
AUSTRALIAN SHAKUHACHI SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Nr. 12 March 2003

ASS P.O Box 63 Woodford NSW 2778



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Greetings!

This edition contains the usual bits and pieces d from various sites and sources. I hope you will find it interesting. I have been asked if I want to continue as News Editor and I have agreed to do so [pending the next AGM] *but* I always welcome items of interest, ideas, snippets, interesting web sites as well as short and long articles. Send them to ranftg@webone.com.au

Unfortunately having to pre-book an overseas holiday well in advance I will not be able to attend the next ASF. ☹ However I hope that I will be able to attend the following one.

I apologise for some spelling errors in the last ASS NL - they were in Andrew MacGregors' articles. I must have inadvertently "unleashed" the spell checker and not monitored it's antics quite closely enough! They were:

Tokyo International article:

para 4 "Shirt Koko" should read "Shirata Koko"

para 5 "Takuma" should read "Tamuke"

From Andy MacGregor's website:

<http://www.japanworldmusic.com/>

..."We are pleased to announce that Andrew MacGregor is one of a small number of shakuhachi players selected to perform in the finals of the all Japan National Music (Hōgaku) Competition (for Traditional instruments) to be held in Kumamoto, 18th May 2003.

This is a rare honor and we wish him every success"...

We certainly do too!

AGM for ASS

The Australian Shakuhachi Association will be holding its annual general meeting at 4:30pm on Saturday 26 April 2003. The meeting will be held at the festival. For those attending the Australian Shakuhachi Festival, the AGM will proceed the happy hour. All members are urged to attend. See you there!



"Kubi furi san nen , koro hachi nen."

Australian Shakuhachi Festival

2003

April 25th to 28th Redland Bay, Brisbane

It's a chance to renew all those old friendships formed through the past festivals, make new and exciting connections and realise that there are many people like you learning to play this incredible instrument - shakuhachi!!

The fact is the festival is a most extraordinary opportunity to immerse yourself in the music and the tradition under the guidance of some of the world's finest shakuhachi teachers, stoking the fire of enthusiasm for the enjoyment of this exquisite instrument. In your everyday lives you may not have the chance for regular tuition or may not be able to devote an extended period of time to your playing. THIS is your time of indulgence.

Again, this year we are being joined by Japanese teachers and students. The Japanese teachers that are coming are Teruo Furuya, Kaoru Kakizakai, Kazushi Matama, and Toshimitsu Ishikawa. Australian teachers are Riley Lee, Jim Franklin and Andrew MacGregor. Koto players will be Saeko Kitai, Megumi Kakizakai and Ms Kimura, when she's not playing the shakuhachi.

Special features of the festival will be workshops for all levels in playing techniques, improvisation, breathing technique, shakuhachi duets, shakuhachi and koto duets, orientation, approaching Rando, using performance technology and the opportunity to record yourself and take it home.

The festival programme is intense and challenging, with time for fun and camaraderie at Happy Hour and mealtimes. Sessions will be about 1 - 1.5 hours long and there will be generally four per day. A CD and notation for the pieces to be taught will be forwarded to you as soon as they are ready so you can familiarise yourself to make the most of the opportunity.

Pieces will include Nesasaha Tori, Asuka Reibo, Tehodoki Reiho, Daha, Reibo, Tamuke, selected Rando pieces for solo, shakuhachi duet and shakuhachi/koto duet, Kumoi Jishi and Sakura as shakuhachi/koto duets, Taihei Manzai Raku (Eternal Peace) shakuhachi duet, three levels of improvisation and traditional folk tunes and duets. Don't try to do them all!

The public concert will now be held in the parkland of Brisbane's Southbank on late Sunday afternoon. This will be the final concert on a wonderful day of sacred music for Brisbane and brings an opportunity to see Brisbane's cultural life beside the river.

The festival is being held in a coastal bush setting in Redland Bay (25 minutes south of Brisbane) with good sleeping, eating and teaching facilities, plenty of space and bush walks. All food preferences will be well catered for and the coffee fresh. The final night is the student concert and festival dinner with a seafood /vegetarian buffet.

Couldn't really miss it, could you?

For more information and registration contact Stuart (07) 5441 6538, Carl on (07) 3379 7859 or shakuhachi2003@yahoo.com.au or visit the website on http://www.rileylee.net/australian_shakuhachi_festival_2003/html/index.htm

SHAKUHACHI/HOCHIKU; MUSIC/SUIZEN

By Dr. Riley Lee

The following is the letter I wrote to the USA based Shakuhachi Group <shakuhachi@communication.ucsd.edu> on 29 January 2003.

During the holidays, I've enjoyed going through past discussions on this list. I felt compelled to reply to one thread. It's partly to do with spirituality, which, according to the introduction to recently posted questionnaire, is of particular interest to shakuhachi players outside of Japan.

In some of the discussions about shakuhachi/hochiku/hoki, etc., there seems to be some confusion between music making and spiritual practice/blowing Zen (suizen).

Nothing new here, as this confusion has been in Japan and elsewhere long before we shakuhachi list people came on the scene.

Here is, in my opinion, one example of this confusion. There seems to be the idea that the meditative/spiritual endeavor of a person playing one type of instrument, e.g., a shakuhachi, is somehow more or less valuable than that of one playing another type of instrument, e.g., a hochiku or hochiku.

A belief that the nature of one's instrument defines one's spiritual experience is, to me, as absurd as believing that doing meditation in, for example, a temple (built specifically for the purpose) is by definition, and always will be, 'better' than doing meditation, for example, at home (built for other purposes). Sometimes this may be true, but not because of the buildings themselves.

Some instruments might be more conducive to meditation, just as some buildings are more conducive to meditation. But no material 'thing' exists that is more or less innately spiritual than any other 'thing'.

I would take it one step further: to think that a hochiku is particularly more spiritual than a regular shakuhachi, or an electric guitar, or any other musical instrument, is risking mistaking the plate for the food.

I appreciate the pleasure of making and playing simple bamboo flutes, hochiku or otherwise. I also respect and acknowledge the challenges these instruments present to their players. I know that often a challenging instrument can make for a great performance, e.g., the recording recently mentioned on the list, of Choshi played on a quickly and roughly made flute.

However... If "the main difference between a shakuhachi and a hochiku is the philosophy behind the two instruments," and, if one plays a shakuhachi with the same PHILOSOPHICAL attitude as when one plays a hochiku, then where is the difference? There may have been a difference in attitude during the making of the instrument, but we are talking here about playing the bamboo, not making the flute.

For example, imagine (it's not hard!) someone who practices 'blowing Zen' for years on what s/he thinks is a really good hochiku, made in the spirit of the hochiku. But actually the flute is really just a badly made shakuhachi. Or imagine that the person knows that the flute wasn't made as

a hochiku, but, doesn't care how the flute was made; s/he just wants to do 'blowing Zen'.

So, for argument's sake, this shakuhachi wasn't made in the 'spirit' of a hochiku, but rather by someone who had never even heard of the hochiku tradition, and who just wasn't very skilled at making shakuhachi. The flute can't play dai kan; the sound disappears with all but a small volume of air; it is so out of tune that it can't easily play pitches based on natural laws of physics (such as octaves); it can't be played together with other folks, etc. It requires a gentle, controlled breath to make it work. This could be a description of a hochiku, but it isn't. It's just a difficult shakuhachi. In any case, the player thinks that this shakuhachi, even though it isn't a hochiku, does very nicely when 'blowing Zen'.

What is the difference between the person using this instrument and another person who practices 'blowing Zen' on an 'authentic' hochiku made by a maker who is very much into the 'hochiku' tradition?

In my opinion, sometimes discussions of differences between hochiku and shakuhachi might be unconscious attempts at placing a high value on one thing at the expense of other things. Generally speaking, value judgments are counterproductive in meditative practice.

Also, think a moment about the idea that it is very important to hear hochiku live. We are told this is so because much of the tone colour is lost on CD's. This may be true, but how does this differ from regular shakuhachi, or any other musical instrument?

[By the way, someone on this list last year asked/lamented how he could ever sound like a performer whose CD he recently listened to. Do not despair. From my limited experience, it is amazing what magic can occur in recording studios. Just try playing in a large concrete stairwell to get an idea of this. A good recording engineer can improve anybody's sound even more than a good stairwell can!]

If the point of playing hochiku is to do blowing Zen, then the question is: Why would someone want to listen to 'blowing Zen' anyway, live or recorded? That would be like watching someone meditating. I suppose that doing so can be a calming, meditative experience, and if it helps one meditate, then that's great.

One could argue that listening to a teacher play his/her hochiku helps one become better at playing one's own hochiku. But then one is now talking about music making, not about spiritual practice. In general, you don't get very good at meditating by watching someone else play a flute.

It can be meditative watching people meditate, but likewise, it can be meditative listening to music. Observing spiritual practice isn't very rewarding as a spectator activity. Listening to music however, is.

Here is my main point: With spiritual practice, it DOES NOT matter what sort of bamboo flute you blow into, and really it might be just as well if you threw all of your pieces of bamboo away as just more distraction, and got on with meditating.

Music making can be spiritual practice, and spiritual practice can include the making of music. They are, nevertheless, two distinct activities. They work under different rules. Confusing the two can result both in bad music and ineffective spiritual practice.

Shakuhachi Tips by Kaoru Kakizakai

Translated by Zachary Braverman

These translations of Kakizakai-sensei's column are an on-going project. I hope to have all six years' worth translated in the not-too-distant future. Check back here often for additions. My heartfelt thanks go to Kakizakai-sensei for his permission to translate and post these tips here. My hope is that they may be helpful to players (especially beginners) in their efforts to master this challenging instrument.

Now Updated Weekly

December, 2002

The More the Meri-er!

[Translator's note:Kakizakai-sensei is not responsible for this pun.]

This month I would like to talk about meri again.

Many people tend to play meris high, but even the same person will play some meris higher than others even within the same song. And, when they become more proficient at meris, people also start playing some kinds of meris too low. Why are there meris that are way too high, just a little bit too high, or too low? This all depends on the level of difficulty each meri represents.

If you have plenty of breath as well as time to prepare for a meri, then that meri will have a low level of difficulty. However, if a meri comes within the middle of a phrase and there is little or no time to prepare for it, then that meri will have a higher level of difficulty. It is these kinds of meris which tend to be higher. Tsu-meri after a Re is one good example of this. Tsu-no-meri after a Ro, on the other hand, has a lower difficulty level than one after a Re, making it easier to play correctly.

Thus, because some meris are inherently more difficult to play than others, you have to adjust how you play them depending on their level of difficulty. (Ideally, you should be able to perform identical meris every time by doing the same thing with you mouth, the flute, and chin angle, but in practice your sense of all of these things is easily influenced by the note coming before.)

Therefore, once you have identified the kinds of meris with a higher level of difficulty, consciously meri more than usual on these notes. For instance, if you concentrate on meri-ing Tsu-meri 30% more or so than usual when it comes after a Re, then you will end up with a more correct pitch.

There are also times when you have to meri less than usual. For instance, after an U-no-Re (where only the 3rd hole is open and you are already in Dai-meri position), you have to open the 1st hole a little bit more than usual when closing the 3rd hole to transfer to Tsu-meri. The reason why is that you are already in Dai-meri position, so if you only open the 1st hole your usual amount and keep your chin in the same

position, you will end up playing a Tsu-dai-meri. One could, of course, raise the chin a little bit, but in this case it is much easier physically just to open up the 1st hole a hair more than usual.

The point to remember is that no note is played in a vacuum, unaffected by the note which comes before it. This is doubly true for meri notes, so identify those meri notes which you need to focus on meri-ing more and those which you need to meri less. Keep these in mind when you play and in time compensating this way will become second nature.

January, 2003

Meri Tone Colour

This is quite an ambitious topic for the first tip of the year. But then again, there may be some who see this and think "not meri again..."

Once when I was giving a lesson to a student, we were practising a honkyoku which began with Tsu-no-meri. Something about the student's Tsu-no-meri struck me as wrong, but I couldn't pin down what it was. The pitch might have been a little high, but that wasn't what made it seem so wrong. Since the student was trying to play the note with lots of volume, the pitch was indeed a little bit high, but there are some cases when a high meri pitch can be compensated for by slightly raising the pitch of the following note. Instead, it was the tone colour of the meri that struck me as wrong.

It is this tone color which is so crucial for meris to be truly effective. The absolute requirement for this tone color is pitch, with volume following in terms of importance.

It is not true all the time, but very often meris only occur within the context of the song fleetingly. They appear and then vanish before you know it. In these cases, it's best not to focus too much on volume, because it is pitch and colour which give the meri note its meaning within the piece.

This is shaping up to be another meri year!

<http://www.kotodama.net/shakuhachi/tips.html>

Used with permission.



Devote yourself to the absolute emptiness; contemplate earnestly in Quiescence. All things are together in action, but I look into their non-action, for things are continuously moving, restless, yet each is proceeding back to its origin. Proceeding back to the origin means Quiescence. To be in Quiescence is to see "Being-for-itself."

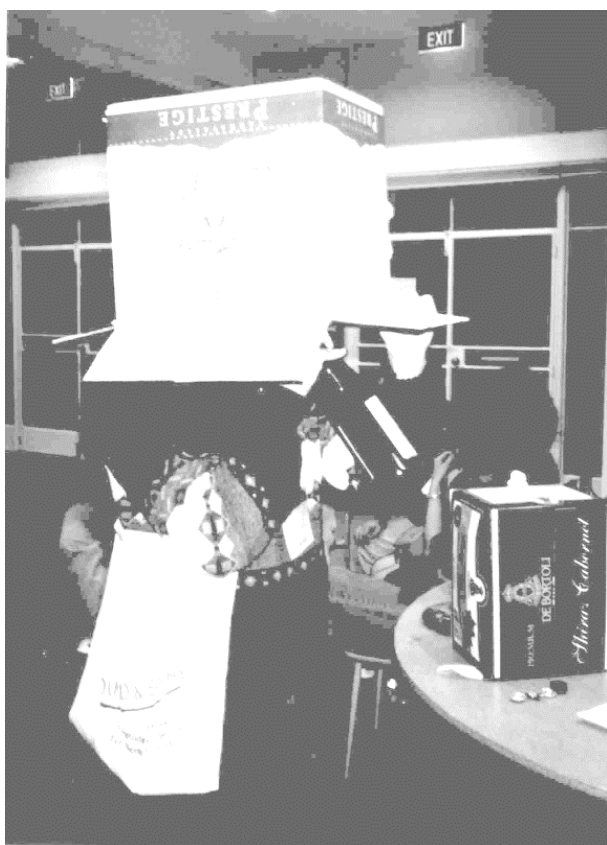
- Lao Tzu



Pictures from Stuart Ransom:



Riley and Stuart playing Kumoi Jishi at Folklorica Stage, Woodford Folk Festival 2002.": Margaret Tung suggested I buy a Hawaiian print shirt!!



Will ASF2003 see the emergence of Shinya Komuso - Deep night Komuso. with the rarely seen glass shakuhachi..... and this guy doesn't drink.



From Andrew MacGregor:



"The Tokyo Shakuhachi Summit 2002 Australian contingent with Araki Kodo V (from left)-Jim Franklin, Stuart Ransom, Araki Kodo V, Riley Lee, Andrew MacGregor And Honorary Aussie Furuya-sensei."

Miscellany

From John Holmes:

I was going through some old CDs the other day and found this little gem.

Artist: Berlin

Album: Count Three and Play

Track: You Don't Know

Why was this a gem? Well, one of the main contributions to the track was a Shakuhachi. played by Yoshikawa Masakazu.

Does anyone else have any Shak spottings in unusual places?

Interesting websites:

<http://www.mustrad.org.uk/articles/japan.htm>

[Robert A Jonas's Empty Bell site:](http://www.emptybell.org/ishaku.html)

<http://www.emptybell.org/ishaku.html>

International Shakuhachi Society

has an extensive section on the titles of Honkyoku pieces, lineage and programme notes:

<http://www.komuso.com/>

[Monty Levenson's Web Site](http://www.montylevenson.com/)

<http://www.shakuhachi.com>

Watch this space: www.rileylee.net
Rumoured to be updated sometime.



Join the

..... **AUSTRALIAN SHAKUHACHI SOCIETY (ASS)**

Attention existing members – Please renew your membership and support ASS!

Other Shakuhachi enthusiasts – You are cordially invited to join ASS

ASS promotes the shakuhachi and its music by:

- ◆ organising **activities** for people to practice or perform together, and share experiences relating to the shakuhachi
- ◆ publishing a **newsletter** four times a year to: publicise upcoming events, provide a forum for articles on shakuhachi, listing resources, reviewing shakuhachi CDs and offering flutes for sale, etc
- ◆ coordinating the **Australian Shakuhachi Festival** to celebrate the art of shakuhachi, workshops and performances are offered.

Please join ASS and help promote shakuhachi music.

Fill out the membership form below, enclose your payment and return to: **The Secretary, Australian Shakuhachi Society, PO Box 63, WOODFORD, NSW, 2778**

Yes, I would like to join the Australian Shakuhachi Society

Yes, I would like to renew my membership.

Enclosed is \$25.00, being dues for one year (Jul 2003 – Jun 2004)

Enclosed is \$50.00, being dues for two years (Jul 2004 – Jun 2005)

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