

Shakuhachi, its cultural context and traditional music

Conference

The Shakuhachi is a Japanese bamboo vertical flute with only 5 holes. A simple structure instrument, that posses a very rich variety of tone colors, sound qualities, and timbres.

It is commonly accepted that it entered Japan from China as part of the Gagaku music orchestra around the VII century. It was later excluded from this form of music and no register is kept until around the XIII century, when it was adopted by a group of Zen Buddhist monks, as part of their religious meditation practice. In this context the instrument was not a musical one but a religious tool. With time this meditations were recovered as musical pieces and formed the group of music now known as Koten Honkyoku.

Besides Honkyoku, the instrument takes part on different traditional Japanese repertoires such as Sankyoku or Minyo.

Characteristics of the conference

The duration may vary depending on the possibilities. In no case should be less than 90 minutes, with a ideal time of 120 minutes.

The structure is based on three different elements oriented to generate a clear and interesting event: music, words and images. The explanations intend to be clear and simple, more as way of giving a context to the hearing experience than to illustrate academically, not explaining music but giving elements to get closer to it. The images helps to imagine and make closer unknown instruments and situations. The recorded and live examples work as the central part of the experience.

Origin of the proposal

The present proposal is based on the conferences given on the subject *musicas tradicionales del mundo I* (traditional world music's I) at the Escola Superior de Música de Catalunya (Superior Catalanian Music School), Barcelona, Spain, on May and October 2002. The subject is common to all the students of the Institution and is a general introduction to the theme. This conference was conceived as a very brief introduction to the subject and the elements related to the instrument and the music with which is associated in the Japanese traditional culture. Special emphasis was put on the way this music is perceived and valuated on the traditional Japanese environment.

The duration of the class was of 90 minutes. On each occasion the themes discussed were directly related to the interests expressed by the students present that day. These conferences – collaborations, originated a posterior extracurricular curse of 10 hours dedicated to a practical – theoretical introduction to the instrument, that was successfully realized on four different 150 minutes sessions on November 2002, at the same institution.

Elements considered on the presentation

– This list works only as a guide of what Can but not necessarily Will be discussed -
Historic context

- The Instrument
- Buddhism / Zen and relations to art
- Other Japanese instruments
- The Honkyoku Music
- Other Japanese musical forms
- Trasmition of the music
- My experience as a western student in Japan
- Notation. Characteristics and functions.
- References

Elements required

- Audio equipment with CD player
- Computer with CD-ROM
- Projector for the CD-ROM images

Horacio Curti
Shakuhachi player & teacher