



Heaven Is ...

The other evening, Sadako and I spent a few hours at a local temple. That's not something that she and I are in the habit of doing very often, but a special opportunity had come up for a chance to do a bit of worship.

Hero worship, that is!

The temple in question was Soukenji, which has been here in this neighbourhood since 1450. I suppose during all that time, they must have had their share of ups and downs, but these days they seem to be doing very well for themselves; their buildings are in wonderful condition, and their grounds are immaculately maintained. This is in quite some contrast to Ome's main shopping street, which runs nearby, and which these days is full of closed shutters and empty lots where shops once stood.

I know nothing of the 'back story' of just why this particular temple can be flourishing so well, but I can hazard a guess that it has a lot to do with the progressive attitude of their management. They know that the one thing they need above all else when it comes to running a successful operation of any kind, whether it be a shop or a temple, is to get people in the door.

And what better way could there be to fill a room with 200 eager worshippers - so eager that they take numbers to wait in line in the freezing cold long before the doors open - than to run a series of jazz concerts. Jazz concerts featuring ... you know, just some guys ...

Guys like guitarist Takeshi Yamaguchi, drummer Lewis Nash, and bassist Ron Carter.

Yes, right here in Ome, at the temple just down the street, we were treated to a wonderful jazz trio concert the other night. When I mentioned to a friend a few weeks back that this concert was coming up he asked, "Why would guys like that - world class jazzers - be doing a gig in such an out-of-the-way small-town venue?" At the time, I had no particular answer for him, but now that the concert is over, I can respond easily.

I can see two completely different reasons how this could happen. One is that - in spite of global fame - the 'fortune' part of the equation might be missing for these guys, and they simply have to take every offer that comes along. I doubt that this is what is happening in this case. Mr. Carter could clearly fill any jazz club in any major city in the world, whenever he chose to take such a booking. He doesn't 'need' to be here.

The second reason is much more compelling, and is almost certainly what is in play in this case. Mr. Carter has been everywhere, played with everybody, and done everything. What is left for a jazz musician in that situation? Well, let's try to imagine what his vision of a 'heaven' would be like.

What if there were a place to play that wasn't a noisy smoky club on a busy street surrounded by traffic and bustle, but a quiet and peaceful room opening onto an elegant garden? What if the patrons weren't chatting over their drinks while you played, but were instead quietly seated on their cushions all around the band, eagerly lapping up every note? What if you were an honoured guest in the community for a special event, rather than simply being 'this week's rotation' at the big city club?

When you look at it this way, a gig in our little town of Ome might actually be just like a slice of Heaven for these men. And even though they were positioned in front of the temple altar for their performance, they didn't even have to die to get there!

David Bull
Seseragi Studio
Nagabuchi 8-4-5 Ome City
Tokyo Japan 198-0052
<http://astoryaweek.com>