

ARTICLES

Self-Expression in Battersea Park

(Simon Neale writes about the experience of a Shintaido Demonstration)

Shintaido demonstrations in front of the general public are very far from being ordinary keiko. If you find that your desire for self expression easily overwhelms your reticence and fear of public ridicule, they may be just the thing for you.

I was talked into it by Debbie Evans, and so (along with Minagawa sensei and Sarah Whiteley) we found ourselves in a huge, bustling, fenced-off enclosure in Battersea Park, on one of the hottest days of the year. It was, I was made vaguely aware, in the interests of Anglo-Japanese cultural understanding. People had actually paid money to get in to watch us do our stuff, along with origami, karaoke, traditional crafts, and the chance to eat noodles and drink Asahi beer.

My basic paranoia was initially fuelled by the large numbers of Japanese salary-men and their families who were smiling abstractedly at the attempts of Westerners to mimic their most treasured cultural practices. I tried to look humble in my hakama, while hoping for second-half revenge when they had a go at "You ain't nothin' but a hound-dog" in the karaoke competition. (Later, it was pointed out to me that the Japanese ex-pats were smiling abstractedly because they were warm and full of beer, and they could relax on the grass while their children played safely!)

The English people who gravitated to the martial arts section were altogether different. Many were impressively well-informed connoisseurs of interpersonal violence. Others didn't know much about art, but "knew what they liked". It seemed that they wouldn't much like Shintaido at first, especially when we started with audience participation in the kenko-taiso warm-up. But when I saw the people that Minagawa sensei had got involved; gentle, open-minded adults, and lots of soft unselfconscious children.... I knew things were going to be OK.

Kata, kihon, kumite, kumi-bo, kumitachi: it all passed in a blur of heat and exhaustion. (With so few people we had to work hard in order to keep up the spectacle.) I think we made an impact. I

think we changed the atmosphere. People could see our difference. No other martial arts group had reached out to involve onlookers, or danced to music, or floated like seaweed, or attacked their sensei en masse.... or ended their session unable to stand up!

Afterwards, we relaxed and strolled around, bought potted herbs, novelties for our children, and good food. Debbie and I marvelled at the man who opened the karaoke competition. He sang "La Bamba" with amazing enthusiasm, yet respect for the musical form. Beyond a sincere desire to do justice to the song, he didn't give a shit about the audience's preconceptions. A born natural.

(Simon Neale)

Shintaido Creative 1995

Jacob Wells Dance Centre, Bristol, 30th September

What, if any, are the connections between Shintaido and the creative arts? This was the question that Jaine Rubin and myself wanted to explore at this event, having felt at the '95 Daienshu and elsewhere that Shintaido is in itself an intrinsically creative martial art.

We had talked about the potential connections between some of Shintaido's themes: focus, broadening horizons, intensity, trust; and other art forms that we both practice such as painting, dance and music, but what would it be like to explicitly merge keiko with a free creative space? There have been some quite well known precedents for this in America and Japan, and notably the Kazu Yanagi live painting event in Paris in 1994, but our event was to differ in so far as there would be no audience, and that this was not to be a performance.

Jaine designed a publicity flyer, sent it out to various Shintaidoists, and hired a dance centre in Bristol for a Saturday in September. Together with Minagawa sensei, Lisa, Matthew and Ian, we drafted in musical equipment, paints, colours, garments, and our energy; ready for the first Shintaido Creative.

Although the afternoon had a rough structure (keiko, creative space, debrief), none of us really knew what was going to happen, or perhaps we all had separate views. The philosophy was very much "live and let live": to create a free, anarchic space in which the whole point was not to have a specific aim, or worry whether what we were doing was

“art” or not, but just to play. A kind of kindergarten for situationists?

After a playful Shintaido warm up led by Minagawa sensei, the 15 or so folk present (including several non-Shintaidoists who joined us for the afternoon) started to “be creative”.

On one wall a huge painting collage began to form, rather like a Kazu Yanagi image. Music and rhythm filled the air, either from Matthew’s didgereedoo and drum corner, or from the portable MIDI studio. Dancers moved randomly throughout the central space, while short bursts of poetry began to appear on the walls. Others carried on with bo practice. This continued for a couple of hours, with people trying out different areas for as long or short a time as they liked. Eventually fatigue set in, and after a brief end session of keiko, again led by Minagawa sensei, we sat in a circle and shared our thoughts about the day.

So what was it like and what was achieved? Undoubtedly some gained more from the event than others, perhaps depending on the extent of their previous experiences of creative play. A certain kind of person will always regard non goal-oriented artwork as a liberating existential leap, whereas others will panic and start mumbling about having to do the Christmas shopping! By turns people found the afternoon nervy, exhilarating, surreal, awkward, funny and playful; which at the end of the day is a fairly similar range of emotions to those one experiences at a good keiko (minus the euphoria!). Certainly in the pub afterwards, we were all smiles!

So to next year. Next time we do this there will be more things to do in the room, and hopefully a few more bodies to fill the space. Thanks to Jaine and her dynamism for making it all happen - and let’s see a few more of you at Shintaido Creative ’96!
(Richard Bell)

Japan’s Warrior Women

The Japan Times writes about Hideko Hokari

The Asian warrior woman does not merely exist in fiction. The concept is simple. First, a woman develops herself physically as well as mentally. Once she gains confidence in herself, she then shares her knowledge and strength with those weaker and younger.

Hideko Hokari, who lives in Kanagawa prefecture, is one example. A graduate of the Tokyo Women's University for Physical Education, she holds a ni-dan in bojutsu. After twenty years of experience in martial arts, she stopped teaching three years ago to become a social worker.

She explains how martial arts inspires her as a healer:

"I have no interest in martial arts as a fighting sport. I was involved in Shintaido, an experimental movement that focuses on communicating rather than confrontation, though it has its roots in karate.

"Martial arts should always be about learning and teaching. I had reached a point in Shintaido where I didn't feel I was growing very much anymore. To me, Shintaido is about communicating through physical movement, and I needed to find my own way of expressing that."

After a year of figuring out what she wanted to do, Hokari now does physical rehabilitation at Wakita Seika Hospital, and holds exercise classes at a senior citizens centre. She also records books and magazine articles for blind people.

"As a martial artist I realized I wanted to fight for a better society. As a social worker, I have finally found my own expression of that belief."

Hokari also emphasises the importance of physical fitness for women.

"Though I myself never was, women are often timid about exercise. Many women feel bad about the way their bodies look and think it's inevitable. It affects their self-confidence. Women athletes or martial artists feel better about themselves because their bodies are physically fit. I think it is important for women to develop physically as well as mentally and spiritually.....

.....Many women martial artists often stop practising after they get married and begin to raise a family. But the knowledge they gain is never lost."

Hideko Hokari uses martial arts now to remind her of its ideals.

"Sometimes I'll go to the park by myself and practice my favourite exercise, eiko. It's funny, but I never appreciated it that much when I was more active, but now, just doing this one movement brings back all the wonderful feelings in Shintaido about believing in myself and my dreams."

Even for the adventurous, spending Golden Week squat kicking in a stinky gym is no woman's idea of glamour. Aikido has attracted

many female enthusiasts because of its fluid motion. Shudo archery's elegance makes it popular with women. But being a warrior does not have to mean training in the martial arts; she could very well be doing other activities like hiking, swimming or weight training. The warrior woman ideal is the belief that women should be physically as well as mentally strong.

However, martial arts incorporate a spiritual training that is missing in most sports. It can inspire self-confidence as well as build endurance.

“Martial arts is an excellent tool to find yourself, to develop your own values, but it should not be your ultimate goal in life,” advises Hokari. For young Japanese women trying to find themselves with exhibitionism and expensive trips abroad, maybe it's time to turn inwards.

BRANCH NEWS

Thames

Bewitching Bavaria. It is a fresh every time challenge to introduce any or some of the Shintaido “curriculum” and practices to absolute beginners and maturer debutantes. It does seem, however, that usually everyone attending has had some experience of expressive movement through sports or corporal arts, or recreational physical training. Grand again to meet with old friends and enjoy pre-workshop preparatory practice together in open countryside. At the workshop, the really positive attitude of all those participating gives me a deep impression. A feeling to start together completely fresh, permits an early empathy and bonding. Five or six friends from an earlier workshop eagerly embrace the Shintaido keiko and encourage their partners. British Instructor leading a Bavarian Group along a Japanese system and Art?!? As the sun shines on and from the faces of each and everyone it is clear Shintaido work goes going on. More next year.

P.S. If anyone discovers our branch's Shintaido banner, removed from the Covent Garden demo, call Tokiko on 0181 891 4054 (who made it, and who'd like it returned, thanks).
(Cyril G. Fitch)

Reading

My efforts to start a class here in Berkshire continue to limp from catastrophe to catastrophe. Following the moderate success of my mini summer “gasshuku”, (reported in the last issue) I was

once again determined to start a regular class. This time I even got as far as hiring a hall... people had promised to come, publicity was out... I even had visions of articles in the local press.

The reality was 2 Wednesday evenings spent waiting in a totally deserted hall, with both myself and the people on the door wondering what on earth I was playing at! Nobody at all turned up.

The experience was actually quite interesting. I couldn't feel that the hall was mine. On the occasions I have attended virtually empty classes as a practitioner I have not found it too hard to create the feeling of a dojo with my own hitori-geiko, but as the instructor I felt quite unable to do this. Without students I could not function. My disappointment made it quite impossible to think "Oh, what the heck!" and simply use the wonderful space for my own practice.

After the second week I regretfully decided to abandon the attempt, and take time to "re-group". That means time to recover from the blow to my ego, and to re-think my publicity strategy now that I know how difficult it can actually be.
(Charles Burns)

BOD REPORTS

AGM 1995

Hosted by Oxford Shintaido, Sunday 26th November 1995

The AGM was held in Oxford on 26th November. Although several people attended the free keiko, no members other than BOD stayed on for the meeting! During the meeting the reports circulated to all supporters were discussed, the 1995-96 budget was formally approved, and branch reports were heard. Since this was the second year in succession in which no general supporters have chosen to attend, it was agreed that in future a far smaller-scale AGM be held, as part of the autumn workshop.
(Peter Furtado)

Sarah Whiteley elected to BOD

In the recent closely fought elections Sarah Whiteley was elected after the first ballot resulted in a two way tie, and a second ballot had to be called. Sarah will replace Pam Minagawa, who is now retiring from BOD after a number of years of selfless service.

Many thanks are due to Pam for all her hard work and support, and congratulations Sarah! Supporters might be interested to re-read the excellent interview with Sarah printed in the last issue of the Newsletter.

Shintaido Resources Centre

Pattie Thornley is starting to compile a collection of books, videos, brochures, photographs and publicity materials which any SF member can use as a resource. Images will be available as computer files ready to import into other documents. She asks if people can start looking out for good images of Shintaido, nature, etc. which she can use. Please send contributions to:
Pattie Thornley, Shintaido Resources Centre, 12 Southernhay Avenue, Cliftonwood, Bristol, BS8 4TJ

1996 schedule

Full information about these events will be circulated nearer the time.

Spring AI: 17/18 February, Brighton Contact Tony Hammick

Exams workshop: 1/2 June, London Contact Pattie or Becky

Autumn AI: 26/27 October, Bristol Contact Marcus

Autumn exams: to be arranged

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1. Discounts on equipment and events
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Please send a completed copy of this form,
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