

the KODŌ beat

鼓童

KASA Workshop Tour 2009

Yoshikazu and Yoko Fujimoto spent over a month on the road in North America from April 28th to the end of May giving workshops to groups in Seabrook NJ, New York City, Minneapolis, Vancouver and Victoria Canada, Denver, San Diego, Irvine and LA. Donna Ebata, the programme director of KASA, (<http://www.kodo.or.jp/kasa/>) organized the tour.

KASA was formed as a tool with which Kodo could reach out to North American taiko enthusiasts. Partly in thanks for their support over the years, we also want KASA to act as a pipeline for joint activities among taiko groups and together with us. We hope you use KASA to reach out to us too.

On this KASA tour we (Yoshikazu and Yoko) offered a selection of workshops ranging from taiko, including, Wachidaiko and Odaiko, singing, including Voice Circle, Kasane Uta, Japanese Lullabies and Yamada



Yoshikazu performing Oni Kenbai at a reception to the delight of Vancouver taiko enthusiasts and other wildlife.

photo by Tamio Wakayama



Yoko's voice workshop.

photo by Mayu Takasaki

Hanya Bushi as well as dance.

The workshops ranged in size from 15 to 40 participants, some groups with just young people, some with a mix of all ages and ethnicities, from community-based groups to professional taiko players.

Wherever we went participants were keen to learn. It was wonderful seeing people play for the sheer joy of drumming, regardless of technique, which can always come later. We did see groups however with both technique and a passion that brought tears to our eyes. As Japanese we admire in North Americans their rich ability for self-expression, not only in body movement and conversation but in taiko too. Occasionally there are things which can seem odd to us for instance North American-style *kakegoe* (shouts of encouragement) – which are fundamental to the Japanese taiko sound – sometimes seem strange to our ears.

Another feature of taiko activity in North America is that everything is *about the taiko*. There is very little song or dance, so we thought it useful if we could



Yoshikazu in Denver.

photo by Yoko

introduce a bit more of that. Obviously taiko is the star of the show in Kodo, but in Japanese historical terms the drum was used as a *background* to song and dance. Ironically it was our group that was one of the main forces to bring taiko to the forefront, so we must accept some responsibility for changing that dynamic. To that end we do a lot of dancing and singing in our performances, whereas North American groups do rather little. Yoshikazu may be a 'Taiko Baka (Taiko-playin' Fool) but...not *only* taiko!' So part of our aim with our workshop tours is to present a more complete picture of the Japanese performing arts.

Taiko playing in North America mostly began as a way for young Japanese Americans and Canadians to get closer to their cultural roots. The taiko has evolved



Taiko in San Diego

photo by Nao Umemura

and broadened to where it is now thought of as a musical instrument in its own right. Taikoists – who now include people of all races – are exploring ways to create something *new* with taiko. North American Taiko is creating its own history. It is our hope that in doing so however, they hold on to this thought.

Japanese taiko is not

simply percussion. There is a special essence to taiko. One aspect of that essence is 'ma' (empty space). What and when you *don't* play is as important as what and when you do. You can hear it in Yoshikazu's singing and drumming. The distinctively Japanese use of *ma* is found in the breathing, and in the communication among players.

It is wonderful that some people are forming professional groups but we also hope the roots of taiko in North America aren't forgotten and its role in bringing together the community.

The Japanese taiko is traditionally used in sacred ceremonies and events. It should be approached with a certain attitude of reverence. Taiko isn't merely an instrument to use to express yourself. You should strive to be a player who is capable of not just *using* the drum, but of *being used* by the drum too. This will be inevitable if you really become *one* with the taiko.

We were also struck on this tour by the power of the taiko and song together. With just one phrase of a song there were tears, and after 3 minutes of taiko joining in there were sobs. Though that wasn't our intention, it happened naturally, as if together they hold some natural, almost therapeutic strength.

In a letter from *Tamiko Ooka* in Seabrook, she wrote to Donna Ebata about her reaction to the workshops:

'I really appreciate your help in making this happen...the show was a complete success. I am hearing many responses such as the flow - drumming/dance/singing was great!...I have always admired the Fujimotos for their amazing talent...but I didn't know them personally...They are such wonderful people with GREAT hearts. They understand who we are individually and as a group and as a community. They ...healed us and strengthened us. I don't know how to explain it but they have some kind of magic.'

Thanks for those kind words and to all who helped make this tour a success, particularly Donna Ebata and KASA. We all look forward to hearing from you with comments and ideas for the future. Get in touch anytime.



Donna Ebata, Yoshikazu & Yoko. photo by Yoshikazu

Kodo Close-up:

Yoshie Sunahata, player

The 36th in a series of profiles of individual Kodo members

Yoshie Sunahata was born 1980 in Kunitachi on the Western edge of Tokyo. Her father was a driving instructor and her mum did a variety of part-time jobs from kindergarten teacher, restaurant kitchen help, to Japanese sewing. Yoshie's brother is five years older and her sister eight.

Yoshie followed her sister to piano practice at age 3 and then began herself. She kept this up until middle school when something else took over her life. She joined the school brass band as a percussionist. Practice on snare, bass drum, timpani, latin instruments, bongos and more was every day and intensive. After 2 years she persuaded her parents to send her to a private high school that took its 100 member band very seriously. She would leave the house at 5 am, go to school in an near empty train and return home late at night for all 3 years of high school. This dedication did not extend to her studies however, keeping her marks well below average. In the end she just managed to scrape by.

After graduating she thought about going to a music college and make percussion her career. Her timpani tutor told her she had the ability to make it as a pro. She was fairly confident that even with her poor marks she could get into a college based on her musical ability alone. Though she had had little acquaintance with *wadaiko* she knew about the original *Ondekoza* and Kodo alumnist *Eitetsu Hayashi*. Hearing that a group to which he once belonged was going to perform in nearby *Tachikawa*, she went to her first Kodo show. She was struck with the level of energy and unity of breathing at a level she had never seen in a brass band, and all with no conductor to keep them as one! At the train station she read in the programme about the *Apprentice Centre*, was immediately intrigued and sent off an application. The reply came and she took it to the bathroom to read in private. She burst into tears...she was in!

During her 2 years as an apprentice she studied drums, dancing, singing, *fue*, farming, Tea Ceremony and *Kyogen*, enjoying taiko and singing the most. She had rarely sung before coming to Sado but now is one of the group's featured singers. She enjoyed learning to cook too. but was slightly less keen on farming and

running. During her precious time off she loved to walk in the hills surrounding the Centre, finding little paths and wandering to wherever they might lead.

The biggest difference between the western percussion she grew up with and taiko was how

incredibly demanding the taiko are physically, and what huge demands that placed on her.

After playing for so long under the sternly critical eye of other Kodo members, at her first performance as a Kodo member she was struck by the look on the faces of the audience. It was wonderful to see their efforts produce such a look of joy.

On her first foreign tour she performed at the Nobel Prize awards and met *Sir Paul McCartney* and *Meryl Streep*. She had come along way from Kunitachi. She didn't want it to end.

One day in 2002 Artistic Director *Motofumi Yamaguchi* told her she was a full Kodo member. The joy of getting her own paycheck! Now she could begin to pay off her debts to her parents.

After becoming involved with fellow player *Kenzo Abe* 4 years ago, they married in 2007. Though he is older than she, he is one year her junior in the group. She doesn't even remember talking to him much when they were both apprentices. The main difference in being married is that she now has a life, a family apart from the group. They are hoping to make that family bigger than just the two of them.

As to the future she feels she must both raise her level of performance and pass along what she already knows to her juniors. Though she doesn't have the power of the men on the big *miyadaiko* she feels in no way second best in playing *shime daiko*, *okedo* slung from the shoulder and *Chonlima*.

Oh yes, and none of the men can sing quite like she can too.



This year, in recognition of 'notable contribution to the promotion of Japanese traditional culture and to the revitalization of the local community,' the *Earth Celebration Committee* was awarded the *Tiffany Foundation Award for the Preservation of Japanese Traditional Arts and Culture in Contemporary Society*. On June 26 in Tokyo, Kodo's *Yoshikazu Fujimoto* and *Motofumi Yamaguchi* performed on stage at the gala awards.

in brief...



Player *Tsubasa Hori* and her Belgian husband *Kurt Van de Cruys* are having a baby, so Tsubasa will be taking a break from the stage.

Kodo editor *Johnny Wales* is holding an exhibition of paintings and objects at *Chobokuri* in Hamochi, Sado till the end of August. Included are puppets, masks, furniture, paintings and 26 cover illustrations for Kodo's Japanese language newsletter.

upcoming performances

Hakusanmaru Matsuri

July 25 Shukunegi, Sado Island 0259-86-3630

Aikawa Kozan Matsuri

July 26 Aikawa, Sado Island 0259-86-3630

Earth Celebration 2009 Aug. 16-18, Sado Island Shiroyama Concerts

Aug. 16 Part one: Kodo, Part 2: Bløf

17 Kodo

18 'Shukusai' Kodo and Bløf

Tickets are on sale now.

Earth Celebration Committee 0259-81-4100

http://www.kodo.or.jp/ec/home/index_en.html

EC Related Event - Sado Takigi Noh Theatre

Appearing: *Reijiro Tsumura (Noh)*, *Tadashi Ogasawara (Kyogen)*, *Ryutaro Kaneko (Taiko)*, *Kaiji Moriyama (Dance)*, and others

Aug. 22 Shiizaki Suwajinja Noh Stage, Harakuro, Sado

23 Kasugajinja Noh Stage, Aikawa Orito, Sado

Sado Tourism Association 0259-27-5000

Kodo 'Ubusuna'

Appearing: *Yoshikazu Fujimoto*, *Chieko Kojima*, *Yoko Fujimoto*, *Motofumi Yamaguchi*, *Eiichi Saito*, *Takeshi Arai*, *Kazunari Abe*, *Masaru Tsuji*, *Kenzo Abe*, *Tsuyoshi Maeda*, *Yosuke Kusa*

Sep. 9 Osaka National Bunraku Theatre
(Kokuritsu Bunraku Gekijo) 06-6362-8122

11 Fukui Tsuruga Shimin Bunka Center 0770-20-1311

13 Kyoto Kyoto-fu Chutan Bunka Kaikan 0773-42-7705

'DADAN' - produced by Tamasaburo Bando

Appearing: *Tomohiro Mitome*, *Yuichiro Funabashi*, *Mitsuru Ishizuka*, *Yosuke Oda*, *Masayuki Sakamoto*, *Kenta Nakagome*, *Tokio Takahashi*

Sep. 19-23 Setagaya Public Theatre, Tokyo 03-3583-6766

Tickets are going very fast.

One Earth Tour Japan

October

4 Miyagi Ishinomaki Shimin Kaikan 0225-94-2811

7 Ibaraki Hitachi Shimin Kaikan 0294-22-6481

9 Tokyo Nishiara Bunka Hall, Adachi-ku
03-3850-7931

11 Saitama Hanno-shi Shimin Kaikan 042-972-3000
15 Saga Saga Shimin Kaikan (Mizugae) 0952-26-2361
17 Kumamoto Kumamoto Kenritsu Gekijo Engeki Hall
096-363-6655

24 Kagoshima Kagoshima Shimin Bunka Hall 099-226-3465

25 Miyazaki Medikit Arts Center 0985-27-6619

26 Kagoshima Soo-shi Takarabe Kirameki Centre
0986-72-0946

29 Fukuoka Acros Fukuoka 092-715-0374

31 Yamaguchi Kikugawa Fureai Kaikan Abnir 090-4692-5217

November

6 Kanagawa Yokosuka Geijutsu Gekijo 046-823-9999

7 Tokyo Komae Ecorma Hall 03-3430-4106

December Concert Series

December

2 Niigata Amusement Sado 0259-86-2330

5,6 Niigata Niigata Kenmin Kaikan 025-281-8000

8 Okayama Okayama Shimin Kaikan 086-224-6066

10 Hiroshima Hiroshima Kosei Nenkin Kaikan
082-249-1218

12,13 Osaka Osaka Kosei Nenkin Kaikan 06-6362-8122

14 Aichi Aichi-ken Geijutsu Gekijo 052-290-1888

17-20 Tokyo Bunkyo Civic Hall 0259-86-2330

22 Yokohama Kanagawa Kenmin Hall 045-663-9999

Attention members of Friends of Kodo

We sent out notification of advanced ticket reservations for the December Concert Series last week.

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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