



SHINTAIDO OF AMERICA

July 1988 Newsletter

San Francisco, California

In Concert with Shintaido

An interview with Berkeley Symphony conductor Kent Nagano

by Michael Goldberg

These days, a few hours before Berkeley Symphony conductor Kent Nagano walks out onto the concert stage to begin a performance, he does Tenshingosho. Since the internationally acclaimed musician began studying Shintaido with Ito Sensei last August, his inner life has profoundly changed. "It's a form of mental concentration," said Nagano, during an interview earlier this year. "Shintaido has helped me keep the focus where it should be, on what's most important: to make great music."

Thirty-six-year-old Kent Nagano sat cross-legged on the floor in the sparsely furnished living room of his San Francisco home, discussing with Ito

power is so much stronger. I think that before I didn't understand totally how much further one could refine and focus a moment of power."

A slight man with long ink-black hair, Nagano looks like he'd be more at home playing in a rock band, than leading a symphony. In fact, although he has extremely high musical standards, he's equally comfortable with both classic pieces by Brahms or Mahler and certain compositions by modern composers including Frank Zappa and Grateful Dead bassist Phil Lesh.

Nagano has found unexpected similarities between Shintaido and music. "I know that the concept of



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Sensei and myself how Shintaido had affected him. "It's amazing to me how much more power, more concentrated power I can get from a sound or certain sounds with an ensemble [since studying Shintaido]," he continued. "Because in my mind the focus of that

movement [in Shintaido] — in terms of tempo and pacing and phrasing — is very natural," he said. "The same way you make music. The worst part of making a movement in Shintaido is if you are trying too hard to make that movement. And the worst thing you

can do to Brahms is to try to make Brahms. As soon as you are thinking: now I must make this phrase feel like Brahms, then it's not music any more. So in Shintaido, as soon as I try to do a complicated movement, then of course it becomes unnatural and doesn't come out right. So it's a combination of mental and physical flow that is very close to making good natural music."

Nagano inadvertently discovered Shintaido last year while looking for a good karate instructor. His interest in martial arts followed a rather "unpleasant experience" in France. "I wandered into a very bad part of town where some gangster types started making fun

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of me because I was Japanese," he said. "I thought I was going to get beat up. I decided it was a good time to learn something about the body."

But instead of a killer karate class, Nagano found himself learning the more esoteric art of Shintaido. He feels it's just what he needs. "I honestly believe that when I am studying Shintaido I am learning self-defense in a more powerful way than learning crude, rudimentary karate moves," he explained. "Crude, rudimentary karate moves — no matter how well you do them — if you meet someone twice as big as you are, you are going to lose. But if your mind is really clear and focused and your energy is concentrated then you may defeat your opponent or protect yourself by not letting them succeed. I think Shintaido is a more effective defense than being able to break a board in two."

Due to his years of studying music, the conductor has an instinctive

***"When I do Tenshingoso,
I hear the universe.
Celestial music."***

understanding of the benefits that come from repeating Shintaido forms like Tenshingoso and Eiko. "Shintaido is an art form and to learn an art form you have to take some crude moment and make this moment more and more refined and precise," he said. "That means repetition — doing things over and over and over again."

He is quick to admit that it's too soon for him to really know how Shintaido is affecting him. "I am just a stupid beginner," he laughed. "And whenever you are at the beginning you can't worry about whether it's good for you or bad — you just really have to concentrate and have faith. Then afterwards, after you get to a certain level you can look around and see if it is helpful."

Still, Nagano has already had moments of satori. "The big surprise was the connection between the

physical and the spiritual," he said. "I mean I am a conductor and we make physical movements as we make music. In a way it's like a ballet form. I am an athlete too — my sport is surfing — but I had never thought of it as an artform. [Shintaido allows one] to get in touch with the power of the universe. When you make great music you realize that you cannot make great music with your own power. You have to ask for help from something else. It's the same universe that we deal with in the musical world, but it's just dealing with it from a slightly different angle."

He was silent for a moment. "Music has something to do with the spirit," he said softly. "I mean we hear some guy playing notes but notes alone are not music. Music is something between the notes. It's not pitch or the sound. When I do Tenshingoso it's not notes that I hear, but you can hear the universe. Celestial music."

For Nagano, Shintaido is helping him put the daily routine of life into it's proper perspective. "When you do an exercise like Shintaido, it's a precise reminder that the point of living is not to keep from looking bad — or being embarrassed," he said. "The point of living is something more important. It sounds so philosophical but it's not really. It's stupid actually that we start worrying about what our friends or colleagues think of us. That's not why we are given our talents. The point is to have your spirit grow because you are supposed to be able to share your gifts with as many people as you can. If you don't develop and grow this means you are being very selfish."

Still there are also other, more basic reasons why he practices Shintaido. "My girlfriend is so happy I'm getting physically stronger instead of staying weak," he smiled. "In fact, she is one of my main reminders to do Shintaido every day. She's very happy."

Special thanks to Tom Stinnett of Bay Area Shintaido for transcribing the Kent Nagano interview.

1988 Spring Gasshuku

by Ron Madson

The 1988 Shintaido of America spring *gasshuku* (retreat/seminar) was held in northern California over the Memorial day weekend. It was organized by the Bay Area Shintaido Executive Council. The theme was "Bringing Shintaido into our Daily Lives." This theme seems synonymous with Shintaido. Shintaido is not only a set of martial arts techniques and a body movement system, but for its practitioners it becomes a "guide to solving problems of the mind and human relationships." To practice good *keiko* yields both good Shintaido and the continuing development of the opening up process. It encourages a bright feeling and increased sensitivity for us as individual human beings.

The *gasshuku* seems the most fertile place where this growth can occur. In his remarks during the opening meeting, Ito *Sensei* contrasted a workshop where a simple lesson takes place to the *gasshuku* experience which he called a "practice whereby you are changed through your daily living in the situation." The *gasshuku* offered not only the opportunity to improve one's Shintaido through many *keikos*, but through our living together, practicing together, learning together and working together; Shintaido will grow in us and thus into our daily lives.

Sunday evening Bela Breslau led a discussion focused on the suggested reading, "Shambhala — The Sacred Path of the Warrior." The lessons of the book as Bela presented them seemed quite parallel to lessons and benefits of Shintaido for our lives. Several main themes presented from the book were: directing ourselves outward to others; accepting the world as it is; synchronizing of mind and body to yield an absence of doubt and a trust in your heart; *Ten Chi Jin* —

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The Enterprise

by Leslie Goldberg

Just when it looked like we were in danger of becoming an enclave of Yuppie Shintaido, the Bay Area group received some new recruits: Robert Gaston, Kris Dirck, Lloyd Johnson and Mike Sheets, all members of the U.S. Navy and all stationed aboard a 85,000-ton aircraft carrier, the U.S.S. Enterprise.

When the guys, or "squids," as they sometimes call themselves are in town and manage to break away from their 16-hour-a-day jobs on the ship and come ashore, they never miss a keiko. They can also often be found taking a bit of a break from military life at Juliette Farkouh's house or at Connie Borden's.

Sometimes Mike, who is quickly becoming our resident chef, can be persuaded to whip up a meal. "You buy the food, I'll cook the dinner," he says.

Mike comes from Missouri, Lloyd is from Arkansas and Kris is from Illinois. Before Robbie joined the Navy, he lived in Oregon where he started studying Shintaido with John Seaman at Eastern Oregon State University. Since the Enterprise is usually docked in Alameda—just over the bridge from San Francisco—Robbie began attending Jim Sterling's class about a year ago. A few weeks later he brought his buddies along from the ship.

"I was looking for something to do and Robbie said this wasn't competitive, so I thought I'd give it a shot," says Mike.

The gang of four has been coming back ever since. "Shintaido has been a rich experience for me," says Kris, one evening before keiko. The foursome are gathered at a San Francisco coffee shop to discuss their impressions of Shintaido.

"I'd taken karate before and it turned out to be a kind of hollow experience," continues Kris. "I've

learned that martial arts doesn't have to be the way the media portrays it. Usually you have the image of it being real hard or you're going to hurt somebody."

For many of their shipmates, life in port can be lonely and boring. There's not much to do, they say, but play cards, watch TV, work on their cars or go fishing. "Usually if you meet someone it's in a bar," says Kris.

"It's hard to meet anyone besides other squids," adds Lloyd.

For Robbie, Mike, Lloyd and Kris, Shintaido has added another dimension to their lives; they've made many friends in Shintaido. For the rest of us in the Bay Area Shintaido family, it's almost like having four new brothers.

The Enterprise guys consider some of the differences between life on the ship and Shintaido. "The ship keeps things very formal and organized," says Mike. "Shintaido teaches you to open up and express your self. If you expressed yourself like that on the ship, more often than not, you'd get yourself in a lot of trouble."

Robbie says he can also see some similarities between Shintaido and the military. "They both have the hierarchical approach. I can see the formality in both. But I would say that Shintaido could learn a bit about organization from the Navy and the Navy could learn from Shintaido about how to treat people."

Robbie, Mike Lloyd and Kris practice Shintaido even when out at sea with Robbie giving go-ri. They say they feel most comfortable working on their Shintaido karate. They don't do kiai or any of the more (how shall we say it?) avant-garde movements of Shintaido.

Other men stationed on the Enterprise stay in physical shape by jogging around the ship, which is a quarter of a mile long. Others lift weights or do aerobic dancing. "It's hard to stay in condition," says Lloyd. "Most of the jobs are sitting down."

Although the deck of the U.S.S. Enterprise is bigger than a shopping center parking lot and the ship itself is nearly 230 stories high, life for those on board can seem cramped. The bunks

are only slightly longer than six feet and are just 40 inches wide. "The ship feels very confining," says Kris. "I think Shintaido is helping me break out of myself."

P.S.: Right now Robbie, Lloyd, Mike and Kris are at sea. They're not expected back until the spring. The night before they left, Mike said, with a good bye hug, "Don't worry. We won't forget you."

We won't forget you! But come back soon. □

Making the Bokutoh

by Michael Buckley

Editor's note: Ken Gwin of San Francisco Shintaido began making bokutohs (wooden swords) and bohs (six-foot long wooden staffs) many years ago. Recently, Michael Buckley and Ben Schireson have been assisting him. Just before this year's West Coast Kan Geiko, Michael, Ben and Ken set out to make bokutohs for the many new students who were joining in Kan Geiko for the first time.

Purple Heart, a South American hardwood, has the necessary strength, density, and grain pattern to be our stock for the Bokutoh. No part of the making process is more important than wood selection. Purchased full size: 2 inches thick, 16 to 20 inches wide, 16 to 20 feet long, these are mammoth sticks! Kazu Shibao, Shintaido of America's Equipment Manager, helps me with the challenge of selection: lifting and turning each examining for grain character and figure through the dirt and rough sawn texture. Critically examined for regular grain (no swirls), free from sapwood and cracks, the plank candidates are then felt and checked intuitively. The selection process takes half a day, especially since I am picky, and the lumber yard

Bokutoh — Contd.

insists we restack the rejects. Kazu wrote a check for the wood, while I was giving the order to have it planed from a thickness of approximately 2 inches to 1 3/8 inches. Later I return to pick up the milled stock for delivery to Ken Gwin's workshop.

Later at Ken's workshop, I use a portable circular saw to crosscut the stock to a rough length (42 - 43"). From this procedure until the final crosscut with the radial arm saw, all milling are rip cuts via table saws.

Ben blocks out the boards to a rectangular shape. All rips are made with steel combination blades, which cause less drag and accompanying burn marks than do the thicker and slower cutting carbide tip blades. While Ben makes rectangle blocks on one table saw, I "set-up" the other with a jig fence and tilt the saw blade for beveling the facets. This set up makes the angular top and blade sections, and requires four separate, careful adjustments of degrees and distance from the angled saw blade. When the stock are rectangles we look and feel for upward thrust choosing the top and blade, then stack accordingly.

I have clamped a temporary fence to the permanent fence just above where the blade is angled in, thereby creating a space for the waste to float out angling to 30°. We reality check the blade with a previously made blank. Then on the new stock we make a short pass to test for accuracy, correcting to the final position as necessary. There can be no mistakes. For the "set-up" Ken Gwin's supervision is essential. It is with a sense of "We're doing right" when he gives the Okay, that Ben and I make our first bevel cuts, the three equally spaced facets on the top of the bokutoh.

Actually we desire the three to be equal in width so we cut the two side angles somewhat longer to accommodate the third cut, which creates the small bevel just to the side of the top

three facets.

The second cut is the same 30° angle as the first except we move the fence to allow the blade to be proportioned correctly. The bokutoh is on its side while being cut.

The third cut is at 25°, bokutoh top to table saw top while being cut. This side of the sword angle is important as it is bisected on the second to last procedure thereby creating the tip of the point.

The fourth pass at 30° helps define the blade; it is cut with the bokutoh on its side. When the four bevels are completed, we have a blank bokutoh, with facets forming the top and blade.

Then a most fascinating procedure: choosing the handle and point. A unique, yet not surprizing fact is that experienced Shintaido bokutoh makers are unanimous, together or separate, eyes open or closed, we invariably chose the same handle and point for each blank!

Direction known, cutting of the point becomes the last table saw cut. Bokutoh on its side, miter gage at 45°, we push the wood, top first, through the saw. Then, turning the wood to its other side, the second pass in aligned to bisect the top side facet (cut #3 above) nipping off the tip just as it coincides with the bottom of the side bevel.

Finally we measure 40" from the newly cut tip to mark for the last: a cut to length crosscut of the radial arm saw (fine toothed blade).

With the deadline 24 hours away, the milling completion time in Ken's shop, start to finish, was seven hours. with a well coordinated *gambatte*. from Ken.

At last we celebrate and rejoice the rough cut bokutoh by holding and touching them one-by-one. We know them intimately. □

New Officers for SoA

As of February 1st, 1988 the following people will be the new officers of Shintaido of America

H. F. Ito	President
Jim Sterling	Vice President & Secretary
Chris Nash	Treasurer
Juliette Farkouh	Equipment Manager
Bela Breslau	Newsletters & Publications

The Board of Directors would especially like to thank Bela Breslau, Bob Howald, Kazu Shibao, Rosemary Sterling for their work as officers since May of last year. □

David Nakagawa

As some of you may know, we have two honorary Board Members for Shintaido of America, David Nakagawa and Nobu Hadeishi. Over the years we have relied on their good sense and advice to keep the organization moving in the right direction. For the past 15 years David Nakagawa has been the minister at the Christ United Presbyterian Church in San Francisco. Recently, he has moved on to become the Field Representative of the Board of Pensions for the Presbyterian Church's Western office which handles the 11 western states. We wish David well in his new post. Perhaps someday he can help Shintaido set up a pension plan for old, retired Instructors! □

Provisional Instructor Exams

According to the new qualification system for Shintaido instructors and assistants, a Shintaido practitioner may apply to take a provisional instructor's examination after serving as an assistant for one year. We hope many of our assistants will decide to take this path and join us in making Shintaido *keiko* available to as many people as possible. The following are subjects which may be examined or considered:

1. *Eiko (dai) no kumite*: one vs. two or three
2. *Kiri-o-roshi no kumite (mae, yoko irimi)*
3. Receiving *jodan uchite* attack (*mae, yoko irimi*)
4. *Gorei* leading group *toitsukihon* movement. ■

Fall Gasshuku

The next national *gasshuku* is being organized by Shintaido of New England and will take place October 7 through 10 (Columbus Day Weekend) on beautiful Cape Cod, Massachusetts.

Michael Thompson, General Instructor and head instructor of Shintaido of America and guest instructor Martine Breant from France will be instructing.

An advanced workshop for instructors and assistants, led by Ito *Sensei*, will take place October 5 - 6.

Examinations for provisional instructor, assistants, *bojutsu* and karate will be offered. Robert Breant, the head instructor of French Shintaido will be guest examiner

A brochure with more detailed information will be sent out by Shintaido of New England at the end of July. ■

SoA Equipment

Shintaido of America has an inventory of equipment available for purchase.

Shintaido bumper stickers	\$1.00
Shintaido red windbreakers	\$35.00
History of Shintaido pamphlet	\$3.95*
Shintaido book	\$10.95*

We will mail any items to you — unless you want to come to San Francisco and get them!

Contact SoA Equipment Manager Juliette Farkouh at 57 St. Charles Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94132-3032 (415) 239-4132.

* Includes shipping and handling. ■

Poem by Goethe

**Now you are no longer caught
In the obsession with darkness,
And a desire for higher love-making
Sweeps you upward.**

**Distance does not make you falter.
Now, arriving in magic, flying,
And, finally, insane for the light,
You are the butterfly and you are gone.**

**And so long as you haven't experienced
This: to die and so to grow,
You are only a troubled guest
On the dark earth.**

translated by Robert Bly



Martine Breant, guest instructor, 1988 fall *gasshuku*.

Calendar

1988

August

Meditation & Kenko Taiso workshop,
August 14-20, San Francisco.

October

Advanced Workshop for Instructors &
Assistants, October 6-7, New England.

SoA Fall Gasshuku, Columbus Day
Weekend, October 8-10, with Martine
Breant, guest instructor from France.
Fall Exams, New England.

November

Thanksgiving Weekend Workshop,
with guest instructor from abroad,
November 25-27, local exams, Goleta,
California.

1989

January

Kangeiko, San Francisco

February

Kangeiko, New England

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Next Issues:

An interview with Mark Salzman,
the author of "Iron and Silk" by Leslie
Goldberg.

An article by Henry Kaiser,
musician.

Johnny Shintaido will answer
questions about Shintaido and life.



Shintaido in the United States

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