

the KODŌ beat

鼓童

Kodo & the Forest

*A walk in the woods of Kodo Village with
Takao Aoki, Kodo Managing Director.*

One day, perhaps 400 years from now, Kodo members will cut down this *keyaki* and make it into a new *odaiko*. If this group only planned to last for one generation, there wouldn't be much chance for this sapling to ever become a taiko, but our goal is to be around for the long run. Look at Kabuki. It is about to celebrate its 400th birthday. As for why we planted it in the central courtyard of Kodo Village, it's there to serve as a reminder to each Kodo member of our intimate connection with *keyaki* (Japanese zelkova), the traditional material for taiko.

For the last year or so we have also begun to actively look after the forest surrounding Kodo Village. For the first 10 years after our first leader *Hancho* (Toshio Kawauchi) died, I didn't have the luxury of time or energy to give much thought to the forest. Now that the basics of the village are in place: the rehearsal hall, the office and the dorms, we have been giving the woods some long overdue attention. I personally have also been influenced by the writings of philosopher Takeshi Umehara, who

believes mankind's salvation lies in the forests.

Kodo Village is built on land graded from part of 13 hectares of ravines. There wasn't a flat spot on it when we bought it. It was planted with *nara* (Japanese oak) and cherry which - up until about 40 years ago - was grown for making charcoal. There is also plenty of bamboo and cedar. Now people use oil instead of charcoal for heating, and most wood for home-building is imported very cheaply from abroad. Profit could no longer be made from these labour-intensive ravine forests so they were allowed to go wild, which incidentally, is why we were able to buy it. Here we Japanese live in this beautifully forested land and yet we use mostly foreign wood. There is a fundamental



*Takao comes across 2 young drummers sawing up a log to make drum stands.
Taking from, caring for and learning from the woods.*

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problem there.

Kodo has so far scarcely taken advantage of these woods, and yet they have so much to offer us. Less as a wood resource, than as a place to spend time in, to learn from and enjoy. Until we started clearing out the incredible tangle of underbrush last year though, you could scarcely make your way through. The cover is so dense that the trees are fighting each other for survival. So the forest was here, but nobody ever went in. Now we can walk through it and begin to make it an important part of our daily lives. We are also seeing new plants that weren't here before. As we thin out the dead wood and tangle we are also encouraging the growth of species that are important to us as drummers. Various kinds we use for our *bachi* for instance. Ideally players should be able to walk in these woods and harvest their own drumsticks. The forest can also help to support us by supplying bamboo for making charcoal or musical instruments. We can use the wood we thin from the forest as fuel for wood stoves, one of which we are about to install



This 400 year old keyaki giant is silent now, but one day it will speak with the voices of 2 or 3 homemade odaiko.

in our dining room. If the woods become important in supporting us than we will be that much more attentive as its custodians.

We are going to have a forest workshop at EC this year. We will work together in the morning and clean up an area and then have a flute concert there. I think after working up a bit of a sweat people will enjoy the concert that much more by having contributed to the environment in which they hear the music.

Most of the people who really understand the forest

deeply, those who actually earned their living from the woods, are in their seventies and beyond. It's remarkable to walk with them when suddenly they shinny up the tree like a monkey. And yet these people won't be around much longer. If we don't learn from them now, a fantastic body of knowledge will be lost. I want the people of Kodo to pass on more than drumming technique to the next generation; things like a deep understanding of how a taiko is born. The instruments with which we make our music are not merely objects bought with money, but wood from a living tree and the skin from an animal.

In this shed we are drying three large pieces from a giant keyaki that was cut down last year on the mainland in Niigata. The centre had rotted out completely so it was in danger of falling. Odaiko made professionally from keyaki run more than a hundred thousand dollars, so needless to say, we don't have one. As one of Japan's representative taiko groups, it is not entirely appropriate that our odaiko are made from *bubinga*, imported from Africa. We should be playing the wood harvested from our own land. The concern is both environmental and cultural. A taiko made from wood grown in Japan will sound at its best when played in Japan. So we are going to try to make 2, or perhaps 3 odaiko from this one giant. Of course they won't be as perfect as the ones we have made by our drum maker, but for better or worse they will be uniquely ours. Tomohiro Mitome and Eiichi Saito are in charge of the project. They have cleaned away most of the rot from the insides and covered the ends with white glue to retard splitting. Our drum maker Mr. Asano drops by periodically to give us advice, so we aren't working completely in the dark. This bark has to be removed soon. We want to make it by hand, not on a giant lathe as the professional ones are. We couldn't buy the special adze that is used to shape the interior, so we had a blacksmith on Sado make us some.

It is all very well for Kodo to make enough money to be able to afford the finest professionally-made instruments, but in this era I think it is important for us to move towards making a more intimate and powerful link between the land upon which we live, and our lives and art.

Kodo Close-up:

Naomi Saito, staff

The 21st in a series of profiles of individual Kodo members.

Naomi was born in 1959 in Tokyo. Her father had a small machinery shop in the house. Her mother did custom sewing. She has two younger brothers.

Her first memory is of falling off a jungle gym at kindergarten. Her early, happier memories include catching grasshoppers and playing hide and seek in a big field near her house with lots of little friends.

In middle school she took piano and *koto* lessons but they didn't last long. In high school she bought Leon Russell albums and went to his concerts. A Japanese musical production she saw made an enormous impression on her. Not that she wanted to perform, but she thought those people must lead such interesting lives. After high school she considered university, and as she wanted to live in the country she checked out an agricultural college in Tokyo. She was turned off however by all the students wandering around in lab coats. Instead she went to a dressmaking college in Shinjuku for 2 years. As her mother was a seamstress it seemed quite natural. During her college years she first saw Ondekoza (Kodo's earlier incarnation) who came to perform at her school.

After graduating she wanted to use her skills in the theatre and so she began sewing at a small costume company. She really enjoyed the work but the hours were very long and so she quit after a year and half. She then worked at a company making ballet costumes. By this time she had had her fill of the big city. She went again to Kodo's concerts and began to think it would be interesting to join, as they were both a performance group and were living in the country. The idea of the early mornings and running frankly appalled her, and that she felt she had no musical talent didn't dissuade her either. Feeling she would have something to contribute she met Hanchō at a theatre and asked if she could join. He told her to come and check it out. Things were much more informal (disorganized) in those days and she took the invitation to visit as an invitation to join. In November of 1982 she arrived and the next day was put to work



Naomi about to cut loose.

in the office helping with mailings. They were a bit short-handed so she felt quite welcome. One of her jobs became trying to find gigs for the group by phone. She also went on the road as tour manager, a task for which she felt particularly unsuited.

Now in her 20th year, her responsibilities are in ticket services and *Friends of Kodo*.

She got married in 1986 to player *Eiichi* (shaven pate) *Saito*. They have two boys, *Yuki*, 15 and *Yusaku* who is 12. Sado is a great place to raise kids she reports, very relaxed. As for marrying within the group the best thing about it is really understanding what her husband's work is about (and also its greatest detraction she quips).

She is a self-professed soccer fanatic, her favourite team being the Japanese 2nd division *Albirex Niigata*. She watches international matches on satellite TV and in April of 2000 she went with the whole family to England specifically to see a game. (Well, they also wanted their kids to travel abroad while they were still young). They went to London and did the galleries and museums for about 5 days, then headed up to Manchester. At Old Trafford (the Theatre of Dreams) they saw United play West Ham. Great seats, very close to the pitch among 60,000 fans going nuts. She wants to go to England again, and Spain too.

The Saitos have a wood stove but Naomi has never had much luck firing up their chainsaw. Then last year while working in the Kodo Village forest a young woman with her own chainsaw was helping. Ever cool! So this January she was inspired to attend a 2 day chainsaw workshop with Eiichi. Everything was covered, from getting it started to sharpening the chain, and of course how to saw wood. She even got a certificate. When Naomi isn't cutting logs, working in the office or rearing kids, she is weaving. Her dream for the future is to learn to do it like a pro.

On April 1st *Mitsuru Ishizuka and Yoshie Sunahata* became full player members, and *Shiho Takano* and *Jun Akimoto* production staff. New probationary members are *Kenzo Abe, Buntaro Tanaka* and *Daisuke Taniguchi*. *Yousuke Oda* is a probationary member for one more year.

in brief... 

Player *Tetsuro Naito* will be leaving Kodo at the end of May to turn freelance. His final performance as a Kodo member will be this spring's EC.

In April staff member *Takashi Akamine* will move his base as Kodo's foreign tour manger to London.

Kodo Apprentice Centre Staff *Yasuhiko Ishihara (Gan chan)* married *Masami Hatsue* at the end of last year. Long-time taiko enthusiast and Kodo volunteer *Masami* will now be working at Kodo with *Oto Daiku*.

Please note our new e-mail address: heartbeat@kodo.or.jp

upcoming performances

Earth Celebration 2002

May 10-12 Ogi, Sado Island

Tickets are on sale now.

Phone: 0259-81-4100

EC website: <http://www.kodo.or.jp/ec>

i-mode: <http://www.kodo.or.jp/i/ec>



Illustration by Hideaki Masago

One Earth Tour Japan

May 29-31 Niigata Ryutopia 025-281-8000

Kodo performances in tandem with the World Cup Opening Games

June

9	Gifu	Tajimi-shi Bunka Kaikan	0572-23-2600
11	Aichi	Toyoake-shi Bunka Kaikan	0562-93-3310
12	Aichi	Toyokawa-shi Bunka Kaikan	0533-85-3444
14	Shizuoka	Numazu Shimin Bunka Centre	0559-52-6633
16	Shizuoka	Kikukawa Bunka Kaikan Ael	0537-35-1515
18	Tokyo	U-PORT	03-3204-9933
19	Tokyo	Chofu-shi Green Hall	0424-81-7222
21	Kanagawa	Isehara Shimin Bunka Kaikan	046-223-6421
22	Kanagawa	Kanagawa Kenmin Hall	045-242-1155
23	Tokyo	Nerima Bunka Centre	03-3204-9933
25	Chiba	Kashiwa Shimin Bunka Kaikan	047-365-9911

One Earth Tour USA

July

13	Gainesville, FL	Philips Center for the Performing Arts
16	Greenville, SC	Peace Center for the Performing Arts
18	Vienna, VA	Wolf Trap
20	Philadelphia, PA	Mann Center For the Performing Arts
21	New York, NY	To be announced later
25	Cleveland, OH	Playhouse Square Center Palace Theater
26	Columbus, OH	Columbus Assn. for the Performing Arts
30	Highland Park, IL	Ravinia Festival

August

1	Interlochen, MI	Interlochen Center for the Arts
6	Morrison, CO	Red Rocks Amphitheater
9	Irvine, CA	Verizon Amphitheater
11	Stanford, CA	Frost Amphitheater Stanford University

Mondo Head

Our Sony CD and SACD 5.1 produced by Mickey Hart will be released in America on April 23rd.

Sleepover Workshops in Sado 2002

Taiko Kokan -

A workshop designed for experienced taiko drummers.

Dates: July 24th-28th

Instructors: Tomohiro Mitome & Ryuji Sato.

Venue: Kodo Rehearsal Hall

Application Deadline: June 20th

Kodo Juku - Eiichi's Taiko

Dates: Part 1...Sep. 25th-29th, Part 2...Oct. 2nd-6th

Instructor: Eiichi Saito

Venue: Kodo Cultural Foundation Apprentice Centre

Application Deadline: July 28th

Kodo Juku - Yoko Fujimoto's "VOICE CIRCLE"

Dates: Nov. 21st-24th

Instructor: Yoko Fujimoto

Venue: Kodo Rehearsal Hall

Application Deadline: Sep. 30th

Please check the *Otodaiku website* for further details.

<http://www.otodaiku.co.jp>

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 website.

For those readers who only want the newsletter, an on-line version is available on the Internet.

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