

Rokyoku St. Louis Blues by KAWADA Yoshio

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English Explanation

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International Friendship Association (IFA)

1. General Description

This is to dedicate to Prof. Carlos Handy, the grandson of W.C. Handy who produced the song of “St. Louis Blues” in 1914. The Junior Ambassadors Friendship Mission (JAFM) 35th Anniversary Group from Japan, led by Ms. Isako Oikawa, IFA met Prof. Handy at W. C. Handy Home and Museum, Florence, Alabama, U.S.A on August 19, 2019. The JAFM was formed in 1985 and had been visited the museum every year until August 2014. Upon request of Prof. Handy, this English Explanation is made. The record of “Rokyoku St. Louis Blues” was discovered in one of the caves of Iwo Jima (Iwo-to), where was the battleground of the Pacific War. Prof. Handy says that this brings up painful memories, but transcending this is the cultural affinity of pre-War Japan with the Blues.

2. Lyrics of the Rokyoku St. Louis Blues

Part I

~Running water and someone are similar,
Falling to the same mountain stream and then
Flowing to the Pacific Ocean.

If you ask to a seagull flying in the offing about the tide,
“I am just a leaving bird.” ♪ Yakkora ♪ Sanosa, ♪ Tokoyan, ♪ Tokose.
“Ask the wave,” ♪ Toko ♪ Zu~i Zu~i

~It is Virginia beyond the river. It is Kentucky here on this side of the river.
The blues of flowers likes the pieces of flowers over a raft on the Mississippi River.
Is it St. Louis blues?

~The melody will remember forever.

Spring has come. This is a story of spring.

“Oh, Ishi-san, Ishimatsu-san, hoping your injured eye will be cured,
You went to Ise (the Grand Shrine of Ise) seven times to pray.
You went to Kumano (Kumano Jinja shrine) three times to pray.
Now a showboat on the Mississippi River,
not the Kompira (Shrine) boat in Sanuki (town’s name)
The boat sent you to the hot-spring spot.
Take good care of your eye in the sento (public bathhouse) at St. Louis.
Even Ohan-chan (lovely Ohan, Ishimatsu’s wife) feels lonely.”

The showboat has gone. There is no smoke, Ah~ha, because of the anthracite coals.”

Part II

Winter has passed. Spring has passed, spring has passed.
I have been waiting for him for a long time, but he has not come back.
While looking at the fairway sky...
Ah~~how frustrating!

~\Back to Ishimatsu, he has taken a bath from the morning to the evening.
He felt dizzy and his brain stopped working.
He sings, “Stupidity is not cured unless being dead.”

“Aha, old man, it is a good song.
Should I also pass away? I don’t want to do so.”

~\Songs change as the world changes. The world is also influenced by the songs.
Different places have different customs.
Countries in the world have different languages but the soul of songs are the same as one.
Bad news runs quickly, you say, whereas songs travel many places.
Some blues are sung here. Other blues are sung there.
There are a lot of blues here and there, but St. Louis Blues is the most fascinating.

3. Background of the Rokyoku St. Louis Blues

1) What is "Rokyoku?"

"Rokyoku" is a Japanese word and a performance that began in the early Meiji era (1868-). It is a narrative art in which the shamisen (Japanese string instrument) accompanies the story with unique verses and narratives. It was popular among common people until around early Showa era (1925-) and then became waning popularity possibly due to a flourishing radio and TV with the public and yet still now small number of Rokyoku players exist.

2) Story of Rokyoku St. Louis Blues

Ishimatsu (a famous character of early 1800 years, Edo period of Japan) traveled to St. Louis, U.S.A. for his healing of damaged his one eye.

3) About Ishimatsu

He is called "Mori no Ishimatsu." "Mori" is the name of town, "no" is "of" and "Ishimatsu" is his given name. He is easy to fight with people but is positively welcomed in town. He became a minion of "Shimizu no Jirocho," who was the boss of a big family, operating a gambling in town of Shimizu, Shizuoka Prefecture. Jirocho's policy was to punish the bad people and help the weak. The Jirocho family was almost respected by town people.

4) Structure of the music and lyrics of Rokyoku St. Louis Blues

The music starts from the original "St. Louis Blues," then the Rokyoku begins. Mr. Kawada picks some famous parts of Rokyoku songs and folk tunes time to time.

Part I

*Running water and someone are similar,
Falling to the same mountain stream and then
Flowing to the Pacific Ocean.*

This is a common usage.

*If you ask to a seagull flying in the offing about the tide,
"I am just a leaving bird." "Ask the wave,"*

One phrase from "Soran Bushi," the famous folk tune of Hokkaido (Northern Island of Japan)

♪ Yakkora ♪ Sanosa, ♪ Tokoyan, ♪ Tokose.

♪ Toko ♪ Zu~i Zu~i

Shouts and/or clapping that fits in with the singing and dancing.

*It is Virginia beyond the river. It is Kentucky here on this side of the river.
The blues of flowers likes the pieces of flowers over a raft on the Mississippi River.
Is it St. Louis blues?*

This part is Mr. Kawada's original. Rokyoku talks and tune.

*The melody will remember forever.
Spring has come. This is a story of spring.*

With the original "St. Louis Blues" playing, Mr. Kawada talks.

*"Oh, Ishi-san, Ishimatsu-san, hoping your injured eye will be cured,
You went to Ise (the Grand Shrine of Ise) seven times to pray.
You went to Kumano (Kumano Jinja shrine) three times to pray.
Now a showboat on the Mississippi River,
not the Kompira (Shrine) boat in Sanuki (town's name)
The boat sent you to the hot-spring spot.
Take good care of your eye in the sento (public bathhouse) at St. Louis.
Even Ohan-chan (lovely Ohan, Ishimatsu's wife) feels lonely."*

With the melody of the song, "O-edo Nihonbashi," Mr. Kawada talks. "O-edo Nihonbashi," is the famous folk tune of Nihonbashi, Tokyo (before Meiji era, Tokyo was called "edo." "O-" is honorific.

"The showboat has gone. There is no smoke, Ah~ha, because of the anthracite coals."

Again, with the original "St. Louis Blues" playing, Mr. Kawada talks.

Part II

Soon after the beginning sign of Rokyoku, the talk starts with the Opera music, "Peer Gynt Suite No.2, Op.23: IV. Solveig's Song,"

*Winter has passed. Spring has passed, spring has passed.
I have been waiting for him for a long time, but he has not come back.
While looking at the fairway sky...
Ah~~how frustrating!*

The wife, called "O-han-chan," staying at home in Japan and longing for Ishimatsu. "O-" is

honorific and “-chan” is used for a person close to and/or for a child.

Back to Ishimatsu, he has taken a bath from the morning to the evening.

He felt dizzy and his brain stopped working.

He sings, “Stupidity is not cured unless being dead.”

Mr. Kawada’s Rokyoku talks. “Stupidity is not cured unless being dead” is one of the famous phrase still now.

“Aha, old man, it is a good song.

Should I also pass away? I don’t want to do so.”

“Aha, old man?” is the popular saying of silent cinema at the time,

Songs change as the world changes. The world is also influenced by the songs.

Different places have different customs.

Countries in the world have different languages but the soul of songs are the same as one.

Bad news runs quickly, you say, whereas songs travel many places.

These phrases are popular saying for Rokyoku and/or folk songs of Japan.

Some blues are sung here. Other blues are sung there.

There are a lot of blues here and there, but St. Louis Blues is the most fascinating.

Lastly, Mr. Kawada ended with the phrase that the “St. Louis Blues is the best in the world.”

References:

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IFA は「ジュニア大使友情使節団」を 1985 年より組織している。昨年 8 月には 35 周年を記念して、ジュニア大使発祥の地である米国アラバマを再訪する記念団を派遣した。アラバマでは、2014 年まで毎年ジュニア大使が訪問していた、W. C. Handy の生家を訪ね、ブルースの父とされる W. C. Handy の孫である Prof. Carlos Handy にお会いした。



W.C.Handy の生家にて。中央が Carlos Handy

今年になり、Prof. Handy より、W. C. Handy の代表曲である、セントルイスブルースの日本語版レコードがあるので英訳して欲しいと依頼が届いた。第二次世界大戦後に硫黄島の洞窟で戦死した日本兵の遺品と言われており、W. C. Handy が晩年、好んで聞いていたという。戦前に作られたレ

コードで、戦時中は敵国の音楽として禁止されていたが、調べると、「浪曲セントルイス・ブルース」がそれだった。歌詞をここに紹介する。



<上>

水の流れと人の身は、落つれば同じ谷川の、流れて末は太平洋へ、沖の鷗に潮時間へば

姿しや立つ鳥ヤッコラサノサ、トコヤントコセー、浪に訊けばの、トコズイズイ
川の彼方はヴァージニア、川の此方はケンタッキーで、花のブルースはらはらと、筏に散るやミシシッピー、セントルイスかブルースか……

そのメロディーの行くところ、いつの世までも名を遺す、おゝ春や春、春なれや、春南邦の物語……

「これぞ石さん、石松さん、お前の片眼が治るやう、伊勢へ七度、熊野へ三度」
「讃岐の金比羅舟ならぬ、ミシシッピーのショーボート、舟に送られ温泉場、セントルイスの銭湯で、ゆつくり片眼の養生を、淋しからうがお半ちゃん」
「おゝ船は出て行く、煙は出ない、出ない筈だよ、アア、無煙炭！」

<下>

冬も過ぎ、春も遺なん 春も遺なん
待てど暮せど帰り来ませず 遠き空よア…… ジレットアイ

お話變つて石松は、朝から晩まで湯につき、のぼせて頭がヘンになり、歌ふ文句も我ながら、馬鹿は死ななきや、治らない。

「なー程ねえ、オイおっさん、いゝ文句ぢやねえ、ワシもやつぱり死ななきや駄目かねえ、あのねえ、ワシ死ぬのは叶はんよ」

歌は世につれ世は歌につれ、所変れば品変る。國々言葉は異なれど、歌ふ心は皆一ツ、悪事千里を走ると云へど、歌は万里を走るなり、コチャラで歌ふブルースも、アチャラで歌ふブルースも、ブルース数々あるけれど、セントルイスのブルースは、これがブルースの親玉なり。

(Prof. Handyへの英文訳・IFAホームページ掲載)
「日本ビクター蓄音器株式会社／浪曲セントルイス・ブルース上下 川田義雄」より



Prof. Handy は「このレコードは辛い戦争を思い起こすが、悲しい過去を乗り越え、戦前の日本とセントルイスブルースには文化的な類似性があることを感じる」と述べている。

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