.

Bronwyn is at the moment staying with her mother Janis at Katoomba.

Now to a different kind of support. As ASS Treasurer, I have set up a separate account to place donations for Bronwyn. If you feel you would like to contribute please make out your cheque/money order/etc. to the "Australian Shakuhachi Society" and please mark in the accompanying letter clearly that it is for "Bronwyn"

As I said above the donations will be held separately and then passed on to Bronwyn when there is a decent amount (this could be done several times) All contributions will be recorded and names passed to Bronwyn (but not individual amounts - so you can donate as much or little as you feel..all donations welcome.

I also would like to thank you for your support in advance. Donations should be sent to:

John M. Holmes: ASS Treasurer
P.O.Box 63, WOODFORD 2778

Email: johnholmes@ozemail.com.au
Phone: (02) 47587206

[John is taking on the role of Secretary for the time being. Ed.]

More News

ASF 2004 was to be at Mona Vale but this has fallen through due to insurance problems. It is hoped to hold it in a nearby suburb. More as it gets sorted.

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### Music for Zen Meditation A new Riley Lee CD:

A double CD of solos and duets composed and performed by Riley. These pieces create a pathway to an inner peace; perfect for contemplative moments.

More details on Riley's website [www.rileylee.net](http://www.rileylee.net)

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. PLASTIC SHAKUHACHI

“PERFECT TUNING”

We recently became aware of a new type of plastic shakuhachi which is made in Japan.

It is elementary that shakuhachi players use instruments that are in tune. If a shakuhachi is fundamentally pitched too high the player must compensate for this by playing all notes more “meri” (that is a technique which lowers the pitch). Conversely, the player must play more “kari” (raise the pitch) all the time if the shakuhachi is pitched fundamentally too low.

This type of tuning problem has serious ramifications for playing technique and can cause development of habits in playing technique that are extremely difficult to iron out.

The new plastic “Perfect Tuning” flutes have the following desirable features:

They are moulded to look just like a piece of bamboo. From a short distance it is difficult to tell they are made of plastic. They are made in two pieces and are easily carried. They are in tune, both for fundamental pitch and for intervals between notes.

They are relatively inexpensive. The price is still under consideration but is likely to be in the order of \$120- \$130.

They sound great. Amazingly so in fact. Better than many expensive bamboo flutes I have heard.

For more details contact Japan World Music at
(03) 9739 7340 or info@japanworldmusic.com.

Andrew MacGregor
Japan World Music

MELBOURNE NEWS

CONCERTO JAPON

Andrew MacGregor offered his students a marvellous and challenging opportunity to participate in a performance of two very beautiful modern Japanese pieces with an orchestra that also consisted of mandolins, guitars, double bass, bassoon, percussion and Japanese Womens' Choir. Rehearsals for our shakuhachi ensemble began a couple of months before the performance, and we had a number of rehearsals together with the orchestra leading up to the concert. Rehearsals and all the extra practice at home were fairly demanding, but many of us felt we had made much more progress on the shakuhachi in those few months than we would have made otherwise. Apart from the technical difficulty in playing some of the phrases, we had to work hard at getting our intonation right, especially when we played with the mandolin and guitar orchestra. It was also easier said than done to accurately follow the baton of our conductor, Basil Hawkins.

The concert was held at Melba Hall in Melbourne on Saturday the 30th of August. The programme was varied and exciting and the concert was almost completely sold out. The first half featured the soloists, Andrew MacGregor (shakuhachi) and Miho Yamaji (koto). Together they played Gekko Gensokyoku (CHIKUSHI Katsuko), Banshu Sankei (MIYATA Kochahiro) and Meikyo (KINEYA Seiho). They were joined for Yuki Monogatari (SAWAI Tadao), the final piece of this half, by Miyama McQueen-Tokita on bass koto. Their performances were wonderful.

The second half of the concert consisted of the two ensemble pieces, Hito Omou Uta Yonshu (“Four Songs for a Beloved”) by FUJII Bondai (1975), and Fuku Kyosokyoku (“Double Concerto”) by FUNAKAWA Toshio (1963). While a modern piece of music, the lyrics of Hito Omou Uta Yonshu are from the Man-yo shu, the oldest literary anthology of Japan, dating from the Nara period (710-794). This piece has a haunting quality and is reminiscent of monks’ chanting, although it has plenty of dynamic contrast and builds up in a very powerful way. It was lovely to hear Yukari Echo, the Japanese Womens' Choir, sing this to the accompaniment of the orchestra,

The final piece, Fuku Kyosokyoku, is a fine and energetic composition, and reveals superbly the beauty and technical subtlety of the two solo instruments, the shakuhachi and koto. While the style of this piece is somewhat Western, the phrasing and, of course, the instruments’ timbres sound distinctly Japanese. A friend in the audience later told me that images of Samurai doing battle kept flashing before her eyes throughout the piece. The audience certainly responded passionately to the performance. As shouts of ‘Bravo!’ and ‘Encore’ were heard, a mischievous thought entered my mind: “The only pieces we have rehearsed with the orchestra are the two we just played. Why not play them again!” I’m sure that after all our practice our shakuhachi ensemble would have been ready for the challenge.

The members of the shakuhachi ensemble were Andrew MacGregor, Molly Choo, Damien Kinney, Peter Neish, Adrian Sherriff, Adam Simmons, Janusz Sysak, and Luke Wood.

Janusz Sysak



The orchestra



The trio



Miho Yamaji

Photos courtesy of Andrew MacGregor

Sound of Bamboo:

Shakuhachi in Australia, 1986-2002.

By Dr. Riley Lee

The shakuhachi is an end-blown flute traditionally made of bamboo. It was imported from China into Japan in the early eighth century, and remains one of Japan's more popular traditional musical instruments.

Despite its long tradition and popularity, the official numbers of shakuhachi players in Japan have, according to a survey undertaken in 2002 decreased by a third in the last ten years.¹ In contrast, shakuhachi players and especially shakuhachi music listeners appear to be increasing in Australia at a remarkable rate.

This article describes the 'shakuhachi scene' in Australia at the turn of the twenty-first century. It focuses upon the author's experiences since his arrival in 1986 as Australia's first professional shakuhachi player. It also discusses the discrepancy between the perceived downturn in player numbers in Japan compared with the increased numbers in Australia.

The shakuhachi has probably been in Australia since World War II, and possibly from much earlier. It was however, virtually unknown here until the latter decades of the Twentieth Century. It is now a vibrant, integrated musical tradition in Australia.

In Australia over the past two decades, the shakuhachi scene has become well established. The level of recognition of its distinctive sound, its name (no mean feat in this case!), and its music is increasing amongst the general public. The numbers of persons purchasing shakuhachi CDs and attending live shakuhachi performances are rising. The numbers of persons who own a shakuhachi instrument, and those who are actively studying with a teacher are growing.

Shakuhachi music can be heard most weeks on one of the Australian Broadcasting Company's radio networks, and shakuhachi recordings can be purchased in most record stores. At least twenty CDs featuring Australian shakuhachi players have been produced in this country. A national organisation of shakuhachi enthusiasts, the Australian Shakuhachi Society, was created in 1997.

The following account of my personal experience with the shakuhachi since coming to Australia in 1986 may shed light on the recent Australian shakuhachi phenomenon in particular, and to a lesser extent the shakuhachi scene worldwide.

The numbers of new works and arrangements for the shakuhachi by Australian composers have increased. Finally, the number of professional shakuhachi teachers and performers are also increasing.

[I cannot remove the faint line beneath ...please ignore Ed.]

Teaching

When I first arrived in Sydney in April 1986, I knew of only one other shakuhachi player in Australia, a former student of mine whom I had taught previously in Hawai'i. As a member of the Sydney Zen Centre, he arranged for me to teach there. For the next fourteen years, I taught privately twice a week in a small studio which the Centre made available to me. I also began teaching at home in the Blue Mountains.

My students found out about me mainly through word of mouth, at concerts and other public performances, and through referrals from, for example, the Japanese Consulate. In more recent times, exposure on radio and television and in the print media, CDs and the internet have also contributed to an awareness in Australia that it is possible to have shakuhachi lessons here.

One of my first students was David Brown, who drove up from Melbourne to meet me in the Blue Mountains, outside of Sydney. He had been playing the shakuhachi and also had taught himself how to make them. One could say that he was the first shakuhachi player/maker/performer in Australia. See below for more on David.

Though I have not kept records, I would estimate that I have given private lessons to more than two hundred people in Australia over the past seventeen years. A percentage of these people only have one to five lessons before, for one reason or another, they stop. I also estimate that the average length of time people continue taking lessons is about two years. About thirty people have taken lessons for over five years, and about twenty people have continued with lessons for over ten years,

One may assume that many people who no longer have regular lessons continue to play their shakuhachi for their personal enjoyment.

At least six of my students teach or have taught on a regular basis. One former student, Andrew MacGregor, of Melbourne, is at present a full time shakuhachi professional, teaching, performing, and recording. The other students, David Brown, Jim Franklin, Richard Hood, Bronwyn Kirkpatrick, Graham Ranft, Stuart Ransom and Carl Rathus have other sources of income besides teaching, though Bronwyn, Stuart and Carl eventually intend to rely upon their shakuhachi activities as their primary source of income.

Though these numbers are small in comparison to, for example piano teachers and students, they represent a tremendous increase for the shakuhachi tradition, which was nil twenty years ago.

¹ 2002 *Hogaku Journal*, vol 189 p44. It should be noted that this dramatic decrease in shakuhachi numbers may have to do with how they were derived. They are the numbers of dues paying members of the large *ryûha* or shakuhachi organizations, which are losing popularity in Japan. In other words, the actual number of shakuhachi players may not have decreased, rather the number of these players who choose not to join an organization may have increased.

[To be continued]

More from Riley Lee:

LICENSES AND CERTIFICATES

CERTIFICATES OF COMPLETION

There are four levels of 'certificates of completion':

- Shoden – Beginner Transmission
- Chuden – Intermediate Transmission
- Okuden – Inner Transmission
- Kaiden – Entire Transmission

These certificates will be issued to those who request them upon the successful completion of a list of shakuhachi pieces, which I'll provide as soon as possible. Obtaining the certificates are not essential in order to receive the teaching and performing licenses, but in most cases the completion of all of the pieces on the list is required.

TEACHING AND PERFORMING LICENSES

There is one teaching license and one performing license. The teaching license is called 'jun shihan' (associate master). The performing license is called 'shihan' (master). Usually, all of the pieces in the 'certificate of completion' list of required pieces must be successfully completed before applying for the teaching license. The teaching license must be obtained before applying for the performing license.

Fees cover the cost of the licensing process and a substantial donation to the **Australian Shakuhachi Society**.

For more details, fees, etc:

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mobile: +61 (0)414 626 453
www.rileylee.net



I heard the unblown flute
In the deep summer shadows
Of the Temple of Suma

Basho



Interview with Kazizakai Sensei

By Tasha Sudan

In October 2002, my shakuhachi teacher in Japan, Suzuki Sensei, took me to visit Kakizakai Sensei in his home in Chichibu. Kakizakai Sensei's wife made us strawberry and cream sandwiches and we spent an afternoon recording an interview and some live performance pieces for a radio documentary that I am yet to make! As the documentary was for a general audience in Australia, the interview was very graciously conducted by Kakizakai Sensei in English, and the questions were formulated with an audience who had no knowledge of shakuhachi music in mind.

TS: When did you first hear shakuhachi music?

KS: I don't remember....

TS: Do you remember why you decided to start playing?

KS: It's a very long story, but when I was about ten years old by chance I watched a TV program about some boat, a boat floating on the sea, the sound was a flute, I was very moved by the sound, I didn't know the name of the musical instrument or which kind of music I didn't know, but later I knew the musical instrument, that was kana – from South America ...then, I was about 15 years old I got the musical instrument, the kana, and I started to play that musical instrument, and when I was university student, I was member of such a group, so I liked very much the music from South America. But after that I thought some strange feeling – 'this was not my music, this was not my original music' I thought, because from South America, the structure of the music, the scale were very similar to Japanese music but I thought, 'this was not my original music'. Then, I in contact shakuhachi music by chance 'oh, this is my favourite position', I thought, 'not music, this is my position', I thought. 'Oh, it's good, very comfortable feeling' when I am playing shakuhachi 'Oh it's good', that was my start of shakuhachi playing.

TS: So you said before that the sound of the flute made a very definite impression on you, made you feel a very particular thing, do you think shakuhachi makes people respond with their feelings more than other instruments?

KS: Mmm...the instrument...we use breath, breath includes many things I think, some feeling or something, so use breath instruments are very easy to express the persons feeling or some thought or something, especially shakuhachi is very easy to express because includes many, many kinds of sounds, tone colour, very good to express something.

TS: Do you remember what it felt like to be a beginner player of the shakuhachi?

KS: Most traditional style shakuhachi music, that was my favourite kind of shakuhachi music, there are many many kinds of shakuhachi music, jazz player – shakuhachi jazz player there are, and contemporary music players, but I'm feeling traditional shakuhachi music was the best for me, most comfortable.

TS: Was it comfortable when you began?

KS? Yes, yes, this is my position, I felt.

TS: Really? Because many beginner shakuhachi players don't feel comfortable at all, it's very difficult even to make a sound.

KS: For me, to make a sound is not so difficult because I had been kana player, the system is the same to make a sound, so to make a sound, not good sound, but to make a sound was not so difficult for me, so I didn't feel so difficulty to make a sound. Ah...many beginners can't make a sound easily, but poor sound – but I can feel the person's feeling or some [thoughts], only good sound can't express many things – poor sound can express their [thoughts] or feelings.

TS: Did you know when you started shakuhachi of its connection to zen practice or meditation?

KS: Ah... historically its true, but I haven't thought the relationship between zen and shakuhachi. History said so, but I playing shakuhachi as music. But deeply if I play, if I consider the shakuhachi music, I can meditate - I can be at some stage, a similar feeling to religious monks, to monks stage.

TS: What do you think about when you play shakuhachi?

KS: Keep the good pitch, keep the good sound, how much do I have air, or something, mainly technical things.

TS: I've heard shakuhachi players say its their ideal to play with no thoughts.

KS: Its ideal thing, but its impossible I think. Most of all my [thoughts are] about techniques or something – do consider the techniques, but its about musical things – the results will go far from technical things. The results will be some very different from techniques or something. But first if I want to express some, a thing, far from techniques, its not good – out of pitch or poor tone colour – such a thing can't express deep inside of a human being. But technically I have to get...after getting technical things I will be able to express many things about me or about the history or something.

TS: But first you must master the technical side.

KS: Yes, yes, but on stage or when there are some audiences, we have to forget the technical things – my answer is two styles, but both are true – technically you have to get, technically you have to play, but forget the technical things.

TS: How do you want the audience to feel when you play for them?

KS: Er...the audience will take a breath with the performer, so if it's so – the performance is nice, then the audience can understand what I want to express. Sometimes I play strongly, make a big sound or big breathy strong sound, the audience will feel something strong, and when I make a small small small sound, they will feel some ...sad.. I can't say in English ...or sad, such a feeling.

TS: So very emotional for the audience?

KS: Yes, yes, yes.

TS: I just want to ask you some questions about your teaching now, Riley Lee has written about teaching shakuhachi as a form of transmission, like Zen transmission, do you see your teaching the same way?

KS: Mmm...I'm teaching about techniques, mainly techniques, but after getting such a technique, the student can express something, the result is not technique, but can express something.

TS: Are there many things you teach your students, that you can't write down?

KS: No, only teaching...by language

TS: And by demonstrating.

KS: Yes.

TS: What kind of people become shakuhachi students?

KS: Many kinds of students.

TS: Is there any one thing all shakuhachi students have? Anything similar?

KS: Mmm...sometimes they don't think [about] promotion in company or something, or they like nature

...

TS: So for you was it difficult to become a professional shakuhachi player?

KS: Yes, it depends on the system of shakuhachi world – shakuhachi music is not so popular, even in Japan, so it's a bit difficult to be a professional shakuhachi player, even in Japan.

TS: Was it a difficult decision for you to make to become professional?

KS: Yeah, for me to do – with not much money, it's very difficult for me.

TS: You often play modern pieces, even Jimi Hendrix or Beatles songs, how does that differ from playing honkyoku music, the traditional music.

KS: Most favourite musics are honkyoku, Japanese traditional musics, but to let many people know shakuhachi music, this is my job, to let many audience, many people know shakuhachi music, to let many people know Come Together, or Purple Haze, sometimes works to let such a people know shakuhachi music.

TS: And then you can introduce them to more traditional shakuhachi music?

KS: Yes, yes.

TS: You teach non-Japanese as well as Japanese, is there a difference in the way they play or the way you teach?

KS: There are no differences between people, sometimes non-Japanese people can't read Japanese indication of notation, but not so difficult, so soon after getting such a

notation, they can read every honkyoku traditional notation, that is the same for Japanese modern people.

TS: Some people say that there is something very Japanese about the shakuhachi and you must be Japanese to play it properly and to hear it properly, you don't believe that?

KS: Shakuhachi player who plays Japanese traditional music, don't need to be Japanese.

TS: Do you think it's hard to teach because everybody plays shakuhachi songs differently to each other?

KS: Not only the person but the musical instrument itself, shakuhachi is ...every shakuhachi have its own character, so good one, bad one, so so or something...so western flute is mainly the same, the same character – so shakuhachi we use bamboo, natural bamboo, so the curve or the thickness or the thick of the pipe is not the same, so its very hard to make completely same shakuhachi. So every shakuhachi has the same character, depends on the character, we have to play, so this is a difficulty to play shakuhachi, and every person have their own face, or piece, or lips, or volume of inside of the mouth, so depends on every such things, so it's a bit difficult to teach general things – to say general things is a bit difficult.

TS: I want to ask you a few questions about shakuhachi history now, can you explain a little about the mysterious komuso?

KS: Komuso was a member of Fuke school of Buddhism, they used basket for head, to hide face, and go around many country in Japan, there were many countries in Japan, and once said they were the spy of the Japanese government, to get many information from many countries, but there are many many fake komuso, so they did many bad things, because they hide face so they could do such a things, and there were many gates from a country to the next country, and komuso can pass without any license so they can easily gain many informations but fake komusos used such ability – so there are many bad komusos. So in Meiji era, Japanese government stopped to being Fuke-shu.

TS: When the government stopped the sect, was that the end of the komuso?

KS: Generally it's true but even now there are many persons who like honkyoku playing komuso style, that is only style, costume or the basket, and music.

TS: So there are no official monks or sects that continue to play for religious purposes?

KS: Um.. there are many flows of shakuhachi music – one is Tozan, one is Kinko, one is traditional honkyoku, there are many styles, so one style is playing shakuhachi like komuso, traditional komuso.

TS: What is the relationship between komuso and samurai?

KS: You should ask that question to a historian! If the komuso was spy, the Japanese government (my opinion) but Japanese government asked a person, you should be komuso and gather information, so go around Japan like that, I think.

TS: Some people say the design of the shakuhachi is something that also comes from samurai history, it could be used as a weapon – have you ever used yours as a weapon?

KS: No no no its very important – its my musical instrument.

TS: What do you think is the future for the shakuhachi, is it a dying art? Some are concerned it is.

KS: Ah, I don't think so. Nowadays many non-Japanese people like shakuhachi music – Canadian, Australian, American, these three countries have similar history. There were original peoples, and then the western people came, so they are think about tradition is not the same as we Japanese. They think they want to get some old thing – things – I don't know but maybe they think so unlike Japanese, old things, old music – its very lucky for us because shakuhachi you don't need to sing, to use language for the music, so they can play, only play, so its very nice for shakuhachi, lucky. And so shakuhachi music don't need to be only in Japan, this is the middle position of shakuhachi I think – before, the instrument would come from China or Korea, but it be a very popular music in Japan. It's Ok to be more popular in another country. This is a history, a middle history.

TS: So you see it as expanding throughout the world?

KS: Yes, yes.

TS: But its so difficult to play, and many people spend a whole lifetime learning to play it, and shakuhach is – the instruments are very expensive – do you think this will deter people from learning it seriously?

KS: To be a good player is difficult, this is not only shakuhachi, but any musical instrument. For example, piano is very easy to make a sound, but play very good music is very difficult, only very few persons can make very good music, this is the same to shakuhachi, but to make a shakuhachi sound is a bit difficult, more difficult than piano, so we think its very difficult, but not so difficult. Poor sound, if it's a poor sound but it can express the person. So our recognition of music is narrow, I think. Shakuhachi music is a music, so it will continue.

Tasha Sudan

About the author:

I am a studio producer on ABC Radio National's Bush Telegraph program, where my main duties are producing a series on beliefs outside the cities called 'Bush Believers', and producing the music for the program. Riley Lee is my shakuhachi teacher and I also live and study zazen at the Sydney Zen Centre.

Editors note: I decided to print this in full as it's not often such an interview becomes available. Many thanks to Tasha Sudan for making this possible..

Interesting Web links:

<http://www.torstenolafsson.com/toshakustud.htm>

This one is still under development and very well worth visiting: <http://www.kotodama.net/shakuhachi/tips.html>

Monty Levenson's site is always worth visiting on a regular basis: www.shakuhachi.com

For info on pieces lineages etc: www.komuso.com

www.rileylee.net



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