

the KODŌ beat

鼓童

On the Road with Ryutaro, Kaoru & Friends in Ireland, France & Spain

Kodo players Ryutaro Kaneko and Kaoru Watanabe joined actress Mayu Tsuruta and a crew of 12 to make a travel documentary to be shown in conjunction with the world's fair beginning this March in Aichi Japan. They spent a week each in Ireland, France and Spain, driving their environmentally correct Toyota Prius, sampling local cultures and jamming with traditional musicians. Ryutaro brought a number of drums, including a massive hirado (the 2 vans carrying it and the crew seem unlikely to appear in the film) and Kaoru took two flutes, a noh kan and shinobue. Here are a few of Kaoru's impressions.

The filming began on The Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland, near Bushmills, purportedly the birthplace of whiskey. The shoot – which was supposed to take a couple of hours – took the whole day, with Ryuta and me perched perilously on the edge of the cliffs trying to keep from being swept off by the wind and driving rain. We ended up playing in the rain and – in what was to be a common refrain in Ireland –



*Makin' music at the Grianán of Aileach, County Donegal
photo: Takuro Susaki*



Mayu 'feeling flamenco' in Jerez. photo: Kaoru Watanabe
the sun came out as soon as we got back to the hotel.

Our first gig was at a pub in Sligo on the west coast where we jammed with a violin, Irish drum, accordion, ukulele and guitar. The Irish seem very open about using new instruments for traditional music, but our Japanese taiko and flute was probably a little weirder than usual. The place was packed and we played for a good couple of hours. The leader wouldn't say, 'What about this piece?' or name the key or tempo, he would just start playing and everyone would join in. Everyone knew it. And so the first piece we played together, it just happened, very natural.

After a 20 hour ferry ride from Ireland to Cherbourg, France, we went to Mont St. Michel.

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Mont St. Michel,

photo by Kaoru Watanabe

Ryutaro got a bad vibe there. The top spire is a figure of St. Michel slaying the dragon, and Ryutaro (which means 'Dragon Man') was really bummed. I had a picture taken of me in the same position as a photo I had taken together with my parents 20 years before. Sort of a present for my mom. Powerful place.

We also went to Vannes in Brittany to a school where they teach Celtic music. There were about 20 people, 10 *binou* (bagpipe) players and 10 *bombarde* (small oboe-like instrument) players, all in costume and some percussion and dancers. It was Celtic but with a hint of the Middle East. We didn't have PA so we were in danger of being drowned out. I figured out where the quiet spots were and when they came, BOOM, I would just take off.

We went to Chateaux de Puy, an organic winery in Bordeaux. The 6 year old grandson of the elderly couple who own and run it will be the 15th generation wine maker. They brought out a 1955 vintage. Now I love wine, but I'm no expert, so we told them that it almost feels like a waste. The old man said to me 'Do you enjoy it, are you enjoying yourself now?' 'Oh yes, it's delicious!' He said, 'I am not in the business of making wine, I am in the business of creating happiness.' That may have been the only 'Zen moment' of the trip that was actually captured on camera. It was a really beautiful moment too because isn't that what we do as musicians?

We made our way down to Jerez de la Frontera in the south of Spain where we were to meet and play at the Arcos Festival with one of the world's top flamenco dancers, *Antonio de Pipa*. There were about 100 huge tents with bands and discos and bars in each one, so it was pretty noisy. The tiny stage was covered in dust and when Senor de Pipa arrived at about 10, tired after a show in nearby Sevilla. He was less than thrilled. We were due on at 11:45 but didn't make it till 2 in the morning. It was great! His 5 musicians

playing, the dust flying, the people in the audience dancing. He really got the crowd going. I thought How do we follow that? How are they going to react to our music? Then I thought 'What the hell' and I got out my *noh kan* (horizontal

bamboo flute used in *Noh* theatre) and

we just hit it, pure classical Japanese, no pentatonic scales, and we pushed it for a bit, like flamenco, built it up to this big pose, then brought it back down, then up again. The 2,000 or so people in the audience responded, so we did it 2 or 3 times. Then we played together with the flamenco band and that went pretty well too. Great fun.

We went to Cadiz for the final filming. The 3 of us were sitting on a wall reminiscing about what fun it was and it got pretty emotional. We really had become true friends over the 3 weeks. When the director said 'Cut, its a wrap!' there was just silence, rather than the usual cheers and applause. I think that said a lot about the kind of trip it was.

Recently I have been trying to become more natural on stage. I just want to be relaxed. It was great working with Ryutaro and Mayu who are both consummate professionals. They are both very relaxed, very basic. On this trip Ryuta and I would play and then when it was over we didn't have to talk about it, or discuss what went wrong, or how we should do something differently, it was great, easy, fun...ideal.

Did I gain from this experience? Well, funnily, right after our run-through the other day Tomohiro said to me 'You've relaxed a lot'. Whaddya know.



Kaoru Watanabe, Mayu Tsuruta & Ryutaro Kaneko on the ferry between Ireland and France. photo by Takuro Susaki

Kodo Close-up:

Masami Miyazaki, player

The 28th in a series of profiles of individual Kodo members

Masami Miyazaki was born in the small city of Minamata on the southern island of Kyushu. Whenever she mentions her birthplace people inevitably (and tiresomely) bring up Minamata Disease. She tells them the ocean is probably cleaner now than most other places, as they are the focus of so much attention. The mercury poisoning scandal raised the citizens' consciousness level about the environment to a very high level, from clean air and water to the recycling of trash.

Masami has two older brothers. Her industrious father ran a *manju* (bean jam buns) business and a fruit and vegetable market. The town was surrounded by rice fields, the mountains and the sea. She remembers enjoying herself with her many cousins living nearby, roller skating and playing capture the flag (well, stone actually) in the mountains. She was a keen swimmer from grade 3 till the end of middle school, and a reasonably good student, a 'good girl' who enjoyed school and whose favourite subject was Japanese.

One of her most vivid early memories was at a swimming meet. Her coach – though well-liked because he genuinely cared about them – was extremely strict, even slapping them on the faces and causing nose bleeds on occasion (ah, the good ole days). At swimming meets schools competed and always lost to local swimming clubs. On their last meet however, Masami's school came in 3rd in the relay! She remembers her and everyone's astonishment when 'Demon' Ikeda broke down into tears.

Masami's early musical experience was a bit of trumpet and electone keyboard. In middle school she saw Kodo when they came to Minamata and remembers being impressed by *Monochrome*. In middle school she also became the president of the student council, and to this day, friends from that period call her 'Pres'. She left home to attend a girls' high school an hour and a half away by train. Upon graduating she went to Nara University in the ancient capital near Kyoto, studying social psychology. She specialized in how convenience stores affect society.

At university her life revolved around the puppet club. *The Great Buddha Puppet Troupe* prided themselves in the serious effort they put into their performances and in

not patronizing their young audiences.

Masami liked Nara, surrounded by the many magnificent temples and often took advantage of the meditative serenity of their compounds.

At university she realized she wasn't the academic type, and also that she wasn't suited to office work.

Searching for an alternative, she went to an *Ondekoza* training session and helped out at one of their concerts where she met *Tagayasu Den*. She was told she could join if she wanted, but they were really on the lookout for people with musical or taiko experience, of which she had precious little. Then she went to her second Kodo concert in Osaka where she read in a pamphlet that they were looking for apprentices, regardless of experience. She was invited to



the New Year's interviews and off she went, arriving in Ryotsu aboard her first large ship and to heavy winter snow, also a first. Over 30 hopefuls shivered away in the freezing practice hall of the old wooden school that is the *Apprentice Centre*. To a 'southern girl' it was all wonderfully fresh and exciting. They sang, danced and played taiko, her *first* experience holding a drumstick. 'This is an exam!?' she thought. She decided this was what she wanted to do, in spite of her parents' opposition, who preferred she marry some rich guy. 11 apprentices were accepted, of whom *Yuuichiro* and *Kaoru* (see this issue's front page) remain today. She was one of St. Louisian *Kaoru's* early Japanese teachers.

Masami is now in her 7th year, her 4th year as a full member. Rather than the large audiences of Kodo's full performances, she prefers smaller groups with whom she can make a personal connection, like those she encountered with *Eichi Saito* on a workshop tour of North America. She is looking forward to joining *Yoshikazu Fujimoto* on another one soon. (See back page for details).

In the future she would like to join two of her loves, taiko and puppets. When that happens you, dear reader, will be among the first to know.

Doing the matsuri in Aikawa, Sado.

Our thoughts go out to all those affected by the terrible Asian Tsunami on Boxing Day. Parts of our own Niigata Prefecture were also devastated by a powerful earthquake in the fall. Sado sits on a different



tectonic plate from the mainland, so we are relieved to report that, though we got a good shaking, there were no casualties here.

The road documentary 'World Great Exchange Caravan' reported on in the cover article of this issue will be aired on TV Asahi all across Japan on Feb. 20th from 2pm-3:25pm.

The CD and DVD set entitled 'Kodo One Earth Tour Special' of our special series of concerts directed by Kabuki great Tamasaburo Bando, recorded in December 2003, went on sale in North America this January.

in brief... 

upcoming performances

One Earth Tour North America

February

- 3 San Rafael, CA Marin Veteran Memorial Auditorium
 4-6 Berkeley, CA Zellerbach Hall
 8 Bellingham, WA Mount Baker Theatre
 11-13 Seattle, WA Meany Hall, University of Washington
 14,15 Vancouver, BC Queen Elizabeth Theatre
 18 Winnipeg, MA Burton Cummings Theatre
 21-23 Ann Arbor, MI Power Center
 24 Kalamazoo, MI Miller Auditorium
 28 Chicago, IL Symphony Hall Chicago

March

- 1 Urbana, IL Tryon Festival Theater
 3 Wausau, WI Grand Theater Wausau
 4 Green Bay, WI Weidner Center for the Performing Arts, University of Wisconsin
 5 Madison, WI Overture Hall
 8 Danville, KY Norton Center Newlin Hall
 9 Indianapolis, IN Clowes Memorial Hall, Butler Univ.
 11 Cincinnati, OH Aronoff Center-Proctor & Gamble Hall
 12 Akron, OH E. J Thomas Hall
 15 Bethlehem, PA Zoellner Arts Center
 16 New Brunswick, NJ State Theatre
 18 Washington, DC Washington Performing Arts Society Constitution Hall
 19 Newark, NJ Prudential Hall
 20 Philadelphia, PA The Kimmel Center
 23 Storrs, CT Jorgenson Auditorium
 24 Schenectady, NY Proctor's Theatre
 26 Purchase, NY The Performing Arts Center - Concert Hall

One Earth Tour Japan

May

- 14 Tochigi Ashikaga Shimin Kaikan 0277-53-3133
 15 Takasaki-shi, Gunma
 Gunma Ongaku Centre 0277-53-3133
 17-19 Saitama Fukaya Shimin Bunka Kaikan 048-574-7075
 21 Saitama Saitama-shi Bunka Centre 048-866-4600
 22 Saitama Iruma-shi Shimin Kaikan 04-2964-2411
 24 Tokyo Hachioui Shimin Kaikan 042-334-8471
 25 Tokyo Hoya Komorebi Hall 0424-21-1919
 27 Sagami-hara-shi, Kanagawa
 Green Hall Sagamiono 042-742-9999
 28 Tokyo Ota Kumin Hall Apurico 03-5744-1600
 29 Kanagawa Kawasaki-shi Kyoiku Bunka Kaikan
 03-3201-8116

- 31 Chiba Ichihara-shi Shimin Kaikan 0436-20-9900
June

- 1 Chiba Funabashi Shimin Bunka Hall 047-434-5555
 2 Chiba Inzai-shi Bunka Hall 0476-42-8811
 4 Saitama Misato-shi Bunka Kaikan 048-958-9900
 5 Tokyo Tiara Koto 03-5468-3282
 6 Saitama Tokorozawa Shimin Bunka Centre
 Marquee Hall 04-2998-7777
 9 Ibaraki Hitachinaka-shi Bunka Kaikan 029-275-1122
 11 Fukushima Haramachi Shimin Bunka Kaikan 0244-25-2763
 13 Fukushima Kitakata Plaza 022-771-1432
 15 Yamagata Yamagata-ken Kenmin Kaikan 022-771-1432
 17 Akita Akita Kenmin Kaikan 022-771-1432
 19 Iwate Kitakami-shi Bunka Koryu
 Centre Sakura Hall 022-771-1432
 24 Fukushima Fukushima-ken Bunka Centre 024-558-0066
 25 Sendai-shi Miyagi Kenmin Kaikan 022-215-2545
 28 Niigata Shibata Shimin Bunka Kaikan 025-244-7485

KASA Workshop Tour, USA and Canada

The Kodo Arts Sphere America 2005 Workshop Tour with Kodo's *Yoshikazu Fujimoto* and *Masami Miyazaki* in a whirlwind tour across Canada and the USA. runs Feb.10 - March 16, visiting 13 cities for a total of 20+ workshops. Still some openings. Check KASA web site for details.
www.kodoarts.com

Attention: Friends of Kodo: Included with this mailing you will find info about advance ticket reservations for June One Earth Tour concerts as well as info about mail-ordering T-shirts available only to members.

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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