

the KODŌ beat

鼓童



Milford Graves & Ryutaro Kaneko get things cooking at their August 21st EC '99 joint performance.

photo by Kazuo Yoshino

Milford Graves & Ryutaro Kaneko Interview

At Earth Celebration '99 legendary American jazz drummer Professor Milford Graves (MG) conducted 4 workshops and held a joint performance with Kodo's Ryutaro Kaneko (RK). The following are excerpts from an interview with Kodo Beat (KB).

KB. I have heard you don't get out much anymore. What brought you all the way to Sado?

MG. Yes, that's true. Well first of all I've been to Japan before and people have said it would be nice if you and the Kodo group can collaborate, and so I listened to them and then I met the group, and they gave me an invitation to come and hear them at Carnegie Hall. 4 years ago? So

I went to the Carnegie Hall concert and I was sitting in the audience and I was listening, to the Kodo group, being a musician, and being a drummer, naturally I would picture myself on stage with them, what I would be doing (chuckle) you know?

KB. Had you heard their music before, heard a CD?

MG. I saw a television programme, on educational television, and I was impressed that a group of drummers (chuckle) can have a place where they just concentrate on what they were doing. It was, very impressive.

KB. The total...

MG. Yes, because I've been talking about doing that with drummers in New York for the longest time. So when I saw this, I said this is really great. So between seeing the television programme, and then going to Carnegie Hall, it was only natural to accept the invitation to come to Kodo

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photo by Susumu Yoshida

Village.

KB. So why did you invite Professor Graves here?

RK. At first, I didn't have any idea of doing a concert in this format. More than wanting to invite Sensei (teacher) to come to Sado and perform, I personally wanted to focus on the things *Sensei* is researching and his *Yara* martial arts and music and people's bodies and their relationship with outer space. However we have established this relationship a bit, he's coming to Sado and we have this place, so I invited him. What he is doing is not very usual, even in Japan, by which I mean, people who do music usually confine themselves only to that. But Professor Graves teaches not only music, but very important things for people leading ordinary lives. I wanted to make a place here at Earth Celebration where these things could be introduced and experienced.

KB. So what's going to happen today, do you know?

MG. No, we don't know.

RK. I have absolutely no idea.

MG. We had a dress rehearsal to get an audio balance. What happened during the dress rehearsal will not happen in the actual performance. I have no idea at this moment, of what the performance will produce. The people will determine what will happen. My frame of mind will be influenced by: the sound of their voice (speech) and their general body motion (walking). The people will set the basic tone and rhythm of the room. Our performance will be the response to the people.

KB. How do you feel about Japanese rhythms and taiko? When you hear Kodo does it hit you where you live, or does it feel exotic to you?

MG. Many musicians have told me that Kodo drumming is linear, patternized, with little syncopation. I don't agree with the negative aspect of this description. There is a similarity of East African drumming (especially

Burundi drumming) and Kodo drumming. I am a fan of Burundi drumming, so therefore ---I am a fan of Kodo, Japanese/taiko drumming-rhythms.

RK. I would like it if we could use this visit as a springboard, in the future – I don't know in what shape – but I would like to create an environment where Sensei could share with us more of his experiences and knowledge. You have had the opportunity to get a bit closer to Kodo, I would be interested in knowing how you feel about it now that you've tried it, how would you like to do it another time?

MG. I am still taking in my visit to Kodo village. I'm really thinking about it at the present moment. I'm quiet right now. However, I am very positive about everything that has happened so far. It was great that I was able to video various aspects of Kodo village. I was greatly impressed with the seriousness and business character of what was taking place at Kodo village. One of my missions will be to show the video of Kodo village to many drummers that I know. I will express to them---that Kodo is an example of what a drum community should be like. I will also express to them, that a communication link and interrelationship should be established with Kodo. I will sort these things out when I return to the USA.

RK. I have my own selfish idea. The workshops are now only 2 hours long. I would like to have a stay-over workshop for several days, 5 days perhaps, and go carefully over and over the basics. Inevitably, when the time is limited, you can only impart a tiny fraction of your huge variety of information and experiences, from the workshop participant's point of view, even if exposed to a tiny amount of your knowledge, if they repeat over a long period of time some of it will truly sink in.

MG. I felt that two hours for a workshop was too short. I was looking at the clock more than what I thought was necessary. There were certain things that I further wanted to talk about---especially at a slower pace, that could not be done because of the two hour time period. There was so many more things that could have been done in the workshops. However, what was done was good.

RK. If we do a stayover then we wouldn't have to worry so much about time. I would really like to organize something like that.

MG. Yes, yes, yes.

RK. After tonight we will have a lot to talk about.

Kodo Close-up:

Kiyoko Oi, Staff

Fifteenth in a series of profiles of individual Kodo members.

Kiyoko Oi (née Obata) was born on New Years Day, 1957 in a thatched farmhouse in Hirokami village, Niigata Prefecture. She has an elder sister, a younger brother and another younger sister, all separated by about 2 years. Upon the arrival of a 2nd granddaughter-in-a-row her grandfather reportedly remarked, 'Not another girl!' She grew up (for whatever reason) a tomboy. Her parents were rice farmers and her father supplemented their income by going to work for half of each year in Tokyo.

She describes herself as having been a flamboyant child, her days filled with play. With the many children who lived nearby she would explore the surrounding hills and mountains, dam up a stream to swim in summer and in winters (where the snow regularly accumulates to 4 metres) ski and sled her days away. Parents would take turns walking in pairs with special snowshoes packing down a path to the old wooden elementary and middle schools in the next village. Children looked after tramping down the snow around the house and a path to the neighbours. She was a reasonably good student but excelled at sports, including running, skiing, swimming and volleyball. In high school she joined the track team running the 400 and 800 metres. She also joined the ski team in the winter and began cross-country. After being on skis for only 2 months her relay team came 4th at a national high school meet.

In December of her last year of school, Tagayasu Den (Ondekoza's founder) scouted her for her running ability and invited her to visit Sado with two other young runners. Kiyoko was impressed with what she saw, both the general atmosphere and the music they made, so in spite of her parent's strong reservations, she quickly decided to join. On March 1st, 1975, less than a week after graduation, she moved to Sado Island.

Though scouted for her running she also began learning Japanese dance and some basic taiko. Each afternoon at 3 o'clock the entire group used a local school ground for training, totalling at least 200 kilometres of running a week. Though none of the 3 young runners was gifted with the drums, she particularly enjoyed dancing *Onikenbai* (Demon Sword Dance) eventually becoming one of the featured performers. She feels that dance

helped both mentally and physically with her running. Each spring the group went to Boston to run the famed marathon. At the finish line they would climb aboard the cart and play a short solo on the Odaiko, still wearing their racing numbers. Each year she incrementally shortened her time and then incredibly in 1978, her 4th year, she knocked nearly 20 minutes off her best time to 2 hours 52 minutes and 32 seconds, the first Japanese



Hiroko, Akane, Kiyoko, Yoshiaki & Shunya Oi

woman ever to break the 3 hour mark. The next year in Japan she further reduced that mark to 2:48:52 to much acclaim in the Japanese press.

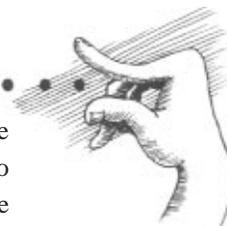
In 1981 she married Yoshiaki Oi, marking both the first marriage in the group and the first of a number of marriages among members. They moved to an old thatched farmhouse nearby. The arrival of their eldest, Shunya, in June 1982 brought the end of her performing career – since which time she has worked on the production staff. Though Yoshiaki was then on the road touring a great deal – a situation that can be difficult for some – Kiyoko found that it helped keep their marriage fresh. It gives her great pleasure that her own children have been able to grow up in an environment not too dissimilar to her own.

Having children had the bonus of bringing Kodo closer to the people of Sado. Prior to their arrival (there are 13 now) the group was in many ways something apart from the people around – an island with an island.

Kiyoko is also an accomplished fabric artist, having held a number of exhibitions of *sashiko*, a folk sewing technique of reinforcing clothes with intricate stitchery in intricate patterns and designs. She stresses the importance of Kodo's drummers having an alternate passion to pursue once their performing days come to an end.

March 16th-20th '00, Kodo Odaiko player and lead Miyake drummer Tomohiro Mitome will be conducting his first workshop called *Taiko Kokan* (Taiko Exchange) specifically for experienced taikoists over 15 years of age. There will of course be taiko playing, but most importantly he sees this is an in-depth chance for experienced taikoists to swap their experience and know-how. Making bachi that suit your playing and physique, and the care and feeding of your instruments will also be covered. Japanese conversational ability required. ¥60,000 (room & board and *bachi* blanks included) Deadline for applications is February 1st. For details please contact the office.

in brief....



Kodo's 15th annual *December Concert Series* finished successfully on December 23rd in Tokyo. From next year there will be a change in format and some venues, so please stay tuned.

This will be Nobuko Yamada's last issue of Kodo Beat as she is leaving Kodo after 6 years on the production staff. We wish her all the best in her new adventures and offer her our warmest thanks. Have fun Nobuko! *Otsukaresama*.

upcoming performances

North America Tour 2000

January

29-30 Cerritos, CA Cerritos Arts Center 1-562-916-8500

February

2 San Rafael, CA Marin Center 1-415-472-3500

4-6 Berkeley, CA Zellerbach Hall 1-510-642-5827

9-13 Seattle, WA Meany Hall 1-206-543-4880

14 Vancouver, Can. Queen Elizabeth Theatre
1-604-665-3042

18-20 Toronto, Can. Massey Hall 1-416-872-4255

22 Clinton Township, MI

Macomb Center for the Performing Arts 1-810-286-2022

24 Indianapolis, IN Clawes Memorial Hall 1-317-940-8050

25 West Lafayette, IN Elliot Hall 1-765-494-3933

26 Bloomington, IN Indiana University Auditorium
1-812-855-1103

29 Cincinnati, OH Cincinnati Music Hall 1-513-721-8222

March

2 Toledo, OH Stranahan Theater 1-419-381-8851

3 Akron, OH E.J. Thomas Performing Arts Hall
1-330-972-7570

4 Columbus, OH Palace Theater 1-614-469-0939

5 Athens, OH Blackburn Memorial Auditorium
1-740-593-1780

8-12 Pittsburgh, PA Byham Theater 1-412-456-6666

Asia Tour

March-April Korea (Seoul, Taejon)

May China (Peking, Shanghai)

Europe Tour

May-July UK / Netherlands / Belgium / Germany / Switzerland

Earth Celebration 2000

August 18-20 Sado Island

Japan Tour

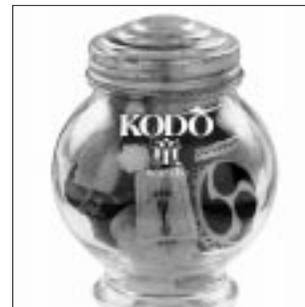
September-October

Niigata / Nagano / Gifu / Kyoto / Wakayama / Hyogo / Osaka / Ehime / Okayama / Yamaguchi / Oita / Fukuoka / Nagasaki / Kumamoto / Kagoshima

Dates after March '00 are subject to change. Contact us for details.



鼓 - *Tsutsumi*



童 - *Warabe*

Kodo released 2 new CDs on Sony Records. The album titles *Tsutsumi* and *Warabe* are derived from alternate readings for the characters used in Kodo's name. You can order through our mail order service.. "Tsutsumi" (SRCL4670), "Warabe" (SRCL4671). Price: 3,059 yen.

Kodo Beat staff Chieko & Johnny Wales 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 special advance 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 available on the Internet.

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