

the KODŌ beat

鼓童

Hideyuki Saito *Takes the Helm*

After 16 years on the stage, player Hideyuki Saito has stepped down for the foreseeable future to take over directing duties from Motofumi Yamaguchi. Beginning this May, he will direct both Kodo's regular One Earth Tour and the summer Earth Celebration concerts on Sado Island.

Though he won't be making regular appearances with the group, as artistic director's Hide hasn't completely ruled out appearing at EC 2004. If, as director, he thinks the character 'Hideyuki' would add something otherwise missing from the performance, Director Saito will ask Player Hideyuki if he would be good enough to make an appearance. It is not something he expects to happen often however, because as a director he feels he must be able to stand back and look at the performance from a distance. If he is on the stage he can neither see what he is doing, nor what everyone else is up to. He also won't be able to play his best, as he would naturally be concerned with what is taking place on the rest of the stage. So he feels that trying to do both would result in his doing neither very well. Though he loves performing and that feeling of being bathed in the warm glow of an audience's ovation, he says that as a director he can equally claim his share of the applause from the wings.

As for the loss of his character from Kodo's stage (he's the short fellow who cannonballs about, usually with *chappa* or a *matoi* [a paper-crested standard atop a bamboo pole] doing cartwheels and flips) he feels that for every personality Kodo loses from their



Hideyuki with a 1/40th scale model of the double stage for this summer's Earth Celebration 2004

performance, an opening is created for some new talent to fill the space. And so it has always been with Kodo. Members change, and one generation passes their drum sticks on to the next. The present Kodo has to move on to the next Kodo, and so what some might think of as a problem, Hideyuki considers a natural part of the growth of the group.

Growing up near the famous *Tsukiji* fish market in downtown Tokyo, Hide and his family regularly went to movies, the theatre and concerts. *Kabuki*, *Shingeki*

volume sixty-eight

spring 2004

(the *New Drama* movement), and *Buyo* (*Japanese traditional dance*). If there is a distinction to be made between artistic director *Motofumi Yamaguchi* and him, it would probably be that Hide's influences were more theatrical and Motofumi's more centred on music. He is concerned with the movement of the eyes, the expression on the face, the expression of feelings, the delivery of sounds which are what he calls 'Kodo's words'. The group doesn't normally play in small venues however, so the emphasis must necessarily be less on tiny, shaded nuances, than powerful sounds and gestures written large.

Hide's first major directing assignment was of *Earth Celebration 2003*. After *Tetsuro Naito* left the group, the position fell open, and as no one else volunteered, Hide decided to give it a try. As a middle-ranking member of the group in terms of seniority, he was concerned about whether he would be completely accepted as a director, but to his delight the senior members were very supportive and gave valuable guidance. It was the more junior players who were difficult to direct. Being the sort of person who says what is on his mind, he found that the older players would respond to his remarks with their own ideas. There was a conversation. But with the younger players there was very little feedback. This remains a challenge to overcome.

His approach to directing isn't to stand out as a charismatic leader and say 'Follow Me!', but rather to work together with everyone as a team. He credits the work the staff and the performers put into his nascent attempt last summer for what generally seems to be considered a success.

One of the things that helped guide him on his new journey was that Kodo had already begun working with the great dancer and Kabuki actor *Tamasaburo Bando*. At first Hide wasn't at all sure about being directed by an outsider. There is a Kodo style. But he soon found it very easy to work with the great man. Mr. Bando understands what it is to be a performer. He would point out a problem when he sensed a player's concern. He listened and then offered advice. Even though Hide sensed that Tamasaburo knew exactly what the best solution might be, the director wouldn't say 'This is the solution' but rather give hints,

point in a certain direction. By not telling the players what to do – but encourage them to think for themselves – they became greatly motivated. Not 'Play that drum harder', but rather, 'Make it wider, wider, broader, broader!' The players would have to look within themselves for a way to express it.

Hideyuki likes to think of himself as a performers' director. He doesn't want to have too definite an image of how the performance should unfold, or to impose too concrete an image upon the artists. He wants to leave room for the individual performers' interpretation. If, for instance, the image he has in mind for a performance is *'The Sea'*, he doesn't want to say 'Give me such and such a sea', but rather; 'Give me what *you* think of when you think of a sea. That's it! Now give me a *broader* version of that!' He wants each member to search within themselves for an image from which to draw upon, to express what is uniquely their own. He feels it is essential that wherever the audience look upon the stage, whomever's face they look upon, there is something there to draw one's attention. Not simply the total effect, but each and every facet of the show is important in creating what he calls 'a thicker performance'.

He doesn't plan to make any vast changes at the onset, one reason being a matter of practicality. There isn't the time to get a whole new show together. But even if it were practical he wouldn't want to change anything too fundamental. Firstly, the confidence of both Kodo and their audience must be earned. He has been entrusted with something that has been flowing for many years. It is inconceivable that he would suddenly change all the costumes or drop *O-daiko* and *Yataibayashi*. That would have to be a group decision.

Motofumi doesn't tell him how he should direct. If Hide feels frustrated or needs advice, he goes to him and Motofumi is happy to help out. Not that once the show for the next tour is put together Motofumi won't have plenty to say.

When his first big attempt to direct the EC 2003 performances was over, Hide surprised himself by not feeling, 'Wow! I've done it!', but rather, 'Gee next time *this* is what I can do to improve things'. It felt less like the ending of an enormous task, than the beginning of a new and welcome challenge.

Kodo Close-up:

Tsugumi Yamanaka, staff

The 25th in a series of profiles of individual Kodo members

On July 8th, 1962, Kodo's only native Sado Islander was born in the tiny village of *Iwakubi* on the south shore. Tsugumi – the youngest of 3 boisterous sisters – longed for an older brother. Her father became ill and went blind when she was in the 3rd grade, making her construction-worker mother the family breadwinner.

Tsugumi went to the local primary school and after classes fondly remembers collecting shellfish with her friends on the beach and throwing rocks into the sea. With school backpacks strapped to their backs they caught *ayu* in the river that tumbled down the mountains through the middle of the village, or explored the forested hillsides. Each day she put off for as long as she could returning to her tumble-down thatched farm house where she was often met by a lecture from her father and immediately put to work setting a fire under the cauldron bath. Her granny's words still ring in her ears, 'If you don't work, you can't eat!'

Winters were freezing inside and out, with snow blowing into the house through ever-increasing gaps in the organically decomposing roof. On Sundays she would set out at 8 am for the hour long trudge up the mountain to work the family rice fields, passing her friends as they headed off for a day playing by the sea. From the mountainside on a clear day she could look across and see the Japanese mainland and think, 'When I graduate from high school I am going to get away from here!' At 5 o'clock – as a concession to her youth – she was let off from work and would beeline down the mountain, singing at the top of her voice, savouring the remaining hours of sunlight.

Tsugumi went to the old wooden middle school perched on the hillside above the town. The 50 students there seemed more like brothers and sisters than schoolmates. Mountain trekking and making snow sculpture were part of the curriculum, and it was here that she discovered that her leather school briefcase made an ideal toboggan. Once in a while the last 8 remaining native *toki* (*Nipponia Nippon* or *Japanese Crested Ibis*, which became extinct in 2003) would alight on the pines behind the school. Lessons would stop and they would

rush to the windows to gaze out at the vanishing treasure.

The school was to vanish in a few years too, and it was Tsugumi who later suggested that rather than raze the wonderful wooden buildings, that Kodo put them to use as *The Apprentice Centre*.

Tsugumi moved away from home to room with her oldest sister to attend *Sado Girls' High School* in the centre of the island. Art was her favourite subject, and so after graduation she fulfilled her dream of escape from



Sado and joined a small printing company in Tokyo that specialized in record album covers. By chance, one of the covers they worked on was for Kodo. Living in a dorm where lizards ran down the walls, she quit after 4 years of 12

hour days and for 2 years worked in the office of a gardening company which kept more reasonable hours.

After 6 years she grew tired of the big city and longed to return to Sado, where incidentally she worried about the effect of rampaging development. Having been a fan of Kodo since middle school, and interested in the idea of Kodo Village, she talked her way onto the staff to look after the books, experience she had gained in Tokyo.

In 1992 she married Keiichi, a local man with whom she now has 2 children, *Nako*, an 11 year old girl, and *Yuuta*, a boy aged 9. Their (snowproof) home is 10 minutes by car from Kodo Village.

Her duties at Kodo include doing the books for *Kitamaesen*, looking after copyright matters for *Otodaiku* and organizing Kodo workshops.

Tsugumi's day begins at 6:30 (considered late by island standards) she makes breakfast by 7, does house cleaning and laundry and is then off to Kodo by 9:00. She works till 7:00 – by which time if dad and the kids can't wait – they have fed themselves on instant noodles.

She longs for the day when she can take more time for herself, but meanwhile – filling the room with her infectious laugh – she says, 'I seem to be joined by fate to a life of toil.'

An old friend who sings opera in Germany, tells her; 'I'm envious!' To which Tsugumi replies; 'I'm the one whose envious, doing whatever you want!' And so it goes.

The Kodo family has expanded to include 3 new faces who – having completed their 2 year apprenticeship – now become probationary members. They are players *Masayoshi Kato* and *Hideki Hayashi*, and *Miwa Kinai* joins the production staff.

in brief.....



After 12 years in Kodo, 1,333 performances in 20 countries, player *Akira Nanzo* is leaving the group (See *Kodo Beat* vol. 54, autumn 2000). Tall and powerful with a gentle spirit, Akira has specialized in playing the back beat on the O-daiko. Largely invisible to the audience, this unsung role is one of the keys to a successful O-daiko performance. Akira long ago made it his aim to become second-to-none in this role. 'Whatever, happens in the performance, and whenever, I want to be there, to be depended upon. When I play my consciousness melts into the drum's vibrations'. He looks forward to a life working with animals and surrounded by nature. We wish him and his family all the best, wherever their journey leads them. Have fun Akira and thanks.

upcoming performances

One Earth Tour Japan

May

7	Gunma	Maebashi Shimin Bunka Kaikan	0277-53-3133
9	Saitama	Kumagaya Bunka Sozo-kan	Sold Out
10	Tochigi	Tochigi-ken Sogo Bunka Centre	028-622-4101
12	Ibaraki	Odaira Kaikan	0294-22-5330
14	Ibaraki	Kamisu-machi Bunka Centre	0299-90-5511
15	Chiba	Togane Bunka Kaikan	0475-55-6211
16	Chiba	Misaki Fureai Kaikan	0470-87-8785
18-20	Tochigi	Sano-shi Bunka Kaikan	0283-24-5733
22	Chiba	Ichikawa-shi Bunka Kaikan	047-379-5111
23	Saitama	Omiya Sonic City	048-647-4100
25	Saitama	Sayama-shi Shimin Kaikan	042-956-6222
30	Shizuoka	Fujieda Shimin Kaikan	054-643-3931

June

1	Gifu	Mizunami-shi Sogo Bunka Centre	0572-68-5281
4	Kanagawa	Isehara Shimin Bunka Kaikan	046-223-6421
5	Kanagawa	Yokosuka Geijutsu Gekijo	046-823-9999
7	Kanagawa	Kanagawa Kenmin Hall	045-242-1155
8	Tokyo	Humming Hall	042-562-0923
10	Tokyo	Fuchu no Mori Geijutsu Gekijo	03-3201-8116
11	Tokyo	Komae Ecorma Hall	03-3430-4106
12	Tokyo	Tokyo Bunka Kaikan	03-3204-9933

Aikawa Kozan Matsuri

July 27 Aikawa, Sado Island 0259-86-3630

Earth Celebration 2004

August 20-22, Sado Island

Theme 'TATAKU'- to Beat a Rhythm

Shiroyama Concerts

Kodo, Fanfare Ciocarlia (Romania)

EC Theatre

"Yukiai"

Mini-Workshops & Seminars

Japanese Taiko, Dancing to the Beat of Kodo, Voice Circle, Gypsy Folk Dance, Ranjosan's Japanese Flute Making Workshop, Traditional-Miyake Taiko, Ogi Okesa Folk Dance, Kasuga Ondeko, Ushibuka Haiya Folk Dance, Hula Kahiko: Basic class, Hula Kahiko: Intermediate class, Hula 'Auana: Beginners' class, Hula 'Auana: Intermediate class, Taiko 'Yobanashi' (Taiko Free Talk)



Multi-Day Workshop

Let's Play Samba! (August 17-19)

EC Pre-Event

Taiko Taiken Juku (Free workshop series offered by Kodo throughout Sado. May through June)

Exhibitions

"The Visual World of Ryo Watanabe"

Earth Furniture

EC ticket sales begin June 1.

Details will be available on our website in mid-May.

Attention members of Friends of Kodo.

An EC ticket information leaflet will be sent to you in May.

KODO's New CD & DVD: now available in Japan.

'Sado e - The Kodo One Earth Special'

The long-awaited CD and DVD are finally here! The project that became a turning point for Kodo is now a dynamic sound recording. The One Earth Tour Special DVD marks Kodo's first video project since "Rock'n'Kodo" was recorded six years ago. So whether it's the CD or DVD, both recordings promise to bring to life the magic of this monumental project.

CD...¥ 2,940, DVD...¥5,985

Info on: <http://www.sonyclassical.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 web site.

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

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