



Episode 107 – Fumio Demura (Profile) | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Jeremy Lesniak:

What is up, everyone? It's time for another episode of whistlekick martial arts radio and here we are with episode 107. Today, we're going to talk about the living martial arts legend, Fumio Demura.

I'm whistlekick's founder but I'm better known as your host, Jeremy Lesniak. Whistlekick, if you don't know, makes the absolute best sparring gear in the world and we also make some great apparel and accessories for practitioners and fans of traditional martial arts. I'd like to welcome the new listeners and thank everyone that's come back again. All of our past podcast episodes, show notes, and a whole bunch more are available at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. You can sign up for the newsletter there as well and I really think you should because we offer exclusive content to subscribers, while some discounts and it's the only place to find out about who's coming up next on the show.

Now, we're selling a lot of sparring gloves lately and for those of you that haven't used them, you should check them out at our website, whistlekick.com. We cut them shorter so your wrist can move better. We put in some extra ventilation, gave an extra durable Velcro strap and reinforced it pretty much all over the place. The end result is a glove that is going to last you much longer than what you're probably used to and, if our sparring gear's not your cup of tea, check out one of the other items we offer at whistlekick.com.

So, let's talk about Fumio Demura, Shihan Fumio Demura. He was born 1938, Yokohama, Japan and he started training in martial arts at, got some conflicting reports, age 8 or 9 originally in kendo but his kendo instructor did teach karate as well. In 1963, he met Donn Draeger who we've talked about on the show a little bit in the past who introduced him to Dan Ivan and it was the introduction of Ivan that brought him to the US in 1965 to start teaching in martial arts.

He was the first person to bring Shitō-ryū to the United States. Shitō-ryū was founded in 1931 by Kenwa Mabuni who taught Gichin Funakoshi, the founder of Shotokan, and he was friends with , Chōjun Miyagi, the founder of Gōjū-ryū. Demura earned his black belt at age 18 and really quickly became a success on the Japanese tournament circuit. I mean, just absolutely dominant for about 4 years. In 1961, he won the National Sparring Title of Japan and, even though he was a great forms kata competitor, he has said that he preferred sparring. It was about that time that he started teaching in Tokyo and did that for just a few years before, like I said, coming to the United States and if you take a look at his resumé, which actually somebody put one together and put it on his website, he's still actively teaching in California. If you take a look at his resumé which is 4 pages long, more of a CV than a resumé really, it's this lifelong list of martial arts training. it goes back to 1948 and it includes karate, weapons, judo, archery, sword, aikido and more and what really struck me was that for each of the things that he learned, he didn't just learned from one instructor. He learned from multiple. They're half a dozen or more with several of those categories and I think that's something that we don't really do today, in today's martial arts society but it's something that I'd like you to consider. Maybe we'll do a show on that in the future.



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He wrote quite a few books on martial arts weapons, traditional Japanese, Okinawan weapons and you can find those as well as link to the self-defense book that I just learned about in prepping for the show. One that I hadn't seen before on street self-defense as well as some books on Shitō-ryū and you can find links over on the website, whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. He was given the first cover of Black Belt Magazine in 1966 and he has official letters of recognition from 3 presidents: Clinton, Bush Senior and Obama. He's appeared on the cover of more than 25 different martial arts magazines and really, what we start to see as we think about him today is that really, this man has been a quiet face of the martial arts for 4 decades.

He's not quite a Chuck Norris. He's not a Bruce Lee that people outside of the martial arts really know who he is but he's been around and he's had a tremendous impact on a lot of the works, cultural works, that have come out of the martial arts. We're going to talk more about those in a minute.

Not long after moving into the United States, Demura got a job doing martial arts demonstrations at the Japanese Deer Park which is a local attraction in California and they had him doing some martial arts demos and the shows were different from the typical demonstrations that martial artists put on in the day so back in the 60s, a martial arts demonstration usually involve people coming very close with their strikes, demonstrating a tremendous amount of focus and this is something that is impressive especially as martial artists, we see people do that but he added another element. The people that were being "struck" that were looking like they were about to get hit, he had them reacting so it looked like they actually got hit and it became this tremendous success and they were doing a dozen shows a day and these demos ultimately got brought to Las Vegas and he did that for years and just some really tremendous stuff and that visual of the person in the demonstration being struck and making it look like they were struck for real, that's something that was definitely popularized by Demura and some people even say he was the first one to really do that in a big way in public demonstrations.

He was involved in quite a bit of film work, mostly stunt work and stunt coordination and, as we've talked about on this show a couple times, he was the stunt double for Pat Morita who played Miyagi in not only the Karate Kid but Karate Kid 2 and Karate Kid 3 and the next Karate Kid and it was actually Chuck Norris who introduced Fumio Demura to the production of The Karate Kid and the original intention was that he was going to be Miyagi but as he was reading through the script, he realized his English was not good enough. He was not going to be able to do this but because of the relationship he had with Chuck Norris and just things going positively, they said hey, why don't you stick around? You can be the stunt double and Pat Morita really liked having him as a stunt double and they actually worked together on some projects outside of the Karate Kid franchise. Other movies that he was involved in that you've probably heard of: Showdown of Little Tokyo, The Island of Dr. Moreau and even the first Mortal Kombat movie. Of course, there were plenty more. You hit his IMDB profile and you'll see all kinds of great stuff there and TV, which most people don't really talk about, his TV involvement. He has credits tied to Power Rangers, the Merv Griffin show and even Walker Texas Ranger.



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There's a wonderful interview with Shihan Demura at USADojo.com and we linked it in the show notes and if you're not familiar with that website, they have some great historical information and actually, we used things that they have quite a bit as we put together these profile episodes and, while I'd love to have the chance to speak with him personally, that hasn't happened yet. I've got my fingers crossed. It's a very small list of people I'd really love to have on this show and probably die a little bit if it happens just out of sheer joy. He's on that list, of course; so rather than fawn over something that hasn't happened, I want to read part of the interview that they put up at USA Dojo and this goes back to, if I did the math right, is from the 90s and I think it gives you a pretty good glimpse into who he was.

The interviewer poses the question what was your early training like in Japan? This is his response: In the beginning, it was very different because tournament sparring had not yet really taken off. We trained mainly for self-defense. We emphasized techniques directed toward the eyes, throat, groin...things we would use in a street fight. Later, when tournaments became more prevalent we started to train more with them in mind. The stances changed . . . the techniques changed. We concentrated on gyaku-tsuki and mae-geri, that was punch and front kick. When I came to America, I found that the kumite involved fighters from all sorts of styles. There were all kinds of techniques. I think that this was a little better than what I was used to because it used more of the total karate. I remember that I was officiating a match where a contestant used a chop, a shuto. It was a good technique but I didn't award a point. I was still thinking the only real point was for reverse punch, front kick, or roundhouse kick. That was my education up to that point. The contestant accepted my decision. After the match, the contestant came up and asked me why I didn't take the chop. I told him that it wasn't an effective technique. He asked me why I bothered to teach it then. It was like . . . boom, IPPON!! I realized that he was correct. After that, as long as the technique was performed correctly and wasn't blind or reckless I would give the point.

Now, I read that excerpt because I think that it does a good job of illustrating something that has always struck me about Fumio Demura and that's his willingness to remain open as he trains. I've read pieces of interviews where he talks about people involved in the arts benefitting in other styles in other instructors and if we go back to the few minutes ago when I was talking about his resumé; yeah, he trained under dozens, literally dozens, of martial arts instructors and not just for a seminar here and there as some people today like to put on their martial arts resumé but he genuinely trained under these people. This is someone who kept an open mind and because of that, really developed into one of the most exceptional martial artist of the 20th century.

Now, it's hard to talk about Fumio Demura without mentioning the amazing movie from 2015, *The Real Miyagi*. What started as a crowdfunding project really turned into an amazing film. It's a well done documentary on the life of Shihan Demura and it's available on Netflix as well as DVD. The cast is a who's who of martial artists and martial arts actors including Billy Blanks, Pat Johnson, Dolph Lundgren, Pat Morita, Christine Bannon-Rodrigues, Steven Seagal, Michael J. White and many more.



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We'll end with 2 pretty amazing compliments. You may not have realized I had really no idea about until putting together the information on this episode. Chuck Norris who, I think most of you listening on this show will know, was an amazing tournament fighter and just a really exceptional competitive martial artist and Chuck Norris is on video crediting much of his fighting success to his relationship and what he learned from Fumio Demura and when we think about Bruce Lee, what's the one weapon Bruce Lee really took to? It was the nunchaku, nunchucks. And who taught him nunchucks? Fumio Demura. So, that's our profile on a man that I think is absolutely amazing. One that I think everyone, regardless of their martial arts style really would do better to learn about. Go watch The Real Miyagi.

Give us some comments, let us know what you think. You can get to us on social media; Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram, username is whistlekick everywhere or leave a comment on the website, whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. Check out the sparring gloves and the other stuff we make. You could leave a comment on the episode on YouTube and if there's someone that you know that doesn't know who Fumio Demura is, please share this episode with them. We like doing this shorter Thursday ones, makes it easier to share so help your martial arts friends know their history.

If you want to be a guest on the show or maybe you have an idea for a show topic, let us know. Fill out the form at the website, whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. Don't forget to subscribe to the newsletter to stay up on everything that's going on and you can learn more about the products, whistlekick.com and the sparring gear is on Amazon. That's all for today so until next time, train hard, smile and have a great day!