

Vladimir Lazutkin, Un Ryu
Un Ryu. A Heart like a bird
Ukraine, Dnipropetrovs'k region
November 19, 1975 | Place of birth: Kyiv | musician

To breathe is to live. For Un Ryu, the breath of life is an instrument that transmits the poetry of the universe from heart to heart.

When I was writing the material, I had a feeling that Un Ryu was next to me, prompting me, and that we existed in a single spatial co-authorship.

Preparing for this interview was probably the most difficult in my many years of journalistic stories. Yes, the sound of shakuhachi exists naturally in me and responds to me to the same degree, but it is unrealistically difficult to write about the music of poetry of silence, filled with the wind of snowy peaks, the sounds of a bell, and the flaps of birds' wings. Especially since the concert-practice-prayer that took place on March 31 in Dnipro was titled "Koku 虚空", a Japanese temple play that means Emptiness.

Of course, emptiness is not something we understand in the dictionary sense, especially when it comes to Zen. To feel the difference, listen to Un Ryu's shakuhachi. At the same time, there is absolutely no need to immerse yourself in a special state, just keep your heart open and I assure you, it will turn into a bird.

Full moon.

Teacher and student are looking at the moon.

The teacher takes the flute and the student takes the flute.

One breath in and one breath out into the Universe,

And one melody sounds - it's Koku 虚空 - Emptiness.

Un Ryu

Rays of the sun for a child's heart

In the fall and spring, he watched the rays of the morning sun with his little childish heart. He liked listening to nature, connecting to the world, feeling its pain, grandeur, and anxiety. He let it all pass through him, and the anxiety went away, dissolved, and was enveloped in joy. At the same time, he always had a keen sense of the moment of transition from happiness to sadness. At the age of 14-15, he started writing poetry, which came with his first love.

He graduated from a technical school, then a college with a degree in management, and later from the European University of Finance, Information Systems, Management and Business in Kyiv, with a degree in economic management.

This time was filled with many interesting meetings and self-discovery.

Depth, one sound, the universe is there for you

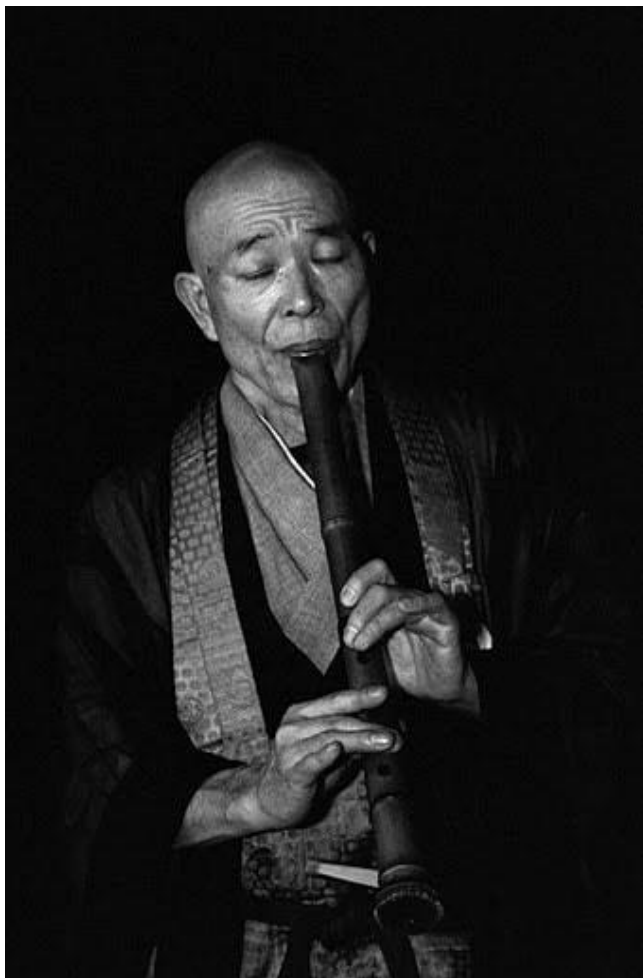
"If God asked you: "Let me hear one note!", what note would you play?"
(Alquin Ryuzo Ramos, "Katsuya Yokoyama's lecture in Meiji-ro")

He was looking for the tuning fork of his own path, the one and only sound that could respond and lead him. Having no musical education, he played various instruments - duduk, Altai kamus, drums, and listened to as much music as possible. Not being a fan of the East, he practiced martial arts, mixed styles, jiu-jitsu, and can still teach it if he wants to. But in martial arts, as in music, he lacked depth.

One day, on St. Andrew's Descent in Kyiv, he heard the sound of a bamboo shakuhachi flute played by a young boy. At first, the sound seemed ugly, wrong, and rough, but it caught Volodymyr's ear, and soon he bought his first shakuhachi. Of course, it was not perfect in the true sense of the word; it was impossible to play "honkyoku" on it, but only one melody.

But the path was already marked. He began to try to blow out the sound, to search, to listen. His memory brought him back to the Japanese movies he used to watch, to the feelings of his childhood, the breath of the wind, all the deep polar sensations familiar to his little heart.

When he practiced and was inspired by himself, he realized that he needs a teacher. And a teacher, as you know, appears at the moment when a student is fully ready for it. And so it happened.



Later, Volodymyr received a call from a friend who told him that a man from Japan had come to Kyiv to play the shakuhachi. This person performed an ancient temple

music, or musical poetry, called honkyoku, which is still the true solo music of Japan. It is also called "blowing meditation". During its performance, it is not so much the technique that is important as the state itself. It was then that Volodymyr heard real shakuhachi, became imbued with its history and traditions, and found a teacher. The puzzle pieces came together.

His name was Ejun Ichika. He asked his new student how he came to shakuhachi. When he heard the story, he told his own story: he was a young monk in a temple and one day he heard a sound that hit his heart like an arrow. He came out of the temple and saw two Komuso monks playing Kyorei and Choshi. By the way, the Komuso monks

or Nothingness and Emptiness (Ko: 虚 Void, Mu: 無 Nothingness/Nothingness, mu is also one of the key concepts in Japanese art, where it reflects the idea of simplicity, modesty and

naturalness as a reflection of the radiant emptiness; co: 僧), the practice of shakuhachi relies on a special breathing technique called "komi buki" or "concentrated/dense breathing". It is known that these monks were former samurai, although, of course, there are no former samurai. It's just that when wars stopped in Japan for 250 years during the Edo-jidai 江戸時代, they devoted themselves to other activities.

That's why Ejun-san became interested in shakuhachi, and it entered his life with true breath. One sound and the path is forever. He stayed in Ukraine for a long time. "I was lucky. The universe was meeting me halfway, and Japan, of course," Un Ryu says today.

"Millimeters of Communication" and Genius as Experience

*"The grasses are spread by winds and winds,
on the ground, on the roads.
They speak quietly and secretly,
they speak of many things.
In the moonlight they are silver,
At dawn they are covered with dew.
I will remain in this breath,
I'll stay in this breath, I'll spread over the leaves with the fresh wind..."*

Un Ryu

Is it possible to teach a sound that can penetrate the heart?
Un Ryu thinks so.



At first, he played without notes, and later he began to learn the notes of the Myoan school. He caught the teacher's breath, absorbed every "millimeter" of communication: conversations over a cup of tea, silence, zazen. The teacher spoke excellent English, Un Ryu spoke a little English. He kept listening, looking, and began to understand the notes. The teacher could tell without saying anything, but the mutual feeling was absolute. He could correct his hand or finger on the flute, everything else was non-verbal. It was the

language of the heart plus shakuhachi. And when Un Ryu is asked today how he learned, he says that this process was the most ideal. "If I had asked the same questions back then that my students or listeners ask me today after a performance and tried to catch the sound with my mind, I would have studied for another hundred years."

Later, he began to record his learning process. When asked what book he could read on shakuhachi before starting practice, he replies: "All books about it go to the stove, because in a year, while you're reading, you can start practicing and breathing. Books will come later, but now it's all about practice."

For Un Ryu, shakuhachi is a continuation of life, an opportunity to convey the entire palette of emotions and sensations in the sounds of the flute.

"Genius is the experience of all the feelings you can express on a shakuhachi. When I started writing poetry, I would feel flying, blissful, and then I would put a full stop and after a while it would feel like hitting the ground. It was a specific and very painful feeling. The poems would end, and everything would seem to come to an end, but at the moment of writing, you would dissolve into words and emotions." Later, he read Boris Akunin's book *The Writer and Suicide* and realized that a similar state of interrupted flight with the writing of the last line is characteristic of all true masters. But when shakuhachi and honkyoku appeared, the poetic pauses began to be perceived more calmly. "Either poems or honkyokus are born, or I can practice Zen Zen."

By the way, Un Ryu has already published a collection of poems, but he is most interested in what is happening to him here and now. Quite often he holds a camera in his hands, and comprehending these fragments of life allows us to learn even more about him.

Lots of candles, "not much music", humility

*"In my voice is a quiet flute
and the silence of a flower near the road..."*

Un Ryu

"What's the difference between practicing for one person and practicing for many? If I were to play for myself, it would be like lighting one candle and it's already warm. But when I have to warm many people during concerts, I use my breath as if I'm trying to light many candles. I heat up my heart to the point where it is enough for the listener, who hasn't yet fully penetrated the sound of shakuhachi. It's as if I'm throwing fire at him, even though I realize that my heart may not be able to withstand it and it will be my last piece, my last breath, but it's important for me to give it away. This is the specificity of serving to people. If a person feels it, it's good. If not, a day, a month, a year will pass and what they heard will come back to them. This always happens.



Of course, I can play not only church music. I'm interested in experiments, if it resonates with me. But even if it's a stylistically purely musical project, I try to bring tradition, "honkyoku" and prayers into it. After all, what I do is still a bit different from music in the European sense of the word.

I can express myself through shakuhachi, and the Japanese feel it well. Once I received a letter from a Japanese woman who is engaged in

ceramics and tea ceremony. She wrote that she was inspired by my practice and wanted to

hear me in Japan. I was pleased. The Japanese feel very strongly about tradition and its transmission, and for modern residents of the Land of the Rising Sun it is a mystery, although traditions are passed on and preserved in this country at the genetic level. I once performed at the Lviv Museum of the History of Religion, which has a church and an organ hall. The concert was attended by a Japanese man who told me that he had never heard shakuhachi before, which was interesting. I'm going my own way, by the way, the way of shakuhachi is great humility, and this is very relevant today. And we are currently in correspondence with Eijun-san, who lives in Kyoto."

Here, every breath, every drop

*"The heart beats in a fleshly frame
but one day it will become a bird
"flying in the morning light
"over the water, where the shadows of the trees,
over flowers where bees drink nectar..."*

Un Ryu

"I'm not going to leave Ukraine yet, I like being here, especially since I have to support my family. For the whole month before the performance, I have been practicing songs in order to give as much as I can to the people. I don't go to offices, I don't do management or banking. Yes, life is difficult, but my family understt arise from the sound, dissolving in the breath. When you make tea, you are careful not to burn yourself. And when the water pours, you feel how each drop harmonizes you. Similarly, each "drop" of sound washes you with harmony.

- The skill of shakuhachi is to breathe again, to listen, to sit, to move. What did your "re-breathing" consist of?

- When I first started practicing, I used to sit down and immediately get up. How strong our bodies are andands this. And it's not a shame if, while continuing to practice, you go bake bread or build houses, it's also practice!"

- When you play the shakuhachi, on the one hand, you need to listen to your feelings, and on the other hand, you need to keep your mind open. Is it possible?

- The mind is there so that you can see the same notes, but of course there is a moment of sensations that arise from the sound, dissolving in the breath. When you make tea, you are careful not to burn yourself. And when the water pours, you feel how each drop harmonizes you. Similarly, each "drop" of sound washes you with harmony.

- The skill of shakuhachi is to breathe, listen, sit, and move again. What did your "re-breathing" consist of?

- When I first started practicing, I would sit down and immediately jump up. How strong our body is and how weak our mind is. "Honkyoku is based on inhalation and even longer exhalations, and the very seiza position you are in can cause pain at first. It takes months and years to overcome, not a day. The practice is that the more you do it, the more you start

over. For more than 15 years now, I have been discovering things that reveal everything in me and around me in a different way, and there is no end to this process, and that is beautiful.

Names, silence, disciples

- It is said that a name, or rather a koan, determines a person's destiny, especially in the Zen tradition. You are Volodymyr, and now you are Un Ryu...

- This is a spiritual name given to me in Zen Buddhism. When I wanted to delve deeper into the practice, I received an initiation (rakusa) from my teacher. Un Ryu means cloud dragon, a very powerful Japanese mystical spiritual animal that can be in water and clouds, dissolving in everything. For me, this name is a kind of a footstool, the effect of a chair being knocked out from under you, a motivation to keep going on the path of searching for your nature.

- During our conversation, you often use the words "pain", "painful"...

- Life consists of this. Someone is now terminally ill, the events in eastern Ukraine, the recent tragedy in Kemerovo... That's why I included the piece "Tamuke Requiem" in the concert.

I was in eastern Ukraine - Kostiantynivka, Sloviansk, Sviatohirsk - and gave "Peace Concerts" for children as part of a joint project of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Ukraine-Japan Center with the support of the Japanese Embassy in Ukraine as part of programs to help stabilize communities in Donbas. After the performance, people came up to me and said that they needed music where there is silence now. It was a joy to hear this, because the shakuhachi is an instrument capable to transmit silence.



And I realized that I was able to bring back to these people exactly the state they were in before the ATO, once again convincing me that I was on the right track.

In addition to the sacrament of breathing, Un Ryu received a personal permit from Ejun-san, a kind of diploma written by him, so that he could pass on

the "shakuhachi poetry" from heart to heart. And when asked about his students, Un Ryu has this to say:

"I guess you have to ask them how much of a teacher I am. There are many students, but few teachers. A student and a teacher are one heart, only in this case something more than

music is transmitted. Not just sound or technique, because a person can play virtuoso, take lessons from me, but not be my student, in the same 'one-hearted' sense."

Shakuhachi for the mayor of Kyoto, Prague, trees of youth

Un Ryu recently performed at the opening of the Kyoto Park in Kyiv. The ceremony was attended by the mayor of this Japanese city, Daisaku Kadokawa. The organizers offered him various programs and performers, but he said that he only wanted to hear shakuhachi.

Un Ryu receives letters from different cities and countries, invitations to perform, but not everyone is able to organize a tour, and he has become more demanding over the years. By the way, in Dnipro, he was very lucky in this sense with Natalia Sazanova, who not only administers flawlessly but also gathers as many people as possible who are familiar with the secrets of this art.



Once he was invited to the Prague European Shakuhachi Festival as a master of shakuhachi in Ukraine. He did not go. That summer, he planted young trees on a plot of land near his country dojo. It was impossible for him to leave them without regular watering. Well, almost like the case of the Roman Emperor Diocletian ☺. That's right! In addition, he decided that Prague could do without his presence: there

were too many masters, including those from Japan, and too much excitement. For him, shakuhachi is a sacrament, not a show program. "I want to be that bird that sings its nightly prayer quietly in the leaves."

Here in the dojo, he also makes his own flutes, practices and just listens to the wind. Many of his instruments have flown outside of Ukraine: America, Spain, Hong Kong, China...

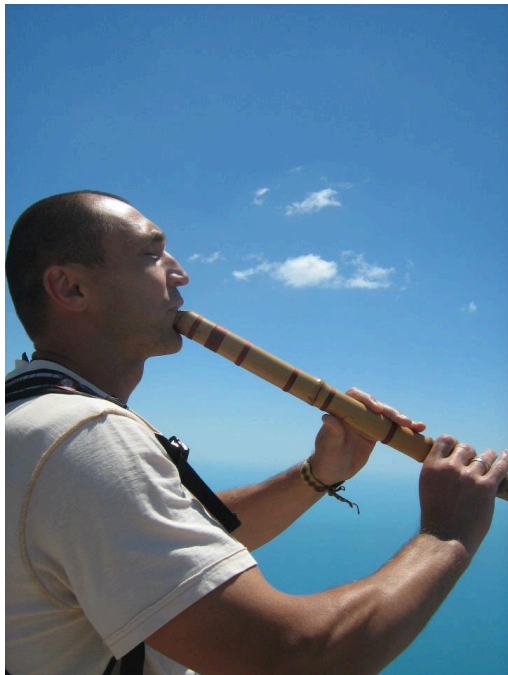
Jesus and Buddha drinking tea...

"One day I was invited to a seminar where various figures, including politicians, gathered, and a lot of secular fog was being created. I asked permission to come with my relative. "No way!" I was told, "They've counted everyone, and there will be people at the level of deputy minister, minister... I hung up the phone, and in a few moments a poem of reflection was born.

"Jesus and Buddha are drinking tea.
The rector of the temple sweeps the leaves.
Clouds float so quietly over the world..."

Despite the difference in religion and everything else, they drink tea, talk about love, and do not fight. Someone older, someone younger, two brothers met, both full of love and compassion. And there is no politics or sophistry. Yes, the world is disharmonious, but everything is in motion, just like the clouds. And people with these clouds, like hourglasses, are involved in the general flow. Down on the ground, there is a fuss, but the clouds float above this human fuss. And the rector of the temple sweeps the leaves... Despite the fact that he is the rector of the temple, he sweeps the leaves.

Today you are a deputy minister or a minister, a president... but what will happen tomorrow? The outward appearance is irrelevant, what matters is what is in your nature. The same evening I got a call back and was allowed to come in together."



"To be a tree somewhere on a cliffside,
And feel the wind.
With roots in the ground and heart everywhere,
And feel the wind.
"To float in the clouds in the fog of autumn
Throwing yellow leaves.
Drinking the moisture of the rains, waking up in the
rays
Washing my eyelashes with mist.
In winter, in the snow, until spring, to fall asleep,
Clinging to the wind with branches.
But in the cold, you have to give the branches to
someone,
To warm them, but to burn right into ashes.
To drink the moisture of the snow that flows in
streams
And to awaken in the rays of the dawn.
To be a home for birds, animals and people,

And to listen to the breath of the wind.
To call you with the scent of spring
The one who is so looking for freedom.
And embrace his heart with the aroma,
And wipe his tears with the leaves".

Un Ryu

April 3, 2018, Kyiv

Poems, photos and videos from the Un Ryu archive.

Photos: Maksym Rysenko, Olena Emelianova, Maryna Shylkina.

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Elena Emelyanova

