

Two for Tea

Susan Meehan joins in celebrating a shared national passion

Ramen and the revolution

Sir Hugh Cortazzi explores noodle history with Barak Kushner

In this sumptuous issue we alter our trajectory a little by adding some new dimensions to our review offerings. J.R.R. Tolkien, one of my favourite authors, once observed, 'If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world.' Sound advice and in this issue we focus on food, drink and music to broaden our review menu which will in future offer such articles to our regular mix. Susan Meehan gives us her take on the much acclaimed 'Two Cultures United by Tea' event which was held at Banqueting House in Whitehall. Sir Hugh Cortazzi takes an in depth and fascinating look at

Slurp! A Social and Culinary History of Ramen by Barak Kushner. We then turn our gaze on this year's Matsuri in Trafalgar Square, the biggest annual celebration of Japanese culture, music and food in the UK. To finish, we have two music related reviews including an exclusive interview with Taro Hakase about his new album *JAPONISM*.

Sean Curtin, August 2013

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Two Cultures United by Tea

Sunday 15 September 2013

The Banqueting House
Whitehall, London
SW1A 2ER

Review by Susan Meehan

Tea is the most widely-consumed beverage plant in the world and China one of the earliest countries to produce and use tea, possibly as early as 2750 BC. The Zen Buddhist ritual of drinking tea before the image of the Bodhi Dharma, as mentioned by Okakura Tenshin in his much-loved (though unsubtle in its nationalistic bent and a product of its time, in the wake of the surprising Japanese victory over the Russians in the 1905 Russo-Japanese War) 1906 publication, *The Book of Tea*, developed into the 15th-century Japanese tea ceremony as perfected and codified by the great tea master, Sen no Rikyu. According to Soshitsu Sen XV, a descendant of Sen no Rikyu writing in his foreword to *The Book of Tea* the great tea master strove to convey the tea ceremony as being a living synthesis of Asian and Japanese arts.

Yet tea is also quintessentially British. There can be no better way of bringing the Japanese and British together than through drinking tea. Soshitsu Sen XV, writing in his afterword to *The Book of Tea*, noted that tea 'transcends the boundaries of nations.' He also stated, 'It has been my conviction that world peace can be achieved starting with the exchange of tea between just two individuals.'

It had been at least two hours since my last pot of tea that Sunday 15 September and I was looking forward to more at Banqueting House as I stepped out onto Whitehall in the rain. I was not as enthused by the prospect of those powdery, floury cloying Japanese tea sweets, which I imagined would certainly be offered to the guests, and which are eaten before drinking delicious, frothy, slightly bitter-tasting matcha (powdered green tea).

This tea event was a highlight of the Japan400 Week, marking the delivery of official letters and presents from King James I of England and VI of Scotland to Tokugawa Ieyasu and his son Hidetada on 8 and 17 September 1613 respectively, as part of their mission to set up the first English trading post in Japan. The bearer of the letters and gifts was John Saris, captain of the *Clove*, accompanied by William Adams, the pilot of a Dutch ship which had been shipwrecked in Japan in 1603 and who had stayed on in Japan in the capacity of honorary samurai and advisor to Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu ever since.

Two Cultures United by Tea succeeded in masterfully celebrating the 400th anniversary of the exchange of letters and presents initiated by Kings James I and

commemorating the historical figures who were vital to success of the East India Company's efforts to trade in Japan 400 years ago. The event brought the audience together over tea, that most unifying of all beverages, under Banqueting House's magnificent Rubens ceiling which celebrates the life and 'wise government' of King James. It is difficult to think of a more fitting or beautiful setting.

The Union of the Crowns, *The Apotheosis of James I* and *The Peaceful Reign of James I* are the three canvases painted by Sir Peter Paul Rubens and installed to decorate the hall's ceiling in 1636.

In addition to this appropriate setting, the presence of Mr Akira Matsura, Head of the Chinshin School of Tea Ceremony and a direct descendant of Lord Matsura, who ruled the area of Hirado in Japan on behalf of Hidetada Tokugawa at the time of the British ship the *Clove's* arrival in Hirado on 11 June 1613, made the event all the more resonant.

'It has been my conviction that world peace can be achieved starting with the exchange of tea between just two individuals' - Soshitsu Sen XV

Tea refreshes the spirit and, as Okakura Tenshin reveals in his *Book of Tea*, it is what keeps the Zen monks awake during their long hours of meditation.

Taking my seat in the beautiful hall, I also noticed a half-built gold-coloured telescope on display. King James I had sent presents to the ruler of Japan, including a telescope, the first ever to reach Asia. Only having been invented in the Netherlands in 1608, this was a precious gift indeed. Sadly the telescope was subsequently lost and Japan400 has set out to replace it with this new model, still a work in progress.

Welcoming all to the event, Nicolas Maclean, Co-Chairman of Japan400, read a short message of support for this commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the start of Japan-British relations from the Rt Hon William Hague MP, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, in which he underlined 'the value Her Majesty's Government attached to that partnership today.'

This was followed by opening remarks given by HRH The Duke of Gloucester, Patron of the Japan Society, who remarked on tea being close to the heart of British people. If a crisis is brewing, the duke only half-joked, tea is called upon.

The Duke of Gloucester urged the audience to look at the breath-taking ceiling painted by Sir Peter Rubens, who had been Dutch Ambassador to London and the first artist to be knighted.

A leading expert on architecture, the duke recounted that Banqueting House had been conceived by Inigo Jones, a court designer, who preferred neo-classicism over the baroque. Jones gave Banqueting House a

sense of authority and elegance (its website refers to it being like a piece of 'Ancient Rome transposed to Whitehall') though its tremendous cost led to distrust between the king and Parliament and the latter's discrediting of the king's architecture.

Following the duke's welcome, Mr Akira Matsura, the 41st-generation head of the Matsura family described how his ancestor had greeted John Saris and crew at Hirado, the Matsura's ancestral land.

On this visit to England, Mr Matsura had already, a few days previously, offered tea to the spirit of Will Adams at St Mary's Church in Gillingham where Adams had been baptised.

Mr Matsura proceeded to conduct a *kencha* tea ceremony, preparing matcha in two cups dedicated to the souls of King James I and the Lord of Hirado (at the time of the *Clove's* arrival). Mr Matsura related that the Chinshin School had been developed by the Lord of Hirado and that he regards the tea ceremony as a way of cultivating the warrior or samurai's cultural sensibility as well as training his mind for military purposes. The *kencha* tea ceremony evolved precisely in order to dedicate bowls of tea to deities or the spirits of the deceased, particularly on important anniversaries.

With clinical precision Mr Matsura, clothed in a kimono and wearing a face-mask, knelt in front of a black lacquer cabinet which held a container of hot water and a pot of matcha. Carefully unwrapping a series of utensils for adding the powder to a bowl and to whisk the tea, Mr Matsura made a single bowl of tea in complete silence. When ready, the bowl was carried by a Japanese teenager (Nanko Suzuki) to a table in front of the throne of King James I. A second bowl was similarly prepared and set in front of a scroll portrait of Lord Matsura Hoin, by British teenager Christopher Hyde.

Special guests near the front of the hall were able to watch proceedings close-up while those sitting further away could watch the tea ceremony on screens relaying Matsura's elaborate rituals. This felt slightly disjointed; those at the back feeling they were at a different event but Mr Matsura graciously apologised for the silence and long wait.

Mr Matsura had brought thirty tea disciples with him from different parts of Japan, all of whom helped prepare matcha for two hundred or so guests gathered in Banqueting House. Robin Thompson played the *shō*, a small, easily portable Japanese musical instrument consisting of seventeen slender bamboo pipes, while the audience waited in silence for their bowl of matcha.

As the disciples marched to and fro, I noticed a lovely touch – one of the kimono-clad women was wearing an obi with an embroidery of what appeared to be the *Clove*.

Just at this point, when I was beginning to think

that while united by the promise of drinking tea the audience might begin feeling fractious at the wait for the matcha, we had a capella singing by director of the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation, Jason James, along with Danae Eleni, Oliver Hamilton and David Entwistle, who thoroughly enlivened proceedings through their singing of 'If ye love me', 'You're getting to be a habit with me' and 'Java Jive' with the lyrics 'I love coffee, I love tea, I love the Java Jive and it loves me!'

This was followed by an even livelier set of songs expertly played by Michael Spencer and Bogdan Văcărescu on violins, Meg Hamilton on viola and Adam Spiers on cello. They began with a tribute to 17th-century music, went on to perform a medley of Japanese folk songs including the ever-popular *Sakura Sakura*, and finished with a variety of tea dance-music and an assortment of Noel Coward songs.

The musical interlude was followed by selection of light-hearted readings about tea, reliant on Okakura Tenshin's *The Book of Tea*, poetry, diaries, histories and pieces written by a selection of famed writers ranging from Dr Johnson to Douglas Adams.

'There are few hours in life more agreeable than the hour dedicated to the ceremony known as afternoon tea' - Henry James

The choices had been excellently made and were read with great panache and humour by Jenny White and William Horsley, part of the Japan400 team, and journalist, Reiko Takashina.

The pieces traced the history and culture of tea and tea-drinking. A quotation from the scholar-monk Eisai's eulogy on tea written in 1211 mentioned tea's therapeutic properties, 'Tea is the most wonderful medicine for nourishing one's health; it is the secret of long life. On the hillside it grows up as the spirit of the soil. Those who pick and use it are certain to attain a great age.'

William Cobbett, the radical 18th century reformer, however, decried the evils of tea, 'I view the tea drinking as a destroyer of health, and enfeebler of the frame, an engenderer of effeminacy and laziness, a debaucher of youth and a maker of misery for old age.'

As Okakura Tenshin includes in his book, the critics of tea met their match in Dr Johnson who referred to himself as a 'hardened and shameless tea-drinker, who for twenty years diluted his meals with only the infusion of this fascinating plant; whose kettle had scarcely time to cool; who with tea amused the evening, with tea solaced the midnight and with tea welcomed the morning.'

Tea of course has triumphed over its critics.

A more modern icon, Douglas Adams wrote in *A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, 'Arthur blinked at the

screens and felt he was missing something important. Suddenly he realised what it was. "It there any tea on this spaceship," he asked.'

The cultural significance of tea simply cannot be overstated. As Okakura Tenshin remarked, 'If you are cold, tea will warm you. If you are too heated, it will cool you. If you are depressed, it will cheer you. If you are excited, it will calm you.'

It is difficult to think of a more miraculous, all-encompassing drink.

The readings entertained the audience while the matcha made inroads. We were offered a sweet and beautiful biscuit decorated with the Japan400 dates in preparation for the bitter tea. The biscuit was wafer-thin, crispy and delicious, with a hint of molasses while the sweet was surprisingly nice. The sweet, in the shape of the Matsura family clan – another delightful touch – had been made with spices that were traded 400 years ago, including clove and cinnamon. The glorious matcha was given to us in beautiful ceramic bowls.

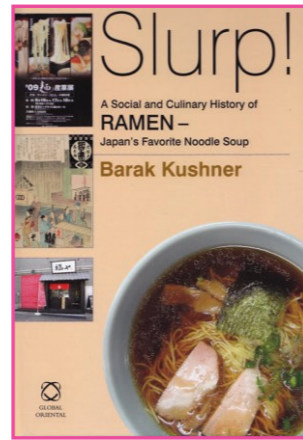
Professor Timon Screech, Co-Chairman of Japan400 gave the concluding remarks and invited the audience to the undercroft below to take part in an 'English tea ceremony' – not quite the use of the undercroft as favoured by James I who used it as a drinking den.

Henry James in *The Portrait of a Lady* said, 'There are few hours in life more agreeable than the hour dedicated to the ceremony known as afternoon tea.' With this in mind, as the line had been recently read by Jenny White, we filed downstairs for our scone with jam and cream and tea. We were spoiled to a selection of tea provided by the East India Company, relevant as John Saris sailed to Japan on an East India Company ship; Birchall Tea, Harneys Tea and Postcards Tea.

A committed and enthusiastic tea-drinker, I was in heaven.

I started with Birchall's Great Rift tea, a deliciously strong breakfast tea, and made my way around all the tables, relishing this opportunity to taste tea and to freely chat with audience members who had been long-waiting for this opportunity to refresh themselves with a reviving cup of tea before heading out into the pouring rain. Nothing like a cup of tea to fortify one in anticipation of battling the elements!

Many thanks to the organisers, speakers and tea disciples for a fabulous afternoon.



Slurp! A Social and Culinary History of Ramen – Japan's Favorite Noodle Soup

by Barak Kushner

Global Oriental, Leiden-Boston, 2012

289 pages

Review by Sir Hugh Cortazzi

Under the heading 'Ramen is Japan' Barak Kushner asserts: 'Ramen (regular and instant) permeates all features of contemporary Japanese life.' He goes on to declare that a life-style investigation in 2004 showed that an overwhelming majority of Japanese prefer ramen to other noodle dishes including soba, udon or pasta. As someone who is particularly fond of zaru-soba and who is conscious of the pride of various regions such as Nagano in their own special varieties of soba and udon, I find this surprising.

Barak Kushner, who teaches modern Japanese history at Cambridge University, is a ramen enthusiast who clearly enjoyed greatly doing the research needed for this fascinating book. In delving into the history of ramen Kushner throws light on many interesting aspects of Japanese social and political history as well as on Japan's lengthy and complex relationship with China.

'Where did ramen originate?' He asks. When he put this question to Osaki Hiroshi who established the Ramen Data Bank, the answer began: 'Ramen represents Japanese culture in that the main pillars of its origin are Chinese but later, Japan nurtured these elements for itself and created something completely different from Chinese culture.' This is true of many other aspects of Japanese culture.

In his further investigations Kushner tries to discover the origins of the term 'ramen' and notes that before the Pacific War peddlers with their food carts used to call their noodles Shina soba (Chinese soba). One theory is that the word 'ramen' came to be used because Japanese cannot pronounce the consonant L, which was used in la-mian, the Chinese term for pulled noodles.

One important post-war development was the invention of instant ramen by Momofuku Andô [安藤百福] who apparently found how to develop the product by looking at how tempura is made. 'The trick is to fry the noodles quickly enough and in hot enough oil that they fuse into a hard block.' Kushner declares that 'Instant ramen helped to spur Japan's third food revolution.' Instant ramen is one of Japan's contributions to the world's inventory of convenience foods.

What is the difference between washoku and Nihon ryōri? Kushner explains that washoku is used to describe traditional home-grown cuisine while Nihon ryōri includes dishes imported from abroad and adapted to Japanese taste. Tempura and sukiyaki fit into this category. Washoku reflects the austerity, which Japanese had to endure because of the vagaries of the Japanese climate and the unsuitability of much of Japan's terrain to agriculture.

Among the interesting historical facts, which emerge in Kushner's survey of Japanese food culture, are his comments on the Heian court. The members of the court produced fine literature and poetry, but their quality of life 'was less than brilliant. They gorged on rice with a few pickled side dishes and rarely exercised ... The men drank large quantities of a sweet alcoholic drink and developed a range of diabetic-related illnesses.'

A modern Japanese would have found Japanese food and cuisine in all periods up to that of the Tokugawa shoguns almost unbelievably poor. No meat, limited vegetables and fish unless you lived by the sea. Rice was a luxury. Millet, which was turned into soba, was the staple diet. In the war years and after even the sweet potato Satsuma-imo was a luxury.

Buddhist precepts forbade the killing of animals. Fish were not 'killed'; they died from being brought out of their natural watery environment. The casuistry, which allowed such an exception, led in Tokugawa times to inoshishi (wild boar) being referred to as yama-kujira, mountain whales!

Kushner has also much of interest to say about the role of food in Shinto and in the ritual of Japanese life.

I would have welcomed a comparison between the spread of ramen culture with the development and role of pasta in Italian cuisine and its spread through Europe and North America, but this would perhaps have made the book too weighty a tome.

I also missed any reference to Morioka's wanko-soba. How many cups could Kushner manage to consume?

Japanese food in recent years has become hugely popular in western countries. Paris has even more Japanese restaurants than London. Sushi, once regarded as 'yuk' is now the luncheon choice of many western office workers. Kushner's book should ensure that ramen becomes equally popular.

This is a book, which anyone interested in Japanese food, will enjoy. I hope that hotel book-shops in Japan will make sure that they have copies on their shelves for visitors as well as for foreign residents.

Japan Matsuri 2013

Trafalgar Square, October 5 2013

Review by Sean Curtin



The 2013 Japan Matsuri was held on Saturday 5th October in Trafalgar Square, its second year at the world famous venue. The dynamic annual event brings the Japanese community and Londoners together to enjoy an amazing day of Japanese culture, creating a genuine Matsuri festival-like feeling. As in previous years the public were treated to fantastic food, live performances, martial arts, dance, arts, crafts, family activities and much more. Huge crowds thronged Trafalgar Square, literally filling it with people from noon until the Matsuri ended at 9pm. The amazing spectacle is probably the largest annual gathering of Japanese people in the UK.

This year's colourful opening ceremony highlighted two important anniversaries, the 400th anniversary of the first official contacts between Japan and Britain, known as Japan400, and the 150th anniversary since the first Japanese university students came to London, known as the Choshu Five. These trailblazers from the Choshu domain, which is today called Yamaguchi Prefecture, returned to Japan and all made a substantial contribution to the creation of modern Japan. One of their number, Hirobumi Ito, became Japan's first Prime Minister and is often referred to as the 'father of the Japanese constitution.' To celebrate this milestone, the current Japanese Ambassador to the UK, Mr Keiichi Hayashi, along with four fellow colleagues from Yamaguchi Prefecture dressed up as the intrepid five for the opening ceremony. The quintet were also accompanied on stage by their top hat wearing professor, Alexander Williamson (Martin Barrow) and key costumed figures from the Japan400 narrative including Captain John Saris, William Adams and Lord Tokugawa. Deputy Mayor of London Victoria Borwick also joined this dazzling gathering of historical figures who kicked off the day by cracking open a sake barrel. After the ceremony, all the historic characters descended into the crowd and paraded around the Square.

From its opening at 11am, the large performance stage conjured up a continuous feast of absolutely brilliant entertainment ranging from traditional Japanese music to electrifying modern performers. During the day, family-oriented acts dominated the stage and entertained the large numbers of children in the audience, making it a great family day out. In the afternoon the 'Nodojiman: The J Factor' Japanese song competition was as popular as ever with some top class performances by contestants battling to win the first prize London-Tokyo return plane ticket. The event's ever cheerful presenters, the energetic Simon Wright and the multi-talented Naomi Suzuki, also deserve a mention. They skilfully navigated the

audience through the various acts and entertained the crowds in the spaces between. Naomi also sang and danced on stage in the late afternoon.

As the evening crept over the Square, the tone of the Matsuri performances changed, generating an exhilarating matsuri-type feeling. The final few acts created a brilliant finale sensation for the enthusiastic audience. The lively crowds were treated to the mesmerizing moves of Siro-A, the amazing electric guitar of Hotei and the wonderful sound of Joji Hirota London Taiko Drummers.

Delicious food and drink could be purchased throughout the day which really enhanced the festive feeling. There were also many fascinating arts and crafts stalls as well as a host of free family activities ranging from origami to traditional Matsuri games as well as amazing opportunities to try on exquisite traditional Japanese armour and colourful yukatas. The Martial Arts stage was also a strong crowd-puller as was the enormous Manga Wall, where members of the public could draw their own comic creations.

This year's Matsuri was a superb festival and brilliant fun. 2013 marked its fifth year and its first since it changed its status from a company to a charity. Japan Matsuri is organized by dedicated volunteers from the Japan Association in the UK, the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the UK, the Japan Society and the Nippon Club as well as strong support from the Embassy of Japan and the logistical management of the commercial company Éclat. These organizations and their army of energetic volunteers all deserve our thanks for arranging such a fantastic day.



Young children perform at Japan Matsuri 2013



Dressed to kill – Beautiful traditional Japanese Armour



The Chronicles of Matsuri: The Lion, the Wisteria and the Geisha



Looking good at 150 years – The Choshu Five with Professor Williamson

Taro Hakase on his new album Japonism

Interview by Mike Sullivan

The violinist and composer Taro Hakase was born in 1968 in Suita City, Osaka, and he has been releasing albums and performing at concerts for over twenty years. For the last few years he has called London home, regularly performing at Cadogan Hall in Chelsea. After the 2011 Tohoku Earthquake he held seven concerts in five days across London to raise funds for the people affected by the disastrous earthquake and tsunami that hit Northwest Japan. This year he released his latest album, *Japonism*, and to launch it he completed an amazing live broadcast of a climb up Mt. Fuji followed by a performance on the summit. He took time out from his busy world tour to talk with Mike Sullivan.



Please tell us about your world tour: *Japonism*.

This project is a tour made up of 45 performances, there will be five performances in five countries around the world and 40 performances in Japan. Since I moved to London in 2007, I have performed many concerts there, but this time I will show a London audience the popular music style that I have always performed in Japan. I have performed for over 200,000 people in my home country using a concert style developed over the span of 23 years.

What does 'Japonism' mean to you?

The word 'Japonism' represents an art movement that took place in the centre of Paris at the end of the 19th century. In world fairs and international exhibitions European artists could touch the culture of Japan for the first time; in particular the art of Ukiyoe and Edo was incorporated into the European consciousness.

Artists like Monet, Van Gogh, Degas, Lautrec, were all influenced by Japanese paintings and a new era of global arts practice began. This album marks the first time that the music and culture of my country has been the central theme of my own work. At forty-five I have come to realise how beautiful my homeland really is. This is my *Japonism*, to show this feeling to the world through music, the aesthetic sense which flows through every Japanese. It is my way of restoring a pride and confidence in Japan as a nation and a call to everyone that I want to make music with all of my heart.

What kind of feeling did you put into the music?

In the album *Japonism* there is some hana (flower)

music. I really engage with the Japanese sense of beauty; such as the moment the cherry blossom blooms in spring. To us beautiful flowers are symbolic of our country.

On the release date of the album *Japonism* you sent out a live music broadcast from Mt. Fuji, what inspired you to do such an event?

For the album release date I wanted to do something active and, during the summer we were discussing it, Mt. Fuji was registered as a World Heritage Site. Just as the album is titled *Japonism*, The Tokyo radio station J-WAVE helped us to plan the ascent; a symbolic mountain to fit with a symbolic album.

How did you feel afterwards?

It took nine hours to climb to the summit and it was extremely cold at the top, with a temperature of just two degrees. I felt that it was only through sheer will power that I managed to complete the live performance. It was very difficult but this ultimately led to a greater sense of accomplishment shared with the whole team.

How does it feel to hold the record for most concerts held in Japan?

The number of people I have performed for reached 200,000 a year ago. However, this number only includes audience members since 2000; it doesn't include the people I have performed for since 1990 when I had my debut with *Chrysler & Company* or as a solo artist. In recent years I have done performances with a classical theme in the spring, from my own albums in the autumn, live outdoor performances known as *Passionate Continent* [jounetsu tairiku -情熱大陸] in the summer and, since 2008, I have managed to stage around 100 performances altogether in London.

What did you think when you heard that Japan had been chosen for the 2020 Olympics?

As a Japanese national I was very proud and felt very happy.

It was very inspirational when you completed seven concerts in five days across London after the 2011 Tohoku Earthquake, it really felt like you represented Japanese spirit at that time. However, it must have been very hard?

As a Japanese musician living in London, I had to do what I could to help my homeland to the furthest extent possible.

When you reflect back on your amazing career, which moments stick out for you?

Everything that I have done has been a precious experience, but the three years I toured the world with Celine Dion was a treasurable experience that left me with a lasting impression.

Please tell us about the origin of your trademark hair.

At the time of my debut, Sauvage [hairstyles] had become very popular amongst young women. Since then the curly hair of a violinist has become my own personal thing, and now as part of my work I continue to perm it.

What are you looking forward to most when you are in London for your concert at the O2 Shepherds Bush Empire on Monday 25 November?

I am looking forward to being able to communicate the cool side of Japanese culture to the people of London.

This time, you will tour five countries outside of Japan, but are there any differences between a British audience and those other audiences?

British audiences are very warm. In the world, their applause and cheers are the loudest, and so I look forward to this every time I am on a London stage.

Since I moved to London in 2007, I have done many classical concerts around the UK, but this time I want to show everyone in London my popular music style from Japan. On 25 November I would like as many people as possible to experience this side of my music at the O2 Shepherds Bush Empire.

I want to celebrate with everyone my first world tour London concert! Get ready to enjoy it!

Finally, what is your favourite thing about having concerts in the UK?

It has been 7 years since I started to live in London and I would be very happy if I could perform a classical concert every year in this city that I love. That I have continued to do this is really thanks to the audience members who have always encouraged me with their constant support. For me, London is my second home.

Out of Silence: A Pianist's Yearbook

by Susan Tomes

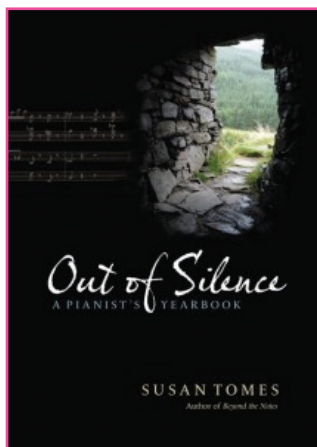
Shunjusha, June 2012

448 pages

ISBN-13: 978-0593066829

Review by Lisa Ueda

Out of Silence traces a year in the life of a classical pianist in the form of a blog. Each entry develops a theme that has inspired her interpretation of a score or her performance of a piece of music. The essays are short, thought provoking, informative, and interesting.



Although my own instrument is different, as a musician and performer I felt such a strong identification with this book that as I read on from page to page, I found myself 'nodding vigorously,' as the translator says in her afterword. The essays in it describe frankly, unpretentiously and straightforwardly the thoughts and feelings of a globe-trotting performer in response to her daily life and experiences, and are short enough for even busy modern people to read.

In reality, performers are constantly plagued by worry and unease. But we hide all that when we're on stage, and radiate confidence, or at least we try to. Performers are human too, so we naturally have our ups and downs. This book is honest about everything, including that worry and unease. Tomes simply says 'this is how I am,' and writes exactly what she feels; you end up admiring her as a performer, or rather as a person.

As an abstract art form, music is often very difficult to write about in words, but Tomes's writing weaves a spell. I also take my hat off to the translation by Noriko Ogawa, a pianist on the same global concert circuit – it's immediately obvious that she's not just translating the material literally.

To translate this book required the ability to see deeply and accurately into the linguistic and cultural differences and nuances not only between Japan and the UK, but also between their respective musical worlds. I think only Ogawa, with her deep knowledge of both cultures, could have managed it.

I read the book from a variety of perspectives – as a performer, as a Londoner, as a Japanese person, as an audience member, as a music-lover . . . Ogawa has rephrased the sometimes distinctively British idioms, phraseology and metaphors of the original text so that they are easily understandable in Japanese, and don't interrupt the flow of the text.

Out of Silence: A Pianist's Yearbook is shot through with Tomes's humanity. I identified with her as a fellow-performer, but she also made me think. She made me see things from a new perspective, opening my eyes to some things I hadn't noticed, and making me rethink others I thought I already knew about.

A further aspect of the book that anyone can enjoy is the exclusive peek it gives you at what life is like behind stage for a world-famous pianist. It made me want to attend Tomes, members of the trio, and Ogawa's concerts.

In the afterword, Ogawa writes that 'she couldn't stop thinking 'Thank you, Susan!' – After reading the Japanese translation of the book, I feel it is my turn to say 'Thank you, Noriko!'