

Kota Hamanaga of Best Brass Corporation

PB Kota, thank you for agreeing to this interview for *The Brass Herald*. Please tell our readers about your company, the Best Brass Corporation

KH Thanks Philip, it's an honour for me to be in *The Brass Herald*. I'm so excited to be able to let us introduce ourselves here. Well, Best Brass was founded in 1999 and is a Japanese manufacturer of brass instruments and accessories. The main products are trumpets, mouthpieces and sound transformers. We call a mute a sound transformer, since a purpose of a mute is not just to "mute" the sound, you know. The quality of our products is welcomed by many great players all over the world. Thank you very much to all those who play our products!

PB You moved to new premises in 2006 - was this due to the rapid expansion of the company?

KH Yes, it was. The main reason we moved to the current location was the success of "e-Sax" in 2005.

PB And the founder of Best Brass was Shinji Hamanaga?

KH Yes - he's my father. Shinji Hamanaga is a fine trumpet and cornet player. He has an academic degree in trumpet. However, in Shinji's words: "I'm a professional in evaluating and designing brass instruments. I don't play or listen to music anymore because it makes me so nervous. I play trumpet only when I test a new product or an improvement on our products." You know, that means "almost every day". Hahaha.

PB I believe Shinji was attached to the Yamaha corporation working on research and design for many years.

KH. Yes, he worked for Yamaha for 18 years as a designer of brass instruments. He designed from tuba to trumpet, but mostly was a horn designer during that time. The horn section of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra used to play Yamaha, didn't they? That was Shinji's era. Mr. Seifert liked a horn designed by Shinji Hamanaga and Shinji often says that he is honoured by that. In the Yamaha years, he invented the world's first Quattro horn and mouthpiece Series IIB-6B, signature series as well

PB Is it correct that Shinji invented the SilentBrass Practise Mute?

KH Exactly. Shinji often got me play the prototype of SilentBrass when I was a child. He invented it in 1995 and has a patent as a designer for Yamaha. Now, he has developed "e-Brass" under the Best Brass brand as a new generation. Yamaha SilentBrass has not been modified for so many years. I guess it's because Shinji left Yamaha and nobody has its know-how.

PB Please tell me of Shinji's other inventions.

KH That's a tough one - we're going to need another page! All the Best Brass products are his invention, such as the "Aiolià" and "Artemis" trumpets, "Groove mouthpieces", "e-Sax", "e-Brass", "Warm-up", "Non transposing stop mute" and more. He is into creating something that has never existed. Invention is his life work. Please let me introduce e-Sax here. e-Sax is a silencer for saxophone and even though it's not so well known in the Europe and USA yet, we have already sold over 19,000 pieces of the e-Sax series in Japan. I believe that many saxophone players in Europe and USA have been longing for this invention. It's very sad that one Chinese company copied e-Sax, then sold it cheaply and that some people even recognized it as the original product.



Kota (left) and Shinji Hamanaga.

PB Best Brass has a fine reputation for the quality of brass instruments and mouthpieces that you manufacture.

KH I would say yes, but no. In fact, we have many great fans of our mouthpiece all over the world. Philip, I'm sure that if you were to play our new mouthpiece

talks to Philip Biggs

"The Groove series", you would be delighted with the comfortable rim, quick response and beautiful sound. Also, the very smooth blow feel of our "Aiolià" and "Artemis" trumpets, which adopt our original "Hamanaga" valve system, should be something you've never previously experienced! The reputation of both trumpet and mouthpieces at the last Musikmesse was quite excellent, but I think most readers won't recognize us as a manufacturer of brass instruments and mouthpieces, but of mutes. I hope being in *The Brass Herald* will be the beginning of our trumpets and mouthpieces getting more popular in the future.

PB What are the future plans for the Best Brass Corporation?

KH Currently, our sound transformers, especially "Warm-up", have a certain position in the brass field. Then, we would like to spread our instruments and mouthpieces as well. e-Sax and e-Brass are for all players, but most of our products are basically designed for advanced or professional players. In the future, I would like to create a situation where high-school students are saying "Someday, Best Brass".

PB Kota, please tell Brass Herald readers about your role in the corporation.

KH I have a role of international sales and marketing representative. I answer all the inquiries about our products from all over the world everyday, so can't wait to receive an inquiry from the readers of *The Brass Herald*! I don't make trumpet, mouthpiece, or sound transformers because they are produced by professional craftsmen. My aim is to let all brass players know about Best Brass and Shinji Hamanaga, and I hope Best Brass is going to be a company like Vincent Bach or Alexander in the future.

PB Are you a brass player?

KH Actually, I used to play the trumpet, but I'm a drum player.

PB Many thanks for this interview.