



1

Niwashi and Shamisen-sosha: Preserving Multiple Artforms

You never know the path a simple introduction will lead to.

The path to Portland for one Japanese gardener began more than ten years ago, while he was working toward a master's degree in landscape architecture at Tokyo University of Agriculture.

Tatsuya Hosono was interested in what one of the speakers visiting his university had to say about the philosophy behind Japanese gardens. That speaker, Portland Japanese Garden CEO Steve Bloom, was on his first sabbatical in Japan talking to students about the ideals of Japanese gardens and why our society needs them. Hosono was fascinated.

"He [Steve Bloom] believes Japanese gardens and our society are connected. I feel it too. At Portland Japanese Garden, there are such good people with a passion for Japanese culture," said Hosono. "We have to get a wide field of view of each other's cultures and backgrounds."

Hosono is a man with double professions: a master gardener (*niwashi*) and a master *shamisen* player. *Shamisen* is a traditional instrument somewhat resembling a banjo. Hosono started *shamisen* training at 16-years-old and has received national acclaim in Japan for his musical performances.

When Portland Japanese Garden's 50th Anniversary gala was approaching, Steve Bloom remembered Hosono's incredible talent and asked him to play *shamisen* at the Garden.

Kazutaka "Kazu" Fukui (Hosono's stage name) performed the first ever solo *shamisen* performance at the Garden's new Cathy Rudd Cultural Corner. Then, another introduction: while in Portland, Hosono met Garden Curator, Sadafumi "Sada" Uchiyama, whom he says he instantly admired.

With Sada's encouragement, Hosono applied for and received a scholarship from the Japanese government to do a garden fellowship at Portland Japanese Garden.

"I am interested in the interaction between people and the Garden," said Hosono. "The word 'biocultural' is a fairly new word, but biology and culture are connected. A Japanese garden is biology and culture. 'Landscape Architecture' is just too broad. Biocultural is better."

This past year, Hosono worked with Portland Japanese Garden's team doing day-to-day gardening work, interviewing staff members, and doing Japanese garden research, as well as participating in the *Waza to Kokoro: Hands and Heart* training seminar, a series of training seminars designed to serve professionals in garden design, construction, and maintenance.

Simultaneously, Hosono delighted Garden employees and guests while performing *shamisen* on multiple occasions. Once home from his fellowship, Hosono will put together a report of his learnings for the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs.

"It's about creating relationship between nature and humans—nature and humans living together, just like agriculture," he said.

Sifting through a year's worth of drawings, photos, and research interviews will not be an easy task. His biggest take-away, Hosono said, is something Sada often tells others, and a sentiment Hosono holds closely:

"To create a relationship between humans and nature, we must know the world, people, their culture, and what they value. A Japanese garden should not be in a glass case. We must use it, teach it to grow, and then grow from it ourselves. That's the true meaning of preservation, I think."



2 Tatsuya playing Shamisen – by Masami Morikawa

3 Tatsuya with Portland Japanese Garden CEO Steve Bloom – courtesy of Tatsuya Hosono