

## Traditional Sound to Bridge Cultures

Pavel Io is a Russian man who has been captivated by a classical Japanese bamboo flute, the shakuhachi. Io first encountered the sound of the shakuhachi as a teenager, when he was watching a documentary show on TV. As a player of the tin whistle, he was familiar with almost all the major wind instruments. However, this sound was nothing like the ones he had heard before; it had the elegance of a flute and the gentle touch of a clarinet. When he learned that this sound was from an instrument called the “shakuhachi,” he was online purchasing one before he knew it. The more he taught himself how to play it, the more drawn in he was by its fascinating sound. As if to spur his burgeoning passion, Russian musicians’ interest in classical Japanese music rose, leading the Tchaikovsky Moscow State Conservatory, renowned as one of the world’s top three music conservatories, to offer a shakuhachi course open to all. Pavel jumped at this opportunity, taking the course, which had a Japanese instructor, and following up to the point of becoming a professional shakuhachi player in Russia.

Determined to deepen his understanding of the shakuhachi’s sound, in November 2013 Io moved to Japan, the instrument’s native land. He based himself in Okayama Prefecture near the International Shakuhachi Kenshu-Kan (training center) and began studying under the famed Toshimitsu Ishikawa. Since then he been performing and teaching all over Japan. Three years since his arrival in Japan, Io’s pursuit of the shakuhachi is far from over. He plans to expand his performance range and has committed himself to study at the Graduate School of Music at the Tokyo University of the Arts starting April 2017. The decision stems from a strong desire to further deepen his understanding of the shakuhachi classics in the hope of further advancing to the next level as a performer. “Every pianist and violinist can play the classics of Western music, such as the works of Beethoven,” he explains. “And I want to solidly study the classical works of shakuhachi music, as there’s a certain sonority that can only be achieved when you’ve mastered the classics.”

Io continues his quest, aspiring to become a shakuhachi artist who uses the power of his music to link Russia, Japan, and the world. “I do not want to be just a shakuhachi performer—someone who just plays good music. I also want to deliver much more, including inspiration. One culture’s music can inspire another’s—for instance, there is a theory that one of the most respected koto [Japanese zither] songs, *Rokudan no shirabe*, composed in the seventeenth century, was somewhat influenced by Gregorian chant. I strongly believe that music is the ultimate cross-border bridge, and I would like to be one of those who can deliver inspiration across borders.”



Playing the shakuhachi at Rachmaninoff Hall, Tchaikovsky Moscow State Conservatory, in December 2016.



**Pavel Io**

Originally from Stupino, a town about 80 kilometers (50 miles) south of Moscow. Learned to sing and to play the tin whistle-like Russian flute from his vocalist mother from the age of three. Studied the fundamentals of shakuhachi playing under Alexander Iwashin and Kohei Shimizu in a shakuhachi course at the Tchaikovsky Moscow State Conservatory. Took part in a performing group led by Margarita Karatygina of the same conservatory using traditional Japanese instruments. Moved to Japan in 2013. Won a prize for excellence at the 22nd Japanese Hougaku Music Contest in 2016. Passed the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) Japanese traditional music audition and appeared on the NHK-FM radio program *Hogaku no hitotoki*.



Above: Io sits at the Noh theater of Koraku-en, a Japanese garden in Okayama Prefecture, where he has performed in the past. Left: Koraku-en, created for the local lord in the seventeenth century, is one of the Three Great Gardens of Japan together with Kenroku-en in Ishikawa Prefecture and Kairaku-en in Ibaraki Prefecture. Its seasonal flowers and traditional structures charm visitors and make its theater the perfect setting for the classical sounds of Io's shakuhachi.