

AUSTRALIAN SHAKUHACHI SOCIETY



GOSHU SHAKUHACHI KAI 豪州尺八会

Nr. 20 March 2005

ASS P.O Box 63 Woodford NSW 2770



To receive *shakuhachi* tuition and to experience the *shakuhachi* and *taiko* traditions in their cultural homeland– Japan

Bronwyn Kirkpatrick

*The dreamy sound of Bokushitsu's shakuhachi
Awakened me from deep sleep one moonlit night
A wonderful autumn night, fresh and bright;
Over the echo of music and drums from a distant village
The single clear tone of a shakuhachi brings a flood of tears –
Startling me from a deep, melancholy dream.*

*From Ikkyu, Zen Master. Wild Ways: Zen Poems of Ikkyu
Translated by John Stevens. Publisher Shambala, 1995*



Greetings!

Due to several reasons the December 2004 issue of ASS NL was not posted. Bronwyn Kirkpatrick has sent in an article of her time in Japan which is very interesting reading.

Patricia Lee has forwarded a painting by Wendy Mercer of the water feature garden at the rear of Checkers from the last ASF. There is also the concluding section of Riley Lee's "The Shakuhachi in Australia".

I hope that you will enjoy this newsletter. Now that it is going to be on the internet it will be a colour edition so those of you who care to print it in colour can do so.

Bronwyn Kirkpatrick has a shakuhachi for sale:

I have a 1.6 flute for sale. It is a **Gyokusui** and I am selling it for around **\$2000**. Interested persons should contact Riley as I am going back to Japan very soon!

I studied the *shakuhachi* for ten weeks in a small town called Chichibu, 1½ hours north-west of Tokyo. My programme was intense, 4-5 lessons a week, six hours of practice a day and the most rewarding experience of my life, the full benefits of which will slowly but surely become apparent over the ensuing months and years!

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my teacher in Australia Riley Lee, for starting me on the path and for your continuing support and guidance and thank you to my teacher Kakizakai Kaoru and his family in Japan. I was constantly moved by your kindness, warmth and generosity.

Highlights and interesting people

- Experiencing the expert tuition of Kakizakai Kaoru not once but four times a week!
- Receiving tuition from Yokoyama Katsuya, one of Japan's most highly regarded *shakuhachi* performers and the tutor of my two teachers - Kakizakai Kaoru in Japan and Riley Lee in Australia.
- The excitement of a recording session with two of the best *shakuhachi* players in Japan, Kakizakai Kaoru and Matama Kazushi.
- Meeting an expert maker of *shakuhachi*, Miura Ryuho and having *shakuhachi* crafted for me.
- Experiencing the spectacular Chichibu Yo-matsuri (night festival) - intangible cultural property of Japan.
- Attending an International Shakuhachi Training Centre workshop at the 2000 year old Mitsumine Shrine, deep in the Chichibu forest.
- Attending performances of *kabuki* (traditional theatre) and *bunraku* (puppet theatre) at the National Theatre, Tokyo.
- Being the non-Japanese person playing the traditional Japanese instrument amongst a group of Japanese professional musicians playing Western instruments.
- Eating the delicious food!
- Meeting the English teacher with the ticket to my future study in Japan.

Major lessons and conclusions

Before I went to Japan I was having niggling doubts about myself, as a non-Japanese person, playing a traditional Japanese instrument. How important was my cultural background in truly realising the music? I can now safely say that cultural background is irrelevant. It is what is in one's heart that matters, not where you were born. I had to experience the tradition in Japan for myself to realise this. Being validated as a *shakuhachi* player by Japanese masters of the instrument was a huge confidence booster for me.

I learnt about myself and my ability to handle more than I thought I could! I learnt that as intensive as my ten weeks were, they were not enough to deeply absorb Kakizakai's and Yokoyama's teachings and will be returning to Japan for a further twelve months of study in 2005, teaching English at the local English school to support myself. I return to Australia in February 2006 and I will begin to share what I have learnt by lecturing and performing at the Seventh Australian Shakuhachi Festival in Canberra.

I will resume my other teaching and performing activities, notably teaching *shakuhachi* at the Sydney Zen Centre and performing in NSW schools with TaikOz and Shakoto

to promote Japanese music and culture. I will also be enrolling in a Masters program for *shakuhachi* run by Dr Riley Lee at the Australian Institute of Music.

This course aims to attract international students. My vision extends to the Fifth World Shakuhachi Festival, to be hosted in Sydney in 2008 and beyond. It is wonderful to think that a simple bamboo flute with five holes can unite so many people from all over the world. Music really is a universal language!

Programme

As soon as I arrived in Japan I was swept into the stream of the International Shakuhachi Training Centre and its activities in Chichibu and Tokyo. This involved tuition with Kakizakai Kaoru, President of the International Shakuhachi Training Centre Chichibu Branch, tuition with Yokoyama Katsuya, Founder and Director of the International Shakuhachi Training Centre and a mentorship with Matama Kazushi, a colleague of Kakizakai and one of Yokoyama's chief students. My programme was intense, 4-5 lessons a week and six hours of practise a day. I was also exposed to a large number of peers on lesson days and I learnt much from observing their lessons.

The *taiko* side of my fellowship included meeting Toshio Takahashi, President of the drummer's organisation for preserving the Chichibu Yataibayashi. I witnessed the spectacular Chichibu Yo-matsuri (night festival) and attended and participated in rehearsals of the Chichibu Yataibayashi in the lead up to the night festival. My understanding of the Chichibu Yataibayashi before I went to Japan was the concert version that I have performed on *yokobue* (festival flute) with TaikOz. I was delighted to experience the original Chichibu Yataibayashi as community music, with children as young as four learning the rhythms!

I immersed myself in as much traditional Japanese culture as possible. I visited temples, shrines and gardens in Chichibu, Asakusa, Yokohama and Kamakura and attended calligraphy classes in Chichibu with Toshio Takahashi. Also attended performances of traditional Japanese music and went to performances of *kabuki* and *bunraku* at the National Theatre in Tokyo.

Main Body

My fellowship was primarily about receiving as many lessons as possible, practising as much as possible and absorbing as much of Japanese culture as possible in the ten week period that I was in Japan. I feel that I achieved this. I received tuition in the traditional solo repertoire for *shakuhachi* called *honkyoku* (original pieces) and a variety of other repertoire including works for *shakuhachi* and *koto* (Japanese zither), works for *shakuhachi* duet and trio, and contemporary works for solo *shakuhachi*.

I was also given much listening to do.

Each lesson followed a similar structure. We would begin with *ro-buki*. This involved blowing one note repeatedly with a smooth and soft beginning, fortissimo and focussed middle and a pianissimo ending that stretches to eternity. Very difficult! I was constantly reminded that each note had to satisfy God! The performance of this one note relates to a philosophical aesthetic, *jo-ha-kyu*, that is found in many Japanese art forms. These three terms translate as introduction, development and conclusion. *Jo-ha-kyu* can be used to describe the structure of an entire piece, each section, each musical phrase and each note. The concept of *jo-ha-kyu* is used to regulate the dynamic and aesthetic flow of events through time.

At the conclusion of *ro-buki*, we would move on to the *honkyoku* that I was working on at the time. I would play solo, my teacher would comment and we would play together. Each *honkyoku* had to be performed from memory and to my teacher's satisfaction before progressing to the next one. I am proud to say that I studied eight *honkyoku* in the ten weeks that I was there.



I was encouraged to go beyond the techniques, to see the techniques as just a tool for a deeper expression. I had to think deeply about what I wanted to express in each *honkyoku* and to spend all of my energy in this expression, from the heart. At the conclusion of this part of the lesson we would move on to some lighter repertoire, a duet, a trio, a piece with *koto*. This repertoire is more closely related to Western ensemble music and marks the distinction between the *shakuhachi* as a spiritual tool (*hoki*) and the *shakuhachi* as a musical instrument.

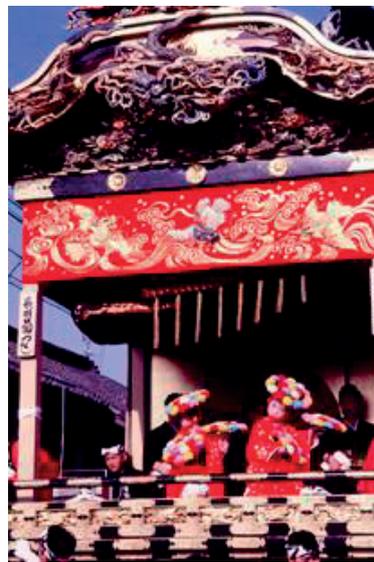
We would have tea after the lesson and this was a good opportunity to talk about the *shakuhachi* world. I was very fortunate that Kakizakai spoke good English. One big lesson that I learnt (yes, it seems obvious) is the importance of having Japanese language skills. Without Japanese language, certain things are simply closed to you. This is a skill that I am determined to develop during my twelve month stay in 2005.

Taiko

The Chichibu Yo-matsuri (night festival)

The Chichibu Yo-matsuri has a history of over three hundred years. Held on December 3rd every year, it is a traditional festival of the Chichibu Shrine to give thanks to the deities for the years' successful harvest and to pray for a successful harvest the following year. Offerings from the years' harvest are made at the Shrine to appease the Gods and huge *yatai* (floats) are pulled through the streets

in celebration. The *yatai* are among the biggest in Japan, ranking with those in the Gion Festival in Kyoto and the Takayama Festival in Hida. The floats are pulled along the streets (by hundreds of people holding long ropes) to the accompaniment of the Chichibu Yataibayashi (float music), while performances of *kabuki* are given high up on the float's platform. The musicians are housed inside the *yatai* and are not visible. The three *chudaiko* (medium sized drum) players beat set patterns in various combinations of solos, duos and trios continuously, in an astounding feat



of physical and mental endurance. Also housed inside the *yatai* are members of the *hayashi* ensemble which give respite to the three *chudaiko* players as the float is raised, balanced on wooden poles and turned, so as to be manoeuvred through the narrow streets of Chichibu. Making up the *hayashi* ensemble are the festival flute *yokobue*, the bell-like *atarigane* and the high

pitched drum *shimedaiko* (rope-tied drum). On the evening of December 3rd, six of these floats illuminated with numerous paper lanterns (*chochin*) and other lanterns with a special wooden frame (*bonbori*) set out for the festival site at Ohanabatake in Chichibu City.

On the way to this festival site the floats (which weigh more than ten tonnes) are pulled at a dash up the steep slope known as Dango-zaka, motivated by the incessant pounding of the drums. This movement is the climax of the festival and is marked by large-scale fireworks displays. Everyone must work together, with equal commitment to pull the floats. Lack of commitment can spell death just as lack of commitment in the fields can spell death.



Thousands of people come from all over Japan to witness this spectacular event. The *taiko* groups rehearse the Chichibu Yataibayashi all year. They are not professional musicians, just members of the Chichibu community. The *kabuki* actors are also local community members. Local children dressed in *kimono* perform traditional dances called *hikiodori* on the floats during the day and the streets are filled with local stall-holders selling food and traditional arts and crafts. You get a sense that the whole

community is involved in this annual festival to honour the deities of the Chichibu Shrine.

Conclusions

Before I went to Japan I had two doubts. The first, my ability as a non-Japanese person to really play traditional Japanese music, especially the *honkyoku*. The second, my ability as a woman to really play the *shakuhachi* (the



shakuhachi is traditionally played by men). I came away from Japan feeling confident that both are possible if I am passionate enough and if I work hard enough! I think that I already knew these things but going to Japan was essential confirmation for me. In the end, we are all human beings trying to realise this music (and in that process ourselves), no matter what our cultural background or gender. We all have to begin at the beginning, trying to make that first sound. We all have to practise the techniques for hours a day, until those techniques finally become our liberators and our tools for a deeper expression and we bring our own experiences to the instrument and we express them through the bamboo in our own unique way. The source of this expression is the heart and which has the ability to cut through all barriers.

To truly realise this music, you have to own it. To own it you have to make your own song and in making your own song, your soul and the soul of the bamboo become one. When this happens, you go beyond the duality of right and wrong and enter into the original spirit of the *honkyoku* as Zen practice.

In the last twenty years, there has been an increasing interest from the West in the *shakuhachi*, as more people become exposed to and captivated by its soulful, meditative and beautiful sound. It is an ironic twist that many Japanese people are being reintroduced to their musical heritage through the sounds of a westerner playing the *shakuhachi*. In the ten week period that I was studying the *shakuhachi* in Japan, there was a student from Majorca, two students from Australia and a group of ten Canadians also studying the *shakuhachi*! The *shakuhachi* and its tradition is now world music which, in the words of my teacher Riley Lee, belongs no more exclusively to Japan than Mozart's music belongs exclusively to Austria.

When I perform, the most frequently asked question is "why did you start playing the *shakuhachi*?" I always answer "the sound". A western meditation teacher and psychotherapist once said to me that the sound of the *shakuhachi* has the ability to cut right through to the core of the personality. In Yokoyama's words, the sound of the *shakuhachi* is honest, beautiful and profound. When Mahatma Gandhi first heard the sound of the *shakuhachi*, he supposedly wept and said he had finally heard the voice of the dead. I believe that it can be a window to the soul.

"In this age we face problems which are both political and economic in nature. To free ourselves from such problems I think the most important thing is the ability to understand each other deeply through cultural exchange." Takemitsu Toru

The *shakuhachi* has become relatively well known in Australia over the past twenty years, largely due to the efforts of *shakuhachi* Dai Shihan Dr. Riley Lee. With increased exposure to high-level performances and teaching of Japanese music in Australia and further exploration into cross-cultural collaborations, we will see a strengthening of cultural exchange and intercultural understanding. I am committed to being a part of this exchange and what better way than to start in 2006, the Year of Exchange (YOE) between Australia and Japan



The girls from R to L are Anne Norman, Veronique Piron, myself and of course Yokoyama Sensei in the middle.



The final instalment of Dr Riley Lee's article on the Shakuhachi in Australia

Other shakuhachi practitioners in Australia

Though Patricia and my efforts have been essential in establishing the shakuhachi tradition in Australia, there have always been others actively promoting the shakuhachi and its related arts and that number is growing. Mention has already been made of some of the persons teaching the instrument. At least three other Australian shakuhachi players, Anne Norman, Andrew MacGregor, and David Jobst have made and released commercial recordings of their own. David Brown, Stuart Ransom, Anne Norman and Andrew MacGregor all perform regularly, both in schools' concerts and public performances, appear in the media, perform 'multiculturally' together with musicians from other cultures, that is, engage generally in all of the activities that I have mentioned above.

Andrew is particularly dedicated to his shakuhachi activities. He has, in recent years, invited other shakuhachi and koto performers from Japan to perform with him, in some cases on national tours. He has produced a number of publications, including a beginner's manual for shakuhachi and a shakuhachi 'dictionary', featuring Japanese/English translations of shakuhachi jargon.

Special note should be made of David Brown. David was the first shakuhachi maker in Australia, at least to my knowledge. He was making shakuhachi before my arrival in 1986, doing some teaching and performing. He continues to sell his instruments around the world. The presence of music instrument makers might be considered an indication of the viability of any musical tradition. Performers of any type of music need only a listening audience to survive; instrument makers need more than just an audience. They need participants, people who play the music in addition to listening to it. When music traditions begin to die out, the instrument makers are the first to go. That David continues to make shakuhachi in Australia is indication of the healthy state of its shakuhachi tradition.

It should be noted that though David's shakuhachi are the best that are made in Australia, he is by no means the only maker. For example, Stuart Ransom, mentioned above, also makes flutes, but a less expensive model than David's. Stuart's shakuhachi do not play as well as David's but they are a fraction of the cost, and fill the need for inexpensive instruments.

As of 2002, David's flutes, which are made of wood, cost \$500-\$700, while Stuart's flutes, made of Australian bamboo cost \$85. It should be noted that David's flutes also feel a need for an moderately priced instrument, as shakuhachi flutes made in Japan in the traditional manner cost between \$2000 and \$20,000.

Anne Norman has the distinction of being the only professional shakuhachi player in Australia who is not a

student or former student of mine. It is hoped that this will not always be the case. The shakuhachi tradition is much more extensive and diverse than one person can transmit, even one who, like myself, represents several lineages. The more variety and styles of shakuhachi music there are in Australia, the better for both the listening public and the shakuhachi tradition.

David Jobst is a special case. His primary economic activity is busking. Besides donations, he sells a self-produced CD when he busks. Because of the nature of his ever-changing venues and audiences, David is potentially introducing the shakuhachi and its music to yet another entirely new group of people. This audience differs from those that might hear me or any of the other performers in more usual venues.

Other activities

Finally, references should be made to two other activities that enhance the awareness of the shakuhachi in Australia, one within the shakuhachi community and one outside it. Since koto player Satsuki Odamura first came to Australia in 1988 at our invitation, numerous shakuhachi, koto and taiko performers have been invited to Australia by Patricia and me, by my students (notably Andrew MacGregor), and by groups associated with us, such as TaikOz and the Australian Shakuhachi Society. These guest performers concertise, teach, and give interviews while here. Their visits tend to be special events, generating more activity and more publicity than usual. Consequently, their impact on Australian culture is disproportionately great.

The second type of activity that contributes to the shakuhachi tradition here centres around the universities and music institutions in Australia. The publication of this article is one such opportunity. I have also had numerous opportunities, as an advocate of the shakuhachi, to guest lecture, perform and give other presentations at Melbourne University, Sydney University, Adelaide University, Macquarie University, Western Sydney University, Queensland University, Monash University, NSW Conservatorium of Music and Queensland Conservatorium of Music. These institutions all contribute to the nurturing of the shakuhachi tradition in Australia, through the activities of their Asian Studies departments, Japanese Language and Culture departments, and their Music departments.

Conclusion

In conclusion, though the shakuhachi was almost unknown in Australia less than twenty years ago, it is now an integral part of the Australian musical culture. A new tradition of shakuhachi has been established in Australia, and appears to have reached that critical size from which it will continue to perpetuate itself. It has all of the elements of an established music tradition, which include professional performers, composers for the instrument, teachers,

performers, composers for the instrument teachers, beginner and advanced students, amateur practitioners, instrument makers, a national society, and a large, loyal and diverse audience.

The growth of awareness and popularity of the shakuhachi in Australia and the development of my own career as a professional shakuhachi musician here in Australia are, of course closely connected. Both phenomena have been facilitated by my not being Japanese. In one sense, the crossing of cultural boundaries, the process of becoming multicultural was partly accomplished during my time as a foreigner studying in Japan.

In addition, I believe that the rapidity at which the shakuhachi has entered the consciousness of Australia's general public reflects Australia's strength as a multicultural society. It is also one example of the many advantages of being a nation with a relatively small population. The swift rise in popularity and penetration into the national consciousness experienced by the shakuhachi in Australia could not, in my opinion, have occurred in, for example, the USA.

The shakuhachi tradition in Australia today includes a number of 'second generation' teacher/performers and 'third generation' practitioners. It is now very much a part of Australian culture, while at the same time it continues to retain its distinctive East Asian flavour. The shakuhachi phenomenon in Australia at the beginning of the twenty-first century is a multicultural one.

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 ryūha 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.

It is interesting that I have not had a great deal to do with the annual festival and other events produced by Carnivale, an organization devoted to multiculturalism in Australia. Perhaps the main reason for this is because of their predisposition towards non-professional musicians, which I am not. Another reason however, for this may be due to the perception, though I am half Chinese, that I belong to Australia's dominant 'Anglo' culture, for which some within Carnivale have no time.

This recording project may become reality in the near future. Tall Poppies has expressed interest in this. Several years ago, koto player Satsuki Odamura's CD Burning House, was one such recording, which received an award for best recording for new Australian music.

The second forty minutes of the work is danced to a pre-recorded symphonic work by Giya Kancheli, called Mourned by the Wind

I was the first non-visual artist, i.e., musician, to receive a residency at the Bundanon Estate, and the only one at the time to have been given two residencies.

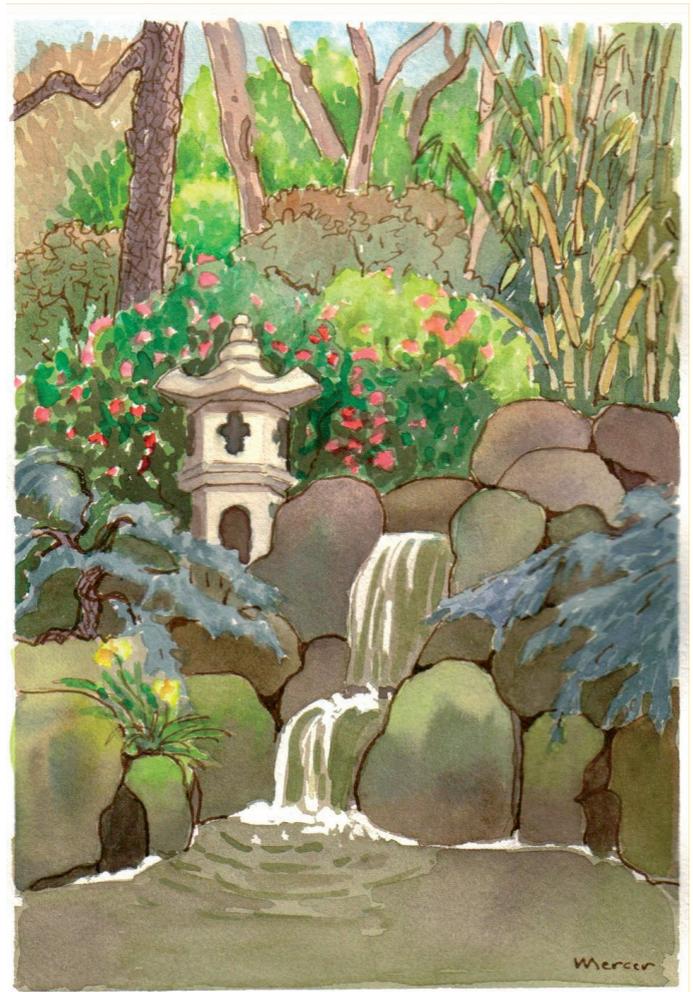
2002 Hogaku Journal, vol 189 p44.

2002 www.musicaviva.com.au

As of November 2002, this name was to change to Golden Buddha.

Email: riley@rileylee.net

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In the absence of a photo of the original, I have painted another from memory (using a little artist's licence). Looking forward to meeting you in Canberra next February.
Wendy

AUSTRALIAN SHAKUHACHI FESTIVAL**2006****MARK YOUR CALENDARS!!!! Book your travel!!!****Bring summer swimwear - it will be hot!!********NEXT AUSTRALIAN SHAKUHACHI FESTIVAL********WHERE: *****CANBERRA*********WHEN: *****FEBRUARY 2006*********Friday 10th FEB - Tuesday 14 FEB****VENUE: UNIVERSITY HOUSE
AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY****PUBLIC CONCERT VENUE: GREAT HALL
University House. Seats 250 has wonderful acoustics.****Riley has played there on a number of occasions.
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fatrain@bigpond.com****Newsletter Editor – Graham Ranft
ranftg@webone.com.au**