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Performing *Noh* Chant in a Foreign Language: Examples from *Sumidagawa*
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00:10 I'm Richard Emmert. First, I would like to express my gratitude to the Koizumi Fumio Prize Foundation and the Committee for conferring this award on me.

00:37 As one of Koizumi sensei's students, like his many other students, I have been greatly influenced by him. In fact, perhaps more than anyone else except my own family, he has been the most influential person in my life. Though not specifically related to *noh* itself, the fact that I am here in Japan doing what I am doing is certainly largely due to Koizumi sensei.

01:38 I first met Koizumi sensei in September 1970 when I came to Japan as a foreign student, and he taught a course on Japanese music in English at Waseda International Division. I was hoping to study a traditional Japanese musical instrument while spending a year in Japan and so was very glad that there was such a course at Waseda. I spoke with Koizumi sensei after class to say that I wanted to study an instrument and was thinking of a string instrument because I had studied guitar. I only knew about *shamisen* and *koto* but wasn't sure yet which one I should study and we decided to wait several weeks.

03:14 Several lessons later Koizumi sensei brought a *shakuhachi* to class and told how it was a very difficult instrument to play. He told how he had practiced it every day when he took it with him on a boat to India when he went there as a student to study for two years. He invited anyone to come up after class to try playing it and so I did so. Strangely enough, I got a sound out of it very quickly. Koizumi sensei right away said that I should study *shakuhachi* and not *koto* or *shamisen*. He later introduced me to Yamaguchi Goro sensei, a living national treasure and I began to study *shakuhachi* with him.

04:37 Needless to say, I enjoyed my term studying about Japanese music with Koizumi sensei. Later, after returning to the United States, I decided I wanted to go back to Japan and study Japanese music. I was able to receive a Monbusho scholarship and as a result was able to study at Tokyo University of the Arts (Geidai) with Koizumi sensei. Clearly, it was Koizumi sensei's influence that convinced me to come back to Japan the second time.

05:38 At Geidai I was in various lecture classes of Koizumi sensei's and in particular was in the Okinawa Seminar and traveled to Okinawa with Koizumi sensei. One notable project I was a part of while at Geidai which Tokumaru sensei has already mentioned was Japan Foundation's Asian Traditional Performing Arts project known as ATPA which Koizumi sensei asked me to be a part of. Koizumi sensei along with Tokumaru sensei and Yamaguchi Osamu sensei were the three supervisors of the project. I ended up going over most of the English for the series including the English for the film series and the editing of the three books that came out of three different projects so I have always considered that a big step in my understanding of the music and performing arts of not only Japan but of Asia overall.

06:58 In the United States, I had studied at Earlham College in Indiana. Earlham, though a small liberal arts school, had one of the earliest Japan study programs in the United States and the Kokusaibu at Waseda was instigated by Earlham College and grew from there. In 1970 before I came to Japan, my first exposure to *noh* was through a seminar on *noh* led by a music professor, Leonard Holvik, and a theatre professor Arthur Little.

08:40 That was the first time that I was introduced to *noh* and its music. In particular, I remember hearing a recording of the *kakegoe* drum calls for the first time and I could hardly keep from laughing because they sounded so strange. Little did I know that later I would perform these myself and even teach them.

09:08 In any case, at the end of the seminar, the participants performed a *noh* in English written by Little with music by Holvik. I was chosen to be the *shite* in that performance. Later a movie was made of that performance and shown here in Japan.

09:45 Although when I came to Japan the second time in 1973, I continued my studies of *shakuhachi*. I had not intended to study *noh* but I was looking for some other kind of music to study. By chance I met a young *noh* actor, Akira Matsui of the Kita School, and began to study *shimai* and *utai* with him in November 1973.

10:29 In April 1974, I was able to enter Geidai as a Ministry of Education foreign student. My *noh* performance lessons of *utai* and *shimai* continued outside the university. Later I began to study the four *hayashi* instruments of *noh* as well. A *noh* student at Geidai suggested that since I was in the Music Theory Department and not the Japanese Music Department of Geidai, that I should take lessons, not at Geidai which had long periods of vacation, but take lessons outside of Geidai. So my *noh* performance lessons were done privately outside of Geidai.

11:40 There was a time when I was taking eight lessons a month of *shakuhachi*, three of *shimai* and *utai*, weekly lessons in the *Noh Uta* Club of Geidai, three lessons per month of *kotsuzumi*, *otsuzumi* and *taiko*, and 6~8 a month of *nohkan*. All this while also taking classes at Geidai. I spent much of my time studying for each practical lesson while on the train going from one lesson to another.

12:20 At Geidai, while taking the lecture and seminar classes of Koizumi sensei, I also took the lecture and seminar classes of Yokomichi Mario, one of the most important *noh* scholars of the postwar era in Japan. In particular, I studied the structure, including the musical structure and

theory with Yokomichi sensei which of course was different from studying practically how to perform. In so doing, I slowly became fully immersed in *noh* and after some eight years decided I should concentrate on it.

13:02 In 1981, having now spent about seven years studying *noh*, I was asked by a young American director in Kyoto, Jonah Salz, to compose music for William Butler Yeats' *At the Hawk's Well*. I agreed to do so and I think he expected me to compose music with a Western sensibility, but I really only thought about composing music entirely in *noh* style for this English text. We had performances in Kyoto and Osaka, and later in Tokyo. I was very fortunate to have the support of several *noh* professional performers, particularly my *taiko* teacher, Mishima Gentarō who is now a living national treasure. In fact, I composed in such a way that these professional *hayashi* performers could understand in *noh* terms how to perform even though it was in English. That was my first time to compose *noh* music for English.

14:21 Here is an example of what I composed and this is how I wrote out the music using a special three-line staff notation which I created specifically for *noh* music. Perhaps you can see what I have done. *Noh* has three central pitches, *jo* (high), *chu* (middle) and *ge* (low). These lines top to bottom represent those. *Noh* is sometimes written out for beginning *hayashi* performers on an eight-beat grid and so these lines are a horizontal rendering of that grid. The *hayashi kakegoe* drum calls and drum strokes are above and below the top line.

16:38 I will sing just this short section from *At the Hawk's Well*.

17:07 I will stop there for time's sake.

17:30 After writing this, I had several chances to write music for other *noh* plays in English. In fact since that time, I have composed music for 14 *noh* plays. One concern already from this time I had was training people to sing English *utai*. For the first performance of *At the Hawk's Well*, I had recruited several foreigners who could sing to become a member of my chorus. But in general, they sang more like in an *uta*-style, that is a Western song style, instead of the more intense *utai* style of *noh*.

18:27 In a later performance of a different play, I asked several Japanese friends who knew *utai* to sing in the chorus. This time the problem was different. While they could sing in *utai* style, they had more trouble singing the English text and still ended up singing in a rather *uta*-like fashion.

19:20 Due to this, I decided I needed to train English speakers to sing *utai* and began doing that in 1991 forming the *Noh* Training Project. I also became an official *shimai* instructor of the Kita school. The *Noh* Training Project continued in Japan and later I also began an intensive three-week summer workshop in Pennsylvania in the United States in 1995. The *Noh* Training Project Bloomsburg continued for 20 summers. In fact it is presently being held this summer in Virginia with two of my students. I also began a summer *Noh* Training Project in London. And now with the Kita School we have continued special summer training programs mainly for foreigners known as the *Noh* Training Project.

21:25 In the year 2000, I began a group called Theatre Nohgaku which were made up mainly of my students with the idea that we would perform *noh* in English. We have since been able to perform about eight pieces and have had tours in the United States, in Europe and have even come to Japan and on to China and Hong Kong.

22:14 One more thing I wanted to say about the *Noh* Training Project is that in 2017 we began doing an intensive three-week workshop also called the *Noh* Training Project here in Tokyo with professional Kita school instructors. We did this successfully for three summers but of course from last summer we had to cancel the in-person workshop and instead began an online workshop with just *utai*. This year we will do the same this summer.

23:02 I mentioned earlier the creation of Theatre Nohgaku and one piece that we have notably performed was the piece *Blue Moon Over Memphis*. This is a piece about Elvis Presley written by playwright Deborah Brevoort who had it performed with contemporary music. I was surprised to first hear about this play, and quite frankly was quite amused that there was such a play, but when I read it realized it's interesting possibilities. I worked with Brevoort for several days each summer from 2008 to cut down her original play and make it a good length to perform in *noh* style and then wrote the music for it. Theatre Nohgaku began to work on the piece in 2012, performed it at a very small venue in Tokyo in 2015 and finally toured it twice in the States in 2017 and 2018.

25:17 I don't have time here to tell you much about the piece but I do wish to sing a short section from it. The notation follows pretty much the same style as *At the Hawk's Well* although I think my notation writing ability has improved somewhat. The section I am singing actually uses the text from a well-known Elvis Presley song. It was actually sung by many others before Presley but his version was also quite popular. Perhaps some of you will recognize this *noh* version of that song.

26:15 This is the original melody for the song *Unchained Melody*.

26:42 This is the way I took the same melody and made it into *noh* style.

27:25 I also wish to briefly show something which is not specifically about the music of *noh* but involves the theatrical aspects of putting on a production. Today I have brought the two masks that we use in the play *Blue Moon Over Memphis*, both made by *noh* mask maker Kitazawa Hideta. This is the mask for the first half *shite* which represented a black blues man. The mask is based on the blues singer Robert Johnson. Elvis was quite influenced by various types of black music and that is why the first half *shite* is a black man. Then in the second half we have the appearance of the spirit of Elvis. Perhaps some of you recognize this mask and can see the likeness. The masks of course were an important part of the performance of the play.

29:20 There are many details to understand when composing *noh* music. Perhaps the most important one is understanding the literary and musical structure of the *shodan*—which can be described as the building blocks of a *noh* piece. In *noh* these *shodan* have specific characteristics. Interpreting these to create an English *noh* is of course what I have to do as a composer.

30:35 From the examples I have sung perhaps you have noticed some of the issues involved when composing *noh* music for English. The first important one is that language structure is different. Japanese tends to have syllables of equal length. English has a variety of lengths which are connected to the emphasis on different syllables. In my compositions I do not try to use English syllables in the same way that Japanese syllables are used. Instead I need to stretch out syllables that are emphasized in the way in the English language and that is in fact how most English songs are sung. In essence, I am just using lyrics in the same way they are used in English songs. The point is one cannot use English syllables in the same way that one uses Japanese syllables.

31:51 One other major difference is that while Japanese ends in vowels sounds, English often ends with a final consonant. Here again, one has to deal with these in the same way they are dealt with in English song which is definitely different from Japanese.

32:36 The biggest problem then is to figure out how to give the same kind of full *utai* sound used in *noh*, to make sure one is singing *utai* and not *uta*. That is perhaps the most difficult when teaching foreigners to sing in *utai* style in English.

33:05 The examples I have sung so far are from pieces that were written originally in English. I have made English versions of parts of several *noh* plays including “Matsukaze” and “Hagoromo”.

33:30 One play, “Sumidagawa”, I made a full English version which was performed first at the University of Hawaii and then later twice in the United States by Theatre Nohgaku.

33:59 In recent years, I have also been invited to Mexico City where I have taught *noh* with the idea of creating a piece in Spanish. We thought about a piece to make in Spanish and decided to create a Spanish version also of “Sumidagawa”. We have been able to create this piece and planned for this to be performed in Mexico City this year but that will not happen due to covid.

34:29 Here at the end of my talk, I would like to present the same short section of “Sumidagawa” in three languages, first Japanese, then English, then Spanish. This Japanese is taken from the Kita school *utaibon* and I will begin with Japanese.

35:51 And next I will chant the same section in English, Sumida River.

37:14 That was the same section of the piece. So, I would like to do the same section but this time in Spanish, “Río Sumida”.

38:40 I hope you get some sort of sense of the three languages and how I actually am trying to do them with the same kind of intensity as the original Japanese. I think I have gone over my time so I wish to stop here. Once again, I wish to thank the Koizumi Fumio Prize Foundation and Committee for this wonderful award.