



MEDIA RELEASE
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RILEY'S MASTERY WINS NEW FANS FOR THE SHAKUHACHI

The Con's **Riley Lee**, the first non-Japanese to attain the rank of shakuhachi grand master, is "wowing" American students with his skill and knowledge of the venerable instrument.

Now two-thirds into a six month tutoring and performance tour of the US East Coast, Dr Lee has attracted a "cocktail" of undergraduates at Princeton University to a semester-long course on how the shakuhachi is represented in Japanese mythology, religion, literature and arts.

The bamboo flute, which traces back to the eighth century, is unfamiliar to many Western ears. With just five finger holes and no mouth piece, the end-blown bamboo pipe can make infinite sounds of a mellow timbre.

Shakuhachi means 1.8 feet — the instrument's standard length.

"Only a few of the students are music majors, with others drawn from anthropology, comparative literature, East Asian studies and mathematics," comments Dr Lee, a member of The Con's Woodwind team.

"Of course, the students are not going to become superb musicians in just one semester, but they certainly will have a much better appreciation for the instrument than they would if we just talked about it in lectures."

This is Dr Lee's third time to Princeton, and his second as a Visiting Fellow. He had a shorter tenure in 2006, also as part of a Humanities Council Fellowship. He is conducting the course with Professor **Thomas Hare**, through the Comparative Literature Department.

Princeton's website reported on the course: "During a recent lecture, discussion moved from references to the shakuhachi in Japanese mythology to its place in historical medieval texts, including an early citation to a piece of shakuhachi music in the diary of a Buddhist priest.

"Hare noted how the piece *Mujō Shinkyoku* — meaning 'that single tune which brings the changing heart of things to mind' — shows the shakuhachi's connection to the Buddhist value of transience.

"Unlike much Western music, classic shakuhachi repertory was an oral tradition, leading to changes in the music as pieces were passed down and to imprecise scores that serve as an outline rather than a prescription."

During his current tour, Dr Lee has:

- Given a master class and a concert at the University of North Florida in Jacksonville;
- Performed in concert in Brooklyn and recorded two new pieces (one, a duet for viola and shakuhachi) by New York composer Ned Rothenberg at a studio at New York University;
- Featured as guest performer with the Princeton Laptop Orchestra.

Next month he will tutor at the 11th Annual Shakuhachi Summer Camp of the Rockies, held near Boulder, Colorado.

A recording he completed with slack key artist **Jeff Peterson** titled "Haleakala" has been nominated as best instrumental album of the year for Hawaii's equivalent of the Grammys, the 2009 Na Hoku Awards.

Last year Dr Lee directed the World Shakuhachi Festival in Sydney, which brought together renowned players, Living National Treasures from Japan, professional performers, scholars, absolute beginners and enthusiasts.

It was the first time the festival has been held in Australia. It was con-sponsored by The Con.

"Riley's contributions to education and music are a source of unique pride to the Conservatorium and Australia," said Dean and Principal, Professor Kim Walker, who was patron of the 2008 festival.

"As we contribute to the broader context of international music-making it is indeed rewarding that our Faculty members are being recognised and featured in other leading institutions."

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