

Shakuhachi! Sibelius-museossa: raportti ja Tani Yasunorin haastattelu

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Shakuhachi! at the Sibelius Museum:

Report and an interview with Tani Yasunori

The Shakuhachi! concert, organised in conjunction with the European Shakuhachi Society's Summer School, featured a total of nine pieces, each performed by a different ensemble/performer.



Tani Yasunori at Sibelius Museum, Turku, Finland.

The Sibelius Museum, located near Turku Cathedral, was sold out on Wednesday 31 July. A concert of Shakuhachi! was about to begin, featuring pieces selected from the repertoires of various schools of shakuhachi playing. The excellent cast of performers consisted of skilled players of both shakuhachi and other traditional Japanese instruments.

Hélène Seiyu Codjo opened the concert with a beautiful rendition of *Acceptance* (2020). The piece was originally composed for the fragile-sounding long *jinashi* flute, but this time it was performed on a 2.1-sized shakuhachi. The piece reflects on letting go of mental and emotional resistance and accepting what you already have. The evocative performance soothed the audience to listen to the delicate sound of the flute

Otto Eskelinen and **Sakari Heikka** performed a shakuhachi arrangement of the Finnish folk song *Soittajapaimen*. The arrangement brought a new atmosphere to the familiar tune by interestingly combining traditional Finnish and Japanese soundscapes. The charmingly rhythmic duet about the construction of a shepherd's flute is based on interplay, with one of the shakuhachi accompanying and the other playing the melody.

Naoko Kikuchi's concert performance of Tomi Räisänen's composition *Kotona* (2022) was the only performance without shakuhachi. The piece was originally composed for string quartet, but Kikuchi presented a solo version for the traditional Japanese *koto* instrument. The work consists of three movements entitled Cradle Song, Pandemic and Return Home. In addition to the powerful *koto* playing, the performance featured Kikuchi's enchanting singing.

Kiku Day's haunting *Daiotsu-gaeshi* was soft and gentle in sound, but at times the melodies soared to soaring heights. The unusual pitch modulations are a special feature of this not so well-known *honkyoku* genre. Despite its peculiarities, the piece exudes a traditional atmosphere.

Emmanuelle Rouaud (shakuhachi) and **Henri Algadafe** (electric guitar) performed *Contraction, Expansion, Resolution ou les Rêveries Cosmologiques d'un Promeneur égaré* (*Contraction, Expansion, Resolution or the Cosmological Reflections of a Lost Walker*), a work divided into nine independent musical moments. This was the first public performance of the work. The work explores the lesser-used techniques of shakuhachi with ingenious playfulness. The combination of flute with electric guitar and electronic sounds created unexpected atmospheric reverberations and contrasting soundscapes in the auditorium.

Riley Lee's evocative *San'ya* (Three Valleys) represents traditional *honkyoku*. The piece has historically been performed largely in the context of meditation. However, Lee's version was more active than the others, and was intended to interpret the experience of the mountain valleys as they are in spring. The gentle chords of the song were a joy to listen to.

Naoko Kikuchi (*shamisen*) took to the stage for the second time but this time with **Gunnar Jinmei Linder** (shakuhachi). The duo performed *Sato no haru* (Spring in the village), a piece composed for the *shamisen* instrument by Kikuoka Kengyō. The song dates from the 1950s, and the shakuhachi was added later. The original arrangement of the song also includes vocals, and once again we were treated to Kikuchi's magnificent voice. The delightful combination of shakuhachi and *shamisen* created a particularly authentic atmosphere.

Before the final performance of the evening, the Japanese shakuhachi star **Tani Yasunori** took to the stage. He performed *Ochiba*, a song about a zen monk who piles up leaves and autumn leaves in the courtyard of a temple along a mountain path. The song's narrative follows a monk quietly raking leaves, who stops to listen to the sound of leaves burning on a campfire a little further away. The beautiful playing combines long, soft tones with a subtle vibrato.

The concert ended with a fitting performance of *Echoes of the Taiga* (2024), composed by **Marty Regan** and performed by the teachers and participants of the **European Shakuhachi Society's Summer School**. The song is inspired by the Finnish forests and the short summer in

Finland. A central element of the piece is the echo. The familiar Finnish saying "the forest answers as you call to it" is clearly present in the structure of the song. After the solo and duet performances, it was great to see the twenty or so shakuhachi players performing together. Almost all of the players we had heard before performed in this issue, as they had been teachers at the summer camp.

After the concert, Tani Yasunori was happy to answer a few questions about playing shakuhachi.

You have been playing shakuhachi since childhood. How long exactly?

TY: 46 years.

Why did you choose the shakuhachi as your instrument?

TY: My grandfather and my father were both shakuhachi players and I decided to continue the family tradition.

What has motivated you over the years to play shakuhachi?

TY: During my playing career, my motivation has been increased by performing in front of a large audience and especially on television.

What is it like to learn to play shakuhachi?

TY: Daily practice since childhood has made it a practically permanent way of life. In Japan, there are various schools of shakuhachi playing, one of which is the Ueda school that I represent. In general, the teaching method is such that the player has to go through a large repertoire of traditional pieces. As the student progresses through them, he or she is given a few different licenses by the school until becoming a master. Through these licences, the pupil can also become a representative of the school as a teacher. Certain pieces of music are then honed by the school community for the rest of the student's life. In addition, there is a huge focus on sound shaping. With shakuhachi, it is considered the responsibility of the player to play each individual note to perfection.

Could you tell us a bit about the flute you performed with at the Sibelius Museum?

TY: I've been using this flute since I was in high school. It was made by a skilled shakuhachi maker I know.

There are different types of shakuhachi - do you own several different flutes?

TY: I have at least one of about every type of shakuhachi.

Do you have a favorite piece that you enjoy playing the most?

TY: Ochiba, the very piece I played at the Sibelius Museum concert.

Shakuhachi is also played in Finland. Finally, could you say a few words of greeting to Finnish flute players?

TY: In Japan, the population and especially the number of shakuhachi players has decreased. I hope that both in Finland and in the world, the number of people playing shakuhachi will increase so that the tradition will continue.

Many thanks to the Sibelius Museum, the European Shakuhachi Society and all the performers for a wonderful concert and to Tani Yasunori for the interview.