Steve Miranda – Professor
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From Kancho to Professor

The grading of Professor Steve Miranda, 8th Dan

Miranda didn’t go lightly during his technique demonstrations, but his ‘attacker’ kept coming back.

Professor Miranda demonstrates one of the many locks and submission-holds in his broad-ranging syllabus.
Late last year, Kancho Steve Miranda of Adelaide’s National Karate Academies (NKA) was elevated to 8th Dan by the Australian Martial Arts Association (AMAA) at a gala grading and demonstration event at Adelaide’s Hilton Hotel. Miranda’s friend and AMAA colleague Kyoshi Gary Simpson flew over from Perth to report on the event, and Blitz also spoke to Miranda about his history in the martial arts, his Zen Do Ryo karate system and what it means to receive an 8th Dan rank.

For several weeks I had been teasing my friend and karate colleague Kancho Steve Miranda with quips like “The Miranda Extravagance” — but eventually his grading was upon us and that is exactly what it turned out to be. In fact, on the morning of the big event I telephoned Steve from my room in Glenelg and said, “Don’t forget, right now you are still a paiby 7th Dan, Kancho Steve.” To which he replied, “Kyoshi, you haven’t seen what I’m gonna do. Just wait, you’ll see.” Touché! And I did. Unfortunately for my wife, Cheryle, and I, our otherwise wonderful weekend had already been marred by a couple of events. Our flight had been delayed several times for all sorts of reasons, then we had to sit in the plane on the Perth tarmac after two people decided that they didn’t really want to go to Adelaide and had to have their luggage unloaded from the plane. Our hotel experience was just as bad!

Steve’s organisation had, however, very kindly paid for our airfares and accommodation, and for that we were very grateful. Upon arriving in the City of Churches we were met by Sensei Roy Fuller of the Bushido Karate club, Roy, the AMAA’s Treasurer and a thorough gentleman, drove us to our (once) favourite hotel on the Glenelg beach front. I liked staying there because I could get up at sunrise when hardly anybody else is around and do my daily training regimen on the beach near the groinie, where the sand is hard and fairly flat. But I digress.

For those who don’t know him or of him, Kancho Steve Miranda heads up a large karate organisation of 25 clubs in Adelaide alone. Don’t be surprised to see even more dojoos appear all over the country in the very near future, with one opening in the ACT very soon.

There are many things to like and admire about Kancho Steve, his senior Yudansha (Black-belts) and, in fact, his entire organisation. Professionalism is the key word. The entire organisation is run with military precision but, unlike the army, the troops actually love their commanders. Key people oversee all important functions and every person executes his or her duties to perfection. You simply can’t help but be impressed, and maybe even slightly envious.

As for the grading, a scrolling banner with the message “Kancho Steve Miranda’s 8th Dan Grading” greeted my wife and I the moment we entered the hotel foyer with our party, which included AMAA President Hanshi Barrie Ravil (featured in Blitz Vol. 22 No. 8, in 2008) and his wife Jenny, Vice President Sensei Roger Coole and wife Margaret, Sensei Geoff Warden and wife Debbie, Sensei Tony Caruso and AMAA Committee man Adam Stevens. The evening kicked off with the large gathering of people with some light refreshments followed by the first DVD presentation on a large overhead screen. It was an overview of Kancho Steve’s start in the martial arts and was a virtual who’s who of early Australian martial arts notables.

What followed was a remarkable demonstration by many seniors of the NKA, led by Kancho Steve. The main demonstrations were Kyoshi Gregg Braun (6th Dan), Shihan Craig Hutchison (5th Dan), Rinshi Shannon Clifford (4th Dan) and Bill Kelly (Shodan-ho). Kancho Steve then proceeded to demonstrate a great variety of judo throws, jujitsu controls and submissions, kendo/karate kicking techniques, kata and self-defence applications. (He holds various Black-belt rankings in all of these arts and also skil). At one point, a replica handgun was fired several times, frightening some in the crowd, and gunpowder wafted through the room. The demonstration team showed remarkable versatility and skill. Kancho Steve virtually pulverised his hapless attackers, at one point unleashing a spinning hook-kick that landed with a loud slap on Shihan Hutchinson’s jaw. For a split second, Hutchinson’s eyes glazed over before he hit the ground, but he shook it off and made a quick recovery.

Such is the skill of the demonstration team that they perform with split-second, precision timing, rolling and flowing with counter-attacks. Yes, the fighting was choreographed, but the timing and realism had to be seen to be believed.

During the many yakasukos (pre-arranged demonstrations) Kancho Steve dealt out rapid and almost merciless punches, kicks, armlocks, finger-locks, throws, leg-rips and weapon-counters to his senior students. All of them were fervently tapping out with regularity as Kancho Steve snapped lock after lock then followed with a series of submission-holds that had his seniors grimacing and yelling out in obvious pain — from our front row seats, we could see that it wasn’t acting for the crowd. There was very little margin for error as ordinary and makeshift weapons were used, including a large, sharp and very pointed knife. To prove its lethal capacity, Kyoshi Gregg Braun first executed several piercing and cutting tests on thick wads of paper and doubled-up lengths of thick nylon cord. The team used a pistol, knife, nunchaku (weighted chain, with which Kyoshi Braun was eventually tied up) nunchakus and other props such as chains, a steering-wheel lock, handcuffs and even a cane. During one of these set-ups that looked particularly realistic, one lady

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sitting behind me exclaimed, “Go a bit easier, Steven. That’s my son you’re doing that to!” I guess she was concerned for her future grandchildren and that bought a few laughs to us in the front.

At one point Shihan Chris Hutchinson attacked a seated Kancho Miranda. The tables were quickly turned and ‘Shihan Grasshopper’, as Chris affectionately known, found himself dumped into the chair and then side-kicked across the chest. The kick was reasonably strong and knocked Hutchinson backwards into a fair fall, with the seat ending up on top of him. Kancho Steve then bowed and he and his team exited the demonstration area. More short DPs were played in between sets on Kancho Steve’s early years and it was interesting to watch old archive footage. Kancho Steve then demonstrated three advanced Goju kata – Seishin, Shosentin and Seipai – his movements all clean and crisp with good power, kiime (focus) and timing.

During the evening Kancho Steve appeared in various attires: a clean, white heavyweight gi, a rather flamboyant red hatama and a pure white hakama. It was all quite impressive and seemed to match the moment. Performing kata in hakama is far more difficult than in a traditional gi plus the mat area was uneven. The performances were excellent nonetheless.

In all, I have to say it was a dazzling performance made all the more difficult due to the presence of his parents, siblings, children, friends, students and the critical eyes of other high-ranking martial artists. I can honestly say that Kancho Steve Miranda fearlessly put himself on the line and won over all those in attendance convincingly.

Some of the more highly recognisable international masters that Kancho Steve has trained with and received instruction from are ‘Ssudo’ Gene LeBell, Shihan Anthony Thompson, Professor Don Jacob and Professor Wally Jay. They have each influenced Kancho Steve in shaping Zen Do Ryu.

Another highlight of the evening was a demonstration by NKAs Shihan Derek MacLucas, 5th Dan. He showed us how the next level of NKA Black-belts can perform, taking them through a typical ‘in-class’ routine of warm-ups, kihon (basics) and non-contact free-sparring in a very confined space. This was good because it showed the foundation of the lower-ranked members who will, in time, become senior Black-belts.

Kancho Steve has a remarkable ability to retain very long serving students. He turns them into instructors and then into senior instructors who are supremely loyal to him and his system. All in all, it was an extremely impressive display by Kancho Steve Miranda and the NKA. In fact, the best I’ve ever seen and that’s saying something, as I’ve seen my fair share.

The highlights of the evening were many. So many students and associates of Kancho Steve Miranda posed with awards, including plaques and all manner of gifts, from books to swords and a most impressive carved gi top and belt belonging to Kancho Steve’s lifetime instructor and mentor, Kancho Bill Fenton, 10th Dan (deceased).

Then, with the grading demonstration over, Kancho Miranda, 7th Dan, became ‘Professor’ Steve Miranda, 8th Dan, and was presented with a very unique master’s obi (belt) displaying his new rank and title. The title and grade were authorised by the Grading Panel of the NKA, in consultation with the NKA’s Kyoshis.

In keeping with the celebrations of the evening, Professor Miranda presented his retired 7th Dan belt to Kyoshi Gregg Braun, to be worn by Kyoshi Gregg in 2013, when he’s due for his 7th Dan promotion. Renshi Shannon Clifford was also promoted to Shihan status within the NKA for his tireless efforts in the smooth running of the organisation. Shihan Clifford, like so many of the senior Yudansha, is an individual of considerable martial arts talent, whose large build belies his agility. Shihan Clifford confessed to me after the grading that he credits Professor Miranda with teaching him everything he knows about martial arts.

Kyoshi Craig Smith, 6th Dan, did a marvellous job as the Master of Ceremonies and kept the evening pumping along at a rapid pace. Kyoshi Bill Wallace, 6th Dan, the ‘elder statesman’ and third of the three NKA Kyoshis, returned to Adelaide from his considerable business enterprises in Dubai especially for this auspicious occasion.

Well done to Professor Miranda, the demonstration team and the entire NKA for a wonderfully fun event that showcased not only your considerable talents but also that of the entire National Karate Academies. Congratulations.

About the author: Kyoshi Gary Simpson is Chief Instructor of Tanshin Kai Karate Do in Perth, WA. He is ranked 7th Dan with both the Australian Martial Arts Association and International San-Ten Karate Association (ISKA). He’s also the AMAA’s WA State Representative.
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