

The following is an abstract from the interview article of Katsuya Yokoyama by the Hogaku Journal's March 2009 issue. <Original text in Japanese>

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***-What happened exactly when you had a stroke on stage in Germany 10 years ago?***

I was invited as a guest performer in Freiburg. I wasn't feeling well before the show so I practiced hard for about 30 min. When I went on stage I collapsed from my chair. There happened to be a doctor sitting in the front row and he helped me.

***-Were you conscious?***

I recovered consciousness right away onstage. I apologized to the audience and then went back stage. I remember asking my wife "Where is my left hand?" To this day my left hand is still numb.

***-You were in a coma for a week at the hospital. What happened after that?***

I started the rehab and stayed in Germany for 40 days. Every time I saw airplanes from the hospital window, I was thinking about how I wanted to go home.

***-Looking back at your musical career, what is your thought?***

It's been 10 years since I collapsed. 10 years before that I was mostly busy establishing the Kokusai (International) Shakuhachi Kenshukan. Now I feel I should have performed more during that time. Playing is such a joy for me.

***-Kokusai Shakuhachi Kenshukan's foundation paved the way to the International Shakuhachi Festival which developed into a worldwide event. What do you think of the Kokusai Kenshukan's activities?***

We could have done more. I spoke to many players about the project, no one was opposed to the idea, but at the same time no one was wanting to join me either. So I had to do it alone.

***-What was your initial plan?***

I hoped to create an organization where the entire shakuhachi society will get together and help each other. Hopefully creating a foundation or something.

***-You wanted to make it happen in Tokyo?***

Yes. When I came to Tokyo (from Shimizu), I thought I had to do something here.

***-You were settled in Okayama prefecture\* and you purchased a closed-down school. Were you satisfied?***

It is hard to say, but it wasn't good enough. To organize the very first International Shakuhachi Festival (1984), I raised money from the city as well as giving up my savings for buying a yacht.  
(\*Okayama--Approx. 700km away from Tokyo.)

***-Your passion was so strong that you relocated to Okayama.***

Because I had a dream.

I strongly believed that the shakuhachi would become international regardless of schools or nationality. I felt the responsibility for making Japan the core for this activity. We are responsible for showing others what this is all about. I find it a problem to have more people who play a shakuhachi but not the honkyoku.

***-Your achievement to have developed the shakuhachi koten honkyoku is a big contribution.***

Tozan players also came to my workshops. I believe that the shakuhachi's origin is the honkyoku, no matter which school you are playing. This is something everyone should learn.

***-At the Sydney Shakuhachi Festival 2008, a lot of the koten honkyoku as well as modern music were presented. What do you think about that?***

It is wonderful. Japanese players must try harder to carry on this tradition. It should appeal to others. I have students coming to me to from abroad. Their style is involuntarily different. So we, Japanese, should present the authenticity of honkyoku. Unfortunately few people can do it.

***-What is missing?***

First, the number of shakuhachi players is very small. You cannot accomplish anything without everyday training. You can never convince others with the honkyoku just by practicing it for a few days.

***People's attitude toward honkyoku is immature?***

They lack a sense of purpose. I like to ask each professional player where they set their ideal.

***-You introduced shakuhachi to the world through "November Steps." Many performers are now playing it. How do you feel about that?***

They come to me for advice. My answer to them is "Do not try to copy me." Sheet music is written in graphics so variance is very natural. Mr. Kinshi Tsuruta fixed the music for biwa which made my playing somewhat steady. I understand that it must be difficult for each performer to play differently, because the first player's influence always remains.

***-You promoted the Fukuda Rando works as well.***

He is a genius. Some say he is childish, but simple recreation and relaxation is always necessary. Is

complexity that noble? It's totally out of the question. His work will live forever. If I didn't become ill, I really would have liked to record his pieces again. Rather than expressing the Taisho and Showa era of romanticism, I'd love to have been able to express his romanticism. I listen to the CD many times and always think about how I should have played.

***-Rando's lyricism is unparalleled.***

And yet, not tacky. Sophisticated modernism, so to speak. Same can be said about Kimio Eto (Ikuta-ryu Koto player) who should be recognized more.

***-You are close friends with Toshio Funakawa whose work you premiered and promoted.***

I took care of him (laugh). We used to eat in my room. He is a genius too, but not a businessman. He won't charge pretty girls!

***-Do you play modern pieces differently compared to honkyoku?***

I try to empty my feelings in the honkyoku. I have been trying to erase my ego ever since I was young.

***-Have you reached there yet?***

No. My ultimate goal was to play the honkyoku with jinashi shakuhachi, which I unfortunately never had a chance to do. I worshipped Watazumi-do sensei and wanted to play like him. We could never be the same, as I am only myself. After the lesson with sensei, I looked up at the cedar trees thinking "When can I get there..." and began to cry.

***-Was he that great?***

More than you can imagine. One second he is emancipated from the world, but the next second he is superterrestrial. He was hard to understand and I was often let down.

***-Any advice for the current shakuhachi world?***

...I'd rather not to say.

***-What is tough for you now?***

That I cannot play. I still have dreams where I try to play but can't.

***-What entertains you now?***

I enjoy CDs everyday. Besides Japanese music, I especially like Ruvimovich Heifetz. I was deeply impressed with the Violinkonzert e-moll op.64 by Mendelssohn in my youth. I like Jazz and ethnic music too. The singer Ofra Haza is fantastic. My current entertainment is music and food. I am fond of French salt, pouring some of it on steamed rice is tasty!                   /END