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Dear All,

I hope that you are well wherever you may be!

Currently in Japan it is finally cooling down after a very long, hot, humid summer. That being said, it is still much warmer than expected for this time of year in Japan.

Thank you very much for those that have submitted articles for this newsletter it is much appreciated. It's great to hear about what members have been up to around the world!

Also, in regards to submissions, please don't be shy! Even if it's just to let us know that you have started playing, bought a new flute, taken part in a workshop, gotten together with friends to play, or seen a performance — we would love to hear about it. All of these exciting experiences and moments, no matter how small they may seem, sometimes end up being our nicest memories.

I look forward to everyone's future submissions!

Kind regards,

**Nicholas Hall**

December 2024

Photo: Don Ricardo

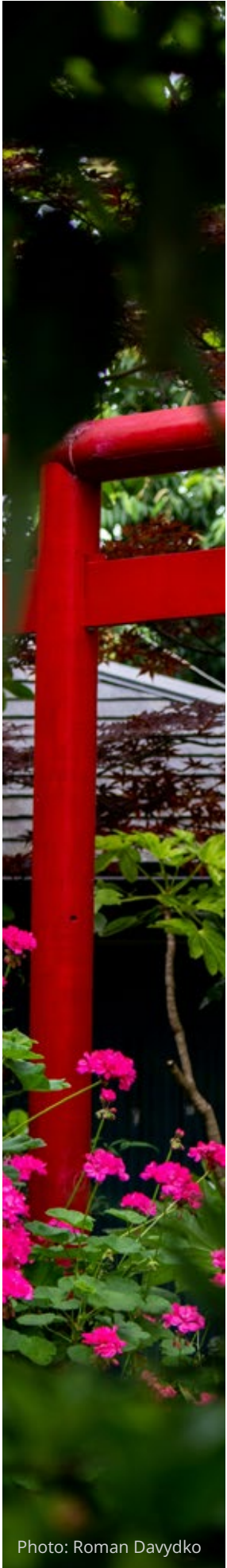


Photo: Roman Davydko

Dear Shakuhachi Friends,

I have a new notation pack out, called *Pneuma*!

*Pneuma* is an ancient Greek word for “breath”, and in a religious context for “spirit” or “soul”.

These pieces, like my other two notation packs (Tsuki and Aki) are designed for beginner/intermediate shakuhachi players. There are ten pieces in the pack and they are all melodic and meditative in nature.

I have included one of the pieces here for you to enjoy playing.

This piece is called *Twilight* and it was commissioned by the European Shakuhachi Society, for their Ignition Commission series.

The melody for *Twilight* emerged from an improvisation and gradually evolved into a full piece.

Most of my pieces are realised in this way. I used the D natural minor scale, which suits the shakuhachi very well and adds a western feel to the melody. I called the piece *Twilight* because that’s my favourite time to play the shakuhachi!

You can find more of my compositions on my [website: bronwynkirkpatrick.com](http://www.bronwynkirkpatrick.com) and a video of me playing *Twilight* below.

Enjoy! •

**Bronwyn Kirkpatrick**



Click image to go to Bronwyn’s video on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

9  
10  
8  
7  
6  
5  
4  
3  
2  
1

Twilight +

~ Composed by Bronwyn Kirkpatrick © 2024 ~

Handwritten musical notation on a staff, numbered 10 to 17. The notation includes various symbols such as 'ト', 'フ', 'シ', 'D', and '甲', along with rhythmic markings like double lines and dots. The notes are arranged in a sequence that appears to be a piece of music.

(twilight)

## Calling all shakuhachi makers!

I have the trunk of a standard cherry tree which would make two or three beautiful shakuhachi. It is almost exactly 1.8 m long and has a reasonably consistent diameter of 60-70 mm, including the bark. It is more or less dead straight.

It has been seasoning in my shed for 2-3 years.

The tree was a Japanese ornamental cherry grafted onto a Tibetan cherry rootstock and trunk. It grew for about 12 years but unfortunately it then failed to thrive.

If anyone is interested in turning it into one or more shakuhachi, please get in touch to make a deal – arrangements for getting it to you.

Please send me an email at [rupert.summerson@bigpond.com](mailto:rupert.summerson@bigpond.com) •

**Rupert Summerson**



Photo: Phil Hauser

Riley Lee

## ***“What makes a good shakuhachi for you?”***

The short answer: It depends.

‘Good’ for me might not be ‘good’ for others. Also, the reasons for choosing an instrument for myself are not necessarily the same ones I’d use in choosing an instrument for someone else.

Even knowing that I’m talking about a shakuhachi for ‘me’, it still depends on how one defines ‘good’.

I am reminded of something that one of the most famous makers of the 20th century, Kōno Gyokusui, said to me. It was in the 1970s or so. We were walking through his small, but immaculate garden, from his workshop to his house in a then sleepy suburb of Osaka.

Gyokusui suddenly stopped and looked up at me. “You know Riley, I still don’t know how to make a good flute.” I was speechless. Here was someone considered one of the best makers around, and who had been, by that time, making shakuhachi for at least 50+ years!

“Yes,” he continued, shaking his head, “All of my good shakuhachi are just flukes”.

Ah, I think I knew what he meant. Gyokusui’s definition of a ‘good flute’ differed from my definition. Back then, I believed that every flute that came out of his workshop was ‘good’.

What Gyokusui was calling ‘good’ were his flutes that I’d call ‘exceptionally brilliant.’ I think that Gyokusui was saying that his best flutes just happened. They were lucky accidents.

Nowadays, in my opinion, almost all of my personal shakuhachi are one of those flukes, instruments that the maker didn’t consciously or deliberately make and certainly couldn’t reproduce at will. They just happened, occasional happy ‘strokes of good luck’. The shakuhachi maker was lucky in making them, and I have been quite lucky to have acquired them.

## ***So, what makes a good flute for me?***

The most important thing with a shakuhachi is its pitch or tuning, on all levels. The flute must be accurately pitched internally or relative to itself. If the player is going to use the flute in lessons or when playing with other instruments, it also has to be fairly accurately pitched externally, too.

By the way, how well a shakuhachi can play in both *otsu* and *kan*, but especially in *otsu*, is related in part to how in tune it is with itself. That means that the *otsu* and *kan* octaves on a shakuhachi have to be in tune with each other.

Photo: Riccardo Chiarini



Photo: JP Sheard

Ease of playing, tone, response and 'feeling' all has to do with the flute being in tune or in harmony with itself. Here we are talking about the harmonics or partials or overtones of each fingering position, not just the fundamental pitch.

In other words, each note is made up of a number of pitches; we often just hear the main or loudest pitch and ignore the rest. But we can feel them. It's usually the harmonics that create the 'tone colour' or 'timbre'. They are what make a note sound 'like an oboe' or 'soft' or 'round'.

One could say that it's really all about pitch or tuning. Good flutes are good, and extraordinarily wonderful flutes are wonderful because they are in harmony with themselves. That's goes for people, too!

I've come across shakuhachi more than once, that the owner could play beautifully, with all the sound qualities that I liked, yet I couldn't make it play at all, no matter how hard I tried.

The flute wasn't bad; I just didn't know where the sweet spot was. The flute was in harmony with itself, but only if it was played a certain way. It was still a good flute in spite of my not being able to find that certain way.

Certain players can bring out the best in certain shakuhachi. The same flutes don't play well, are not in harmony with themselves, when someone else tries to play them. The ease of playing shakuhachi is, like everything else, very subjective.

### ***Aesthetics:***

If we're talking about visual aesthetics, then I've never been fussy about how a shakuhachi looks. Sure, the more attractive the bamboo, the more joy I get just by looking at it. But I can't see my instrument while I'm playing it.

I have seen exceptions where the looks of the flutes were actually off-putting, but these really ugly bamboo flutes played so badly that the visual aesthetics weren't the main issue.

### ***Weight:***

As I whiz through my 8th decade on earth, weight has become something I notice. That wasn't the case in the past. Nowadays, the lighter the instrument, the longer and more often I can play it.

On the other hand, I have a couple of heavy flutes that are worth dealing with their weight. I have to take care, space my practice time wisely, so that I don't injure myself with RSI. But the flutes are so good that I don't mind.





Photo: Riccardo Chiarini

My longest shakuhachi is an example of this. It is a 3.6, one octave below a 1.8 (D below middle C). It is heavy and uncomfortable to play. When I first acquired it, it took 18 months of daily practice before I was able to perform on it in public. I had to strengthen my muscles, relax my fingers, etc. I've not played it for a while now, and know that I will have to start almost all over again. It's worth the effort every time.

### **Comfort:**

This usually becomes an issue only with people with very small hands, e.g. children, or when using longer flutes. The lighter the flute, usually the more comfortable it is to hold for long periods of time.

But generally comfort has to do with hole placement. When buying a long flute from a maker, you can usually request where the holes are placed. On my long, pre-owned 2.7 (G), I had a maker move one hole to suit my hands better.

### **Blowing Edge Positioning:**

I'm not that knowledgeable about this. Perhaps, where the blowing edge is and its angle in relation to the bamboo, should affect how easily or difficult it is to get the *meri* or *kari* changes.

But it can't be that difficult to get it right; almost every shakuhachi I've played, even the barely playable ones seems to have it right. But I really don't know.

### **Feeling:**

When I pick up a flute for the first time, whether with the thought of getting it for myself (rare these days) or to test it for someone else, I look, or rather listen for a number of things.

Ultimately it does come down to the 'feeling' that the instrument gives me. One should always choose an instrument that gives one a good feeling.

I don't think anyone needs to know more than this when picking a shakuhachi.

If you can play shakuhachi well enough to be able to choose your own instrument, then you probably intuitively know what I've been talking about. If you can't play that well yet, then you shouldn't be choosing your own instrument.

**“What makes you prefer the shakuhachi that you use over others (at this current time)?”**

This one is easy. I pick the shakuhachi I’m using right now by the length or pitch that best suits the music I’m playing right now.

Even with *honkyoku*, where the length of the shakuhachi is really up to the player, I tend to have a favourite length for each piece.

I used to have a number of redundant shakuhachi, that is, flutes that were the same pitch/length. Over time, I’ve relinquished all but one of these older, redundant flutes. It’s a 2.1 (B). I never use it, mainly because it’s a quirky, almost *ji-nashi* flute, and as such isn’t as versatile as my newer 2.1. One could say that I’ve become lazy, as I suppose I could make it work with everything if I played it enough. But also, it’s in one piece, so I can’t travel with it easily. I haven’t let it go because of sentimental reasons.

I also have two 1.8 shakuhachi. I’ve owned one for almost three decades and the other for only 10 years or so. They are both very special instruments. I tend to play each 50% of the time. Why I do this, and what makes them so special is a story for another time.

Finally, people often ask me how much they should spend on a shakuhachi. Though it can depend on how much you know about makers, the sources — buyer beware! — I typically answer that you should spend as much on your shakuhachi as you can afford at the time.

A higher price doesn’t always mean a better flute, but it usually does, especially if you have the necessary knowledge. The better the flute, the better you’ll sound. The more you invest, both in time and in money, the better a shakuhachi player you’ll become.

If all you can afford is \$50/\$100, there are decent shakuhachi around for that price. Buy one! You’ll certainly become a better shakuhachi player, and faster too, than if you buy nothing. •

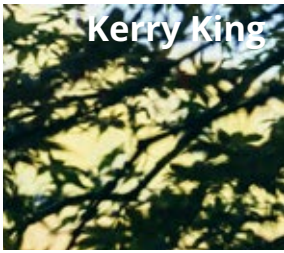
**Riley Lee**



Photo: JP Sheard



Photo: Yamashiro Hiroko



Kerry King



Photo: Tsuyoshi Kozu

I have attended several workshops this year. Rather than review just the one I helped organise, I have decided to share my experience of them all.

## 1. Lindsay's Monthly Workshops [Online]

I haven't attended all of these but many. They have been well worthwhile for working on practice techniques and particular areas of difficulty, e.g. breath/volume control, getting tone promptly and clearly, and transition between notes, *meri* to *kari*.

Lindsay invites questions, thoughts and discussion so we learn from one another and share the challenges. I find this valuable to lift me out of the (narcissistic) belief that I'm the only one who has them!

## 2. ESS Online Workshops on the Voice

I think there were five in this series but one was cancelled. They were led from Tokyo by Japanese musicians so with only one hour time difference it was easy to attend. They were all good.

Furuya sensei led one which was good but I'd hoped he would teach me how to sing the *honkyoku* and he didn't. The *shomyo*, Buddhist Sutra Chanting, sung acapella as performance and the *minyō*, or folk-song were interesting and entertaining. Although quite different from one another I could identify a shared aesthetic.

The real treat from these workshops was on the Voice in *sankyoku*. I wish I'd done this workshop before hearing Kakizakai sensei performing with koto and shamisen in Chichibu last year. I'd have had a better understanding of the music.

The workshop was presented by Shino Arisawa, a musicologist and academic, and Miyama McQueen-Tokita, a Japanese-Australian performer.

In the first section we heard the history and evolution of the music. Male singers used to deliberately damage their vocal cords to get the vocal timbre they wanted. This seems to me to be a valuable insight into the importance of tone colour in traditional Japanese music and especially for the shakuhachi.

Miyama McQueen-Tokita, koto player and singer really excited me. She played some traditional *sankyoku* and explained techniques for both playing and singing. She also performed a contemporary piece composed by an Australian and showed a video of a performance she gave with a Canadian String Orchestra where she sang in a traditional style but in English. It was wonderful.

I am very fond of Australian contemporary classical music. We have some excellent composers and performers. I think it expresses who and

where we are. The blend of cultures happening in music now is exciting. Miyama is part of this, I wish I could hear her live and more often.

### 3. *Lindsay's Sydney Workshop [In-person]*

Lindsay came to Sydney to perform another contemporary Australian composition with The Song Company [*"Vespers for Mother Earth"*] and gave a workshop while he was here. This included the *sankyoku* piece, "*Rokudan*".

This workshop built on the ESS workshop and explained how the ornamentation and phrasing are necessary to give the music meaning.

Interestingly in preparing this review I found that "*Rokudan*" [*Akikaze no Kyoku*] was also one of the pieces discussed in the ESS *sankyoku* workshop and, looking at the program, one of the pieces Kakizakai sensei played in the Chichibu concert last year.

So I have gone into YouTube and listened to it played and sung on koto and now it is familiar and lovely. How enriching!

### 4. *The Sydney Workshop with Riley Lee and Bronwyn Kirkpatrick [In-person]*

At the ASS AGM last year I complained that I didn't have an opportunity for a workshop with Riley. I was aware that he was teaching in the U.S. and Europe but not here and I only live up the hill.

Riley responded that he would do a workshop but would not organise it. So I set about finding a venue and a suitable date and, with Lindsay's support and the co-operation of Riley and Bronwyn, we had a successful and enjoyable day.

The Library at Green Square, Zetland is centrally located, next to the railway station and has a cafe on site. The building is a Design Award winner - two glass structures sit on a paved square with a glass circle on the pavement between them. At street level they are separate but below ground they are linked by a large, elegant space that is the library with a circular glass ceiling.

The Music Room in the Tower was the perfect venue. It is owned by Sydney City Council who encourage its use by community groups.

I was a little worried about numbers. After so long without live events it is difficult to create a community. Nevertheless there were eight registrations and although we missed a couple of familiar faces it was very nice to meet new ones.

The teaching, of course was excellent. The pieces varied and challenging but not painfully so. Riley had those of us who could not read staff notation doing so within the hour.

Photo: Tsuyoshi Kozu



I think it is always valuable to be exposed to different teachers and learn from their insights and experience. With the shakuhachi we have access to the best teachers and performers from the beginning which is not the case with most Western instruments. Its an advantage we should make use of.

It was also great to play together. For some of us a live workshop like this is the only opportunity we have to 'perform'. I think everyone enjoyed the day and left feeling stimulated and motivated as I did. The plan is to run another workshop in about 6 months.

That's it! I am grateful for these workshops. I thought my shakuhachi diary this year would be limited to practice and lessons.

Instead I have learnt to understand and appreciate a music that was foreign and difficult and encountered an exciting performer.

I have gained a deeper understanding of the traditional aesthetic of the shakuhachi and with Riley and Bronwyn, learnt how the shakuhachi can move beyond that tradition as a World instrument playing music from the 12th to the 21st century. •

## Kerry King

▼ Sydney workshop participants

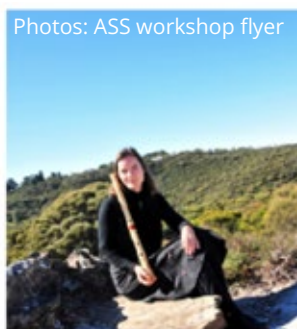


Photo: Kerry King

▼ Green Square, Zetland, Sydney



Photo: Kerry King



Photos: ASS workshop flyer



Photo: Tsuyoshi Kozu



Photo: Nguyen Tp Hai

Lindsay Dugan

The Japanese concept of *ma* is often defined as 'silence', 'negative space', or 'the space between', yet its significance transcends mere pauses or voids.

In the realm of *honkyoku*, *ma* represents a dynamic and expressive relationship between sound and silence, embodying balance, tension, and anticipation.

My research delves deeply into this concept, uncovering its nuanced presence across multiple levels of *honkyoku* structure through a groundbreaking methodological approach.

In the recent *Ma of Sound and Silence* workshops (which ran from September to November 2024), I was able to share some results of this research in ways that are relevant to performance and interpretation.

At the heart of my work lies the concept of *intra-action*, a term coined by physicist and feminist theorist Karen Barad.

Intra-action moves beyond the conventional idea of interaction, which assumes pre-existing entities acting upon one another. Instead, intra-action emphasises that entities, such as sound and silence in music, emerge and define themselves through their relationship.

This perspective has proven transformative for understanding *ma* in *honkyoku*, where sound and silence co-create the essence of the music rather than existing as separate, causal elements.

The concept of intra-action helped me to venture beyond linear, cause-and-effect reasoning to a more relational, holistic perspective that considers the entanglement of sound and silence events. Considering musical expression as it unfolds in real time reveals new dimensions of perception, where sound and silence can mutually reshape our understanding of presence. This dynamic interplay aligns seamlessly with the experience of being fully immersed in the moment.

Through analysis, I was able to discern musical characteristics of *ma* at several structural levels in *honkyoku*.

The high resolution of my analysis method for assessing duration of sound and silence events enabled the detection of patterns in their interplay (or rather, their intra-play) that were previously inaccessible.



Photo: Kezia





Photo: Kezia

My findings illuminate how *ma* is not only a temporal or spatial phenomenon but also a vital expressive force that has shaped the aesthetic sense of generations of players.

The innovation of using intra-action as a lens for analysing *ma* has been pivotal in my research. Traditionally, musical analysis often treats sound and silence as separate entities with a causal relationship—for example, silence “follows” sound, serves as a “pause” between sounds, or “gives meaning” to sounds. While these perspectives have merit, they can overlook the deeper inter-dependence of these elements. In contrast, viewing these elements through the framework of intra-action has allowed for a more holistic understanding.

In *honkyoku*, sound and silence are inseparable, mutually defining one another to create the ebb and flow of the music.

Two analogies may help to illustrate this dynamic relationship. Imagine sound and silence as partners in a dance. Each step and movement is shaped by the other, and the rhythm and flow of the dance emerge from their combined movement. Similarly, breathing requires both inhalation and exhalation, neither of which holds meaning in isolation; it is their intra-play that sustains life.

In *honkyoku*, much like in these analogies, the intra-play of sound and silence sustains the music’s vitality and expressiveness, revealing an entangled dynamic that is deeply felt but often intangible. Neither entity takes precedence; their intra-action gives rise to an essential timing that integrates all elements.

While my primary focus has been Yokoyama’s lineage, the methods I developed also allow for the exploration of other aspects of *honkyoku* and related traditions. For example, I have begun analysing patterns in inhalations, gestures, rhythms (including *tatami-komi* rhythm), and interpretative styles in other lineages, including Kinko. This expansion underscores the universal applicability of intra-action as a tool for understanding *honkyoku*, offering insights into how *ma* and its underlying dynamics manifest across different traditions.

My thesis and melograms of the recordings I analysed and created in relation to this research can be accessed at the following link:

[www.lindsaydugan.com/phd](http://www.lindsaydugan.com/phd) •

**Lindsay Dugan**

## PURPOSE

The purpose of the Society is to promote the shakuhachi and its music, and to assist others who are doing the same, by:

- organising workshops and other activities for people to practice or perform together, and share experiences related to the shakuhachi
- publishing a newsletter to publicise upcoming events, provide a forum for articles on the shakuhachi, list resources, review shakuhachi CDs, and offer flutes and other shakuhachi related items for sale
- coordinating the Australian Shakuhachi Festival, which includes guest teachers and performers from Japan and elsewhere.

If you want to get in contact, you can email us at:  
[info@shakuhachi.org.au](mailto:info@shakuhachi.org.au)

## MEMBERSHIP

Membership to the Australian Shakuhachi Society costs \$30 per year.

Subscription funds are used to organise the Australian Shakuhachi Festival and other shakuhachi related activities.

*Your membership is valued!*

Joining the Society also offers benefits, such as:

- discounts to the Australian Shakuhachi Festival
- discounts to workshops.

To join, please visit:

[www.shakuhachi.org.au/membership](http://www.shakuhachi.org.au/membership)



**AUSTRALIAN  
SHAKUHACHI  
SOCIETY**

## Bronwyn Kirkpatrick

**月 TSUKI**

Ten compositions for beginner & intermediate shakuhachi players

Composed by Bronwyn Kirkpatrick

Tsuki (Moon)  
Dusk  
Uta (Song)  
Awakening  
Drifting  
Exile  
Lament  
Yearning  
Journey  
Lullaby



© Bronwyn Kirkpatrick, 2019

**秋 AKI**

Ten compositions for beginner & intermediate shakuhachi players

Composed by Bronwyn Kirkpatrick




Aki (Autumn)  
Dreaming  
Minyo (Folk Song)  
Angels  
Dawn  
Take Bushi (Bamboo Melody)  
Saizen (Blowing Zen)  
Ether  
Suryata  
Meditation

© Bronwyn Kirkpatrick, 2021

**Pneuma**

Ten compositions for beginner & intermediate shakuhachi players

Composed by Bronwyn Kirkpatrick



Pneuma  
Gratitude  
Bamboo Heart  
Namu Amida Butsu  
Deep Peace Meditation  
Call of Bamboo  
Rainy Moon  
Spirit Cry  
Twilight  
Aria

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## Riley Lee

**BREATH OF THE EARTH**  
Songs of Hildegard  
3 Disc Set



RILEY LEE  
shakuhachi

**NOBLE GREENNESS**  
Hildegard von Bingen



RILEY LEE  
shakuhachi

**DIVINE SECRETS**  
Hildegard von Bingen



RILEY LEE  
shakuhachi

**WISDOM**  
Hildegard von Bingen



RILEY LEE  
shakuhachi

European Shakuhachi Society • Finland 2024 Summer School



Photo: ESS

2025 World Shakuhachi Festival • Texas USA



Logo design by Tim & Lucia Cassler, Big Oak Studio, calligraphy art by Reiko Yoshida