

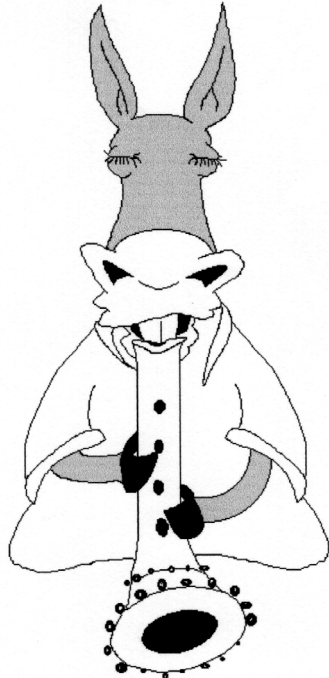
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# AUSTRALIAN SHAKUHACHI SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Nr. 10 June-July 2002

P.O. Box 63. Woodford, NSW. 2778

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This newsletter is a bit thinner this edition as I have not been able to pin down some authors to submit new articles.. This is *your* news letter so *please* keep those cards and letters, photos, web links etc etc, rolling in.... You can always reach me at: [ranftg@webone.com.au](mailto:ranftg@webone.com.au)

Graham Ranft News Editor

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## Bits and Pieces:

### News from Monty Levenson

I am writing at this time to let you know that I've recently had a significant breakthrough making jinashikan. These are natural bore chokan or long shakuhachi ranging in size from 2.2' to 2.8' made without a precision cast interior, hence "ji nashi" or no ji which is the filler used to fabricate the inside. These new instruments are made completely of bamboo and have a rustic, but rich, mellow tone color. I have, however, meticulously worked out resonances for all of the notes, so they have a strong full sound and can take all the air one can give. Jinashikan are quite difficult to produce and crafted in Japan by only a few makers. They are made from uncut pieces of madaké

and tuned to the bamboo itself rather than western standards of pitch. As a result, jinashikan are solo instruments that some feel more closely reflect the mood and spirit of shakuhachi honkyoku ("original" zen music).

I am very excited about this new direction in which my flute making is moving and am presently focusing on perfecting the design of these instruments. I hope soon to expand the range of available sizes to include 2.0' and 2.1' as well as 2.9' and 3.0'. I've had the opportunity to show my jinashikan to a number of well-known shakuhachi teachers and players, all of whom were very enthusiastic about the way they performed.

After 32 years, of making shakuhachi, I feel as if my contract is being renewed. Thanks so much for your support and encouragement over the years. It is greatly appreciated.

If you would like to learn more about jinashikan, please go to:

<http://www.shakuhachi.com/Q-Models-Jinashi.html>

For a listing of jinashi shakuhachi in stock, go to:  
<http://www.shakuhachi.com/TOC-JinashiInStock.html>

Please get back to me if you have any questions.

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Jane Suffield has moved from Wagga Wagga to Melbourne. Hope it is going well for you!

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In the night the bells of the mountain temple  
Are swung by the wind from the pines.  
From my bed of stone by the wintry lamp  
I can hear the flowering rain of Buddha.

- Wang Wen-lu (16th century)

## Finding my pitch in Central Australia.

By Fiona Dawes

As part of my nursing training I spent three weeks in Central Australia with the Aranda people, at Artijere (Ah-tich-er-ra). I took with me my plastic beginners flute which can be mistaken for a root end bamboo flute in looks. At the end of the school year books put away, the children were delighted to have a visitor and I was invited to play. I showed them the notation and explained that it is read from right to left. As I began their teacher warned that they may not have heard music like this before, it was from another country, this was solemn indeed. I proceeded to play Riley's exercise number 10 which translated is a version of 'Mary had a little lamb'. What a surprise, "Mary had a little lamb" responded one of my audience, now captivated. I continued with exercise number 11 and another piece while the teacher explained that this music was for relaxation and that they should lie down. As I looked up at the now lying audience I exclaimed "was I flat?". Nobody could say, but after asking the children if they liked the music they hesitatingly responded, politely shaking their heads, that no they did not.

I had a second opportunity at another school nearby. I had spent some time now at the clinic with children approaching me and making their own music, shyly sometimes; I would hear it as a trail as they walked away. This time I told a story of how the shakuhachi was at one time carried as a weapon and that it can only be played by men in some cultures. After playing for a little while I passed the flute around for the children to try to get a sound out of it. On that day no-one else could get a sound, their teacher included who, having some experience in making homemade instruments was keen to get information on making PVC flutes. This was made simple via the internet. I remember my surprise on finding my beginners flute locally by posting a message to an e-mail group. The previous owner had found it in Japan and generously passed it on to me. I continue to be surprised at the places the flute takes me.



*Does a Dog have Buddha nature?*

Devoted fan of one of our members..somehow found it's way onto a CD ROM of ASF pictures.....

## Haiku

Hatsu geiko  
Shi'n mi it'tai  
Robuki kana

Original English version:

The first exercise  
Focussing mind and body  
Blowing RO-BUKI

Written by Rupert Summerson  
Japanese translation and calligraphy by Maki Findlay

初  
稽  
古  
心  
身  
一  
体  
ロ  
ブ  
キ  
か  
な

The stone Buddha

stone deaf

to the cuckoo.

Issa 1813

## The Meaninglessness of Zen in Shakuhachi: Suizen and Honkyoku

According to the fundamental experience of Zen the aspect of shakuhachi (Japanese vertical 5-holed bamboo flute) in relation to Zen is meaninglessness, but the playing of Honkyoku occupies a unique position in religious world music. Sui-zen (blowing zen, or blowing meditation) is the practice of playing the shakuhachi bambooflute as a means of attaining self-realization. The monks of old Japan who practiced suizen were called Komuso, or Monks of Nothingness and Emptiness (Ko: emptiness, mu: nothingness, so: monk or priest). These monks belonged to a Rinzai Zen Buddhist sect called Fuke-shu, named after the legendary Tang Dynasty Chinese monk who first used a bamboo flute as a meditation tool. The pieces on which suizen are based are called Honkyoku, or original pieces and were basically solo, with a few exceptions. In playing honkyoku the state of mind was the most essential element, rather than musical enjoyment, therefore it wasn't music per se. Indeed, it was prohibited for Komuso to play with O-koto (horizontal harp) and Shamisen (three-stringed banjo-like instrument) in those days. The monks blew shakuhachi for their own enlightenment not for entertainment. However, since Zen Buddhism puts no accent in devotion to a deity or god, their music contains no sense of praise of faith. This is what is so unique about suizen as opposed to other religious musics. It was not a practice connected as closely to the life and death struggle as tea ceremony, martial arts, or meditation was; which may lessen its meaningfulness in relation to the Zen experience. But it was close enough to spirituality to have an impact on the religious landscape of Japan. Today, honkyoku has evolved (some say devolved) into music which is both profound and beautiful in its expression.

Very few people today actually understand or practice suizen in its true form. But honkyoku has turned out to be one of the most popular forms of music in the contemporary music scene today (in and out of Japan). There are various reasons for this. Many who have passed down the traditional shakuhachi players insisting on keeping the practice of suizen by playing only Honkyoku. Since these were mostly intellectuals isolated from the central musical scene in modern Japan where radical westernization took place, they concentrated on nurturing the spiritual side of Honkyoku. But it was only a matter of time until western musical ideas affected honkyoku as well, which ironically was important to its survival. New forms of Honkyoku began to appear which were much more dynamic and lively but still based on the original ideal of suizen. Hideo Sekino said, "When we conceive The

Art as the underlying spiritual representation of the ancient legend of the Komuso, the modern creation of Honkyoku might have been the very effort to revive the dying legend from the overwhelming westernization in modern Japan."

### Shakuhachi and Bushido

After the death of Hideyori Toyotomi in ca.1610 the Tokugawa family came under control ushering Japan into the Edo period, an unprecedented stretch of peace which lasted 250 years. This was the golden age of the Shakuhachi and other Japanese arts which enjoyed support from the government, forming the base of today's "traditional Japan". During this time, the Shakuhachi underwent a transformation from a 6-holed, thin piece of bamboo, to the 5-holed, root-ended bamboo flute that is most common today. Many samurai at that time who's masters were defeated by Tokugawa were forbidden to carry swords and were left homeless. These were the "ronin" (masterless samurai), many of whom joined the ranks of the Komuso monks for spiritual focus as well as a chance to carry a weapon again, namely, the club-like Shakuhachi. Earlier, this sect of monks (formerly known as Komoso, straw mat monks) attracted various riff-raff and beggars; but since the establishment of the Fuke-shu with its strict code of discipline (and support from the Tokugawa government), membership became exclusive to only those with samurai ranking, and the use of Shakuhachi was limited to only the Komuso. They travelled from place to place on pilgrimages to the various Komuso temples

throughout Japan, playing their Shakuhachi for alms and meditation, concealed from the outer world by a large basket-like hat (tengai) that completely covered

their faces. They were given special passes by the government which allowed them free access across any border in Japan and on boats across bodies of water. Consequently, many Komuso were used by the government as spies.

The influence of Zen on the spiritual and aesthetic landscape of Japan was profound. Zen which simply means "meditation" (from the Sanskrit 'dhyana') appealed to the intellectual, ruling class, therefore was supported and permeated just about every art form at the time. From Zen came the ideas of spiritual selflessness and concentration of the mind. In the Samurai tradition of Bushido (Warrior Way) one dedicated his entire life to the protection and well-being of his master and was trained in such a way as to merge totally with one's weapon (e.g. the sword) as well as the environment and the opponent so as to have victory over him. When many of the samurai's swords were confiscated by the Tokugawa Shogunate, the Ronin found it very easy to fit into the Komuso way since the concentration needed to

learn Shakuhachi was similar to their sword training, and, the shape of the Edo period Shakuhachi resembled a hand held weapon, and no doubt was used as one as well! In the daily life of the Komuso monks, the day included morning zazen (sitting zen), suizen, begging, and martial arts training. In the rural Aomori district of northern Tohoku, Japan,

one of the most famous schools was the Kimpu School (Nezasa-ha) which developed a unique technique of breathing called “komi-buki” or “concentrated or packed breath”, where an intentional steady, pulse-rhythm is created while blowing the Shakuhachi by contracting and relaxing the diaphragm. It is said that it came about when after the Komuso Monks finished a hard training in their martial arts, which included jujutsu (soft technique) and kenpo (sword play) they would play their shakuhachi immediately afterwards, and the pulsing sound would be from their shallow breath and fast beating hearts. A lesser known fact was shakuhachi’s connection with the Shogun’s Ninja (surveillance/assassin) force, a subject which deserves more research. One famous Ninja named Sugawara Yoshiteru who became a komuso first in Kyoto and then in Edo often dedicated his performances to the Tokugawa Daimyo. Due to his skills as a Ninja, Sugawara became something of a small daimyo himself. He was permitted to build his own temple in Niigata, which became Echigomeianji. He composed the piece Echigomeian-hachigaeshi.

Perhaps the most significant 20th century honkyoku persona was Watazumi-do So who combined a martial arts-like physical regimen complete with detailed breath exercises with Shakuhachi practice. His disciple, Yokoyama Katsuya is one of the most important professional shakuhachi players focussing on transmission of Honkyoku today.

During the Meiji Reformation, the Fuke-shu of Komuso was abolished and many secret characteristics of this group were lost. Because of this historical loss we’ll never know entirely the reality of the Komuso. However, their instrument, the Shakuhachi has survived the westernization policy of the Meiji government. It’s use as a religious instrument (hoki) is now a musical one (gakki) utilizing western musical scale as well as Japanese, and played in ensembles, a practice which was previously prohibited.

Today, in our post-modern age, shakuhachi music is appearing to those hemmed in by their material world. There is a renewed interest in a wholistic approach to playing shakuhachi where mind, body, and spirit are developed along with musical ability. People like Riley Lee in Australia and Ray Brooks in B.C. Canada give breath and honkyoku

workshops all around the world and seek to integrate the whole person with one’s environment and playing, just as the Komuso of old did. Many contemporary musicians are looking back at and discovering the beauty and enormous expression of traditional instruments, and the traditional style of playing Shakuhachi. Shakuhachi music uses many notes which do not fall within the standard western musical temperment. It makes active use of “non-musical” sounds or noise such as blowing, windy sounds, simulated animal sounds, as well as no sound, or the silence between the notes (ma), which is a very important element in performance and symbolizes emptiness, selflessness, the basis of the life motto of the Komuso “Coming from nowhere, going to nowhere like the wind”. It also expresses that all things are related in this intricate web of change we call life.

Al Takegawa

Used with permission.



南無阿彌陀佛



# Australian Shakuhachi Society

## Interim Annual Financial Report (To align the society with the accepted financial year) (1st February 2002 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2002)

### INCOME

### EXPENDITURE

|                                           |                |                                       |                |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| <b>Balance at 1<sup>st</sup> Feb 2002</b> | <b>1801.59</b> | <b>GIO Insurance</b>                  | <b>176.45</b>  |
| <b>Subscriptions</b>                      | <b>225.00</b>  | <b>Postage</b>                        | <b>77.00</b>   |
| Interest Credit                           | 0.34           | Stationery                            | 14.50          |
|                                           |                | Balance at 30 <sup>th</sup> June 2002 | 1758.98        |
| <hr/>                                     |                |                                       |                |
| <b>TOTALS</b>                             | <b>2026.93</b> |                                       | <b>2026.93</b> |

Account: Encompass Credit Union  
Account Number: 69397

Financial statement prepared by John M. Holmes, Treasurer.  
22<sup>nd</sup> July 2002

**Join the**  
**AUSTRALIAN SHAKUHACHI SOCIETY (ASS)**

**Attention existing members** – membership fees are due for all members now (unless you've paid since the last newsletter). 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** in NSW, Queensland and ACT 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
- ◆ co-ordinating 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, P.O. Box 63. Woodford, NSW.**

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**Yes, I would like to join the Australian Shakuhachi Society.**

**Enclosed is \$25.00, being dues for one year**

**Enclosed is \$50.00, being dues for two years**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_