

Bamboo Voice, Human Flute

Shakuhachi and Voice by
Christopher Yohmei and Mika Kimula

The Instruments

The human voice and shakuhachi flute are two of the world's oldest and most expressive instruments. The voice—mankind's most basic instrument—gives utterance to our inner feelings and allows the soul to manifest itself in the world. On a cultural level, song reflects the innermost spirit of the culture and the folk experience. Song is indispensable to Japanese music, and the voice is used in all aspects of Japanese music, both traditional and modern.

The shakuhachi vertical bamboo flute entered Japan in the seventh century from mainland Asia and is one of the most versatile flutes in the world. It is capable of subtle nuances in timbre and pitch, and its tones can soothe through a meditative stillness or excite with explosive bursts of sound. The shakuhachi is performed with a wide variety of ethnic or

western musical instruments in contemporary compositions or improvisational settings.

The Blasdel/Kimula Ensemble offers performances for various types of audiences. Their presentations range from the highly scholastic, suitable for university or graduate school courses, to community based art and educational performances. They can tailor their presentation for middle or high schools as well.

According to the needs of the presenters and the venue, the performers can explain the music, the instruments and their relevance to both Japanese and world culture. Both Blasdel and Kimula believe that awareness of the cultural and historical aspects of the music greatly enhances both the listeners' perception and understanding of Japanese music and, ultimately, the listeners' own musicality.



The Ensemble:

The **Bamboo Voice, Human Flute** makes full use of the unusual combination of shakuhachi and voice with musical performances which contrast, blend and transcend the ordinary. They can perform as a duo or be joined by a guest performer on the traditional Japanese *koto* or piano. Their repertory is extensive and includes traditional works from the Edo period (17-19th centuries) early 20th century works (Michio Miyagi, etc.) and contemporary compositions (including their own). They have performed throughout Japan, the United States, Europe, the former Soviet Union and Southeast Asia, and have received sponsorship from such organizations as The Japan Foundation, the Cultural Affairs Agency (Japan), Lufthansa Airlines, United Airlines, Earlham College, Chatham College (USA), Chulalongkorn University (Bangkok). They often performed as featured guests on the Mitsui Shipping luxury cruise ship *Nippon Maru*,

The Artists:

Christopher Blasdel/Shakuhachi (<http://www.yohmei.com>)

Blasdel began the shakuhachi and studies of Japanese music in 1972 with Goro Yamaguchi. In 1982 he received an MFA in ethnomusicology from Tokyo University of Fine Arts and received his professional name "Yohmei" from Yamaguchi in 1984. Performing in Japan and around the world, Blasdel maintains a balance between traditional shakuhachi music, modern compositions and cross-genre work with other musicians, dancers, poets, and painters. Discography includes several CDs of traditional and contemporary music. He has composed and performed music for NHK documentaries and various films. He is the author of *The Shakuhachi, A Manual for Learning* (Printed Matter Press, 2008), the foremost English language book about the shakuhachi and *A Single Tone—A Personal Journey into Shakuhachi Music* (Printed Matter Press, 2005), originally written in Japanese, a detail of his experiences learning and playing the shakuhachi around the world. He co-organized the Boulder World Shakuhachi Festival '98 and the Sydney World Shakuhachi Festival in 2008. He is also Senior Advisor to the yearly Prague Shakuhachi Festival. He presently teaches Japanese music at Temple University, Japan, acts as the coordinator for the Columbia University Hogaku Mentor Program and is Artistic Director at the International House of Japan.

Mika Kimula/Voice (<http://web.me.com/mikakimula/>)

Kimula graduated from the Voice Department of the Tokyo National University of Music and Fine Arts in 1980. Her musical focus is Japanese song (both traditional and Western) and their importance to the Westernization and modernization of 20th Century Japan. Kimula began her education by studying Italian classic and modern songs, but soon became interested in Twentieth Century Japanese vocal compositions and traditional Japanese singing styles as *noh* chant and *nagauta* singing.

Kimula is a recognized expert and performer of 20th century Japanese vocal music. In addition to performing, Kimula records, lectures, writes and gives workshops throughout Japan and in numerous "Japan Week" festivals, conferences and educational programs held in the U.S., Canada, the Republic of Georgia (former Soviet Union), Thailand, Bangladesh and throughout Europe. Discography includes a CD released from Teichiku Records, *Vocal Music in Twentieth Century Japan--The Inner Revolution between Silk and High Tech*. She has also performed and given demonstrations in various universities and institutions across the US, including Stony Brook New York State University, University of Colorado, and Chatham College in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. From 1997-1998, Kimula was a Fulbright Scholar in Residence at Chatham College, where she taught both language and music courses, such as "Japanese Language Through Singing," and "Vocal and Singing Skills." Kimula currently teaches at Ferris Women's College in Yokohama.

Youtube videos of Blasdel and Kimula (both in ensemble and alone)

Sasaganino, a contemporary composition for shakuhachi and voice based on ancient Japanese poetry:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5-GXcuq_Wk

Sasaganino performed in its entirety performed at the 2012 World Shakuhachi Festival in Kyoto:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k3wmz7mD3WQ&feature=related>

Kyorei solo shakuhachi *honkyoku*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ksansOKZkDo&feature=relmfu>

Tsukiyo no Kenshi (by Miki Minoru) A contemporary piece for shakuhachi (performed at the Sydney World Shakuhachi Festival, 2008):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jzH55i5a4U&feature=related>

Uguisu for solo voice, by Hayasaka Fumio

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m7JbW-kNCoY&feature=relmfu>

Three Songs from Medieval Japan, for voice and piano, by Masumoto Kikuko

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pwiz2tEvM7c&feature=relmfu>