

IN MEMORY – MIURA RYUHO

by Thorsten Knaub



With great sadness we announce the loss of Miura Ryuho, who was one of the great shakuhachi craftsmen of the last 40 years. Miura pioneered and perfected a new approach to *jiari* shakuhachi making and can be credited with developing a contemporary *jiari* flute.

Miura Tatsumi was born in Akita City, Northern Japan in 1952. He had his first encounter with the shakuhachi when about 10 years old, hearing someone playing *min'yō* shakuhachi in the street. A few years later he heard the well-known shakuhachi player Minoru Muraoka accompanying Misora Hibari on the song “Yawara”. But it took one more meeting to finally discover his passion for making too – having bought a cheap shakuhachi and hearing shakuhachi sounds he knocked at the door and met his first teacher, Ōse Shōun of the Kinko school, who was also a shakuhachi maker. There he discovered the tools of the trade and although he was not taught making by Ōse, he began exploring the making process by himself.

After high-school Miura started working for Nippon Gakki (now Yamaha Cooperation) in Hamamatsu. He was introduced to Yokoyama Ranpo nearby living in Shimizu City, and continued studying playing with him and subsequently with Ranpo's son Yokoyama Katsuya in Tokyo. Ranpo was of course a famous maker himself at that time, but he would not teach making. After some time Miura returned to Akita City, where he established his own shakuhachi teaching studio, and began performing and repairing shakuhachi. Receiving instruments from many different makers, he would study them and continue his experiments making longer shakuhachi.

Returning to Tokyo about seven years later, he dedicated most of his time to developing his unique way to craft shakuhachi and, working alongside Yokoyama Katsuya, he improved his methods and evolved his style of shakuhachi making further. Inspired by the saxophone family with its various different pitches and keys, he worked out bore profiles, making processes and specialised set of tools for the *jiari* shakuhachi to be able to craft instruments able to express the demanding needs of Yokoyama Katsuya's dynamic playing style and interpretation of the *honkyoku* repertoire. In particular Miura was perfecting the way to make longer flutes (up to 3.1 or even 3.7) to have a similar response, attack and handling as the standard lengths (eg 1.8).

In the following years, working between his shakuhachi making studios in Noshiro (Akita) and Tokyo, he became arguably one of the most sought after craftsmen of shakuhachi of his generation. His order list was long and it was not uncommon to wait for several years to receive the finished instrument, let alone if one was ‘foolish’ enough to order the ‘high or highest level’, which for a perfectionist like Miura meant even higher attention to every detail of the making process, resulting in even longer delivery times.

Miura's shakuhachi are often characterised by having “that honkyoku sound” and at the same time a contemporary playability. Given the close working relationship, it is maybe no surprise that his flutes are widely appreciated and used by Yokoyama lineage players (Kokusai Shakuhachi Kenshūkan, Chikushinkai, Dokyoku), but his craft stretches beyond a particular school or style and his instruments are played by other contemporary performers too (eg Fujiwara Dozan).

Miura was also an accomplished *honkyoku* and *sankyoku* player, and in recent years very active as both player and teacher. He was on the board of directors of the Akita Sankyoku Society and a part-time instructor at Hirosaki University's Education department.

On a personal note – Miura Ryuho was also my shakuhachi making teacher whom I initially met in his Tokyo studio – a small flat full of tools and bamboo on the way to Haneda. I owe him a great debt for leading me through the shakuhachi making processes he had developed. I have a cherished memory, when later taking lessons in his Akita studio, of witnessing his dedication to shakuhachi making and also his happiness to share, albeit cautiously, some of the ‘secrets’ he developed. But also in the many years after he was generous with his advice, in particular when he felt I progressed in my understanding and asked the right questions.

He will be not only greatly missed by his family and friends, but by the shakuhachi community too. The sound of his flutes remains. It will stay with us as long as we are able to blow. 🍵



Miura Ryuho in his Akita studio using the ‘center tool’ to check the nakatsugi cut. Summer 2019 (Photo: Thorsten Knaub)