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Firstly, I'd like to offer my heartfelt condolences to the families and friends of John Holmes and Paul Sheehan. John and Paul both passed away at the end of 2023 and it was a huge shock to our community.

Thank you to Lindsay for offering a *Tamuke* session as a tribute to both John and Paul. Thank you to Riley and Bronwyn for leading those sessions as well.

John and Paul were both very active members within the Australian Shakuhachi Society and throughout the worldwide shakuhachi community. Both of their contributions have led to growth of the Australian Shakuhachi Society, and they happily shared their experiences and ideas with all of us. Both John and Paul will be missed dearly and their contributions will be remembered.

Thank you John and Paul, you will both be missed by all of us. •

Nicholas Hall

February 16, 2024



*John Holmes*



*Paul Sheehan*

Nicholas Hall

February 16, 2024



Photo: Kelsey He

Greetings all,

I hope that the new year is treating you all well and that your practice and playing is going how you'd like it to.

Currently I am in Japan and we seem to be getting cold spells, warm spells, mixed with a bit of rain in between. So my practice sessions which mainly take place outside requires a variety of gear from, a rain jacket, a beanie, a hoodie, a warm jacket, regular fleece gloves, 'custom' fingerless gloves, a neck warmer, sweatpants, thermal bottoms, leather boots, two shakuhachi (1.8 and 2.4), music, and my trusty *mama chari* (a Japanese style bicycle mainly used by mothers to pick up their children from daycare/school, or to do the week's shopping – it usually comes with an incredibly fashionable basket on the front).

My warm up for my body for the practice session is done on my *mama chari* while I cycle to my practice spot. Keeping my body warm is done by the layers and accessories that I wear/bring with me. Warming up my instrument enough so that it makes a 'nice' consistent sound seems to take considerably longer than in warmer months, and the condensation that frequently builds up on the inside changes the sound quickly as well.

With all the prep/gear that is required and not to mention the fact that it's cold, you'd think I wouldn't like to practice in the winter time. Not entirely. Some benefits of winter outdoor practice include:

1. The air that I blow into my flute must be warm to produce a nicer sound. Practicing outside forces me to do this so it becomes a habit.
2. The condensation build up can be a good measure (somewhat) of how warm and humid the breath that I am blowing into my flute is.
3. I can't feel my fingers as well as I would like to, so I need to use the feedback of my sound to check whether I am closing my finger holes correctly. A good example would be the second finger hole when playing a *tsu* or *tsu meri* especially on something like a 2.4 length shakuhachi.
4. I become more focused on my practice session as I don't want to be noodling around in the cold. (That doesn't mean that you can't or shouldn't!)

After practising in the cold for a while here are some tips that I would like to share from my experience:

1. Purchase a cheap pair of dollar store fingerless gloves, this will allow you to play a 1.8 or any length that allows you to play with your finger pads and keep your hands warm while doing so.



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## Nicholas Hall

February 16, 2024

2. If you plan to play a length that requires you to play with an adjusted bottom hand grip such as a 2.4 length, cut the fingerless glove at the base of the index finger of the bottom gripping hand. This will allow you to comfortably close the second finger hole without the glove getting in the way.
3. (This is one that I always forget) Purchase foot warmers. Known as *kairo* in Japan, they are little disposable packets made to keep your hands and feet warm. Place the ones made for your feet in your shoes and you'll be toasty warm for your practice session.
4. Wipe out your instrument frequently as the condensation will change your sound and ability to close and open finger holes properly/effectively.
5. Inhale, relax, and allow your body to exhale warm air, rather than trying to blow the air out. It will allow you to 'breathe' a warmer air out, and also allow you to relax. Use your embouchure to control the amount of 'warm, humid air' naturally leaving your body. I find this helpful for creating a softer sound to the start of a note.
6. Prepare a Thermos with a hot drink!

I know that most of you are in the summer months of Australia, but keep these in mind when winter rolls around! I hope that you might be able to use some of these tips and reasons to practice outside in the cold. It's not always bad, in fact I have some really nice memories of practicing in cold bicycle pathway tunnels in the middle of winter during my first few years of practicing the shakuhachi. I wish I was more prepared back then, like I am these days. Preparation is key! I wish you all the best with your practice whether it's in the hot or cold. •

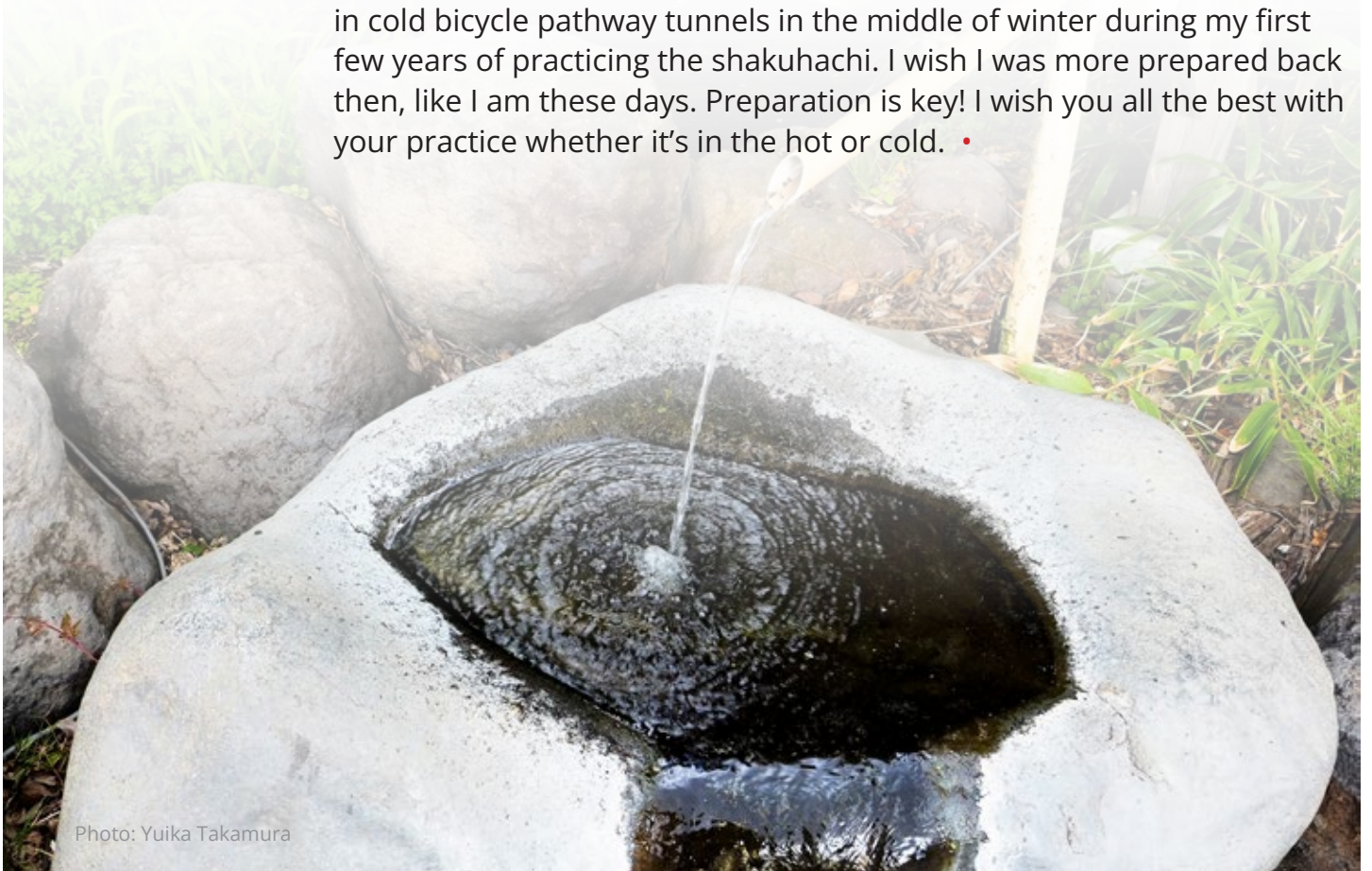


Photo: Yuika Takamura

## TRIBUTE TO PAUL SHEEHAN

Paul Sheehan was our shakuhachi buddy! We would get together with Rob and myself, almost every Saturday and do *robuki* and practice some pieces over the last two to three years. He was always keen to practice and blow *ro*. In September 2023 we got together at Rob's place to practice our repertoire for the upcoming Cowra Spring Festival. It was a good session. Later that month we met in Cowra and performed in the gardens during the morning session. Then he had to leave as he already had the alarming news about his illness. It was a very touching moment as it felt that we knew there were going to be tough times ahead. We kept in touch over video chats ever since and we did some more *robuki* until it became quite difficult for him to go on.

Paul was a good shakuhachi friend, sharing his love for the instrument with anyone who would listen. He went to Japan several times and played with a local Tozan group ensemble also acquiring a diploma for performing Tozan repertoire. In Australia, he had taken lessons with Riley Lee, Bronwyn Kirkpatrick and Lindsay Dugan, either in festivals, live, or remotely.

On Wednesday night of the 20th of December 2023, a little before 11:00pm, Paul left us for good, drawing his last breath and possibly blowing a mental *ro* for the last time.

Paul was our musical partner and we will miss him a lot. Rest in peace Paul... •

### Alkis Moriatis

Photos: Paul Sheehan



## TRIBUTE TO JOHN HOLMES

John M. Holmes, a cherished member of the Australian shakuhachi community and longstanding treasurer of the Australian Shakuhachi Society has recently passed away. John served as treasurer for the Society for a decade, finishing up his contributions in this role in 2009.

John had a deep passion for the shakuhachi. His journey with the instrument began under the guidance of Riley Lee in the late 1990's. One of his unique accomplishments was the making of a perform-able shakuhachi from molten glass. He also designed and made custom Buffalo/Cow hide *utaguchi* covers for shakuhachi which he advertised through the society newsletter.

John's commitment to the society and fellow students of the shakuhachi extended well beyond his role as treasurer. In the early years of the society he spearheaded the collection of donations from society members to support Bronwyn Kirkpatrick subsequent to her house and almost all of her possessions being destroyed in a random arson attack. John was also particularly thanked by Riley for the huge amount of time and effort he put into the World Shakuhachi Festival in 2008 (Sydney). In Riley's words, "he did far more than what is usually required of a treasurer, before, during and after the event".

John Holmes' legacy as a significant early member, dedicated treasurer, and generous contributor to the growth of the Society will be remembered by us all. •

### Adrian Sherriff

(Secretary of the Australian Shakuhachi Society)

Photo: Kelsey He



## TRIBUTE TO JOHN HOLMES

Soon, I will be in my third year of my eighth decade. Of course, I have absolutely no memory of the first two or three years. But then, I barely remember the first 4 to 70 years either. Or much of last month, for that matter.

Memories are not necessarily what makes us really and truly 'alive', that is, super-conscious and aware of what is going on inside and outside of ourselves. Yet, creating memories from our experiences and retrieving them right here and now, is a big part of being fully alive. Memories are also what keep our own past alive within us.

John Holmes left our small, worldwide shakuhachi community late last year. This is not a sample of the many interesting and memorable stories I have of good times shared with John. It's more about life and memories.

My memories of John are very much alive right now, here, today. They are pleasurable, even though he has gone. John continues to be, in that sense, a part that makes me 'me' today. How is that possible?

Patricia and I visited John in Katoomba Hospital less than a week before he died. His life-partner Mary and his brother were also there, John was lying in bed and absolutely knew that he wouldn't be leaving that hospital bed alive. And yet, even the very last stages of his strength-sapping, terminal liver cancer did not prevent him from giving.

Always giving. That was John. In this final instance, John did so with his ever-present sense of humour and wit, his generosity and caring, and especially his calm, as well as calming, total acceptance of what that moment was, and what soon would be. He gave us his presence!

Photo: Kelsey He

The irony of course, is by doing so, he also increased what was already and still is a heavy and heartfelt sadness. He's gone, but not the memories of him. I keep them alive within me and they keep me alive.

How often are we given the heady experience of actually enjoying a visit to the deathbed of someone close to us?! What an unexpected honour and intense sadness!

I've said elsewhere that with music, especially with the traditional shakuhachi *honkyoku*, it is important to play with an impossibly focused awareness, to the point of 'becoming' the music. Also, it is in particular absolutely critical to end every *honkyoku* well. I think *honkyoku* are good metaphors for life.

John played, and ended, his life like the best of *honkyoku* performances. We are so very grateful to have been able to enjoy John's company for so many years, even intermittently. He made us pause to consider what 'ending well' might mean for each of us. I hope that for as long as I can, I play my life, especially the very end, as well as John did. •

**Riley Lee**

Princeton University | 14 February 2024

Photos: Mary Holmes



## Kerry King

I have read somewhere that if you develop a passion for something you should follow it with curiosity and openness wherever it may take you. When I met a couple of shakuhachi enthusiasts at the 2018 ASS Festival, planning to visit Chichibu for lessons with Kakizakai-sensei it seemed quite natural that I should do the same.

It's amazing looking back how naive and enthusiastic I was! I polished up '*Hon Shirabe*' and took '*Shingetsu*' (in case I got past first base) and in May 2019 went off to spend 3 weeks in 'The Trailer'. It felt quite an adventure, made more so by being the first time I had travelled alone in almost 50 years of marriage. Unfortunately I contracted the flu in my 2nd week which sapped my energy for the remainder of my stay. I was not home long before I was planning a return, initially for 2020 but finally in October 2023.



Chichibu is an easy place to get around. Everything is within walking distance. 'The Trailer' is at one end of the street which runs parallel with the main road. At the far end is the big Chichibu Shrine, the site of the *yo matsuri* or the night festival held every year in early December. Kakizakai-sensei lives 5 minutes away on the opposite side of the main road and Belc, the large supermarket is a short walk in the opposite direction, so the route: The Trailer – Kakizakai-sensei's – Belc Supermarket forms a well trodden isosceles triangle = sleep/practice – lesson – eat.

'The Trailer' itself is old but quite spacious and comfortable enough. Many students have stayed there, from Europe, Australia and the U.S. and there is a sense of their presence which leaves a feeling of continuity



Photos: Kerry King



## Kerry King

and community. In fact it was quite humbling to consider all the talent that preceded me, I may easily have felt unworthy but for the generosity of Kakizakai-sensei's teaching.

On both visits I have had the good fortune to see Kakizakai-sensei perform. In 2019 it was a concert in Tokyo put on by the Japanese Shakuhachi Professional Players Association. A concert built around '*Tsuru no Sugomori*' – the first half of the program was traditional, different schools playing *honkyoku*. The second half was contemporary interpretations. I think about 40 players, all male, as were most of the audience. For the final piece they were all on stage as a shakuhachi choir with three or four soloists. Kakizakai-sensei was the bass soloist. The composer conducted from his seat at the front of the auditorium. It was great, with lots of syncopated rhythm.

In October 2023 there were two performances, both in Chichibu. The first was organised by a koto teacher. There were koto and shamisen players, mostly female, and shakuhachi. Kakizakai-sensei accompanied four of the pieces on the program. Lindsay's name was also on the program but unfortunately he was unable to be there. I found the music difficult. The pieces were traditional. I am not very familiar with the koto or the shamisen and it was difficult to discern different parts. I think there were at least two, five koto players on one part, two on another, plus in some pieces four shamisen and shakuhachi. I could of course hear changes in tempo. There was also some vocalising but I am not sure if it was lyrics. The performers wore traditional dress, seated in seiza and did not lift their heads or engage with the audience. However, the audience, mainly female on this occasion, were quite informal. I enjoyed observing the way the women interacted with each other without the distraction of understanding what they said.

- ▶ Kaki-sensei playing in koto concert





Kerry King

The second performance was in Chichibu one week later. It was the Chichibu Oto-Fes 2023, late morning – mid-afternoon on a Saturday. "Our" street was closed for 2 blocks in front of the Shrine, allowing pedestrian traffic only, with stalls, tables and chairs down the centre. A performance space was created in an old warehouse at the end of the street by opening what was the loading dock to form a stage and chairs placed in the parking area. Kakizakai-sensei performed solo. This time he was simply himself, doing what he does best. It was quite special and on my last weekend, the icing on the cake.

These experiences were more than seeing and hearing Kakizakai-sensei perform, they were little windows into another culture, another way of being.

It is a unique experience to visit Chichibu and stay in 'The Trailer'. Of course, the benefits are face-to-face lessons, playing with Kaki-sensei and having the freedom to practice whenever without the distractions and responsibilities of home. It is also lovely to settle into that little corner of the world and observe daily life – kids going to school, cars washed on the weekend etc., it's not so different and yet culturally it is very different. It was an enriching experience but it would be wrong to suggest it was easy. The lessons (3 per week) and practice (4hrs a day) were intense, the solitude for 3 weeks was intense. I felt challenged and frequently needed to 'dig deep'. Perhaps that's what journeying with the shakuhachi is really about. •

- ▶ Kaki-sensei playing 2.4 in Chichibu Oto-Fes23.
- ▶▶ Mt. Bukō, Saitama Prefecture

[Parts of this article are based on a piece originally written for *BAMBOO*, the European Shakuhachi Society Newsletter, Winter 2023]





Why do I play the shakuhachi? This is a question I have asked myself many times over the years.

Before (rheumatoid arthritis), I would have said because I love the sound and how it feels to play. Now, I still love the sound but it doesn't always feel good to play. My body is stiff and painful and I'm not even old. It doesn't seem fair! But shakuhachi continues to be my teacher. It's teaching me that I must RELAX. I thought I knew this and I've been telling my students this for years. But now it's thrown in my face every single day, I'm really starting to understand the benefits of *ro buki* for relaxation (not just to get a powerful sound). I must let go and breathe ... the more I breathe, the more the stiffness melts away. The more I breathe, the more the self-doubt melts away. "Detach from the sound and breathe" is my motto. It's not always easy but I try.

Shakuhachi is so sensitive. I can play clarinet and recorder and get away with a stiff body but I can't hide with shakuhachi. If there is tension, it's there in the sound immediately. It's a very humbling instrument in that way.

I'd like to thank my students for persevering with me and encouraging me, while I navigate this tricky phase and thank you to my first shakuhachi teacher Riley, for introducing me to this profound instrument and for continuing to be so supportive!

If you'd like to listen to some of my music, please go to my YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUVkrl-kbHUlpAmV5DJNOUw>

Or Bandcamp: <https://bronwynkirkpatrick.bandcamp.com/> •

Kind regards,

**Bronwyn Kirkpatrick**



## Lindsay Dugan

In January, I finally submitted my PhD thesis! The research topic is interpretation and musical variation in KSK transmitted variants of *San'ya*. It involves an analysis spanning 40 recordings by Watazumi, Yokoyama, and students of Yokoyama, plus three of my own recorded performances.

The analysis method is based on a structural theory that I've been working on since about 2012. At first, I developed this theory to understand pitch intonation differences between Kinko-ryū *honkyoku* and *gaikyoku* performance. At the time, I was approaching Kinko lineage repertoire from my base as a Yokoyama-*kei* player, and developing my ear for another set of sounds was like learning a new language dialect and cultural notions. That structural theory formed the basis of my 2013 thesis submitted at Tokyo Geidai. I'm currently working on summarising and translating that work into English; I'll have it up on my website when done.

The very first class I had at Geidai was on scales in traditional Japanese music. The topic was the *miyako-bushi* and *inaka-bushi* scales, but that was the only time in four years at Geidai that I ever heard scales mentioned, and it was limited to that theoretical context only. The other dozen-odd shakuhachi students in the room were sitting there politely listening, but I got the feeling that nobody really cared about scales, and that it was a box-ticking exercise to satisfy the requirements of the curriculum. I understand what the *miyako-bushi* and *inaka-bushi* scales mean, but in twenty years of playing, I've never felt that they practically inform my understanding of *honkyoku* or *gaikyoku*.

The structural theory that I developed for my 2013 thesis, rather than focussing on a scale structure, involves three note types: core notes ('*kakuon*'), derivative notes ('*haseion*'), and ornamental notes ('*sōshokuon*'). Core notes are the meat and bones, derivative notes are the tendons, and ornamental notes form the skin.

With this framework, I focus on pitch intonation relationships among a cluster of notes ('*ongun*', meaning sound group) in a given location of a piece of music. For example, in the first three phrases of *Hon Shirabe*, the central pitch is G4. G4 is produced by the note *re* acting as a core note, and also by *maru no u* or *circle u*, which appears as both an ornamental and a derivative note, and is unnotated but for the direction of the *neume* lines (the lines that indicate duration, pitch, and ornamentation in KSK scores). By centring my pitch on that G4, I don't have to extend my internal sound sense to the abstract structure of a musical scale. I only have to think about how my sounds orbit around that G4 – some notes want to pull away, while others want to gravitate towards it. I also feel that this approach keeps me more in the moment, because I'm focusing on the tangible sounds that are happening right now, rather than on an abstract scale structure that extends through an entire section or piece.

Photo: Man Chung



Lindsay Dugan

This approach has numerous advantages. One is that it provides a flexible frame of pitch reference, which is crucial for context (for example, determining the pitch of a *meri* note in relation to a core note, or playing in *kan* as opposed to *otsu*, among other things). Another advantage is that it accommodates stretched pitch, which basically means that pitch gets sharper as you go higher. Use of stretched pitch is common among professional players whose recordings I have analysed.

In my recent PhD research, I extended the range of musical parameters of the three note types, and barely even touched upon pitch. Instead, I looked at the what, where, how, and why of musical variations, *ma* as timing, and rhythmic structures from micro- to macro-levels. All of this can be applied practically, and my observations are entirely rooted in what actually happens in performances of prominent members of the tradition of Watazumi, Yokoyama, and Yokoyama's students.

I believe some of these findings could profoundly influence the way we approach timing and structure in *honkyoku*. I've already been testing ideas and implementing results in my own playing and teaching for some years now. Another hint of the potential effect of this research emerged in one of my lessons with Kakizakai sensei last year. After I'd asked him what he thought of a potential finding I'd made, I could feel that he was immediately experimenting with it during the lesson.

Of course, when performing, you only have what is in your tool bag, which you fill with knowledge and experience. However, the bulk of our shakuhachi activities encompasses listening, practicing, learning, and teaching, and that is where my research may have implications for anyone playing *honkyoku*.

At the moment, my thesis is being examined, but in time, I'll run some focussed workshops to condense the findings into digestible packages. For the time being, I'm so happy to finally be able to get back to just practicing shakuhachi, and to use my body as well as my head. •

Photo: Man Chung



## ASS Monthly Online Practice Workshops 2024

Hosted by Lindsay Dugan

It's been a little over a year since I started up the Monthly Online Practice Workshops. So far, so good!

Typically, the workshops happen on the third Sunday of each month. We go through *robuki* and some exercises, and then use selected phrases in a *honkyoku* piece as focus points for the exercises. Focus points include tone, *meri/kari* technique, how to open and close the finger holes, finger movement, and volume control, among others.

Another important factor is tension in the body. For me personally, body tension became a focus point when I was doing Kinko-ryū repertoire. Many of the Kinko *honkyoku* are long (10~20 minutes in duration), but the *gaikyoku* are often even longer and much more complex. Getting through a ten-minute long *honkyoku* piece is one thing, but *gaikyoku* contains so many more notes. Against the percussive attack of string instruments, and the tuning from the string instruments and vocals, any technical shortcomings manifesting in poor timing, inaccurate pitch, fuzzy tone, and low volume are clearly revealed. It's an ongoing process, but *gaikyoku* practice really helped me to get my body and breathing in order.

In the lead up to performances, my first few hours of daily practice would involve technical exercises for finger movement, breathing, and posture. I observed how other players approached practice and warming up for performance, and refined my own set of practice methods that I wrote down in a little notebook.

At some point about five or six years ago, I managed to condense all of those exercises into one scheme that fits on a single page.

It contains everything I need to target specific aspects of my sound, body, and ear. The monthly workshops are based on that practice scheme. It is still the mainstay of my own daily practice, and I think its longevity in my practice toolkit is due its simplicity and versatility.

I've become better at recognising tension when it's developing so I can get back to my centre through specific strategies. Nowadays, I rarely get to perform *gaikyoku*, but the effects for my *honkyoku* playing are ongoing.

For 2024, the monthly workshops will be occurring again from February, and will typically be held on the third Sunday of each month. Thank you to everyone who has participated in the workshops so far. I'm looking forward to doing more this year! •

Regards,

Lindsay Dugan



Workshop schedule for the first half of 2024:

February 18th

March 17th

April 14th

May 19th

June 16th

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

## 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)

## AUSTRALIAN SHAKUHACHI SOCIETY

### 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)



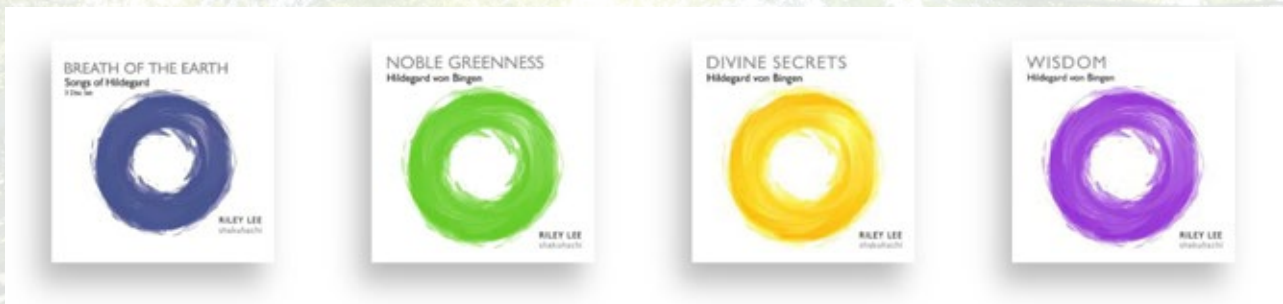
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## Bronwyn Kirkpatrick



## Riley Lee



## European Shakuhachi Society

