I, James Bunte, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of:

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A Player's Guide to the Music of Ryo Noda:

Performance and Preparation of Improvisation I and Mai

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A Player’s Guide to the Music of Ryo Noda:
Performance and Preparation of *Improvisation I* and *Mai*

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Abstract

The compositions of Ryo Noda are performed in virtually every major university and saxophone studio throughout the world, and yet there is very little published to help the performer understand and prepare Noda’s unique contemporary saxophone techniques, many of which are based and shakuhachi flute gestures. Saxophone teachers often recommend listening to shakuhachi when preparing the compositions of Noda, but there is a need for explanation of the techniques specific to the shakuhachi flute.

This performer’s guide will help saxophonists prepare and perform two compositions of Japanese composer Ryo Noda, *Improvisation I* and *Mai*. This document will provide foundational exercises designed to prepare the performer for the unique challenges represented in *Improvisation I* and *Mai*. It will also provide a detailed explanation of all notation and techniques as well as a musical and cultural context with which to prepare a *culturally informed* performance practice.
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Chapter One

Introduction

Ryo Noda (b.1948) is perhaps the most performed composer of contemporary saxophone music. His compositions have become standard repertoire in all major universities around the world, and are regularly performed at national and international saxophone conferences. A brief survey of repertoire lists published on the world-wide web indicate that Noda’s music is studied at:

   University of Michigan
   Northwestern University
   University of North Texas
   University of Illinois
   Michigan State University
   Paris Conservatory
   Indiana University
   Bowling Green State University
   et.al. (26,000 results on Google)

His compositions are included in most university saxophone professors’ essential repertoire lists, many of which are published on the web. Dr. John Sampen states:

   Many of these [Noda’s] compositions have already achieved a permanent position in the standard repertoire of most classical saxophonists.

Also Harry Gee says in his book Saxophone Soloists and Their Music 1884-1985: “… (Noda is) particularly brilliant in his avant-garde improvisations and inventive techniques for the saxophone” (Gee, 1986, p. 249).

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1 http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=ryo+noda+university+repertoire&aq=f&oq=&aqi=
Born in Japan in 1948, Ryo Noda completed his undergraduate study at the Osaka College of Music. He went on to complete a Master of Music degree with Fred Hemke at Northwestern University and a Performers Certificate with Jean Marie Londeix at the Bordeaux Conservatory. In 1973 Noda was awarded the *Prix de Composition de la S.A.C.E.M.* Also Ryo Noda’s compositions have been on the repertoire lists for the international competitions including the Adolphe Sax Competition in Dinant, the International Saxophone Competition in Slovenia, the International Saxophone competition in Nantes, and the North American Saxophone Alliance Biennial Conference Young Artist Competition.

Studying with two of the most prominent saxophone teachers gave Noda a solid foundation in both the traditional French saxophone repertoire and the extended-techniques involved in the new French repertoire. Londeix was working with young French composers on a new wave of saxophone repertoire that built upon the classical music trends of the 1960s, incorporating non-traditional forms, serialism, and extended-techniques.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this work is to help the performer prepare, practice and execute the music of Ryo Noda. This includes both the extended-techniques involved and developing a culturally informed interpretation.
This document will also focus on possible interpretations of *Improvisation I* and *Mai* based on incorporating traditional shakuhachi techniques. It will also examine how Noda notated these techniques for saxophone, labeling each of the techniques on the score and provide explanation on how to perform and understand each technique in the context of Noda’s unique style. The purpose of this research is to provide a model to integrate traditional shakuhachi techniques within a contemporary saxophone composition for a *culturally informed* interpretation.

When studying the music of Ryo Noda, it is important to understand some of his musical influences. Ryo Noda’s music is often a student’s first exposure to extended-techniques, non-traditional notation, and non-Western music. Certainly his interest and exposure to traditional Japanese music, including shakuhachi flute, as well as contemporary French repertoire, helped shape Noda’s compositions.

Authors such as Nathan Nabb, Steven Mauk and Donald Sinta have provided valuable insight on Noda’s *Improvisation I* as well as the contemporary techniques contained therein, but the shakuhachi-based analysis in this document will help the performer execute this *culturally informed* interpretation.

A thorough understanding of shakuhachi and its influence on Ryo Noda’s compositions can radically change the interpretation/performance practice of his works. This type of analysis can lead to a greater understanding of the cultural and musical context of the music of Ryo Noda. With greater understanding follows increased potential for a *culturally informed* interpretation.
A Brief History of the Shakuhachi

The term ‘shakuhachi’ derives from the length of the flute, as ‘shaku ha sun’ (the standard shakuhachi length) is approximately 1.8 feet.

In China (and later Japan) the shaku was an official unit of measurement. The shaku length has changed…present day shaku is equivalent to 11.9 inches or 30cm (one shaku is also divided into ten sun). Hachi in Japanese means ‘eight’ so the standard length of bamboo for a vertical flute is one shaku+hachi sun (shakuhachi for short) is 21.5 inches or 54cm.

The shakuhachi flute in its current form (five holes, four on the front, one on the back) first appears in the Fuke sect of Buddhism (also used by sarugaku actors—a predecessor to noh theater) in the 13th Century, in which the practitioners use the shakuhachi flute in meditation. The early period for shakuhachi music was associated with religious practice and meditation, especially the Zazen tradition (literally ‘Sitting Zen). Until the Fuke sect was banned in 1871, shakuhachi was restricted to religious use. After 1871, the shakuhachi lost its religious associations.

In addition to its function in meditation and religion, shakuhachi was also used in concert ensembles and accompanying dance and drama. The practitioners of shakuhachi are traditionally seen wearing reed baskets on their heads for anonymity (though Bledsel tell us that it is also ‘to keep out the cold and rain’). Because of this ability to hide one’s identity, shakuhachi was outlawed in the 19th Century as ronin (rogue Samurai) who

4 Wen p. 27.
5 Bledsel, p. 82.
were fomenting unrest against the Shogun. Practitioners continued to transmit the
tradition covertly and the practice of shakuhachi was again legalized in the 20th century.

Shakuhachi gained popularity in Japan and the west in the second half of the 20th
century in traditional Japanese music, contemporary classical music, and the ‘New Age’
movement.

In order to understand the shakuhachi influence, the performer must understand
some of the aesthetic differences between Japanese and western music.

The Japanese have a preference for irregular, ambiguous, indefinite, and
asymmetrical forms…complex, dynamic concept of musical tone…constraint…
complex tonal beginnings and endings…ornamentation as a prominent part of the
music…expressive use of silence…sound valued for its own sake.6

The above principles are central to Japanese music in general, and both
shakuhachi and Noda’s compositions specifically.

6 Wen, p. 31.
Chapter Two

Warm-up and Foundational Exercises

**Flexibility**

The performer who wishes to play Ryo Noda’s compositions must be flexible, both in terms of pitch and tone. Embouchure/oral cavity flexibility and control is essential to the performance of any contemporary works for saxophone and indeed in any wind music.

Before attempting any of the extended techniques...one must understand that correct formation and flexibility of the embouchure and oral cavity are essential prerequisites for successful mastery of saxophone performance. A properly formed embouchure and correct tongue position ensures pitch adjustment capability, vibrato control and air stream manipulation requisite to properly shape and phrase definite musical gestures during performance of standard and contemporary saxophone repertoire. Such flexibility is not solely idiosyncratic to saxophone performance. A command of brass wind performance also requires similar embouchure and oral cavity control. Trumpet practice routines, for example, regularly include lip slurs and other flexibility exercises to develop greater control and agility in their performance ability. Vocalists must also master similar manipulations to achieve proper diction, timbre and intonation. Indeed, flexibility of embouchure and oral cavity is one of the most integral aspects of woodwind, brass and vocal performance.\(^7\)

Flexibility is indeed the key to performance of many of the techniques discussed in this document, and there are many exercises to develop flexibility on the saxophone.

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\(^7\) Nabb, p.52.
Mouthpiece Exercises

Any saxophonist who would like to perform the music of Ryo Noda (or any other contemporary saxophone music) must have flexibility. This requirement for flexibility is not limited to saxophonists wanting to play Ryo Noda.

Many teachers have stressed the importance of flexibility at least to the point of achieving a certain pitch on the mouthpiece. The most famous example is Eugene Rousseau’s recommendation of a concert A being achieved on the alto saxophone.

“A simple test to check both embouchure and air pressure in saxophone playing is as follows: Blow a sustained pitch on the mouthpiece alone at the fortissimo level. The approximate concert pitches which should be obtained are A for the alto saxophone, G for tenor saxophone; Eb for baritone saxophone.”

The ability to play A on the mouthpiece, however, is not sufficient in terms of the flexibility needed to perform the compositions by Ryo Noda. For the purposes of this document, all exercises will refer to the alto saxophone, though they should be practiced on the other saxophones as well.

Perhaps the most fundamentally important exercise to practice for flexibility on saxophone is the mouthpiece ‘siren’. This is simply playing from the highest possible note on the mouthpiece (typically C6, though some performers can achieve even higher, depending on the mouthpiece) to the lowest possible note on the alto mouthpiece (typically C5, though some performers can achieve a bit lower).

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9 Rousseau recommends A for alto, G for tenor, and F for baritone.
To achieve a full octave (or more) on the mouthpiece, the performer must be able to manipulate three things: Pressure on the reed, jaw position, and oral cavity. It is important to try to limit the movement of facial muscles outside the embouchure.

...aim for minimal facial contortions (i.e. nose movement, eyebrow lift, forehead wrinkles.) Maintain normal facial mask and concentrate on tongue movement. While blowing air, attempt to deliberately move the tongue to different positions in the mouth...forward, backward, sideways, arch in center, curled up or down.¹⁰

The performer should maintain the normative jaw position for all but the most extremely low pitch positions. Though the jaw might move very slightly at the lowest positions, moving the jaw down or back for all but the lowest notes will cause the tone to become diffuse, grainy and buzzy. The performer should be able to move the pitch on the mouthpiece without changing the jaw position, but at the lowest position, the performer can slide out toward the tip of the mouthpiece slightly.

As a corollary to the above statement about jaw position, the performer should try to maintain normative playing pressure on the reed. If the performer tries to change the pitch on the mouthpiece by lowering the pressure on the reed, the sound will become airy, diffuse, and unfocused. The one exception to this idea of constant pressure is vibrato, which must involve movement of the jaw. The key to maintaining clarity of tone in vibrato is to limit the movement of the jaw to the slightest possible motion to achieve the desired effect/sound.

¹⁰ Sinta, p.7
The second exercise to practice is an expanding interval exercise. The performer must learn to lock in the mouthpiece pitch at different levels, and by starting at the top of the range and expanding the interval by half steps until performing again an octave slur, such as in the siren exercise. By completing the expanding interval exercise, the performer can produce a full octave major scale on the mouthpiece.

Dr. Nathan Nabb has illustrated this mouthpiece exercise:

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\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure1.png}
\caption{The author advises practicing this exercise descending from C, B, Bb etc...}
\end{figure}
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Dr. Nabb also stresses the importance of the tongue position for flexibility, but focuses on the movement of the tip of the tongue and how it affects the rest of the tongue.

The saxophonist does not affect pitch changes by altering jaw pressure or air stream; rather, they are achieved by changing the contour and size of the oral cavity through tongue position manipulation. The saxophonist draws the tip of the tongue down and back, which, in turn, raises the main body and rear portion of the tongue to lower the pitch. The difficulty in this exercise rests in developing the precise tongue positions in the oral cavity to create the defined pitches, as well as maintaining uniform timbre throughout this process.\footnote{Nabb, p.62.}

This technique is the most difficult to understand, perhaps because it is counter-intuitive, but the act of moving the middle/back part of the tongue up results in the pitch going down.
Overtone Matching

Another preparatory exercise for the use of extended techniques is the matching of overtones. The control of the overtone series is essential for the production of multiphonics, alternate fingerings (bisbigliando), and altissimo.

Many teachers promote the idea of playing the overtone series, but playing the overtone series from the fundamental tone upward promotes biting, excessive jaw motion and glottal tension. The author suggests following the approach advocated by Sinta and Dabney, matching the overtones from the regularly fingered note.\textsuperscript{12}

There are many reasons that overtone practice helps the performer. By practicing overtone matching, the performer can select a specific note contained in a multiphonic and bring clarity as well as the correct partial contained within the multiphonic.

Extreme Dynamics

In order to successfully perform the compositions of Ryo Noda with the appropriate drama, the performer must practice extreme dynamics. The sudden dramatic

\textsuperscript{12} Sinta, p. 17.
dynamic shifts found in Ryo Noda’s compositions present specific challenges to the performer, especially in terms of pitch and tone control.

The following exercise is a graphic representation of one of the most important exercises, which in essence is a long controlled decrescendo to \textit{niente}. This exercise should be practiced for consistency of tone throughout the dynamic range of the instrument.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{figure3.png}
\caption{Figure 3}
\end{figure}

Obviously the exercise should be practiced both from soft to loud and from loud to soft, working for a smooth transition between all dynamics with no bumps or timbre changes. The parabolic shape above is a good exercise to practice because it requires a more sudden dynamic shift at the louder end, while demanding more subtle control at the softest dynamics. When playing Noda’s compositions, sudden dynamic shifts while still having control is essential.

Once this becomes manageable, the performer should practice the exercise with a tuner. This ‘\textit{niente} exercise’ is one of the most important for control of the softer dynamics required for Noda’s music.
In order to master the softest dynamics in the lower register, the performer must develop strategies to master the challenges presented by the conical bore of the saxophone. As the performer plays the lowest few notes, E-Bb, the resistance increases and response becomes problematic. There are three methods effective for control of the lower register: two kinds of subtone, and tongue-to-reed subtone.

Classical subtone is very different from the kind of subtone used in jazz. In the subtone that works with the classical embouchure the performer tries to maintain the normative jaw position, while removing the tooth (jaw pressure) support and relies upon the musculature of the lip only. The performer can achieve this with a double-lip embouchure, where the lip is over both upper and lower teeth, and this method is very good to practice as a preliminary exercise. In practice, however, the double-lip embouchure can be difficult to switch to in the middle of a musical passage.

The other way to achieve the lip-supported subtone is to simply lift the teeth from the mouthpiece but maintaining the normative jaw position. The performer should practice low register notes at a medium dynamic and practice lifting the teeth from the mouthpiece while doing the niente exercises.

A difficult but effective method to perform the softest dynamics in the low register is the tongue-to-reed subtone. This technique, once mastered, can provide a very stable sound, though the performer should be advised that the pitch can be quite flat, and sometimes quarter-tone fingerings are required for accurate pitch.
**Variable Vibrato**

Ryo Noda uses vibrato as a specific effect, and notates each instance differently. Noda notates the specific amplitude and frequency changes graphically, and it does not conform to traditional vibrato styles. The performer needs to be able to play exaggerated width vibrato in an improvisatory style, while still maintaining smooth, natural sound. This does not come easy for some performers, especially at the bottom of the vibrato. The performer should begin by practicing slow pitch bends on the mouthpiece, then gradually apply the principles stated later in the *yuri* section.

The performer must be able to differentiate this type of vibrato from traditional concert saxophone vibrato. When doing exaggerated widths, the performer must use more tongue position/oral cavity manipulation in addition to jaw motion. This allows the performer to maintain a clear, consistent sound.

**Portamento**

A very important technique that should be mastered is the portamento, which highlights many of the performance issues brought into play by Ryo Noda’s compositions. Portamento should be practiced for two techniques, slow fingers and voicing control. These two techniques should be practiced separately and then integrated for greater effect.

In order to get a convincing portamento the performer must have control over finger speed. In the first sixteenth of an inch of opening a key (or the last sixteenth when closing a key) most of the pitch change occurs. In order for a smooth transition between
notes to occur, the performer should work to play with the same dynamic level throughout the finger movement, which is most difficult when the key is first opening or almost closing.

Nabb’s graph clearly elucidates the problem with the resistance level.\textsuperscript{13}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure4.png}
\caption{Point of Greatest Resistance}
\end{figure}

The second part of a convincing portamento involves control of voicing. For an upward portamento, the voicing must, perhaps counterintuitively, go down as soon as the key begins to open. Then the performer can slowly bring the voicing back to normal while slowly opening the key. By combining the two techniques, the performer can perform portamento intervals ranging from a half step to more than a double octave.

\textsuperscript{13} Nabb, p 32.
Chapter 3

Improvisation I

Written in 1972, Improvisation I is Ryo Noda’s first published composition. Improvisation I is for solo alto saxophone and was written for Jean Marie Londeix, the teacher at Bordeaux. Londeix was working with many composers to create saxophone repertoire that includes extended techniques, and techniques that are specific to saxophone.

Improvisation I follows an arch form, with the primary material repeated (with a small variation) at the end. Most phrases begin softly with no vibrato and then crescendo with ornamental vibrato or other effects, then taper to a either a soft release or an abrupt short ending (Japanese cutting tone). This phrase form mirrors the arch-form present in the entire composition.

Extended-techniques required for Improvisation I include (in order of appearance) portamento, pitch bends, quarter-tones, special articulations (Japanese cutting-tone), flutter-tongue, indeterminate music, tremolos, and bisbigliando.

The notation is somewhat different than other contemporary saxophone repertoire of the same period. Noda creates some of his own notation and in the case of Improvisation I Noda does not provide a key. Each gesture, including notation will be explained in both traditional and shakuhachi terms.
Nayashi (Portamento)

This first gesture does not need much explanation in traditional terms, as the grace note is a common gesture in many genres of saxophone music.

Shakuhachi Interpretation

The opening phrase of Noda’s *Improvisation I* (figure 1) begins with a grace note one half-step below the first sustained note: a typical way to begin a shakuhachi composition\(^\text{14}\). The Japanese term for this type of grace note is *nayashi*.\(^\text{15}\) *Nayashi* is performed by dipping the head (*meri*) and slowly using portamento to slide up to the goal note (*kari*).

In contrast, saxophonists would typically play a grace note trying to center the tone on each note, trying, in fact, to avoid any sliding between the pitches. To improve your ability to slide between pitches, practice sliding between half steps first. Start with low E to F and work to move your second finger as slowly as possible, while increasing your airstream at the first moment your key begins to open. Steven Mauk has

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\(^{14}\) Lependorf, p.6

written an article on pitch bending which give the performer a methodical approach to increasing both flexibility and facility with slow fingers.\textsuperscript{16}

![figure 6 (shakuhachi term inserted by author)](image)

**Yuri (Special Vibrato)**

After the initial gesture, Noda graphically depicts the shape of the vibrato.

![figure 7 (shakuhachi term inserted by author)](image)

\textsuperscript{16} Mauk, p. 14
The performer must practice manipulating the vibrato both in frequency and amplitude in order to portray the above shape.

Building on the preliminary exercises presented in Chapter Two, the performer should practice pitch bends both above and below the normative mouthpiece pitch. Because there is much more room to move the pitch below the center, the performer should think of the center of pitch being about 25% below the top of the pitch.

The performer should separately practice increasing both the amplitude of the vibrato and the frequency.

Though many saxophone teachers teach the frequency of classical vibrato should be in the range of 72-84 for sixteenth-notes, for Noda’s music the performer should be able to...
perform vibrato with a much wider frequency range. The author suggests practicing sixteenth notes from 60-96, and also in different groupings, from triplets to septuplets.

**Shakuhachi Interpretation**

The typical vibrato in vibrato in shakuhachi is also wider and less regular than in contemporary saxophone performance. Shakuhachi vibrato can be created by moving the head up and down, side to side, or in circles. This motion creates changes in pitch that can resemble anything from a quiver to a tremolo. Also shakuhachi vibrato can be improvisatory in nature, both in terms of frequency and amplitude.

After the opening *nayashi*, Noda graphically represents a vibrato that gradually increases in amplitude. This resembles a shakuhachi technique called *yuri*. *Yuri* is can be improvisatory, so rather than playing a simple vibrato with the amount of waves shown in the gesture, a saxophonist can make this vibrato more like *yuri* by starting the note without vibrato and slowly increase the amplitude and frequency in an improvisatory and dramatic fashion. This phrase ends with a typical shakuhachi gesture, so it is important to not tongue the accented C, as this grace note is one of the types of articulation on shakuhachi.

One of the most important things for the performer to be able to do is bend the pitch without allowing the sound to degenerate…a product of dropping the jaw.
Other Vibrato in Shakuhachi

There is another technique called *komibuki* that is described as a ‘rhythmic pulsing of the air’.¹⁷ This technique sounds very much like modern flute vibrato, though it is used irregularly, and often in conjunction with other types of vibrato. *Komibuki* is performed by manipulating the abdominal wall and the vocal tract to oscillate the intensity of the airstream, much in the way you might say ‘hoo-hoo-hoo’. The unique aspect of this type of vibrato is that it does not affect pitch as much as the other types of shakuhachi vibrato.

The various types of vibrato can be adapted to saxophone, and can add another dimension with which to individualize interpretation. The baroque flute technique of *flattenment* is similar to certain instances of *meri* and *kari*. This is performed by partially covering the tone holes, and is also easily adapted to saxophone. The performer must be aware that most of the pitch change on the saxophone occurs within the first few millimeters of separating from the tone hole, so a delicate touch and a sensitivity to tone-hole proximity is a must.

Meri and Kari

The second gesture in *Improvisation I* is a slower manipulation of pitch and is notated in both modern notation with quarter-tone notation and a graphic representation of the exact shape of the pitch bend Noda desires.

¹⁷ Lependorf, p. 238.
The traditional method of accomplishing this quarter-tone gesture is to use quarter tone fingerings such as the ones below.

Though the fingerings will help the performer obtain the quarter-tones notated, Noda also depicts a shape that the performer is to follow. In order to achieve this flexible shape, it is necessary to use shakuhachi techniques in addition to the normal saxophone fingerings.
Shakuhachi Interpretation

The downward bending of pitch (meri) on the shakuhachi is accomplished with the changing of angle between the head and the flute. The pitch is lowered when the head is lowered and the flute is pushed further away from the body. One unique effect of meri is that the tone becomes transparent, soft and muted as the space between the lips and the rim of the flute decreases.

The shape of the pitch bend begins with meri, comes back up to pitch and then progresses through the original pitch to a quarter-tone sharp using kari. Kari is accomplished by the raising of the head and the pulling in of the flute toward the body. The tone becomes harsher, brighter, and louder when using kari.

Kitte

At the end of the first phrase in Improvisation I, Noda uses another shakuhachi technique for ending a phrase.

He explains this marking in his notation key as “Japanese Cutting Tone”, which is one of the few direct references to the Japanese influence on his music. Wen tells us that it should be played as a note “not to be sustained”\(^{18}\)

\(^{18}\) Wen, p.49
Shakuhachi Interpretation

In shakuhachi music one of the traditional ways to end a phrase is with the use of *kitte* from the verb ‘to cut’. This sounds very different on the saxophone, as most performers use a tongue release, when it would certainly sound more like shakuhachi to use an abrupt air release, even an explosive air release, rather than a tongue release.

Tamane

The gesture at the end of the first line is marked ‘*flatterz. (ad lib.*)’, and is traditionally played using flutter-tongue.

![figure 13](shakuhachi term inserted by author)

The flutter tongue can be difficult for some performers, but it is an important element in Noda’s compositions and many other contemporary saxophone music.

The flutter tongue is perhaps one of the most widely used extended techniques in the symphonic repertoire. Orchestral music has for many generations utilized this technique and it has become especially common for flutists. The flutter tongue is very similar in effect to the string tremolo (in the French language, for example, the term for flutter-tongue is *tremolo avec la langue*). Though common, the flutter tongue has taken on a somewhat mystical presence for those instrumentalists inclined to believe that performers are genetically predetermined for successful, or, in many cases, unsuccessful execution of this technique. They claim that if one cannot roll the “R” consonant when speaking in the Spanish language, then s/he cannot successfully flutter-tongue. Performers who find themselves in this frustrating predicament will often substitute the uvular flutter for this technique.\(^{20}\)

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\(^{19}\) Lependorf, p. 236.  
\(^{20}\) Nabb, p. 154.
Some performers who have intermittent success with traditional flutter-tongue should concentrate on relaxing the front of the tongue. The tongue must also be in the proper shape, with the tip pointing upward, touching the ridge of hard palate behind the upper teeth.

**Shakuhachi Interpretation**

Since *shakuhachi* doesn’t traditionally use flutter-tongue (most of the texts state that it is not possible on *shakuhachi*), it is possible to use *Tamane*. *Tamane* is a technique involving the use of the uvular flutter. Uvular flutter is a similar effect to gargling water, or growling without engaging the vocal chords.\(^{21}\) The performer should practice gargling water, making sure not to engage the vocal chords.

**Muraiki**

Ryo Noda marks the low F in the second line with a Sforzando and decrescendo which is typically played with a hard tongue accent.

\(^{21}\) Nabb, ch. 9, p.3.
which is a common technique in *shakuhachi*. *Muraiki* is an explosive breath technique which can appear at the beginning of a low note or as a low grace note preceding a sustained upper pitch.  

**Shakuhachi Interpretation**

Many saxophonists would perform this kind of sforzando accent with a hard tongue accent, but on *shakuhachi muraiki* is performed with a large, explosive, breath accent with a diffuse attack and very little tone. *Muraiki* is played with a variety of lengths, and is improvisatory in nature.

**Suriage**

The third gesture on line two of *Improvisation I* is an upward portamento.

![Suriage](image)

Portamentos can be found in shakuhachi in a variety of settings, but upward slides are called *suriage* (*suri* means portamento, -*age* meaning upward). Noda uses his own graphic notation which is a combination of the typical straight line between the two notes

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22 Lependorf, p. 236.
and also a semi-circle below, emphasizing that this should not be a fingered glissando, but more of a portamento.

**Shakuhachi Interpretation**

This effect is easier to create on shakuhachi because of the open tone holes, as one can simply roll the fingers off of a tone hole in any direction to achieve a smooth transition between notes. Also, shakuhachi performers combine *meri* head movement with slow fingers to create a seamless and fluid portamento. Shakuhachi performers are extremely fluid with regards to pitch and the saxophonist playing Noda’s compositions can apply this performance practice throughout *Improvisation I* and *Mai*.

On saxophone this technique is much more difficult and requires a combination of voicing control, breath control and slow fingers. As explained in the introductory exercises, the resistance is greatest when the pad is within the first millimeter or two of the tone hole. The performer must have very fine control over breath support, increasing the support at the point of most resistance (p.16) without increasing the dynamic level. Then, when the resistance decreases, the performer must suddenly decrease the support in order to avoid a sudden bump in dynamic.

The subtle control over the breath support is aided by voicing control. The performer needs to manipulate the voicing as in the mouthpiece exercise (p.11).
Surisage

_Surisage_ is exactly the same as _Suriage_ but is a portamento in a downward direction. Noda tends to use downward portamentos in conjunction with a _kitte_ ending. The first example of _surisage_ is at the end of line six of _Improvisation I_.

![Surisage notation](image)

_figure 14 (shakuhachi term inserted by author)_

Koro Koro

There are two types of _koro koro_, one resembling a traditional tremolo between two notes and one that creates a multiphonic gurgle (there is a clearer example of this in _Mai_). There are specific tremolos on shakuhachi that create this gurgle, as there are on saxophone, and _koro koro_ is one way to interpret Noda’s notation which will make the gesture sound more like _shakuhachi_. The gesture at the end of line two resembles a series of traditional tremolos, gradually increasing in volume and speed.

![Koro Koro notation](image)

_figure 15 (shakuhachi term inserted by author)_
Trills and tremolos are a very common technique in *shakuhachi* compositions, though there are more limitations on the range and note choices than there are on saxophone.

**Atari**

On line three of *Improvisation I* Noda writes a melody with grace notes, all of which are c#.

![figure 16](shakuhachi term inserted by author)

*Atari* appears in traditional *shakuhachi* as a series of grace notes which sound ‘more like blips than well-defined pitches’. In *shakuhachi*, *atari* is used as a type of articulation. Noda (especially in the *Improvisations*) uses this kind of articulation to create dramatic melodies which are a strong contrast to the otherwise lyrical sections.

To adapt the *shakuhachi* technique of *atari* to saxophone, it is important to remember that *shakuhachi* traditionally does not use tongued articulations. The example in line three of *Improvisation I* should be played without any articulation. Noda combines the *atari* and *kitte* techniques at the end of the line for the climactic moment of the composition.

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23 Lependorf, p.237.
**Kara Kara**

*Kara kara* is a technique in which the performer trills the first hole of the flute, changing the pitch only marginally. This kind of microtonal trill is similar in effect to the gesture at the end of line four of *Improvisation I*.

![Figure 17 (shakuhachi term inserted by author)](image)

The gesture at the end of line four is not explained in Noda’s notational key and is a graphic representation for alternate fingerings (*bisbigliando*). The term *bisbigliando* (Italian for ‘whispering’ but commonly used to describe microtonal trills in saxophone)\(^ {24} \) is shown many different ways in contemporary music. Noda uses his own notation to delineate both the frequency and intensity of the gesture. This gesture is typically performed by alternating fingerings in the right hand, which affects the timbre only minutely.

To create a more interesting sound, the performer can use harmonics and perform Figure 5 by alternating right hand fingerings with the fourth overtone built on the low C#.

\(^ {24} \) Cambridge Guide to the Saxophone
fingering. Another fingering which can sound a bit more like koro koro is to alternate the normal C# fingering with B and palm key D.

**Indeterminacy**

On line two of *Improvisation I*, Noda inserts a section of indeterminate music.

![Figure 18 (shakuhachi term inserted by author)](image)

The indeterminate section has more to do with contemporary saxophone techniques than shakuhachi, and shows the strong influence that western music trends had upon Noda during this period. It is interesting to note that this is the only time that an indeterminate section appears in Noda’s compositions.

There are many ways to approach this section, but the author recommends using shakuhachi techniques and applying them to the given pitch set. Two examples by the author follow.

![Example 1](image)
figure 19 (shakuhachi term inserted by author)

These are merely two examples of different performance ideas for the indeterminate section in *Improvisation I*, but since Noda gives no performance instructions, there are many ways with which to approach this section. The performer can play the pitch more than once or even in reverse order.
Chapter 4

*Mai*

While many of the same *shakuhachi* techniques are explored in *Improvisation I*, it is clear that Ryo Noda was exploring more saxophone-specific possibilities in *Mai*. While *Improvisation I* was written in Toronto, Canada, *Mai* was written three years later (19751) in Bordeaux where Ryo Noda was studying with Jean Marie Londeix. Though both compositions are dedicated to Jean Marie Londeix, one clearly sees Londeix’s influence on *Mai*.

In the 1970s Jean Marie Londeix was working with young composers in France and abroad trying to develop a new type of saxophone repertoire which focused on techniques which can only be performed on the saxophone. More than 250 works are dedicated to Londeix, and much of this repertoire is focused on extended techniques. From the website of Jean Marie Londeix:

[Londeix]…Strives to create a contemporary repertoire for saxophone that equals that of other orchestral instruments.\(^{25}\)

It is these extended techniques for saxophone which make the *Mai* such a different composition from the *Improvisation I*. Noda explores the altissimo register in this composition, as well as multiphonics. Though *shakuhachi* does have the capability to create multiphonics, it is rare in the traditional repertoire. The use of the altissimo is

comparable to the shakuhachi’s highest register, daikan. Traditional shakuhachi uses the highest register fairly frequently, often with wide leaps and in combination with other techniques. Noda’s Mai is an important development of compositional style in the combination of Japanese aesthetic and contemporary saxophone techniques.

**Johakyu**

The Japanese aesthetic principle of *johakyui* is important to traditional shakuhachi composition.

The three sections of jo-ha-kyû can be translated as *introduction*, *scattering* and *rushing*. This tripartite structure can be traced to the eight-century rhythmic distinctions in bugaku, the ancient court dance of Japan. The theory was developed in the treatises of Zeami (1363-1443) about Noh theatre. Jo-ha-kyû was later applied to other musical genres such as shômyô (Buddhist chant), kabuki, sökyoku (koto genres) and jiuta (song with shamisen accompaniment). The aesthetic has also been used in other art forms such as ikebana (Japanese flower arranging) and kendo (Japanese martial art).26

While *Improvisation I* has a form which more resembles the western form of introduction, development, and recapitulation, *Improvisation II, and Mai* both exhibit a three-part structure that tends to follow *johakyu*.

*Mai* contains the only reference to shakuhachi from Ryo Noda himself. In the accompanying poem *The Battle of the Sea*:

> At twilight one night in Autumn,  
> while the moon reflected its silver light on the surface of the waves,  
> General Kyotsun plays his flute.  
> Standing at the prow of the ship, he seizes his sword and cuts the plate which goes down to his feet and disappears into the sea.  
> On his doorstep the phantom of the Samurai appeared. Facing him is his wife asks him "Why did you go?"

26 [http://www.shakuhachizen.com](http://www.shakuhachizen.com)
"To save my army" he replied, "because I knew the battle was lost in advance and I also saved the lives of my men and their families."
"And me," she said. "Did you think about me!"

Mai has three main sections, each of which is greater in scope than the Improvisations (one page each), but Mai certainly follows the three-part ideal of johakyu.

Though many of the same techniques are used in the opening section, there is a greater emphasis on the flexibility of pitch, the use of quarter tones, and portamento. In the first page there is also more use of low muraiki leaping up to sustained high register notes. The first page also has a three-line phrase, which is a combination of tremolos with muraiki accents. The conclusion of the first section occurs on the second page, there is a clear example of kara kara.

The second large section begins on line two of page two with a kind of murmuring triplet pattern, which has a false climax in the middle of the page with more muraiki tremolos. This pattern gets more complicated and exciting, culminating at the end of the page with fff trills ending in a sudden silence of five seconds (foreshadowing the ending which specifies a silence of ten seconds).

Soraiki

There is a new technique on the top of page three: soraiki. The explanation in Noda’s key is to ‘relax lips’. This is exactly how Gutzweiler tells us to perform soraiki. The sound produced is supposed to be more air than sound, and is a very interesting

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27 Gutzweiler, p.32.
change of timbre, especially after a five second silence. Though this technique certainly causes the pitch to go flat, this can be somewhat avoided by relaxing the upper lip and corners before releasing the pressure on the reed. The effect then becomes a mixture of leaking air as well as a diffuse tone caused by the lessening of pressure on the reed.

As with much of Noda’s music, this ‘loosening of the lips’ can produce more than one effect, as Dr. Nabb infers this gesture to be a multiphonic which splits the octave.

the saxophonist is directed to relax his/her embouchure (the score contains a key to the symbols provided) in order to split the octave. This is a very indeterminate manner of writing for this technique, as the composer does not notate desired pitches.\(^{28}\)

The expanded scope of Mai also includes much more altissimo, goes higher (to altissimo Eb), and requires much more control over the high register. The performer must be able to slide between pitches as well as center on high notes at variable dynamics. The yuri at the end of the piece is difficult to control in the altissimo register, especially if one is striving for the wider pitch variation (vibrato) used in shakuhachi.

The multiphonics section in the third section of Mai starts on line two and includes multiphonics which are more difficult to produce than the ones in the Improvisations. Also, Noda includes a melodic guide in the form of an arrow, which weaves through the changing multiphonics. This section concludes with a ffff multiphonic which is to be played with vibrato. This section is extremely difficult for the performer to maintain the clarity of the multiphonics, and also to add vibrato to multiphonics.

\(^{28}\) Nabb. p.102.
The final section starts on line five and includes much use of *meri, kari, suriage,* and *surisage.* There is more pitch manipulation, demanding a fluidity of voicing, support and finger control which is extremely difficult and requires a synthesis of all the techniques outlined in this document.

**Silence**

The use of silence is an integral part of Japanese music. Andrew Wen lists important characteristics that are important in Japanese music and four of them relate to silence:

- Expressive use of silence
- Continuity as the result of tension sustained through silence and held tones
- Stasis as a source of value
- Constraint

There are many silences in Ryo Noda’s music, from fermatas over an eighth note rest to specified lengths of silence as we see in *Mai.* These silences are a chance for interpretation by the performer and should be treated with care. Lengthening a silence can prepare a surprising, loud entrance or contribute to the contemplative mood of the music.

Noda is very specific in his use of silence, and uses three different notations for rests: traditional rests, rests under fermatas, and caesura under fermatas.

\[\text{figure 21}\]

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\[29\] Wen, p. 30.
Noda gives no instructions for how to interpret these different types of rests, so this is a chance for personal interpretation by the performer.

One example from Mai is the first notated silence which is a quarter rest prolonged by a fermata. The silences in Mai are measured, at least in relation to other rests. This first rest is a chance to let the first phrase breathe and build tension for the next phrase. Noda uses longer rests as a compositional technique, and this is perhaps one of the most difficult elements for the performer to convincingly execute. In an unaccompanied solo, the use of silence can be extremely dramatic, but onstage time seems to dialate. On the other hand, a short silence which follows a phrase that includes a long silence can create surprise.

Conclusion

The combination of a modern saxophone aesthetic, adaptation of shakuhachi techniques and programmatic elements combine to present one of the strongest voices in the saxophonists’ classical repertoire. Noda’s music is perhaps the best introduction to contemporary saxophone music, and because of its beauty and power, can lead to a love of contemporary music.

Perhaps the most compelling reason for the success and longevity of the compositions of Ryo Noda is that the extended techniques are not the focus of the music.
Rather, the musical ideals (both Japanese and contemporary saxophone) are served by the techniques.

The performer unfamiliar with contemporary techniques and/or shakuhachi music needs foundational exercises to prepare them for unique flexibility needed for the compositions of Ryo Noda.

If the modern performer is looking for a more ‘culturally aware’ interpretation, than a study of shakuhachi techniques and Japanese aesthetic is essential.

**Need for Further Study**

In contemporary classical music of the latter half of the 20th century, there were two ways in which shakuhachi has influenced composers and performers. Henry Cowell, Toru Takemitsu and Minoru Miki have written new pieces of music for shakuhachi using western notation. More common, however is the use of shakuhachi techniques adapted to western instruments such as the European flute, saxophone or clarinet. Though this document focuses on the influence of shakuhachi techniques on the music of Ryo Noda and how the performer must prepare to perform this music, one possible avenue for future study is the place of shakuhachi flute in modern chamber music.

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30 Lependorf, p. 233.
Bibliography


