

Welcome to the December issue of the *Japan Society Review*. The *Review* could never claim, or attempt, to give an exhaustive account of the latest Japan-related publications and performances in the UK, but looking back on the books, films, artists and performances featured in this publication throughout 2016 does give an impression of the healthy level of interest in Japan in Britain. This issue is no different with reviews of new historical fiction, theatre, biography and music.

The Shogun's Queen is the final novel in Lesley Downer's quartet on the political and human consequences of the 're-opening' of Japan and the end of the Edo period, a period that Downer presents through the eyes of its women. In her review, Elizabeth Ingrams tells us that *The Shogun's Queen* makes for a suitably dramatic climax to the series.

Throughout 2016, the Japan Foundation, in collaboration with Yellow Earth and StoneCrabs Theatre Company, has presented a monthly series of events, introducing UK audiences to the work of some of Japan's outstanding contemporary playwrights, all of which have been heard in English for the first time. September's

edition featured Suzuki Atsuto's *Global Baby Factory*, and in her review Susan Meehan leaves us in no doubt that Suzuki's vibrant, cosmopolitan style transfers very well to the British stage.

At ninety-four years of age, historian Donald Keene is showing little sign of slowing down. In his latest monograph he ensures that Ishikawa Takuboku, one of Japan's great yet neglected – particularly domestically – writers, receives his proper recognition in English language scholarship.

On the subject of due recognition, it is always inspiring to read about contributions, often unsung, to the understanding of Japan in the UK. In *Bridges* we hear from ten distinguished personalities at the heart of the UK-Japan relationship.

Lastly, Annabelle Sami reviews a performance by Kero Kero Bonito. This London three-piece bring a high level of both musicality and irreverence to J-pop, a genre not normally associated with London's thriving alternative music scene.

William Upton

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Sir Hugh Cortazzi, Elizabeth Ingrams, Susan Meehan and Annabelle Sami

(Photo: Tom Lilly)

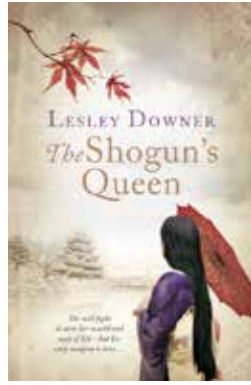
The Shogun's Queen

by Lesley Downer

Bantam Press (2016)

ISBN-10: 0593066863

Review by Elizabeth Ingrams



The historical and emotional sweep of Lesley Downer's *The Shogun's Queen* takes your breath away. While some people may have filed Downer's work under 'Japanese romance' or 'geisha', this book takes her tetralogy about the death throes of Japan's Edo period (1603-1868) to new heights. The story of Atsu, also known as princess Sumiko or Atsuhime (the title of NHK's major 2008 historical drama), is the stuff of legend. Elevated from her samurai origins in the Satsuma domain to be married into the Tokugawa family as a political match to one of Japan's last shoguns, the epileptic Iesada (ruler from 1853-1858), Atsu's rise and self-sacrifice is conceived as mirroring the sacrifice made by Edo-period Japan in the face of external forces.

It is 1853. Commodore Perry's 'black ships' have arrived at Shimoda and Japan is now ruled by a very different shogun to the fearsome Tokugawa Iyasu, who, along with his son, expelled foreigners in the 17th century. Now the Shogun has been warned that the West wants to force open Japan's ports for trade, and as a terrifying precedent, China's southern coast has been bombarded by the British in an effort to force the continuation of its opium trade. These threats require drastic measures and changes to the Shogun's inward-looking administration. Lord Nariakara, lord of the Satsuma domain, sees opportunities in trade with the West, but also the dangers of an unequal partnership. In a bid to end 250 years of division between the house of Tokugawa and the 'outlying' lords of the Satsuma, Chōshū and Tosa domains, Nariakara makes an unlikely match for his strong-willed niece Atsu.

Against this epic backdrop, and Nariakara's ambition, Atsu, aged 15, is just a pawn. As the first test of her steel she is given a diplomatic letter to deliver to the previous lord of 'crane' castle in Kagoshima before making her way to Miyako to begin her adoption into the Imperial household (part of the process of becoming eligible to marry Iesada). Along the way she faces assault and abduction, but by far the greatest trials come only after she has become eligible for ascension into the gilded cage of Edo castle's women's palace. She is aware that this is effectively a one-way ticket to

luxurious incarceration. The key secret that everyone has omitted to mention to her is that her husband-to-be is incapable of ruling.

From the beginning, Atsu conceives of Edo castle as a persimmon with a maggot at its centre: the maggot in this case is Lady Honju-in, her mother-in-law. She has more power than Rome's Livia or Scotland's Lady Macbeth, having succeeded in obliterating all other rivals to the throne (including twenty-five children) in order to establish her sickly son as sole heir. The whole of Edo is held hostage to her power as she refuses to come to terms with the arrival of US Commodore Perry with his fleet of black ships, and what it means for Japan's – and by extension her – position. Atsu's mission, closely monitored by her lady-in-waiting, Ikushima, is to persuade Iesada to install a regent who can take decisions in his place, rally Japan's lords 'and to work out a solution to the impossible situation we are in.'

Her vain attempts at womanly diplomacy for the installation of Nariakara's favourite as regent, go against Lady Honju-in's preference for a 12-year-old heir, a decision which would plunge Japan ever closer to the civil war that Nariakara has been striving to avoid. However, along the way Atsu does succeed in driving her new husband, Iesada to overcome his inhibitions, resentment and epilepsy to make an impressively enigmatic peace agreement with the Americans: 'Pleased with the letter sent with the Ambassador from a far distant territory and likewise pleased with his discourse – intercourse shall be continued forever.'

Downer depicts the halcyon final days of the Edo period with brilliant sympathy, as she has done in the previous novels, which are set a decade or so later. What brings this tale of female statecraft to life above all, is the dialogue. Downer has an unerring knack for capturing spiteful repartee filtered through silken politesse; in this courtly language, every act of humility is feigned and every put down is framed as concern for the feelings of the other. The real danger for Atsu comes once Iesada has died, poisoned, it is suspected, for striking a deal with Perry. Only at this point do we see a fall from grace; the high-class choreography plummets into farce as Lady Honju-in accuses Atsu of plotting against her son. She picks up her imperial kimono only to descend on her young opponent: 'You were in it too, you miserable interloper,' she screeches, 'you wormed your way in here, fooled us with your pretty face and pretty ways. I should denounce you too.'

As we learn in the afterword, Atsu's intransigent loyalty to the shogunate did eventually pay off, leading her ultimately to negotiate a peaceful surrender of Edo castle to the imperial troops in 1868, ushering in the Meiji period.

In the triumphant culmination to her tetralogy, Downer succeeds in lifting noble Japanese samurai women from the dust of a period when, according to the prevailing Confucian diktat, women had 'no place outside the home'. She gives life to Atsu's brave struggle to save their country from destruction, and in doing so, does a great service of providing inspiration not only for Japanese – who in my humble opinion are in desperate need of strong female role models

– but for readers of all nationalities. I only fear that if Hollywood were to lay their hands on the rights to this tale the true elegance, sophistication and moral courage of a character like Atsu would be lost in the more obvious commercial selling points of political intrigue, Japanese swagger, assassination and hara-kiri, all rolled together as the curtain rises on the arrival of America to the stage of her first major Pacific 'subaltern' alliance. §

Elizabeth Ingrams is the author of *Japan Through Writers' Eyes*, Eland Publishing Ltd, £12.99 2015, ISBN 978-190601108-6

Global Baby Factory by Suzuki Atsuto (translated by Rui Sayaka)

RADA Studios, London, 1 September 2016

Review by Susan Meehan

Atsuto Suzuki was inspired to write *Global Baby Factory* in 2012 after reading *Justice: What's the Right Thing to do?* by Harvard University Professor Michael Sandel. Sandel invites readers to consider controversial issues – such as the use of torture, abortion, affirmative action and assisted suicide – from new perspectives, and in *Global Baby Factory* Suzuki sets out to explore the issue of surrogacy in Japan. It was performed at RADA Studios in London on 1 September, just days after the Indian Government approved the draft Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill*, which severely restricts the practice of surrogacy in India. This made Suzuki Atsuto's original and thought-provoking piece searingly topical.

37-year old university friends Sunako and Nachi are working out in a gym in Tokyo as they lament growing old without a love interest. Trim and youthful Sunako is paying huge amounts of money for a range of beauty treatments and products in order to preserve her youth, but won't tell Nachi. Her parents are desperate for her to marry and have children and her insensitive mother warns that she is no Cinderella, that her menopause is probably fast approaching. Sunako, however, is leaving nothing to chance; as a back-up she has also frozen some of her eggs.

Before long, Sunako reluctantly attends an arranged marriage party and falls for Jun'ichi. They soon marry. In one of many hilarious scenes, a Greek-style chorus celebrates Sunako's impending nuptials while also bemoaning Nachi's single state, exhorting her to wed. And befitting a Greek tragedy, calamity



soon strikes. Diagnosed with cervical cancer, Sunako, while still hoping for a baby, needs a hysterectomy.

The play shifts intermittently to the Desai Surrogacy Clinic in India, where potential surrogate mothers – most of them destitute housewives and cotton pickers – are paid 30,000 rupees per month while pregnant and an extra 300,000 rupees if the pregnancy is successful. This is enough for most of them to buy their own home.

The play concludes in India as Sunako and Jun'ichi travel over to collect their baby. Nachi is there too in a capacity as an investigative journalist, hoping to interview the Japanese couple she has heard about, who are having a baby via an Indian surrogate mother. The penny soon drops and Nachi is caught between the role of friend and investigative journalist. Is surrogacy exploitative? If not, why is it rife in India but not in Japan? Why didn't Sunako's sister take on the role of surrogate mother? Sunako feels she is giving her Indian surrogate mother hope and enabling material comfort. In Nachi's words, is Sunako



really using an abnormal system to become what she considers “normal”?

The play avoids becoming didactic, allowing the audience to ponder these themes for themselves. The casting was spectacularly good and, as with their reading of Suzuki’s *The Bite* in the summer, the Yellow Earth Theatre actors were fantastically committed. It was clear that they had devoted time and effort to familiarising themselves with the script and characters, the end product being virtually indistinguishable from a full theatrical performance. Kumiko Mendl’s flawless direction seems to have perfectly captured the essence of Suzuki’s play. The flamboyant chorus scenes were cleverly directed and acted and other surreal scenes, involving the shortlisting of surrogate mothers and the release of sperm, to name just two, were funny and memorable.

Q&A

Following the performance Suzuki, who is on a six-month grant from the Japanese government to study British theatre, gave a fascinating Q&A, emceed by Takekawa Junko, Senior Cultural Officer at the Japan Foundation, London.

Takekawa began by remarking that it was rare for a male playwright to deal with issues of infertility. Suzuki first encountered the issue on a personal level when in his thirties and in a relationship with a woman 12 years his senior. He was then inspired to write the play in 2012 after reading Sandel’s *Justice: What’s the Right Thing to do*. Suzuki has since written and staged *Global Baby Factory 2* which was instigated by the story of a rich Japanese man who arranged for 20 of his babies to be born to surrogate mothers in Thailand. During his time in the UK Suzuki met a gay couple who

had a baby via a surrogate mother, an encounter that may result in *Global Baby Factory 3*.

Takekawa suggested that Suzuki is drawn to taboo or touchy issues (such as eating dolphin in *The Bite*) and wondered whether he intentionally writes with a view to reflect contemporary Japan. Suzuki replied saying that he doesn’t consciously attempt to tackle contemporary or controversial topics. He continued by saying that in Japan audiences like plays with small casts and which delve deep into certain situations. In order to appeal to this predilection writers in Japan tend to write plays which focus on family or friends. Suzuki, he told us, has a different approach; he likes writing about encounters between people from different cultures and enjoys including non-Japanese in his plays as it has become less rare to come across international people in Japan. This is the aspect of contemporary Japanese society that he would like to reflect.

Quizzed about his views on surrogacy, Suzuki said that before visiting India, which he did only upon completing the play’s first draft, he was not convinced that it was a good idea. He visited a dwelling near the fertility clinic housing surrogate mothers, all of whom seemed happy. One of the pregnant women told him that she was carrying a Japanese baby. At that point Suzuki began to feel that a regulated form of surrogacy is probably better than a black market system. He remains unsure, however, about the merits and demerits of surrogacy itself.

Asked whether religion played a role in discouraging surrogacy in Japan Suzuki said that his impression was that the real pressure came from family and friends. Suzuki pointed out that plenty of women like Sunako exist in Japan, pushed by their parents into marriage and into having children. Nevertheless, Takekawa pointed out that the birth rate in Japan remained very low; she suggested that this topic could form the basis of *Global Baby Factory 4*.

*The draft Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill ‘provides for surrogacy as an option to parents who have been married for five years, can’t naturally have children, lack access to other reproductive technologies, want biological children and can find a willing participant among their relatives.’ The bill ‘would also restrict overseas Indians, foreigners, unmarried couples, homosexuals, and live-in couples from entering into a surrogacy arrangement. The surrogate mother has to be a married woman who has herself borne a child and is neither a non-resident Indian (NRI) nor

a foreigner. Couples who already have biological or adopted children cannot commission a surrogate child.' ('Understanding India's Complex Commercial Surrogacy Debate, India's draft Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill sparks debate over the government's role in reproduction,' by Ibu Sanjeeb Garg in *The Diplomat*, 31 August 2016)

Yellow Earth theatre company was formed in 1995 with the aim of developing the range of acting opportunities available to British East Asian actors. In March this year,

it celebrated twenty-one years of theatre making with an international play reading festival, 'Typhoon', at Soho Theatre and Rich Mix in London

This was part one of 'Winds of Change: Staged Reading 2016'. The Japan Foundation, in collaboration with Yellow Earth and StoneCrabs Theatre Company present a new monthly series of events, to introduce UK audiences the work of some of Japan's best playwrights, all of which will be heard in English for the first time. §

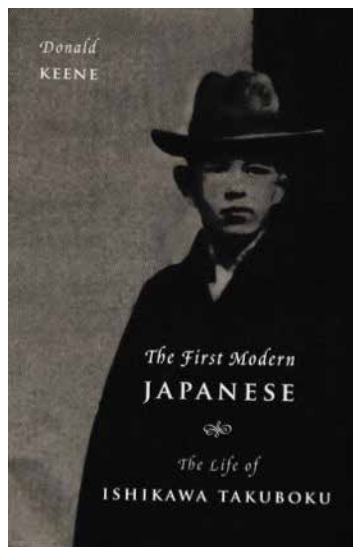
The First Modern Japanese: The Life of Ishikawa Takuboku

by Donald Keene

Columbia University Press
(2016)

ISBN-13 9780231179720

Review by Sir Hugh
Cortazzi



Donald Keene, Professor emeritus of Japanese literature at Columbia University and doyen of Japan studies in English, continues despite advancing years to produce well-researched, well-written, informative and interesting studies of Japanese personalities and historical themes.

Ishikawa Takuboku (1886-1912), the subject of this study, is little known outside Japan and according to Keene increasingly overlooked in Japan. For a time he was 'Japan's most popular poet. He still is popular but many Japanese have lost interest in works of literature unlikely to appear in university entrance examinations.' This is a pity because, as Keene tells us, he 'probably ranks as the most beloved poet of the *tanka* [...] Ishikawa's *tanka* stand out less for their beauty than for their individuality; his poems are as surprising today as they were for the first readers'.

Like Shiki Masaoka (see Cortazzi's review of Keene's biography of Shiki on the Japan Society website) the poet who modernized *haiku*, Ishikawa, who used the classical language (*bungotai*) in his *tanka* poems, eschewed conventional themes such as the blossom falling or other images suggesting the passing seasons. Instead he took as his inspiration everyday modern objects such as trains.

Ishikawa thought that the terseness of the *tanka* form was not an obstacle to expressions of emotion, as some other contemporaries did, but rather kept the poet 'from exaggerating his emotions'. Nevertheless he could not remain immune to traditional Japanese themes such as the brevity of life. The Japanese word *suna* (sand) which he used in the first ten poems of his most famous collection of poems, *A Handful of Sand*, suggested 'the passing of time, like sand in an hourglass'.

Ishikawa wrote some poetry (*shi*) in other forms, as well as stories and literary criticism. His most famous prose work was his *Romaji Diary*. He claimed, implausibly, that he used roman script to keep its contents from his wife. The diary is an example of Japanese extreme introspection and is revealing of his emotional life and his worries and aspirations. It is also an explicit account of his life including his sexual encounters. Despite his promiscuity, Keene tells us, 'his love for his wife Setsuko remained unchanging and passionate'. She overlooked his infidelities and even forgave him for missing his own wedding; he arrived in Morioka five days after the ceremony had taken place without the bridegroom.

Ishikawa was born in a tiny village in Iwate prefecture as the son of a Zen Buddhist priest. His mother, who was devoted to him, indulged him. He did well at school and read widely if unsystematically in English as well as in translation from Russian and German. He became fascinated with Wagner as a dramatic poet but showed little interest in Wagner's music.

Russian literature 'awakened him to the idea of downtrodden masses' and encouraged his rebellious spirit; he was influenced by anarchist concepts and in May 1911 wrote a version of the 'letter of vindication' written by Kotoku Shūsui who was charged in a high profile trial of having plotted to kill the Meiji emperor.

Before finding work he had thought of moving to America but was refused a passport to travel abroad. So in 1906 he decided to return to Shibutani, his old village in Iwate, 'where he could write without interference'. But he had to earn a living, so he became a schoolteacher.

He described his time in Shibutani 'as a lonely year in a lonely village'. He was dissatisfied by the way the school was run and called on the principal to resign. The principal refused. So Ishikawa resigned and decided to move to Hokkaido.

He went first to Hakodate where local poets found him a temporary job at the Hakodate Chamber of Commerce but this was unpaid. He got a temporary teaching job where he fell in love with one of the teachers. He was also asked by the local newspaper to write a weekly poetry column, but after only two of his articles had been published there was a devastating earthquake and fire in Hakodate and the paper's premises were destroyed.

Ishikawa's 'exile' to Hokkaido then took him to Sapporo, Otaru and eventually to Kushiro where he was employed by the local newspaper. In Kushiro he led a dissolute life of drinking and womanizing. This life style exacerbated the tuberculosis, from which he was already suffering and which eventually killed him.

He decided to escape from what was then a remote and desolate part of Hokkaido and scraping together the fare he left by sea for Yokohama.

He went on to Tokyo where he was able to mix with other writers such as Mori Ōgai and pursue his literary interests. Unfortunately the stories, which he had hoped would enable him to make a living, failed and his poverty exacerbated his depression and misanthropy. He was eventually employed by the *Asahi* although only as a proof reader. In 1909 his wife rejoined him. But Ishikawa was constantly in debt and deeply depressed. In *Garasu mado* (*Glass Windows*) he expressed his 'derision for all varieties of literature'. He was however beginning to be recognized more widely as a writer and poet.

Ishikawa's health continued to decline. He quarreled with Setsuko telling her that they were divorced but Setsuko who was also suffering from tuberculosis, as was his mother, continued to live with him. In 1912 first his mother, then Ishikawa and two months later Setsuko succumbed to the disease, which was a rampant killer in Meiji Japan.

Professor Keene has drawn a sympathetic portrait of an important figure in Japanese literary history. His book also contains interesting descriptions of life in late Meiji Japan. [S](#)

Bridges: Anglo-Japanese Cultural Pioneers, 1945 to 2015

edited by Suzanne Perrin
and Jeremy Hoare

Fast-Print Publishing of
Peterborough (2016)

ISBN: 9781784562663

Review by Susan Meehan



This handy book comprises dialogues with ten distinguished personalities in the UK-Japan world who have made considerable contributions to the understanding of Japan in the UK. Each one is a fascinating individual with an incredible backstory. The names are all familiar; I have enjoyed, mesmerised, Hirota Jōji's drumming not just at Japan Matsuri in Trafalgar Square but also and unexpectedly at a production of *Antigone* at the National Theatre in 2012, and have admired Katō Setsuo's photographs on

display in numerous exhibitions. I have been enriched listening to talks by Sir Hugh Cortazzi and Professor Ian Nish and have been impressed by Phillida Purvis's work with her NGO Links Japan. Despite this familiarity I was previously oblivious to huge portions of these valuable figures' fascinating histories.

At one end of the book are interviews with Sir Hugh Cortazzi and Professor Ian Nish, both of whom served in the armed forces during the Second World War and whose initial encounters with Japan were inevitably shaped by this experience. Cortazzi maintains that he is neither 'pro-Japanese nor anti-Japanese' but cognisant of Japan as a key agent in the global community and aware of 'its good and bad points'. At the other end of the book we have Keiko Holmes who has tirelessly and impressively crusaded to promote reconciliation between Allied PoWs and Japan.

As well as individuals, the book highlights the importance of organizations in developing the Anglo-Japanese relationship; in particular, the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation makes frequent appearances. Indeed, the Foundation played a key role in precipitating *Bridges*. The exhibition which Phillida

Purvis – Deputy Director of the Foundation from 1993 to 1998 – curated in 1997, also called *Bridges*, was held at the Foundation, and Professor Nish's book, *The Japanese in War and Peace: 1942-1948* was launched at the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation in May 2011. The book launch, held not long after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami which devastated northeast Japan, attracted a large gathering of attendees and served to remind the audience of the embarrassment of riches in the UK-Japan world. A small group decided to create a book of interviews with ten exceptional people and to dedicate it to the memory of Professor Geoffrey Bownas, a much-loved and distinguished linguist and scholar, and a pioneering Japanologist in the UK, who died in February 2011.

The diplomats, scholars, artists, humanitarians and grassroots campaigners highlighted in *Bridges* all impress for both the ambition and modesty at the heart of their work. The interviews are frank and often pack a punch. Katō Setsuo and Keiko Holmes's accounts of racism comments towards the Japanese in the 1990s are cautionary. What is also apparent is the serendipitous nature of the ways in which these figures became involved in the UK-Japan relationship. 'They chose me. I didn't choose them,' says Professor Nish about his encounter with Japan. In 1945 he was in the army in India and was recruited for a Japanese language course. He was just 18 when he joined the school in Simla for 18 months. He graduated in July 1946 and went to Singapore where he worked in the Southeast Asia Translation and Interrogation Centre. Within two months he was based in Japan.

When talking about Professor Geoffrey Bownas's involvement in Japan, his widow, Wiesia Cook uses a lovely phrase, 'Slices of luck which made a wonderful cake'. One slice of luck (for the UK-Japan world) was that Bownas ended up breaking Japanese codes at Bletchley Park. His next encounter with Japan was also accidental; while studying Classics at Oxford he was given a grant to go to China, but was unable to visit due to the Chinese Revolution. Oxford decided to send him to Kyoto instead to study with China expert Professor Kaizuka Shigeki.

Garden designer and co-founder of the Japanese Garden Society, Robert Ketchell was travelling overland to India in 1980 to discover Buddhism. He stopped in Japan en route and fell in love with the country. Changing his plans he ended up spending three and a half years in Japan, initially teaching English and then studying landscape architecture at Kyoto University. Concert pianist Kobayashi Junko and musician Hirota Jōji both

make similar observations – they hadn't planned to stay in the UK, but are very happy that they did.

Despite the fact that the interviewees are all old hands, their thoughts remain rooted in the present. The book was produced pre-Brexit, but Sir Hugh Cortazzi in particular gave his thoughts on what would happen should the UK leave the EU. He says, presciently, that the UK is important to Japan as long as it remains in the EU and UK universities maintain their global standing. And looking at things from the other perspective, he says that the UK will retain a good relationship as long as Japan resists isolationism and ultra-nationalistic sentiment.

The individuals covered in this book have all left, or continue to leave, considerable legacies. Just to highlight a few, Professor Bownas returned to Oxford from Kyoto in 1954 and was appointed lecturer in Chinese and Japanese. He established Oxford's first full honours degree in Japanese in 1963 after which he moved to Sheffield in 1965 where he became first director of its Centre of Japanese Studies. Bownas tirelessly lobbied the British and Japanese governments to support the strengthening of Japanese Studies at universities in the UK. His efforts were richly rewarded when Prime Minister Heath invited him to Number 10 Downing Street in 1973 to present him with a cheque for one million dollars from Prime Minister Tanaka.

Robert Ketchell's idea of setting up a Japanese Garden Society to promote understanding of the Japanese garden tradition came to fruition in 1993, and has been a thriving organisation ever since. Among Ketchell's aims was to re-establish past historical Japanese gardens in the UK and one of his many achievements has been the creation of a *kare sansui* (rock garden) at Norwich Cathedral.

In the 1970s, Keiko Holmes and her British husband, Paul came across a memorial stone for sixteen British army soldiers in Iruka, now called Kiwacho, in her home prefecture of Mie. The men had died while working as prisoners at a copper mine. Keiko discovered that of the thousand PoWs captured in Singapore and sent to the Thai/Burma railway, three hundred were sent on to Iruka on completion of the railway. Captivated by this story and realising that the British PoWs felt nothing but animosity for Japan, Holmes persisted in working towards reconciliation. Her story and drive are humbling. Since 1992 some five hundred PoWs from Britain and elsewhere have been on pilgrimages to Japan organised by Holme's charity, *Agape World*.

While I enjoyed delving into the lives of these pioneering personages from the UK-Japan world, I would also encourage others to complement their reading by referring to the Japan Society's *My Britain, My Japan* series on its website (while containing some of the same figures as *Bridges*, such as Phillida Purvis and Setsuo Katō, it also contains valuable newcomers to the scene such as Rebecca Salter, Sioned Huws and Haroon Mirza) and to *Japan Experiences – Fifty Years, One Hundred Views: Post-War Japan Through British Eyes* available on the Japan Society eLibrary. Another priceless initiative is the Wasurenagusa project, a series

of filmed interviews with Japanese individuals living in the UK. Again, there are overlaps with *Bridges* in the form of Katō Setsuo and Hirota Jōji.

There are a few spelling mistakes in *Bridges*, some sections which need further editing and the occasional timeline error. I also wondered whether some readers would benefit from a brief explanation of important organisations which feature such as the Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures (SISJAC) or of key people referred to such as Carmen Blacker. Maybe this could be addressed in what I hope will be a future edition. §

Kero Kero Bonito Review: Lily Allen Meets J-Pop

Scala, London, 9 November 2016

Review by Annabelle Sami

Kero Kero Bonito are a quirky three piece from London producing exciting alternative dance music. What immediately sets this group apart is the heavy influence of *kawaii* J-Pop in their otherwise avowedly indie London aesthetic. This comes across most clearly in lead singer Sarah Midori Perry's half-spoken, feel-good lyrics, which slip between Japanese and English.

On first listening it would be easy to assume that this brand of highly produced, ultra-melodic pop would attract a teenage fan base, dominated perhaps by those with an interest in Japan. On the evidence of this gig, where the audience comprised Londoners in their 20s and 30s, this would be to underestimate the broad appeal of Kero Kero Bonito's music. Underneath the sugary surface there are strong elements of psychedelic indie rock, alt-pop and dance, and with both music and lyrics it can be hard to tell where the cutesiness ends and the irony begins.

Look at the comments on YouTube and it becomes even more apparent that Kero Kero Bonito are introducing a new audience to J-pop. Certainly, the friend that came with me to the concert is now exploring what the genre has to offer, and on the night I was even being quizzed on the meanings of the lyrics – something that has inspired me to get back to the vocab books!



It was wonderful to see a venue packed full of people listening to an artist sing and rap in Japanese, enjoying the show whether they understood the language or not. Kero Kero Bonito certainly put on a show, with Sarah out front and Gus Lobban and Jamie Buller on electronics, half-hidden behind a long table decked with synths and stuffed animals in equal measure.

All in all, to listen to KKB's music, and to go to their shows, is an uplifting experience. The fusion of Japanese and UK culture could bring a new dimension to the Anglo-Japanese community in London and is introducing new audiences to Japanese pop culture. Whether or not this is their intention, Kero Kero Bonito are clearly having a lot of fun doing what they do. §