

## Professor Richard Emmert

TOKUMARU Yosihiko

Professor Richard Emmert, born in 1949 at Bluffton, Ohio, USA, is musicologist and performer/composer of *noh*. He studied the Japanese language and Japanese history at Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana. He came to Japan in 1973 and studied musicology, with special reference to Japanese and Asian performing arts, under the guidance of the late Professors KOIZUMI Fumio (1927-1983) and YOKOMICHI Mario (1916-2012) at the graduate school (MA and Doctoral courses) of Tokyo University of the Arts. He also learned how to perform *shakuhachi* (bamboo vertical flute) and *noh* (*utai* ‘vocal part’ and *shimai* ‘dance’ as well as the four instruments: *kotsudumi*, *ôtsudumi*, *taiko* and *nôkan*) with distinguished instructors. He acquired the title of *shimai kyôshi* (*shimai* dance instructor) from the Kita school. Presently, Prof. Emmert is teaching at Musashino University (Tôkyô), participating in *noh* training in many parts of the world, and actively composing and directing *noh* plays.

The first time I met Richard Emmert (nickname, Rick-san) was in 1975. He already skillfully spoke Japanese and was able to make one joke after another. The 1970s was a time period when Japan started to actively introduce the its music and that of the rest of Asia to the world. For example, the Japan Foundation actively began supporting musical exchanges with other Asian countries and recorded and filmed these exchanges with the aim of using them to promote understanding of Asian music traditions abroad. In 1974, myself along with Koizumi Fumio and YAMAGUTI Osamu of Osaka University, were asked by the Japan Foundation to head a new project. This came to be known as *Asian Traditional Performing Arts* (ATPA) and it turned out to be a long-term (15 year) project. The first week-long event in conjunction with this project was held in 1976. It consisted of a seminar with performers and scholars, performances open to the public, and recordings and film documentation. As a researcher fluent in both Japanese and English, Rick-san played an important role throughout the project. A report was published in book form in 1977 entitled *Asian Musics in an Asian Perspective* (Tokyo: Heibonsha). Since it was in English, Rick-san took on a major supporting role as one of the assistant editors, with Koizumi, Tokumaru and Yamaguti as main editors. Rick-san took on an even larger role from the second round of ATPA

activities.

At one ethnomusicology conference, ATPA was criticized - mainly by American researchers - as a vehicle for “Japan to exploit and alter the music of Asia.” That was a complete misunderstanding. For example, there were Thai traditional musicians who, after having listened to the variety of music at the ATPA events, decided to “create something new,” and attempted a musical arrangement that had not been done before. That arrangement was recorded and published by the Japanese supervisors affiliated with the ATPA. Scholars who seemed to think “tradition is only something from the past” were critical of our process. But the goal of ATPA was never to record the music in order to “set” the tradition, but rather to recognize that each bearer of tradition can cause change and that tradition is a “living” event that allows for its continuation.

The ATPA was committed to the idea that “within tradition lies the future.” Japanese *noh* is a good example. After the Meiji Restoration (1868) and again after the end of World War II, its living tradition was able to continue because new pieces were composed and a new interpretation of classical work was born.

Never losing sight of the future of *noh* tradition, Rick-san endeavored to contribute to that future. The English *noh* that Rick-san has created is also an experiment in invigorating the tradition of *noh*. Its aim is to perform *noh* in English, rather than combining several elements of *noh* with western media. For this purpose, he organized a performing group of English speakers named Theatre Nohgaku, and further began training *noh* performers actors in various regions of the world. He still directs training projects in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania and the Royal Holloway of University of London.

With cooperation of performers and playwrights in and outside Japan, Rick-san composed and directed many works of English *noh*. (see the list below). Although they are in English, traditional aspects of *noh* - for instance, use of masks, *jiutai* (chorus) and traditional instruments - are also present. It was his *noh* expertise that enabled him to do this.

By performing *noh* in both Japanese and English in many countries, Rick-san has succeeded in disseminating the power of *noh*. It should be added that he introduced *noh* to other Asian performing artists, by participating in such collaborative works as *Dragon Bond Rite* and *Siddharta* with them. In a similar vein, his English summaries of

*noh* works for the National Noh Theatre helps many people to deepen their understanding of *noh*.

Recently a memorial book for celebrating Rick-san's seventieth birthday was published: Cheong, Jannette (ed.) *Getting to noh, a tribute to Richard Emmert- a man with a constant vision* (London; LDP, London Digital Print, 2020). All the papers contributed to this book show how deeply Rick-san is respected and loved by those who have worked with him.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that Professor Richard Emmert has shown by his creation of English *noh* that *noh* possesses the potentiality to generate new works crossing cultural and linguistic boundaries. I express my deepest trust that Professor Richard Emmert will continue his path and his English *noh* pieces will provide new stimuli to performing arts around the world.

(Professor Emeritus: Seitoku University, Professor Emeritus: Ochanomizu University)

#### **List of Emmert's major works for English *noh***

*At the hawk's well* (1981)

*Drifting fires* (1985)

*Saint Francis* (1988)

*Eliza* (1989)

*Moon of the Scarlet Plums* (2001)

*Pine barrens* (2006)

*The Gull* (2006)

*Sumida River* (English version, 2008)

*Pagoda* (2009)

*Blue Moon Over Memphis* (2013)

*Oppenheimer* (2015)

*Emily* (2018)

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*Noh in English*. Tokyo: Teichiku Records, TECY-28010, 1990.

### **Emmert's publications on *noh***

- 2017 *The Guide to Noh of the National Noh Theatre, Book 6 (Tom-Z)*. Tokyo: National Noh Theatre. 136p.
- 2016 *The Guide to Noh of the National Noh Theatre, Book 5 (Sh-Tok)*. Tokyo: National Noh Theatre. 146p.
- 2015 *The Guide to Noh of the National Noh Theatre, Book 4 (N-Se)*. Tokyo: National Noh Theatre. 144p.
- 2014 *The Guide to Noh of the National Noh Theatre, Book 3 (Ko-M)*. Tokyo: National Noh Theatre. 147p.
- 2013 *The Guide to Noh of the National Noh Theatre, Book 2 (H-Ki)*. Tokyo: National Noh Theatre. 158p.
- 2012 *The Guide to Noh of the National Noh Theatre, Book 1 (A-G)*. Tokyo: National Noh Theatre. 143p.
- 1997 *Noh Performance Guide 7: Aoinoue* (co-authored with Monica Bethe). Seventh booklet in a series of guides to the plays of classical *noh*. Tokyo: National Theatre. 80p.
- 1996 *Noh Performance Guide 6: Ema* (co-authored with Monica Bethe). Tokyo: National Noh Theatre series. 83p.
- 1995 *Noh Performance Guide 5: Atsumori* (co-authored with Monica Bethe) Tokyo: National Noh Theatre. 92p.
- 1994 *Noh Performance Guide 4: Tenko* (co-authored with Monica Bethe). Tokyo: National Noh Theatre series. 84p.
- 1993 *Noh Performance Guide 3: Miidera* (co-authored with Monica Bethe). Tokyo: National Noh Theatre. 88p.
- 1992 *Noh Performance Guide 1: Matsukaze and Noh Performance Guide 2: Fujito* (co-authored with Monica Bethe). Tokyo: National Noh Theatre. 80p. and 72p. respectively.