

Asian Arts & Culture

Agatsuma Rocks

"I want to free the audience from the fixed idea that shamisen is old — I want to be the instigator to make this music relevant to everyone." — Agatsuma

Agatsuma is a "rebel," a hero of hogaku (traditional Japanese music), playing the shamisen non-traditionally. With his "pop" dress style and hair, Agatsuma is "hot." The artist's United States debut is for a one-show only performance on February 9, sponsored by the Asian Arts & Culture Center in cooperation with Japan Society.

Shamisen is a three-string guitar that has remained functionally the same for centuries but until recently, has decreased in popularity among young people in

Japan. Agatsuma uses tsugaru shamisen, an aggressive style that originated in the Amori prefecture, as a foundation for his modern, rock style arrangements. Starting in secret at the age of 6 practicing his father's

prized shamisen, Agatsuma quickly found a talent he could make his own. By the

AGATSUMA ROCKS

What: Agatsuma Rocks
Where: Center for the Arts
Harold J. Kaplan
Concert Hall
When: Sunday, Feb. 9
3 p.m.
Tickets: \$12; \$10, \$8
Call: 410-704-ARTS

age of 14, Agatsuma was winning nationwide contests for tsugaru shamisen, becoming national champion for 1995 and 1996. He won the 2002 Gold Disc Award for traditional Japanese music Album of the Year.

Although traditionally trained, Agatsuma was determined to change the image of shamisen and challenged his friends who were studying American-style guitar riffs by Eddie Van Halen and Richie Sambora.

The clash between the conservative style of the hogaku industry and young innovators is more than just about the music. The traditional master apprentice relationship can be viewed as restrictive to some young students. Consequently, some musicians have been learning and playing outside of the traditional system, something

Agatsuma actively encourages.

Agatsuma himself evolved his style of shamisen by studying sheet music, videos and listening to old records of past masters.

Agatsuma's recently released CD, *Beams*, is a mix of both tough classical tsugaru-shamisen arrangements and stylish rock band based ballads. Praised for his imagination, Agatsuma likens his style to Japanese blues. Agatsuma is making good on his promise to increase the relevance of shamisen to everyone. An Internet search resulted in 211 "hits" in more than three different languages, posting reviews of his new CD raving about the fusion of the sound. For younger audiences Agatsuma's interpretation of the traditional shamisen brings them to a music that they otherwise might not have listened to.

Seating is limited for this one-performance show. Order tickets by calling **410-704-ARTS** or online: centerforthearts.towson.edu

From the Director

Suewhei Shieh

Happy New Year from the Asian Arts & Culture Center! On February 1, it officially becomes the Year of the Ram! A determined attitude can make the Year of the Ram one marked by good fortune especially with planning and the sage advice from the experienced. The sign of the ram is an artistic one whether it is music, dance, theater, literature or art. A very good sign for the Asian Arts & Culture Center!

Those very qualities will be needed this year as we anticipate a major change in our physical location during the year 2003. The much-anticipated renovation of the Center for the Arts is scheduled to begin by late spring. This will result in a move for the offices in the building. The gallery will close its doors during this time and allow us an opportunity to plan for the re-opening of the Center and the more accessible, new gallery afforded by the renovation. As a tribute to the Asian Arts Gallery, which has been the foundation of the Center's growth, a retrospective exhibition will feature items from the historical collection to be displayed prior to the closing of the gallery.

Your continued support will make this time one of metamorphosis, a time during which we will explore new avenues for continuing our mission.




TOWSON
UNIVERSITY



Calendar of Events

Agatsuma Rocks

February 9, 3 p.m.

Center for the Arts

Harold J. Kaplan Concert Hall

This tour is the U.S. debut of one of the most sought after shamisen (three-stringed instrument) players, **Hiromitsu Agatsuma**. By age 14, he was winning nationwide contests for tsugaru shamisen, a fast and aggressive style, which Agatsuma likens to blues. Bridging innovation and tradition, his music is a fusion of both classical arrangements and more stylish rock-based ballads. *Organized in cooperation with Japan Society.* Tickets: \$12 general; \$10 students and seniors; \$8 members and TU students with valid ID.



Lecture and Workshop by Phillia Yi

Thursday, April 3, 2003

Center for the Arts

Phillia Changhi Yi, professor of art at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, has developed a unique method for making large color woodblock prints. In this free workshop she will show her work and detail the process for making her prints using contemporary woodcut techniques on an etching press with luan plywood. Co-sponsored by TU Art Department.

APPRECIATION EVENT

Current members of the **Crane Club, Tiger Society, Phoenix, and Dragon Circles** along with other distinguished benefactors will be invited to a preview of the **Chasanow exhibition** and an exclusive buffet reception on **Saturday, April 5 at 6 p.m.** Guests will enjoy a festive evening savoring Asian cuisine along with live performances.



Dragon plaque, jadeite

Introduction to the Collection of Howard and Deborah Chasanow

April 6-May 16, 2003

Opening Reception:

Sunday, April 6, 3-5 p.m.

Asian Arts Gallery, Center for the Arts

Lifelong collectors of Asian art, **Howard and Deborah Chasanow** have generously donated a major gift to the Asian Arts & Culture Center. The gift up to now focuses on Chinese scholar's objects, a special interest of Howard's, including ornamental rocks, table screens, brush holders, and jade and ivory carvings. The donation will be completed over the next several years. **Judge Chasanow** will talk about his collection at the opening of this introductory exhibition on April 6.

Reclaiming Tradition ... Highlighting 30 years

February 16-March 21

Asian Arts Gallery

Center for the Arts

Thirty years of collections will be highlighted in the Asian Arts Gallery to honor the historical space that has been the Center's home. The historical collection comes together for this retrospective exhibition to represent the arts of Asia in various media. Included in the exhibition are items not seen publicly in years – wood block prints, paintings, porcelains, carvings and sculptures. *With curatorial support from John Gilmore Ford.*



Hamada Vase, Japanese

A Festive Tribute

Saturday, March 1, 1-5 p.m.

A day of celebration in honor of the Asian Arts Gallery, the foundation of our growth for the past 30 years. Join us in this great family event featuring a shadow puppet theater, performance of music from Vietnam, a children's craft corner, film screenings, and more. Free. *With support from the Embassy of Indonesia.*



Gallery Hours:
Monday-Friday
11 a.m. – 4 p.m.
and Saturday 1-4 p.m.
(during special exhibitions)

For Tickets:
Center for the
Arts Box Office
410-704-2787
or visit
centerforthearts.towson.edu

This programming is made possible through the support of Asian Arts & Culture Center members; McCormick & Co., Inc.; Towson University Foundation, Inc.; TU International Education Office; and by program grants from the Maryland State Arts Council, an agency funded by the state of Maryland and the National Endowment for the Arts; and the Baltimore County Commission on Arts & Sciences.

Center Receives Ivory Gift

The family of Monroe Uris Sarezky has bestowed a gift of his extensive Asian ivory collection upon AA&CC at the end of 2002. The gift consists of 112 ivory carvings, which Monroe lovingly collected on his travels throughout the Orient. Monroe and his wife, Roslyn, traveled together to more than 150 countries around the world, including a trip to the North Pole aboard a Russian nuclear icebreaker.

Monroe was born in 1918 in New York City and graduated from Johns Hopkins University in

1938. During this time he met his future wife who was a student at Goucher College. They made their home in Connecticut where they raised three children, Louise, Laurence and Michael. Monroe enjoyed his career as a builder and enjoyed his second home in Palm Beach, Florida. In his later years, he worked as a volunteer at the Palm



Hotei, ivory, signed by Seishi Kaze



Monroe and Roslyn Sarezky

Beach County Court House and at the Palm Beach public television station.

It is both ironic and highly fitting that the ivory collection should become part of the Asian Arts & Culture Center of Towson University, so close to where both benefactors attended college. Monroe was a man devoted to the benefits of higher education and wanted his collection to be gifted so that people of all ages and backgrounds would have the opportunity to enjoy and learn from the beautiful objects he so carefully collected.

Board Member Remembers 30 Years



Stanley Pollack

Professor emeritus, Stanley Pollack, has been a member of the Asian Arts & Culture Center Advisory Board since its development in 1995. He has seen AA&CC rise to become an important part of Towson University and only sees that role strengthening in the next 30 years.

The Asian Arts Center was established during his term as chair of the TU art department. The donation of a collection of carvings by Frank Roberts, a local businessman, matched by federal funds, became the springboard for what has

become the Asian Arts & Culture Center.

Stanley connected the Center to the Chasanows, who recently made a major donation of their Asian art collection to the university. He enjoys being on the Advisory Board and says that the members are a great group of people to work with. He also has strong feelings about the director, Suewei Shieh and credits her with providing direction for the Asian Arts & Culture Center. Adding performing arts, dance and music to the Center's presentations has also increased the diversity of the Center and brought it to a position of strength and community recognition.

The next 30 years will be a challenge for AA&CC as it faces not only renovation of its space but also a new Towson president and a new state governor. But Stanley is confident that with the course well organized and steered by Suewei and the Advisory Board that the AA&CC will continue to be the center of Asian activities within the Towson community and the surrounding area of Baltimore County.

Contributors, Aug.-Dec. 2002

DONATIONS TO COLLECTION

Pierre e. Berry
Debby &
Howard Chasanow
Benjamin Chou
Charles and Muriel
Walts
The Sarezky Family
Janet M. Simon

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Wan Yue Chen
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Lu Beth Cornell
Maggie Faulkner
TU Foundation, Inc.

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Alice Schlessinger

Museum Assessment



Carole Krucoff, Larry Rosenweig and Siewhei Shieh

In accordance with a grant awarded in spring 2002, public Dimension Assessment surveyors have visited the Asian Arts & Culture Center. The grant from the American Association of Museums and the Institute of Museum & Library Services offers a self-study program which supports an evaluation of exhibits, programs, public relations, and marketing.

Larry Rosenweig, director of The Morikami Museum & Japanese Gardens in Florida, and **Carole Krucoff**, head of education at the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago, were designated to work with Siewhei Shieh, director of the Asian Arts & Culture Center, in December. Over several days, they met with university officials and Faculty and Advisory Board members. Benefits of the assessment include: a clearer understanding of the museum's image in the community; insight into developing/improving marketing; increased ability to broaden the museum's audience; and improvement in public programs. Along with these benefits, recommendations by the surveyors will be included in a written report to assist us in future planning.

Contributors, August-December 2002

(continued)

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