

the KODŌ beat

鼓童



The members of Huun-Huur-Tu with Kodo's Tetsuro Naito jamming on the steppes of the Republic of Tuva

Journey to Tuva

Formed in 1992, Huun-Huur-Tu is a 4-man group from the Republic of Tuva in Russia who mix modern innovation with traditional music. They have worked with the likes of the Chieftains, Frank Zappa and Ry Cooder – who said about them; 'They are both the cowboys and the Indians'. Masters of both traditional Tuvan instruments and 'throat singing' – in which a single vocalist produces two or more notes simultaneously – Huun-Huur-Tu joins Kodo on the Earth Celebration (EC) stage for three concerts.

EC Managing Director Atsushi Sugano and Player Tetsuro Naito traveled to Tuva in April.

As Huun Huur-Tu are the featured guests at this year's EC we were anxious to get to know each other better before their arrival in Sado. We had only met them briefly at last year's Edinburgh Festival after which we talked about playing together some day.

Tuva is situated on the plains (steppes) north of Mongolia. During the Soviet era it was closed to the outside world, and it's still not a very easy place to get to. We flew from Tokyo to Moscow and then on to Abakan. From there we rode in a minibus for 6 hours over the snow-covered mountains where at a rest stop we heard what seemed to be perfect silence – something we realized we had never heard before. As we descended from the mountains the vast steppes spread out before us and there in the middle – like an hor-d'oeuvre on a gigantic platter – sat Tuva's capital Kyzyl, a quite ordinary small city which gave little hint of the nomadic roots of many of its residents. We joined the members of Huun Huur-Tu at a restaurant for Korean food and retired exhausted to our hotel. The next day we met again – and as they had never seen Kodo perform – we thought we would show them a video of our performance. They looked on keenly at first but soon their restlessness became palpable as they started wandering off smoking

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cigarettes and falling asleep. We found ourselves thinking 'Whoops, forgot...nomads of the open steppes' and put an end to the video and their misery. We decided it was time for a bit of a jam so we could generate some ideas for our joint performances at EC and so headed off to the steppes by minibus. By the banks of the Yenisey River – which traverses the entire breadth of Russia, emptying finally into the Arctic Ocean – they began their extraordinary throat singing – accompanying themselves on a collection of traditional instruments. It seemed surprising that music originating on these vast steppes would be so quiet. Perhaps it grows from the need to draw together and feel a sense of intimacy in a place of such a Brobdingnagian scale. There was strangely a sort of roots-country and western *giddy-up* feel to the rhythms, reinforced by the very realistic imitations of horses neighing and and sheep baa-ing.

On our final day we were honoured by a feast with about 30 friends and relatives still living the nomadic life. As cell phones have yet to become a part of their lives, one of the group set off in the morning to see if he could find their present whereabouts. After tracking them down he returned to guide us there and we arrived about 3 in the afternoon, still early in a part of the world where it doesn't get dark at that time of the year until 10. We watched transfixed as they slaughtered the sheep without spilling a drop of the precious blood, and prepared in stages blood sausage and stew which we washed down with beer and vodka. Eating this creature which had so recently been



A Tuvan Style Feast Al Fresco

alive made us more keenly aware than ever before of the meaning of the expression we utter before each meal in Japan '*Itadakimasu*'. 'I Receive'.

In thanks for the feast Huun Huur-Tu and Tetsuro broke out their instruments and together they played some of the pieces they had worked on the previous day. As the music began (did the sound really carry that far?) Tuvans appeared, it seemed from nowhere, some on motorcycles, others charging up to our circle on camel-drawn carts.

As the sun set, the men of Huun Huur-Tu (whose name refers to the unique rays of light that appear on the grasslands after sunrise or before sunset) sang a ballad of an orphaned child, we looked around to see many of the women crying. We knew then that this was truly music that had grown from the heart of these people, out there in the vastness of the trackless plain.

EC Theatres

This year a series of performances will take place throughout Ogi at three smaller venues jointly referred to as *EC Theatres*. Each with an atmosphere of its own, EC Theatres promises to add a new *drop-in-at-the-spur-of-the-moment* flavour to the festival with Kodo players making impromptu appearances here and there.

Ayusu Kaikan – the largest venue – will normally be set up as an open space featuring dance, concerts and collaborative improvisations. The warm acoustics of *Marine Plaza*, on the 2nd floor of the Information Centre, will feature unamplified performances. *Cafe Harbour* will feature a club-like atmosphere where drinks will be served. Only tickets for *Ayusu Kaikan* events will be pre-sold, all others will go on sale from Aug. 19th so you can decide which performances you want to see once here.

EC Kids

This year we are also introducing *EC Kids*, a programme designed especially for younger Earth Celebrants. EC Kids events take place at *Kisaki Shrine*, right at the entrance to Shiroyama Park. Here children can play on the grass under the pines as they are led on artistic adventures by our special guest navigators. On the first day musician and painter *Jadranka Stojakovic* will lead in the creation of a group painting on a giant canvas. On the 2nd day *Hideki Sekine*, Director of the History of Primitive Technology Research Institute will have the kids making primitive tools, do ancient face painting and traditional fire making. On the 3rd day, *Masahiro Mizuno* will show the young ones how to juggle. *Please note that participants must pre-register for EC Kids events. Please check our Homepage or contact us for details.*

Kodo Close-up:

Tetsuro Naito, Player

The fourteenth in a series of profiles of individual Kodo members.

Tetsuro Naito was born deep in the countryside of Aichi Prefecture on October 12th, 1967. His father lost his sight and became a masseur before Tetsuro was born and his mother did office work. His brother Naonobu – who is 10 years older – works for Sony.

Though he describes himself as a poor student, Tetsuro didn't particularly hate school. One of his enduring memories of childhood however, was being teased by girls for his white legs, so thereafter he refused – even in the tremendous heat of summer – to wear shorts. He joined the children's version of the local taiko group *Nagashino Jindaiko* at age 12 as the youngest member.

In middle school one of his taiko friends played Western style drums too, so he gave them a try. He found it difficult at first – he couldn't get down the 8-beat – so he practiced at home with disposable chopsticks on his pencil sharpener. When he figured he 'had it', he showed his friend who told him 'You've got the hands and feet backward'. Before long he graduated to his own cheap drum kit.

In high school – as well as acquiring his black belt in judo – he formed a band with some guitar players to appear in the school talent night where they played Japanese pop covers. He realized before long that he wanted to make drumming his career, so after graduating in 1985 he went to Tokyo to Musashino Music School to study drums. There he realized how hard it would be to make it as a pro – chance and luck being as much a part of the equation as talent and hard work. He was also struck by the gap between his goals and that of his friends with whom he played in Tokyo who – though they were excellent guitarists – had no intention of turning pro. They just played for the fun of it and told him that becoming a pro meant often having to play music in which they weren't interested.

Returning home after 2 years, he picked up with his former rock band. He also rejoined his old taiko group and on a week-long performing trip to Vancouver (where they were looked after by the members of *Katari Taiko*). He was amazed to see how enthusiastic non-Japanese were about taiko music. This strengthened his resolve to



blend the two worlds of his music which had so far remained apart. After going to a Kodo performance his taiko leader suggested he join. To get a first-hand look they set off together to Sado to take part in a 5-day taiko workshop. On the last day they went to Kodo's performance and he remembers how *Chonlima* drove him crazy thinking, 'How do they do that? I bet I could learn. I can *take* these guys'. He decided he wanted to join.

Soon after returning home he was involved in a car accident resulting in damages of ¥600,000 – which he could hardly hope to repay on his puny video store wages. A friend who worked for a parcel delivery service suggested he join them. The hours were gruelling – 6 am till midnight, 4 hours sleep a night, one day off every two weeks. He could earn, however ¥800,000 a month. He decided that he would give it a go for 6 months and if he could manage that job, then he figured he could survive the rigours of Kodo. He not only survived, but thrived on his self-imposed test and in April joined 5 other hopefuls for the Apprenticeship Programme.

After 8 years with the group Tetsuro doubts he would have developed musically to his current level, nor had the opportunity to perform with first class musicians from around the world – something he particularly enjoys – had he stayed at home. He has also composed 5 or 6 pieces for Kodo, including the regularly performed *Nanafushi*.

Kodo – being an ensemble – inevitably spend a lot of time together. But an artist needs to be something of a lone wolf too – to look over one's shoulder when one has to create and see no one there. It is frightening but necessary to confront the slenderness of oneself.

Tetsuro is especially looking forward to adding to his performing and composing duties the challenge of directing this year's main joint concerts at EC featuring Huun Huur -Tu.

The second biennial Taiko Conference will be held at the Japanese American Cultural Center(JACCC) in LA from July 30 - Aug.1. Over 400 taiko enthusiasts from 80 groups from around the world are expected. The Kodo Cultural Foundation will co-sponsor Kodo's 3-woman song and dance ensemble *Hanayui's Voice, Song and Dance Workshop*, *Yoshikazu Fujimoto's Taiko Workshop* and a *Miyakedaiko Workshop* led by drummers from Miyake Island. For information, contact JACCC at 213-628-2725.

in brief...



Sacramento Taiko Dan will hold their *10th Anniversary Gala Concert* at the Sacramento Community Center on Aug. 24. *Yoshikazu Fujimoto* and *Hanayui* will appear as guests. For information, contact Sac. Taiko at 916-444-5667.

In May, for the first time in Kodo's history, we launched two simultaneous tours. Parallel to our tour of Japanese concerts a smaller group is giving a series of junior high school concerts and workshops throughout Japan. Being able to stage simultaneous performances of different size and character has long been one of our goals.

upcoming performances

July

27 Sado Aikawa Kozan Matsuri 0259-86-3630

August

20-22 Sado Earth Celebration '99 0259-86-3630

Japan Tour

September

10 Ishikawa Kaga-shi Bunka Kaikan 0761-72-7888

11 Ishikawa Kanazawa-shi Bunka Hall 076-262-2611

12 Niigata Nagaoka Shiritsu Gekijo 025-229-1111

14 Miyagi Ezuko Hall 0224-52-3004

15 Akita Yuzawa Bunka Kaikan 0183-72-2121

19 Hokkaido Kamiiso-machi Sogo Bunka Centre
0138-74-2000

22 Hokkaido Shiraoi-cho Chuo Kominkan 0144-85-2972

23 Hokkaido Tomakomai Shimin Kaikan 0144-55-3247

24 Hokkaido Hokkaido Kosei Nenkin Kaikan
011-241-5161

26 Hokkaido Muroran-shi Bunka Centre 0143-44-9922

29 Hokkaido Chitose Shimin Bunka Centre 0123-26-1151

October

13 Niigata Arai Sogo Bunka Hall 0255-72-9411

14 Niigata Koidego Bunka Kaikan 02579-2-8811

15 Niigata Shibata Shimin Bunka Kaikan 0254-26-1945

17 Saitama Hanno-shi Shimin Kaikan 0429-72-3000

19 Tochigi Tochigiken Sogo Bunka Centre Main Hall
028-622-4101

20 Gunma Gunma Ongaku Centre 027-322-9999

23 Ibaraki Akeno-cho Chuo Kouminkan 0259-52-5333

24 Gunma Ota Shimin Kaikan 0276-45-4871

26 Ibaraki Ushiku Shimin Centre 0298-74-3111

27 Chiba Noda Shi Bunka Kaikan 0471-24-1555

29 Chiba Ichikawa-shi Bunka Kaikan 047-379-5111

30 Tokyo Ota Kumin Hall Apuriko 03-5744-1600

31 Tokyo Komae-shi Ecorma Hall 03-3430-4106

Kodo Juku Autumn '99

Kodo Juku are multi-day, sleepover workshops where participants can get a taste of the Kodo Lifestyle as they rediscover their individual potentials.

Voice workshop 15-18 Sep. (Held in Kodo Village, hotel accommodations)

Taiko workshop(1) 6-10 Oct., (2) 13-17 Oct. (Workshop and accommodations in Kodo Apprentice Center)

Contact the office for details, or check our website.

Application deadlines: Voice Workshop- July 31/Taiko Workshops- August 31

Kodo Beat staff Chieko & Johnny Wales and Nobuko Yamada look forward to hearing from their readers.

Notice to Kodo Beat Readers

Kodo Beat is a newsletter focusing on the activities of Kodo and is sent quarterly to members of *Friends of Kodo*. *Friends of Kodo* is dedicated to bringing Kodo closer to our audience and fellow taiko enthusiasts. Membership is available to all. As well as receiving *Kodo Beat*, members also get priority ticket reservations for selected concerts in Japan, the chance to buy original goods available only to them, and selected discounts on a range of Kodo goodies. For further information about these offers contact us or check our homepage.

For those readers who only want the newsletter, an on-line version is in the works for the Internet. For information about joining '*Friends of Kodo*' – or anything else you might want to know about us – have a look at our homepage on the Web, give us a call, or from within Japan you can check out the *Fax Joho Service* at (03)3940-6000 and follow the instructions given in Japanese. You will need to input Box No. 510100 to access the Kodo menu. Kodo Village, 148-1 Kanetashinden, Ogi, Sado Island 952-0611 Japan Tel.0259-86-3630(Fax:3631) e-mail: JDC03000@nifty.ne.jp

Our web site: <http://www.kodo.or.jp>