

# **JAPAN SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION OF SCIENCE**

Trever Hagen, PhD

## Host Institution

Kobe University  
Department of Human Expression  
Graduate School of Human Development

## Host Researcher

OHTA Misako  
Associate Professor  
Department of Human Expression

## Title of Research in Japan

“Auto-ethnography of musical learning and health through improvisation”

## Fellowship Period

September 2012 – July 2013

## Research Background

My JSPS research project examined musical improvisation and how cultural contexts of reception influence and shape health promotion—specifically, how music, when configured in certain spaces, comes to afford wellbeing in everyday life. The research project addressed musical learning and wellbeing through a proposed auto-ethnography of improvisation.

The primary research site started in Kobe with my host institution of the Graduate School of Human Development and Environment at Kobe University. I carried out music-making with the improvising group “Otoasobi” at Kobe University, which is organized by Dr. Rii Numata. Beginning in 2005 with workshops on free improvisation between musicians, music therapists and individuals with learning difficulties, “Otoasobi” seeks to create a sonic environment from where people can emerge collectively and individually. Along with a great number of participants with learning difficulties or cognitive disabilities, there are also musicians from Kansai’s improvising community. Thus a key link in my research was made to non-academic music-making. Throughout my ten months in Japan, I participated in a number of workshops and performances of Otoasobi.

My secondary research site was located in Hiroshima, where I worked with Daisuke Terauchi at Hiroshima University. During these visits, I participated and led workshops on improvisation to local residents. These typically lasted for three hours on Sunday mornings and involved a number of improvisation ‘games’. The objective was to provide secure spaces for individuals with no improvising experience to try out new and often exploratory musical ideas.

In addition to my proposed research in these sites, I was able to locate a further field site in Osaka, which offered a substantial contribution of data and research for my initial question of musical learning and health. My research in Osaka examined how music and soundscapes are used as a material resource in building collective phenomena, specifically communities. I was interested in the microsocial processes of how one enters a community through music and then sustains themselves within that social environment through aesthetic means. In Osaka, I researched the informal network of musicians and artists in the Konohana district. Here I was invited to live and participate by the neighborhood members; such immersion was essential to auto-ethnographic methodology. I believe my research in Konohana will carry on over years as a longitudinal study, providing the basis and purpose to continue research collaboration in Japan.

In addition to my interpersonal international exchange involved in fieldwork and data gathering, I was able to have meaningful international exchange within the Japanese Academy. Primarily this was through the efforts, networks and invitations of my host researcher Ohta Misako. While a JSPS Fellow, I was able to participate in several academic exchanges, such as giving invited talks at the Japan Musicological Association (Western division) and the Graduate School of Human Development, Kobe University along with guest lectures in Dr. Ohta's graduate course on Musicology. As well, I was able to participate in over thirty performances, artistic meetings and rehearsals in Kobe, Osaka, Kyoto, Hiroshima and Tokyo.

I am very grateful to JSPS for providing the opportunity to conduct research in Japan and for giving me the chance to work with excellent scholars and forge new relationships with local artists and musicians.