

Také-no-Michi: The Path of Bamboo

A Guide to Playing the Classical Shakuhachi Honkyoku



By Tokuyama Takashi

Edited by Barry Nyosui Weiss

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About this Guide:

This document is a guide to understanding some of the special fingering and unique techniques that appear in Tokuyama's sheet music and recordings. It is not intended as an Advanced Player's Guide. It does mention some very special techniques like Komi Buki. These very unique and advanced techniques should be learned directly with a teacher. If the knowledge is gained only through manuals, it quite easy to have a poor understanding and the proper result will not be gained.

If one is new to the Shakuhachi and wishes to begin study (without a teacher), then one can obtain an instrument and beginner's manual from contacting Monty Levenson at www.shakuhachi.com.

About Tokuyama Takashi:

Tokuyama received a degree in Shakuhachi performance from Tokyo Fine Arts University, a course of study he completed after already having received a degree from Keio University in philosophy and art.

At the age of 20, he first heard Zen Shakuhachi and from that time he has decided to preserve this tradition as his life's work. Tokuyama Sensei has been studying, collecting and teaching Zen Shakuhachi for over 30 years. In his travels, he has discovered more than 200 of these unique music treasures from all over Japan. A few non-professional elders and Zen priests kept many of these pieces alive and most of these individuals have since passed away. Thanks to his efforts, these pieces have come down through the ages to us. He has been working diligently to maintain this tradition for the present and future generations.

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Advanced Finger Techniques

ATARI—Attack of a Note

Compared to other woodwind instruments, the Shakuhachi has a wide inside diameter. This distinctive feature makes it difficult to play the first note clearly. To help compensate for this deficiency, the technique of ATARI has been conceived. To play a note clearer, the same note is played twice. The ATARI for a MERI and KARI sound are done the same way. This technique should be executed quickly (not done in the extremely slow fashion of the Kinko School).

As a rule, the Tozan School does not use this technique of ATARI. But in the Kinko School, this technique is used almost for every note. It is most usually used in the Honkyoku, but there are some exceptions. For example: HA-CHI-RE (in the Kinko School either RI-CHI-RE or HI-CHI-RE). In the usual Kinko style, the RE is always hit, but in the Honkyoku it is never hit. The same can be said for the phrase: RE-TSU-RO.

The number of the finger doing the hit is written in Chinese characters on the right or left side of the notes. When there are different numbers written on both sides, it means that both ways are possible. The attack (ATARI) may also change according to local traditions or to the feeling of the song.

Finger Combinations:

二	三二	一三	二四	三四	五四
2	3-2	1-3	2-4	3-4	5-4

Move the fingers in the order of the numbers that coincide with the Chinese characters. Do not use the Tozan school technique of “Momi Te” when playing these notes. Each fingering gives out a clear and particular sound.

ツレ TSU RE—Start with your fingers in the position of a TSU with hole #4 open. As you close #4, start blowing. As soon as you get a “TSU” sound, move to “RE”.

ハロ HA RO—Start by covering holes #1, and #3 and then shade holes #2, #4, and #5. Start blowing softly doing a MERI (slight lowering of angle of the chin). When the sound is produced, play a high “RO”. Make sure that the MERI-KARI (movement of the chin) is very slight when moving from “HA” to “RO”.

ロメロ RO MERI RO—Start in a MERI position and lower the chin to the maximum. Open Hole #2 or #4. Blow as you close the hole. After you produce the first sound, go to a regular “RO”. The first note should be an O-MERI (Big MERI). The closer the pitch is to a “HA”, the better.

ハイ HA I—Start with the fingering for an “I” (or a “HA” with the back hole opened) and hit hole #5. (Produce the sound as you close the hole, then reopen quickly). Do not play the “I” sound too strongly. It should be used as an echo of the “HA” sound.

ウハ U-HA—U is played with hole #1 MERI and hole #3 in KAZASHI (slightly covered). This technique is often used when playing Kimpu Style melodies from the Nezasaha School. Immediately after doing the “U” sound, move to “HA” and hit hole #5 (the back hole) at the same time.

In the high octave, the ATARI (hit) for U is sometimes not used. For instance, in the Meianji School from Kyoto, you will often see a 不_ニ FU (which means: no hit) next to the Ha.

Advanced Finger Techniques

Replacement Fingering

ア “A”—“A” is a replacement for the low octave “HA” Meri. From the “HA” fingering, slightly lower the chin doing a MERI and close hole #3. This is often used at the end of a phrase and played in the same breath. “A” has the same role as the “OTOSHI”.

ウ “U NO SAN”—The sound is the same as U, but the fingering is different. The chin is slightly up (as in KARI) and blowing sharply and only hole #3 is open. This fingering is only used in the high octave.

イ “I”—Similar to “U NO SAN”, but again there is a slight change in fingering. The chin is slightly up (as for a KARI) and blowing sharply and holes #2 and #3 are open. Only used in high octave.

Note: You can notice a difference between “I” and “U NO SAN” only on a natural bamboo Shakuhachi (Ji-Nashi), which are sometimes preferred to play Honkyoku. When playing a modern pitched Shakuhachi, you will not notice any differences between the two notes and so you can use either notation or fingering.

キ “KI”—A substitute fingering for “RO”. Open hole #5 and play with the chin positioned as for a MERI sound. This distinctive soft sound is used in melodies as “Tamuke” and “Akebono no Shirabe”.

ラ “RA”—A technique used to repeat the HA sound by hitting hole #4. It usually appears in the form of HA RA or HA RA HA RA. In this case the holes #5-4 or 5-4-5-4 are hit.

ル “RU”—This is played by hitting hole #1 regardless of what the previous note was. The attack is done not by just closing, but by a quick hitting of the hole. The finger does a quick closing and opening movement.

コロコロ KOROKORO—Start with covering holes #4 and #5 in KAZASHI with the chin in a MERI position. Holes #1 and #2 alternate in opening and closing, but both holes should be closed for a brief instant. (You can also start with the opening of #2.)

When either hole #1 or #3 is open, the “HA” sound is heard. When both holes are closed, the “RO” sound is heard. The soft and quick change between these two sounds is called KOROKORO. The secret of the KOROKORO lies in the combination of a soft tone and the movement of alternating fingers. The fingers should not go too far off the hole.

ハラロ HARARO—Blow softly with #2, #4, and #5 in KAZASHI (half covered) and the chin in a MERI position (same pitch as “HA”). After producing a sound, go immediately to a “I” (pitch of “RO”) by releasing the KAZASHI fingers and doing a KARI. Hold this note for a while and then do a MERI. When you reach the pitch of “HA” (same as in the beginning), hit hole #2 and go to a RO. (When playing RO, the chin goes back in the normal position.)

This technique is very difficult to execute. There is a saying that goes, “3 years for HARARO, 8 years for KOROKORO”. For these two techniques, a softer breath and a good KARI-MERI movement are necessary.

ホ HO, ホロイ—HOROI, ホロロ—HORORO, ホロホロ—HOROHORO

A technique similar to the KOROKORO, but in this case there are fewer movements of the fingers. Play a HO with #2, #4, #5 as KAZASHI and the chin in a MERI position. Holes #1 and #2 alternate in opening and closing, this will give you a RO sound and end with a “I” when #2 and #1 are closed. For the pitch, it will sound as if you played HAHARO. HO is repeated by hitting #2.

Chin Techniques

YURI—Vibrato Produced by Shaking the Head

If ATARI is the major technique for the fingers, YURI is the major technique for the chin. For classical Honkyoku, no extra YURI (not notated) is used. But it is often used in the Honkyoku from Kyushu and Tohoku.

There are several techniques of YURI: the TATE YURI (shaking up and down), the YOKO YURI (shaking from side-to-side), the MAWASHI YURI (circle movement) and the KARI YURI (shaking in KARI position). There is also a difference between a big and a small YURI.

YOKO YURI (sideways)

This Yuri is done with no change of pitch. Start with a long note (held) then go into a delicate shaking of the note. After shaking 4-5 times, go to a natural stop and end with the note held. This is the general form of the Yoko Yuri.



Tate Yuri (down and up)

This shaking is done with a change of pitch. From a basic note, do a MERI, then go back and forth between the two pitches. Usually this sort of YURI is done slowly and deeply first and ends faster and smaller. This is often used in the Honkyoku from Kyushu and Oushu (Northeast Japan).



KARI YURI (up and down)

From the basic tone, go to a half tone higher pitch and then alternate going back and forth. The KARI YURI is written on the right side in this score, however it is seldom used.



力 KA (KARI)—Without changing the fingering, make the pitch go half a tone higher by changing the angle of the chin.

メ ME (MERI)—Lower the pitch of the sound by half a tone by lowering the angle of the chin.

入 SURU—This is used to give a tone a soft and quiet beginning. Start with a sound lower (MERI) than the first note, then bring it slowly back to the note by doing a movement of KARI. This technique is used in songs like Sankyorei-Classical Sankyoku, Kumoijishi, and Shino no Kyoku.

し SURI AGE—A technique used to make a bridge between two notes. It is done by sliding the finger up. It is comparable to the western glissando.

〜 FURI—The FURI is often not written. When a sound is repeated two or more times, a slight shake of the head is done right after the last hit. This gives the sound a change of quality. When the head is shaken, the sound drops in pitch and then comes back to normal.

The FURI technique is not something that is absolutely necessary. It will come to you naturally once you have grasped the essence of the Honkyoku. If played too slowly or too clearly, it becomes a NAYASHI which is a different technique.

Chin Techniques



OTOSHI—This is done by lowering the sound by half or one full tone before the ending of a phrase. The OTOSHI sound should be short. The sound is lowered by using the finger to cover part of the hole and by doing a MERI.



NAYASHI—A note which is preceded by this symbol is lowered by a one full tone before it is played. This is played strongly and clearly using a combination of the chin (MERI) and the finger. The sound is then brought back to the full note. The whole sound should be balanced, making sure the non-MERI part does not get too strong.



MERI KOMI—After playing the note, lower the pitch by one-and-a half tones, then bring it back to the original note. There are no fingering changes or attacks on any holes for this technique. The tone is held for the first half of the phrase. The second half is equally divided, first by the MERI sound and then by the original note. In most cases, the note before and after a MERI KOMI is the same.

Breath Techniques

IRO–Tone Coloring or Sound Texture

As a general rule, do not put any coloring to the tone. Just play the phrase with the right amount of breath and the coloring that fits. Just play the note simply without overdoing it. The coloring-IRO is used for a phrase and not a single note.

FUKI-KOMI–Strong Blowing

The Honkyoku is usually played by a wedge shaped breath (strong first, then it becomes smaller). The volume at the end of the phrase tends to get smaller. But with the Fuki Komi the notes stay strong to the end of the phrase.

KOMI BUKI–Intermittent Blowing

This technique has been passed on in the Kimpu branch of the Nezasaha School. The note is intermittently repeated without using the tongue or the throat. This technique has been inspired by the bitter cold weather and the windy winters of the Tsugaru Region (Aomori).

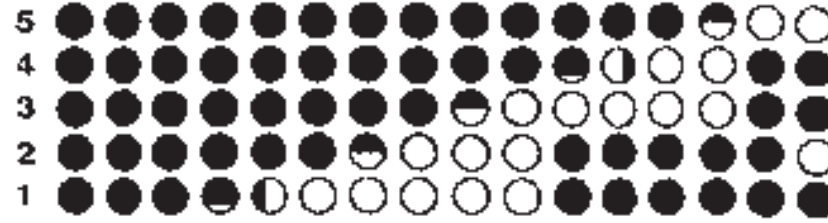
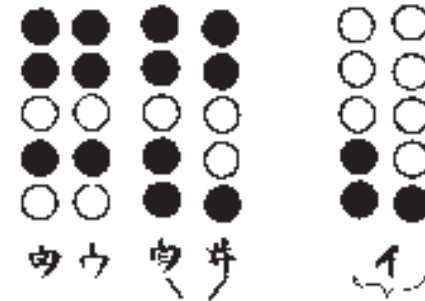
TAMA

This is short for TAMA-NE. To produce this sound, you have to shake the tongue or make it tremble on purpose to create a strong sound. Try to get a rolling sound “Trrrr” by keeping your lips relaxed and in a normal position with the tongue towards the upper palate.

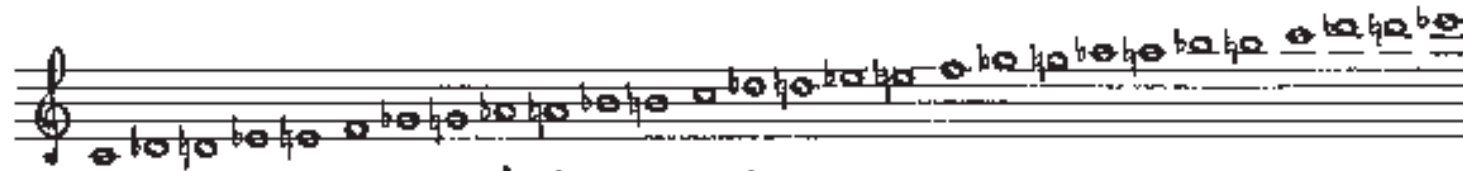
TABA NE

It is also called KUCHIGURUMA. To do a TABA NE a gargling sound is produced. It is similar in volume to the pronunciation of an “R” in German. With some practice, TAMA NE and this technique can be achieved by anyone.

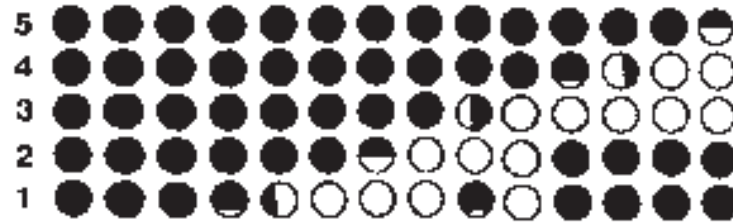
Fingering Chart



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Also Available from Tokuyama Takashi:

1. Shakuhachi Honkyoku Sheet Music

Tokuyama Takashi is the founder of the Fuke-Doyukai in Tokyo. He has traveled throughout Japan researching and transcribing honkyoku, some of which are rare and known only to a few surviving players. Tokuyama has published many of the oldest known pieces of "original" shakuhachi music. His sheet music series comes in three sets, which correspond to the degree of complexity and order in which students at his school learn the pieces. All music is written in the Japanese cursive style and comes with an English translation of Tokuyama's Honkyoku Playing Guide on fingering, breath and chin technique.

2. A Beginner's Guide to Learning Shakuhachi Honkyoku

The goal of this manual is help familiarize the student to the basics of the Shakuhachi as an instrument and a practice. No prior music training is necessary. The Guide comes with a CD and an optional practice grade shakuhachi. After completion of this manual, the student will be able to play music and if he/she desires can continue on through the more advanced training guides, CDs and sheet music.

3. Shakuhachi Honkyoku CDs

Now available, 5 CDs of Tokuyama's Honkyoku. All of them are played on 1.8 Shakuhachi and are perfect for study or meditation.

Vol. 1: Hi Kyoku • Vol. 2: Korei • Vol. 3: Shumi • Vol. 4: Michi • Vol. 5: Kumoi (New)

4. Shakuhachi

We usually start students out on beginner shakuhachi and offer a line of inexpensive instruments to be used with this manual.

Tokuyama Sensei normally plays on Jinashi Shakuhachi. In order to allow individuals to play such instruments, we will be offering these unique Shakuhachi through the websites listed below. They are made in the old Zen style without lacquer (natural bore) so the sounds are subtler than normal Ji Shakuhachi. They are available in a number of sizes and price ranges.

Products are available online from www.shakuhachi.com and www.jinashi.com

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