

## REVIEWS

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From the reverberating tones of the Itchōken tradition, to contemporary excursion with jinashi shakuhachi and on to jazz infused relaxation sounds, we asked Brian Ritchie to share with us his impressions of three recent CD releases.

## Daiji-fu by Renkei Hashimoto

*Daiji-fū* by Renkei Hashimoto contrasts the austerity of Itchōken honkyoku with almost surreal acoustic splendour in an unusual and extravagant recording. The aridity of *jinashi nobe chokhan* shakuhachi sound imparts a tactile message of Buddhist philosophy bathed in otherworldly echoing reverb.

Itchōken is historically one of the main temples of Fuke shakuhachi practice. The repertoire has crossover with Myōan Taizan Ha. Most shakuhachi players would be familiar with some standard Itchōken *honkyoku* such as *Kyushu Reibo*, *Banshiki* and *Sashi*, as well as *gikyoku Kumojishi* and *Azuma no Kyoku*, which have passed into other traditions. Hashimoto got her training in Komusō Fuke shakuhachi in Germany from Ikkei N. Hanada. Her previous CD featured some commonly performed honkyoku such as *Tamuke*, *Yamato Choshi* and *Murasaki Reibo*. *Daiji-fū* delves into seldom heard Itchōken-specific pieces and an original (the title track).



It's undignified to inject oneself into a review but I'm going to do it anyway to illustrate one of the main points about this CD. I got an abrupt lesson in beginner's mind when I put this CD on, wearing headphones. I wondered what the recording engineer was thinking (or taking) because the levels of reverb are astonishing. So much that it did not seem possible for anyone in a recording studio to consider doing it. So it made me wonder whether it was natural reverb. Reading the liner notes clarified all – the album was recorded in an architectural monument in Germany, the *Befreiungshalle*. One of the features of this building is a 12 second reverb with complex waves of sound. The recording was made with a combination of binaural and standard microphones and presents an amazing acoustic. Liner notes suggest headphones to get the proper effect. On speakers it sounds a bit more conventional.

Hashimoto's playing counterintuitively suits this lush and sensual sound world, because of the contrast her fundamentalist approach presents. She lays out notes and phrases slowly and deliberately, with minute microtonal and dynamic nuances gaining weight by their interaction with the resonance of the *Befreiungshalle*. An example of this being used cleverly for musical effect is in *Takiochi*. This piece about a waterfall is illustrated during the accelerando sections by a cascading echo which emphasises what is implied in the score. *Shika no Tone* is usually a duet, but Hashimoto's solo version creates the impression of a ghost duet through interplay with the room.



A refreshing aspect of this recording is the presence of some works we seldom hear. *Ekō*, arranged by *sensei* Hanada is a profound memorial piece, as is *Chikuzen Sashi*. The title track *Daiji-fū* is an original composition combining elements of *honkyoku* and folk music in an appealing mode.

The packaging is elaborate, with recycled cardboard cover and extensive liner notes. Hashimoto expounds on basics of her (and Itchōken's) approach, including emphasis on breath, Buddhist compassion, eschewing worldly matters, and use of raw bamboo. She plays gigantic long and fat *nobe*. The recording, produced by Klaus-Dieter Eichler and engineered by Rüdiger Sturm, is highly detailed. It captures the echo of the room and the interior of the flute equally.

This album will suit people seeking relatively ego-less playing looking for simple and deep *honkyoku* with luxurious sound to relax into.