

Perspectives

THE JAPAN FOUNDATION LONDON NEWSLETTER

Stringraphy: UK Tour in November

Kazue Mizushima Turns Cups and Strings into a Giant Harp



Photo: T. Sasaki

“When I stood in the forest I felt it would be wonderful if I could stretch hundreds of string threads in the trees and transform the whole forest into an instrument.”

Kazue Mizushima

As part of our continuing series, *Japanese Performing Arts: Here, Then and the Future*, the Japan Foundation is delighted to bring Kazue Mizushima and her Stringraphy Ensemble to UK audiences in November.

What is Stringraphy? The concept is simple: the sound unique. It is a massive string telephone harp, a geometric web of silk thread and paper cups that stretch from wall to wall. Its unique name derives from the fact that it resembles a huge work of visual art. So Mizushima put the word ‘string’ together with ‘graphics’ and named the instrument Stringraphy. The way the crew of musicians in flowing costumes move around the massive instrument in unison, plucking and rubbing the tightly stretched silk strings, is like watching a graceful dance.

The repertoire is rich and varied and a typical performance might include original compositions, gagaku, classical music, pop, contemporary music, children’s songs and ethnic music.

But how did she hit upon the idea of playing

music on string telephones? After a classical musical training, years experimenting with her own sounds, an active interest in experimental contemporary music, people like John Cage, and a desire to combine music with live expression and visual arts, the idea came to her in 1992 in a Japanese forest. ... She was participating

in a performing arts festival in the mountains, where the concept was to perform with the natural environment. “When I stood in the forest I felt it would be wonderful if I could stretch hundreds of string threads in the trees and transform the whole forest into an instrument.” Her concept, therefore, was to take space into a giant acoustic instrument. Since then she has refined her original discovery, perfecting the sound and expanding her repertoire.

Stringraphy, she stresses, is “a spatial instrument as well as a string instrument”. Each venue is set up differently to transform the stage into one piece of installation art, and this emphasis on the visual makes each Mizushima performance such a unique treat.

Don't miss these UK performances!

Kazue Mizushima and her Stringraphy Ensemble Performance schedule:

22 November	St Andrew's Hall, Norwich
24 November	Wales Millennium Centre Weston Studio, Cardiff
26 & 27 November	Sadler's Wells Lilian Baylis Theatre, London
1 December	The Sage Gateshead

For further details visit www.jpf.org.uk

Director's Message

BUNKA, the Japanese word for ‘culture,’ consists of the two Chinese characters; BUN, which can be also pronounced FUMI or AYA, and which originally means ‘figure’ or ‘design’ and KA meaning ‘to transform’ or simply ‘to form’. The sound AYA makes me imagine designed textile woven into various beautiful colours. BUNKA, therefore, may be likened to brocade woven using a variety of threads, each one retaining its own original colour and still forming part of the whole. My imagination floats further up into the air to the image in which each thread grows to reach another from a different piece of brocade so that each enriches the other or forms another colourful textile with every thread and brocade connecting and joining together.

My name is Fumio Matsunaga and I took over in May this year from Mr. Kohki Kanno as Director General of the Japan Foundation, London. I am delighted and excited to work with you and very much hope to have your cooperation and assistance. Yoroshiku onegaishimasu.

I fear that it may seem as though I am flattering myself but my name, Fumio, literally means a man of FUMI or AYA, using the same character as the BUN of BUNKA. I should like to contribute, in however small a part, to the deepening of cultural exchange between our two countries.

Fumio Matsunaga, Director General



Book Review

Japanese Journeys, Writings and Recollections

by Geoffrey Bownas

Global Oriental;
ISBN 1-905246-01-3; 280pp plus
16pp. plate section; £35 (hbk)

Geoffrey Bownas has been in the forefront of Japanese studies in Britain for over fifty years. This has been recognised by the award both of the Japanese Order of the Sacred Treasure and of a British CBE. In *Japanese Journeys, Writings and Recollections*, he has created a vivid, anecdotal, often amusing, sometimes moving portrait of his relationship with Japan and the Japanese from 1952 to the present day.



It has been a story not only of an academic relationship (He taught Japanese at Oxford University, then became Sheffield University's Founding Professor of Japanese Studies) but of a close bond with the business world as well.

Geoffrey Bownas was intimately involved with Honda, Toyota, Mitsubishi, and other important concerns. At the same time, he was responsible for many pioneer and radio broadcasts concerning Japanese literature and life. I myself was happy to work with him on both the original version of the Penguin Book of Japanese Verse (1964, and many times reprinted: total sales were over 100,000 copies) and the 1998 up-dated and revised edition, now sadly out of print.

Geoffrey Bownas is full of good stories and, being a Yorkshireman, can be laconic and self-deflating too. Some of his most fascinating memories are of that strange genius Yukio Mishima, with whom Bownas worked closely

until shortly before Mishima's death.

This book is a most attractive and readable memoir, which should be read by anyone with an interest in Japan.

Anthony Thwaite

The official launch of the book will take place at the Japan Foundation on 1 November 2005 at 6:30pm at which Professor Bownas will give a talk. All are invited but booking is essential, as seats are limited. To reserve a place, contact info@jpf.org.uk or fax 020-7323-4888, giving your name and those of any guests. Copies of the book will be available for purchase on the night at a reduced price and Professor Bownas will be signing copies before the launch between 6.00 and 6.30 pm and later from 7.45 to 8.30pm.

Book Review

The Religious Traditions of Japan 500–1600

by Richard Bowring

Cambridge University Press 2005;
228 x 152 mm; 463pp; Hardback;
4 line diagrams; 30 half-tones;
11 maps; ISBN-10: 052185119X
ISBN-13: 9780521851190; £75.00;
Publication: September 2005
University of Cambridge

Richard Bowring traces the development of Japanese religious thought and practice from the introduction of writing to the point at which medieval attitudes gave way to a distinctive pre-modern culture.

The resources of art, history, social and intellectual history, as well as doctrine are brought to bear on the subject in order to give as full a picture as possible of the



richness of the Japanese tradition. This is the first book in a Western language to provide an overview of how Buddhism and Shinto interacted in Japanese culture.

- The first Western language book to give an overview of the interaction between Buddhism and Shinto in Japanese culture
- Takes account of the latest scholarship on Japan's religious traditions
- A comprehensive guide to this long and formative period in Japan's religious history

Contents:

Introduction; Part I. The Arrival of Buddhism and Its Effects (c.538–800): 1. The introduction of Buddhism; 2. Creating a dynasty; 3. Buddhism and the early state; 4. Monuments at Nara; Part II. From Saicho to the Destruction of Todaiji (800–1180): 5. The beginnings of a 'Japanese' Buddhism: Tendai; 6. The beginnings of a 'Japanese' Buddhism: Shingon; 7. Buddhism and the state in Heian Japan; 8. Shrine and state in Heian

Japan; 9. The rise of devotionalism; 10. A time for strife; Part III. From the Destruction of Todaiji to the Fall of Godaigo (1180–1330): 11. For and against exclusive practice of the nenbutsu; 12. Religious culture of the early 'middle ages'; 13. Chan Buddhism; 14. Zen Buddhism; 15. Reform from within and without; 16. The emergence of Shinto; 17. Taking stock; Part IV. From the Fall of Godaigo to the Death of Nobunaga (1330–1582): 18. Two rival courts; Muromachi Zen; 20. The end of the medieval; 21 Appendix: reading Shingon's two mandala.

The book has been given a grant by the Japan Foundation under its Translation and Publication Support Programme. For further information, and to order, e-mail tmcluskey@cambridge.org or visit: www.cambridge.org/052185119x

Comic Proportions

Japanese Films Adapted From Manga

Following last year's inaugural film season *Self, Identity and the Outsider in Recent Japanese Film* and our equally successful programme earlier this year of post-Tarantino generation films *Japanese Film after Mr Pink*, the Japan Foundation is now planning a unique presentation of Japanese films that have been adapted from manga. In collaboration with UK professional organisations, it will run from mid January to March 2006 and venues will include Watershed, Bristol, Sheffield's Showroom and London's ICA. The programme will comprise contemporary Japanese films such as: *Blue* by Hiroshi Ando (2001); *My House (Bokunchi)* by Junji Sakamoto (2003); *Fancy Dance* by Masayuki Suo (1989).



Fancy Dance by Masayuki Suo, 1989 Kadokawa Pictures, Inc.

Manga manifest a huge diversity in both style and subject matter. From historical dramas and classic literary adaptations to sci-fi epics, instructional "Information Comics" like the 1987 best-seller *Introduction to Modern Economics (Nihon Keizai Nyumon)*, and tales of sports-field heroics, the spectrum of subjects is no smaller than novels or films.

And after all, why should it be? Far from the diverting sketches that occupy newspaper back pages in other countries, *manga* combine the narrative ambition of novels with the pictorial sense of movies. Many of Japan's biggest box-office hits in recent years have their origin on the printed page: the Heian-set period fantasy *Ying-Yang Master (Onmyoji)*, (2001); the hyper-kinetic sports comedy *Ping Pong* (2002); and even unlikely offerings like the long-running everyman series *Journal of a Fishing Idiot (Tsuribaka Nisshi)*, (1988-2005).

The vogue for live-action adaptations of comic book heroes really picked up in the 70s, with films such as the 6-installment samurai drama *Lone Wolf and Cub (Kozure Okami)*, (1972-74). *Lady Snowblood (Shurikyuhime)*, (1973), about a beautiful Meiji-era assassin, was based on a manga serial

cast in *Lady Oscar*, a lavish historical romp set in the court of Versailles at the time of the French Revolution, who would have ever guessed that its source was Riyoko Ikeda's phenomenally popular serial *The Rose of Versailles (Bersaiyu no Bara)* and that Toho studios was behind the production?

It's no surprise that so many *manga* find themselves immortalized in celluloid. With their lengthy action sequences spread across pages of frames, they are intrinsically cinematic, resembling movie storyboards, but with the advantage of a ready-built audience of fans eager to see how their favourite stories have shaped up under the personal vision of the individual film director. Having similarly evolved to fit in with the same contemporary social issues, interests and tastes as their big screen counterparts, *manga* comics and their adaptations represent a vital part of Japan's cultural landscape.

Jasper Sharp

For details visit our website www.jpf.org.uk

Japanese Performing Arts:

Here, Then and the Future

This 7th event in the Japanese Performing Arts series on 1 September was a seminar exploring the theme, *Do we need children's shows? Theatre practices for children in Japan and the UK.* Nicholas Barter, Principal, Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, lead the lively debate between Tony Graham, Unicorn Theatre, Guy Holland, Quicksilver Theatre, Professor Yuriko Kobayashi, Kawamura Gakuen Women's University and Sosuke Komori, Theatre Company En. Children's theatre proved to be an emotive topic with many theatre staff, members of leading cultural/educational agencies and dramatists engaging in a lively two-way discussion with the panelists.

The title question "Do we need children's shows" raised a few eyebrows among many of the children's theatre professionals in attendance. Certainly it may be true that, as one eminent Japanese playwright suggested, good theatre should theoretically appeal to the whole family. However, Tony Graham stressed from the outset that children are all too often excluded by the very atmosphere of the theatre and that physically bringing children along to the West End can be "drama enough in itself".

If children's shows are needed, how do we make children's theatre sustainable? The challenge seems to be to create theatre to which children can relate. Nicholas Barter, opened the debate by referring to a Japanese production of *King Lear* performed in such a way that each time a character was killed, the performers put on a baseball cap with wings to signify their flying off to heaven. As the cap went on there were shouts of "he's dead, he's dead" engaging the children in the performance. This anecdote highlighted the fact that in producing children's theatre one must think outside conventional boxes. Creative theatre was marvellously illustrated by *The World of Andersen presented by ATOM* introduced by Professor Kobayashi. In this show, Theatrical Company ATOM use inventive techniques such as special sign language, a mixture of dolls,



continued on next page

continued from page 3

ropes, mime and animation.

Although many issues, such as the involvement of children in the process of production remained to be discussed, the session offered a unique opportunity to compare and contrast practices in Japan and the UK. Children's theatre has been thriving in the UK with many companies turning their eyes towards the international scene and collaborating with companies particularly in Europe. In Japan, too, despite many of the difficulties faced by this specialist area, such as a significant decline in parent /children associations upon which theatre companies had previously relied for venues, there are many companies producing sophisticated theatre that successfully entertains and enlightens children.

David Ross

Out of the Ordinary/ Extraordinary Japanese Contemporary Photography



From the series "OMIAI♡"
2001 by Tomoko Sawada

works by 11 Japanese artists that give new expressive form to the complexities of our ever-changing world and the instability of Japanese society behind the façade of economic prosperity. Information: visit www.artsdepot.co.uk

This Japan Foundation Touring Exhibition is on show at artsdepot, London in the Aphorp Gallery from 27 October to 24 November 2005. It comprises 102 photographic

Traditional Music Today: Performing Arts in Japan

Booklet Available

This useful booklet is designed to give people from the arts community outside Japan the latest information on the Japanese traditional music scene.

Copies are obtainable from this office upon request (e-mail info@jpf.org.uk) and all information in the booklet is also available on line from Performing Arts Network Japan www.performingarts.jp

2006/7 Grant Programmes

Guidelines and application forms are now available for our 2006/2007 Programme of Grants.

The deadline (unless otherwise stated) is 1 December 2005. For a programme summary please visit our website www.jpf.org.uk/ourfunding.html For full details of individual programmes and to download application

forms go to our Tokyo website:

www.jpf.jp/e/about/program/index.html

Alternatively applicants who do not wish to use the on-line facility may request hard copies of Guidelines and application forms to be posted to them by contacting info@jpf.org.uk or info.language@jpf.org.uk (language programmes only).

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Events organised by, or with support from, the Japan Foundation

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| Now until 30 October | Rock the Future An exhibition focusing on some of the most innovative Japanese digital artists Ryota Kuwakubo and artist collectives resentment and exonemo. Related events and screenings during the exhibition. At the Foundation for Art & Creative Technology (FACT), Liverpool. Details: www.fact.co.uk/ |
| Now until February 2006 | The Cruel Beauty of Masumura Yasuzo Programme of 8 feature films to introduce UK audiences to the Japanese 'New Wave' avant-garde Director, Masumura Yasuzo. At NFT and then touring 15 venues nationwide. Info on, venues and dates visit: www.independentcinemaoffice.org.uk |
| 6 October
- 22 January 2006 | Self Life Death: First major exhibition in London of the work of Nobuyoshi Araki featuring photographs from the 1960s to 2005 along with installation works, books and archival materials, and a comprehensive examination of his work and career. Barbican Art Gallery. Details: visit www.barbican.org.uk |
| 20-24 October | Frieze Art Project As part of the daily performance programme, Japanese artist Q Takeki Maeda with the American Jay Jung will present a tour performance project at the Frieze Art Fair at Regent's Park, London. Details at www.friezeartfair.com |
| 1 November | Book Launch to celebrate the publication of the book Japanese Journeys by Geoffrey Bownas. At the Japan Foundation at 18:30. See page 2 for details. |
| 7 November | Edexcel GCSE Day Feedback and guidance meeting on GCSE Japanese. Details and booking from Edexcel Tel: 0970 240 9800 or from www.edexcel.org.uk |
| 10-12 November | Leeds International Film Festival Featuring Japanese documentary films. Details: visit www.leedsfilm.com |
| 22 November
- 1 December | Stringraphy Kazue Mizushima & Stringraphy Ensemble Details see front page article and visit: www.jpf.org.uk |
| 18-20 January 2006 | Head Start An introduction to Japanese for heads of modern foreign languages and senior managers in secondary schools including language co-ordinators at primary level. Details from Ben Brailsford Tel: 020 7436 6698 or from www.jpf.org.uk/language |
| 28 January 2006 | Speech Contest for University Students Open to undergraduates studying Japanese. Deadline for entry 20 November 2005. Conditions & information Tel: 020 7436 6698, e-mail: speechcontest@jpf.org.uk or visit www.batj.org.uk |
| 29 February 2006 | Tobu Workshop Practical workshop for primary school teachers with or without Japanese. 16:30-18:30. Enquiries: Japan Foundation London Language Centre, Tel: 020 7436 6698 |



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