

FOREST OF SHEEP AND STEEL

BOOK REVIEW BY ERI ONAMI



I have been asked to review the book introduced by Mr Ura from YAMAHA at the special “Talk” at the PTA convention 2016, “A Forest of Sheep and Steel” Hitsuji to Hagane no Mori.

This book won Japan’s Nationwide Booksellers Award 2016. The story is about how a 17 year old student’s chance meeting with a piano technician at his school sparked an all-consuming ambition to become a piano technician.

The popularity of this beautifully written book has created an appreciation and respect in Japan for piano tuners and technicians.

Japanese novelist Natsu Miyashita, made her writing debut in 2004 and received the 98th New Novelist Prize for Literature in Japan. The author’s tranquil poetic style transports you to Tomura’s much loved forest and the gentle beauty of nature.

Tomura, the main character of the story, is going through the motions of school life with no ambition, living in Hokkaido in the northern part of Japan with a beautiful mountain surrounded by forest.



Forest is in the air. It’s the forest of an autumn and just before dark....

Most of his classmates had left school after finishing the midterm examination, Tomura was still in the class room. His teacher asked him to take the visitor called a “Piano Tuner” over to the school gymnasium.

(The school gymnasium in Japan is most likely to include a stage and is used as a multipurpose auditorium, so there is a grand piano.)

On entering the gymnasium there was a piano; it is a big, black... He has never noticed the “piano” until then. The piano tuner gently opened the piano lid; to Tomura the lid seemed like a wing. Tomura gazed inside at the 88 keys and the strings attached to each one, stretched out straight with the hammers lying ready to strike. This reminds him of the order of the forest. When he hears the beautiful sound of the piano for the first time, he feels the air and beauty of the forest.

He was spellbound as he watched the piano tuner work. So many tools he had never seen before. The piano tuner explained that the hammers, the wood and the wool that create the sound come from the mountains and the fields.

He imagines the forest while he watched the tuning. After the piano is tuned the beautiful sound was clearer and brighter. The piano tuner gave him his name card mentioned Soichiro Itadori/Piano Tuner....

The story begins.

The sounds he had heard that day stayed with him. He went to a musical instrument store where Itadori was there and asked to be his apprentice. Instead, Itadori gave him the name of a school that trains piano tuners and technician in Honshu. (Honshu is the largest island of Japan).

After graduation, he started work at the same musical instrument store that Mr Itadori worked for in his hometown.

It splendidly depicts the fabric of human relationships between the characters. Mr Itadori – Concert Tuner, creating sounds as beautiful as the forest. Tomura admires him.

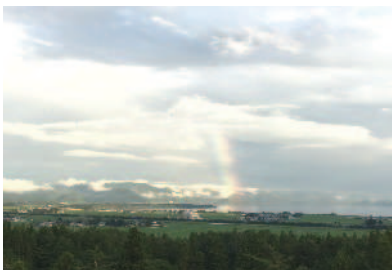
Mr Yanagi – Senior Technician, detailed care for client, in charge of the education of the new staff as well as mentor of Tomura. He uses metaphors to express his ideas to Tomura.

Mr Akino – Senior Technician, he gave up being pianist and was a piano technician because he felt that the sounds he made playing the piano were quite different to that of a leading pianist.

Ms Yuni and Ms Kazune – twin sisters, both gifted piano players but each with a different style of performing. Understanding the different styles is essential for Tomura to determine how he should approach tuning of each piano. One of the sisters, Kazune, in the future becomes a pianist.

During our day to day life there are a variety of things we need to be aware of and often inner conflict arises. What am I looking for in myself? What is my life's purpose? What is the sound I am looking for? What is good sound?

We are learning “love” in nature. The book illustrates a fascinating portrait about the life of the piano technician, as well as warmly watching over his spiritual growth; a journey common to most people. We can enjoy reading how he grows and matures in this story. I think this is the reason why the book is so popular in Japan now. This story is full of love and joy with blessings from God.



Over the rainbow in Lake Inawashiro surrounded by forest in Fukushima Prefecture. I took this in July 2016.