

European Shakuhachi Society
Newsletter
2019, Vol.2



**Interview with *Nakamura Takashi* :
Casa Mozart Music Association and shakuhachi****by *Kiku Day***



KD: I would like to first ask you about the history of Casa Mozart and your relationship to shakuhachi?

TN: Casa Mozart means the house of Mozart. My father really liked Mozart. He was a medical doctor but admired Mozart. And since Mozart was a 'freelance musician' [sic], he travelled to many places for various commissions and performances. For many years my father travelled along the same route as we know Mozart did, and came to the same places thinking 'Mozart has been right here', or this is the home of this and this noble person who commissioned this and this piece. Sometimes when they were going to demolish a place Mozart had been, my father saved a piece of wallpaper and other things from there. Over many years he thereby built a large collection from the places Mozart had been. The first idea was to make an exhibition of all these things, and he built Casa Mozart. That was in 1983. The first floor [ground floor in Europe] was a café where the music of Mozart was always playing. On the 2nd floor, we had the exhibition of my father's collection, and on the 3rd floor it was made as a space for hosting concerts. And that was the beginning of Casa Mozart.

KD: You grew up in Harajuku. When did you move to Kamakura?

TN: I moved in 2002. After I graduated from university, I worked editing TV programmes – first in a production company, then as a freelancer. I often went to shoot overseas. I then worked for Asahi Television. I was very busy and began to feel I couldn't stay working with TV the rest of my working life. It was not easy to get such a job, my life was very stable and the salary was great but I thought I would waste my life if I continued doing this job. I quit in 2001, and while thinking about what to do – I wanted to move to the countryside. One time I went off the train at the station Gokurakuji in Kamakura and I was taken by the peacefulness of the place. I saw kids passing by the *dagashi-yasan* [an old fashioned Japanese traditional candy store] on their way home from school, which reminded me of old Japan. At that time my child was 2 years old and I thought it would be nice if she could experience this. That is why I moved to Kamakura. Since Kamakura is a coastal town, there are many surfers here. I also began surfing. I have had times where I surfed every day. But I kept Casa Mozart.



KD: When did you encounter the shakuhachi?

TN: In Kamakura, when the kids are in first year of school, they are taught matsuri-bayashi [music for the local festival]. My daughter loved this and went to play on the drum during summer. When she entered lower secondary school, she wanted to play in a brass band. But when you enter a brass band, you can't be sure to be allowed to play what you want. They rather direct you to the instruments that they need players for. She had said for a while she wanted to play the drums and if not then she would like to play saxophone. I then began learning saxophone just in case she would play that, so I could help her. But she managed to get into the percussion section, and I continued playing sax. But there was something... like the sound did not fit me exactly. It was when I began to think about looking for another sound – I suddenly thought about the animation Lupin III. In the scene that included samurai, you hear the sound of shakuhachi.

This sound impressed me deeply and I thought to myself, I like that sound! I looked up shakuhachi teachers and found a young Tozan teacher in Kita-Kamakura. I studied with him for about a year and a half but felt it wasn't the right sound either. I also performed sankyoku.. but it wasn't right. One day I went to perform with some biwa players. One of them told me he has a friend who played something that is more similar to Edo period shakuhachi [sic]. I was introduced to Masaaki Aoyama and quickly after to Atsuya Okudua sensei, with whom Aoyama studies. When I heard Okuda sensei's sound, this surely was what I had been searching for. But it was hard to stop learning with the other teacher. First of all, it was hard to tell him I wanted to stop. It took me about half a year, and I was able to shift. I have now studied with Okuda sensei for about 3 ½ - 4 years.

KD: So how was that?

TN: Despite the fact that we are Japanese or Asian people, the music we encounter first is western music. You even get bad grades in primary school if you are not good at do re mi. But with komuso shakuhachi there is no exact rhythm or other aspects like in western music and one has much more freedom of interpretation. In the beginning it was hard for me to grasp this freedom. I asked myself, is this good enough? And the more I played the more interesting it became, and I really felt it was a valuable experience. So far, I had played music in which there was a certain number of beats per minute and I suddenly felt I had more freedom than I ever had in music. I also felt very attracted to the fact that the jinashi shakuhachi is such a simple instrument. And I have been looking for freedom before, for example in the hippie movement or in rock music or like in the movie Easy Rider. And I felt there was a resonance.



KD: How interesting! So going back to Casa Mozart. You organise concerts by Okuda sensei, jinashi shakuhachi making workshops, and Aoyama san teaches playing workshops. Anything else?

TN: What happened at Casa Mozart at first is aiming to become a kind of entrance to this wonderful world of shakuhachi that most people do not know – also in Japan. Somehow to be the vehicle that enables people to experience this world. Aoyama san told me he would like to do a workshop teaching khoomii [throat or overtone singing] and shakuhachi. But I also wanted to host workshops in koten honkyoku, so he agreed to do this. We called the workshop Ittonzen – writing one sound Zen [一音禪].

We only promote via the internet, so we don't get many people – in the beginning only one or two. Now more people know about it so more come. Ittonzen attracts people who is searching for something else or special. We can now offer them to try to make their own shakuhachi. At Ittonzen we only teach the very basics. If someone really want to go deeper and learn the shakuhachi, we refer them to Okuda sensei. I think three of Okuda sensei's students came via Ittonzen.

KD: The workshops in which you teach the basics, do you do this once a month?

TN: Yes, Aoyama san's class is once a month. And then we have Ittonzen, which is taught by Aoyama san and myself – and that is once a month as well. I host meditation workshops once a month on the 19th. I choose the 19th because Buddha died on 19th February, so to honour him it is held every month on the 19th. I play a little in the beginning, and then we meditate in silence for one hour.

KD: Can you repeat the dates of the various workshops, please

TN:

- Meditation: Every month on the 19th. First we play and there are some guidance for the meditation. Then we sit one hour in silence.
- Jinashi shakuhachi making workshop: Every month on the first Friday from noon 14:00-18:00

- Experience jinashi shakuhachi: Every month on the first Friday from 19:00-21:00. There will be instruction in how to play, discussions etc.
- Khoomii and shakuhachi workshop: Every month on the fourth Wednesday

KD: Can I ask you about the shakuhachi making workshops. How did you begin and what is the aim?

TN: I really wanted to create a space for people who like jinashi shakuhachi. I wanted to make it a space in which you don't particular need to make a shakuhachi. Some people make shakuhachi, others just play, and others come because they want to fine-tune their instrument. We have now a collection of tools that people can use. We also have days where nobody comes, but we are here. So even if people don't come, I wanted to create a space that welcomes anyone who likes shakuhachi.

KD: How do you get the bamboo?

TN: We go and dig them up ourselves, dry them and make them ready for the workshops.

KD: Do you also attend the bamboo harvesting trip Okuda sensei does every year in November?

TN: Yes, I do. But harvesting bamboo for the workshops once a month - one day is not enough, so we also go elsewhere. Actually, we have several places where we have an agreement with the farmers who own the bamboo forests to harvest bamboo from there. From November we will be busy going to several places harvesting.

KD: When you want to go to Casa Mozart to make a jinashi shakuhachi, do you buy a piece of bamboo or how does it work?

TN: Yes, that is right. We have bamboo without the root, and those are cheap. The root ends we sell for about 5-6000 yen. But please remember that we are *not* bamboo sellers. We *only* sell to people who come to the workshops and make shakuhachi together with others in a group. The social aspect of making is important for Casa Mozart. We are not doing a business.

KD: That means people cannot order bamboo from you from abroad.

TN: That's right - absolutely not. What we want to be is the foot of the mountain. We want to make people know about jinashi shakuhachi. We are the entrance to that world, and we want to make the threshold as low as possible so as many people as possible can enter. My experience from when I studied mainstream shakuhachi is, that buying an instrument we are talking about ¥200,000 to ¥300,000 (€1600 - €2500). It was also very expensive to study with the teacher. For many people the economic aspects may make them hold back and not learn - unless your motivation is very high. I wanted to create something less serious, more lighthearted. It doesn't matter if people stop. The aim is first and foremost to make more people know about this music. So, it is not a business. To participate in Ittonzen, it costs ¥2000. But this money is not included in the business, which Casa Mozart also is. But it is only used to buy tools that people can use at the workshops, or we use the money to pay the farmers who own the land where we harvest bamboo. It will be a very different thing if I made it to a business. Right now, I just want as many people as possible to go through.

KD: Is there still a café at Casa Mozart?

TN: No, not any longer. Casa Mozart is today only the 3rd floor space. Mostly on Saturdays and Sundays, we rent out that space for concerts. During weekdays we have the shakuhachi workshops, guitar workshops, and piano workshops.

KD: Are those something you do?

TN: Yes, I hire the piano and guitar teachers and they do the workshops and lessons there. So, music remains the heart of Casa Mozart.

KD: Are you only hosting shakuhachi concerts by Okuda sensei or other players too?

TN: Yes, that is true actually. At the moment basically only Okuda sensei plays at Casa Mozart. Sometimes Aoyama san also plays concert, especially collaborating with butoh dancers. Although right now we have a pause – we also do a series presenting Japanese culture called ‘The Art of Raw’. The word raw we use because we want people to experience Japanese culture live [*in Japanese the word live as in live music and raw as in raw fish are the same and therefore this pun using raw*]. A shamisen player can for example come and introduce people to the music played on shamisen. And we do it *nagesen* style. Do you know *nagesen*?

KD: No, I don’t.

TN: After hearing the music, if you liked it, you throw money at the musicians. That is their payment. It is a Japanese tradition. So, the performers do not have to hire the space, the audience do not have to pay entrance fee. We send information about the concert out, and if people liked it, they throw money.

KD: I must admit, I did not know this kind of performances. And you say it is a Japanese tradition?

TN: Yes, it is.

KD: I find it really exciting there is a space for shakuhachi – of course jinashi shakuhachi – but anyway shakuhachi in general – in central Tokyo that is not expensive, and which allows people to come just to check it out.

TN: Yes, I don’t think there are other places or rather venues like this in Japan where you can come and try jinashi shakuhachi, get some guidance for this little money.

KD: It reminds me of the time when Okuda sensei had his café and you could just come and listen to jinashi shakuhachi.

TN: Did you go?

KD: Yes, just once. It is 30 years ago. He closed the café soon after I started playing.

TN: Wow!

KD: Do you have anything in particular you want to say to the European shakuhachi players and others outside Japan?

TN: I believe that the shakuhachi – this wonderful unique sound created by this relatively simple piece of bamboo – is a sound that is necessary in the world today. The world has become all about economy and business. But when performing shakuhachi, there is the space for thinking about the kokoro [heart/mind]. I think – and I am not the only one who thinks so – that playing shakuhachi is like praying. I feel it has the timbre of a prayer. It is not music, nor is it a performance. Sensei says it too. But it is a sound that makes me feel. It is less important whether you are good or bad but if you can make people feel... Yes, getting in contact with your emotions and what is important for you. I once played Tamuke at my best friend's funeral. After I played, an elderly couple came up to me and said: 'We felt it! We know what you feel' I think many people need a sound like the shakuhachi. So, for me an important aspect of shakuhachi playing is like playing for people who need it. This is also a new idea that came to me when the elderly couple spoke to me at the funeral. I felt the shakuhachi enabled me to express how it is to lose your best friend. I will never get a friend like this. We had been friends since we were very young. That is the power of the shakuhachi.

KD: Thank you very much for your wise words, the time and effort you put in to disseminate jinashi shakuhachi, and for your time!



More information on the activities at Casa Mozart

Keep an eye with the shakuhachi workshops and concerts : <https://casamoz.org>
or for the koten shakuhachi related events : <https://ittonzen.casamoz.org>

You can read about their past and upcoming events here :
www.facebook.com/CasaMozart

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1-10-23, 3F Jingumae, Shibuya, Tokyo 150-0001, Japan

ブツタの月命日は15日になります。

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