

“EAST MEETS WEST IN NAGAKUTE”

Donny Schwekendiek

One aspect of jazz that I have always felt to be very important is its use of acoustic instruments. The natural sounds of the resonating strings and wood and skins, I believe, also find a sort of natural harmonic resonance within the human body thus making listening to acoustic music a very pleasing experience. Not surprisingly, my appreciation of acoustic instrumental music soon led me to a keen interest in the folk/classical musics of many different cultures. The music of India with its meditative ragas played on sitar and *tabla* was an early favorite. I also liked Irish folk music, folklore from Peru and I really enjoyed the gamelan of Indonesia. I, too, played for a short while in a Chinese orchestra. I played the *sho* or mouth organ - an instrument also played in the temples of Japan. Another style of music that caught my ear was that of the Japanese *koto* and *shakuhachi*. I first heard *koto* played by my jazz piano idol McCoy Tyner and thereafter bought a record of Japanese classical music which I found very enjoyable. When I came to live in Japan I definitely had the hope that I would someday have the opportunity to make music combining jazz piano with Japanese folk and classical music. For years now I've been incorporating songs such as “*akai-kutu*” “*hamabe no uta*” and “*yuki ya konkō*” into my jazz repertoire. Now, with “Grace in Motion”, I finally have the chance to work with two of the finest practitioners of Japanese classical arts...Nishikawa Masako, a master of the Japanese *buyo* style of dance and John Kaizan Neptune, an acknowledged master of *shakuhachi* - the Japanese bamboo flute. When Nishikawa-san, first approached me about the idea of combining her dance with jazz piano I was very excited. I would be able to arrange traditional Japanese songs with jazz harmonies which were very challenging. Even more challenging, however, was Nishikawa-san's introducing the concept of improvisation (a jazz hallmark) to Japanese *buyo*, this was truly revolutionary! Now she was not restricted by the size and shape of the performance space but rather liberated by it. We had something new! With John added to the unit the possibilities really began to blossom. Now we can perform Japanese songs (*haru no umi*, *sakura sakura*) with jazz harmonies as well as jazz standards (fly me to the moon, over the rainbow) with Nishikawa-san dancing gracefully to all of these sounds! “Grace in Motion” is still in its formative stages and I look forward to being part of its growth. Of course, I'm continuing my regular jazz performances and will be releasing a CD of jazz standards (with a couple of Japanese tunes) in late summer/early fall. I am, however, very proud to be a member of this east/west collaboration that was formed right here in our own Nagakute!



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