

Yoshikazu Iwamoto

Thought on folio for shakuhachi

[excerpt from liner notes for **Wheat**, 1984]

I can vividly recall my first impressions when I received in Japan the music of these three pieces from Frank Denyer. At the very beginning I was startled by the strange title of the first piece, **On, on - It Must Be So**. Then I glanced over the written notes and thought: "This is not possible at all! It is so thoroughly inundated with microtonal phrases next to impossible, there is no place I feel I can attack first. "But the title strangely attracted my mind, although I could not find any suitable Japanese translation for it! Nearly the same feeling came to me when I read the following two compositions, **Wheat** and **Quite White**.

Despite many efforts, one and a half years passed in vain without any successful technical solutions to the overwhelming difficulties to be surmounted. Therefore I began to reconsider the whole performing technique of the shakuhachi with these tremendous difficulties of Frank's pieces always in mind. For a long time I never imagined I would be able to play them, and I felt a great joy when I first discovered some basic principles by which one could produce and accurately control various microtones: 1/4, 1/3rd, 1/6th tones and even finer shades. Some downward glissandi that I had considered impossible I found were attainable if I used my knee to gradually cover the end of the instrument, and thus encouraged I began to think that I should continue my study of these pieces until I had solved every difficulty. The first note of **Quite White**, which is at the very top of the shakuhachi's range and which had only ever been played in fortissimo, gradually became possible in pianissimo after a long period of practice.

I had spent almost three years practicing the music, slowly discovering the new techniques demanded by each piece, and it was therefore like a dream when I came to the point of recording my playing for the disc.

Quite White was the first piece to be recorded (in 1981), three years before the other two pieces. In that first session I was suddenly caught by a very deep feeling. I was very delighted that I could at last touch the core of the work. Later the other pieces also spontaneously revealed their special feeling which I could not render into words, but which I felt to be something very pure and deep. Returning to Japan (in 1981) I found some phrases of T.S. Eliot which were exactly what I felt towards this music... "the word within a word, unable to speak a word, the notion of some infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering thing."

Frank once told me that the title **Wheat** attracted him because the sound of the initial consonant and vowel - Whe - evoked in his mind the sound of the shakuhachi. What I have found in his pieces is perhaps Frank's heart that is as gentle as the gentle hills in England.