

September

Often in spring and fall many temples, shrines and parks around Nara have evening light-ups that gather many people. Nara Park of course hosts a large event, but equally interesting is the light up of the ancient capital in Asuka. Asuka is home to many historically important places such as Asuka Temple, the oldest Buddhist temple in Japan, and the Takamatsuzuka tombs, just to name a few. This September I was honored to have a solo concert in the "Starry Night's Music Festival" held amongst thousands of candles in the Asuka Historical National Government Park. With artistic candle landscape designs and candles lining the pathways around the hills and through the forests, it really was a memorable event. It actually was a starry night, filled with a soft wind which carried my shakuhachi sounds throughout the park.

In the shakuhachi repertoire there is an ancient piece called "Asuka Reibo". The term Reibo alludes to the ringing of a bell which is symbolic for attaining enlightenment. Various areas of Japan have their own distinct flavor of Reibo, which often can be a reflection of that society. An austere sound is predominant among the pieces, but, interestingly the Asuka Reibo version is quite melodic and bright sounding, which I believe is a manifestation of the Asuka people and culture from many generations ago which has been passed down to the present. Even within traditional shakuhachi circles it is a rarely heard piece, so for most people it was probably their first time hearing it. I wonder if they could feel a connection to it and the people of the past. With the help of Mother Nature surrounding me, I tried to create an environment in which people were free to imagine what the meaning of the songs were or what life was like back then. Shakuhachi music affects people differently and with the right atmosphere I think it can touch a lot of people and allow them to explore, just by relaxing and letting go. Our busy lives are filled with decisions all day; this type of music allows us to "actively relax", as I like to call it.

Standing in the middle of the historical park, getting ready to perform my next piece, I thought about the light wind that was blowing from behind me. This was the same wind that had been blowing here in Asuka for well over a thousand years. The originators of this piece, the wandering komuso monks of this area, must have stopped to contemplate the wind hundreds of years ago as well.

I took a breath and began to play my original composition called "Asuka no Yugure" (Asuka Twilight). From the terraced rice fields of Asuka you can see a perfect view of the Niho Mountains, where I live at the foot of. I was walking there in the evening one day and got a perfect scene of the sun setting behind those mountains off in the distance. The beautiful twilight scene was the inspiration for this song. Seeing the sun slowly set behind the Niho Mountains led the ancient people of Asuka to believe that Paradise lie on the other side, and when we departed this world that was direction we went. With this glowing red twilight, I felt a deep connection between Asuka and my home of Katsuragi, which I could see off in the distance.

Sometimes when we step back and take a breath, we can see the interconnectedness of everything; different historical periods, peoples, traditions and music. It is always there, we just need to let the thousand-year-old winds blow the dust off.