

the KODŌ beat

鼓童

Unchanging Kodo

Reflections on Kodo's 30th Birthday

by Takao Aoki, Kodo Managing Director.

2011 is the year we celebrate the 30th anniversary of Kodo's founding and the 40th year since the establishment of Kodo's antecedent group, *Sado no Kuni Ondekoza*. I have been giving much thought to the things we need to value most and what it is we must do to assure that we may thrive for another fifty or one hundred years.

I am often told that 'Kodo's performance never changes.' I think one can bring two interpretations to this remark. One is that it is intended favourably, as in 'It's wonderful that Kodo never changes!' but it can equally be interpreted as, 'Same old routine eh?' Whichever meaning one takes, I think it's important that people continue to remark that 'Kodo never changes' and in order to accomplish this it is vital that we continually strive for improvement.

It goes without saying that we must deliver ever more physically powerful, passionate performances filled with variety. They must be charged with that expressive power and unchanging primal Kodo emotion we have become known for. Can we somehow dig deeper yet and achieve an even more finely honed kind of expression? I think that is the road to Kodo's continued success. If we make only changes to the surface of our performance the audience will see through it and as a group we will not survive.

Since the founding of *Sado no Kuni Ondekoza*



Kenta Nakagome confronts the odaiko.

photo by Junko Susaki

on Sado Island in 1971 many taiko groups have been established around the world. If we continue to present the very same thing on the stage over and over people will say 'Their performance has dropped in quality.' If however, we maintain the same unchanging *kata* (form or style) as our base, continue to express ourselves one step ahead of our audience's imaginations, then that is the secret to maintaining the 'unchanging Kodo' in its best sense. This however, is more easily said than done.

In the course of Kodo's history many members

have come and gone from the group. What is vital for us today is that we learn and maintain the *kata* cultivated over the years, right back to 40 years ago in *Ondekoza*. If our performance is based upon a profound understanding of that fundamental 'way' of ours, we can venture off into methods of free expression. This is what is meant when – in spite of an evolving repertoire – Kodo continues to remain fundamentally unchanged. And to carry on achieving this will require the spilling of much blood, sweat and tears.

The concept of *kata* is very difficult to express in words. *Kata* is really only the skeleton, to which the addition of flesh and muscle is left up to each individual. If the time and place in which that individual lives isn't creatively expressed however, the style alone becomes meaningless.

In modern Japan there is the danger that when people attempt to learn *kata* what they are really doing is simply learning the flesh that has been laid over the skeleton of the *kata*, and in so doing will never surpass what has gone before or create something original. Tradition is not that which has passed, but rather each and every *present* moment.

Over the next fifty or one hundred years Kodo



Performing 'Stride'

photo by Taro Nishita

must heighten its consciousness, seeking new means of expression. We must continue to explore ever more deeply the primal emotions of an *unchanging Kodo*. That growth has only just begun. In order for our audience to continue to experience this unchanging Kodo, we will never flag in our search for an expressive power that is one step ahead of our audience's imaginations. I believe that this is the way Kodo should proceed as a member of this age.

We want to thank you for your continued support and wish you a wonderful 2011 from Sado Island.



Kodo performing 'Sora'

photo by Buntaro Tanaka

Notes from the Artistic Director, *Mitsuru Ishizuka*



As we approached the 30th year of Kodo I found myself asking 'What is Kodo?' I peeled away the many layers of the elements that are our group and decided there are three things without which, there would be no Kodo. The first is 'people.' These are the people I am surrounded by – both my seniors and juniors – who work very hard playing the drum. The second is 'taiko.' The third is our island home of Sado. Even if we have nothing else, if we have these things, we have Kodo, and that is a powerful thing indeed. It feels like the spirit of an unmeasurable energy. On this 30th Anniversary tour we will concentrate on Kodo's original power. We want the audience to enjoy both the rhythm and intensity of the taiko as well as the joy and beauty of our melodic instruments. We hope to bring moments when the throbbing of Kodo's spirit reverberates the taiko to their core.

'Miyake' photo by Taro Nishita

Mr Kodo turns 60!

Yoshikazu Fujimoto, Kodo's principal odaiko player, and arguably one of the most famous taiko players in the world, celebrated his 60th birthday on Dec. 30th. On Dec. 18th a big birthday bash and concert was held at Tokyo's Bunkyo Civic Hall.

'I want to thank you all from the bottom of my heart for your continued support over the years. I will work even harder to earn your support from here on. My real life as a taikoist is just beginning!'

Yoshikazu Fujimoto



MCs Masami Miyazaki and Kenzo Abe introduce Yoshikazu



Yoshikazu hammers out 'Yatai-bayashi.'

photos by Taro Nishita

On January 22nd Kodo's new CD celebrating our 30th anniversary 'Akatsuki' was released. Included with the CD as a limited edition new release is a DVD of the recording sessions and performances.

in brief...



The CD is available at tour venues and our online shop. <http://kodo.shop.multilingualcart.com/>

30th Anniversary Special. From January 2011 through March 2012 we will tour North America, every prefecture in Japan and Europe seeking both new encounters and meetings with old friends.

Due to delays in freight transport carrying our drums, our performance for January 26th in Spokane, WA, was cancelled. Our sincerest apologies to the presenter and audience in Spokane.

Notice to Kodo Beat Readers

It's a sign of the times. The next issue of Kodo Beat, *Spring, Volume 96* will be the final issue of this quarterly publication. Kodo Beat has been the principal English language source of information on Kodo since its founding in January 1987. KB is being replaced by the *Kodo eNews* which appears monthly online. Subscribe for free so you can be notified by e-mail when each new issue is ready.

upcoming performances

Kodo 30th Anniversary One Earth Tour 2011 North America

February

- 11 Balboa Theatre, La Jolla, CA
- 13 University of Arizona - Centennial Hall, Tucson, AZ
- 16 Paramount Theatre, Austin, TX
- 17 Margot and Bill Winspear Opera House, Dallas, TX
- 19 The Joint at Hard Rock Casino Tulsa, Tulsa, OK
- 21 Symphony Center, Chicago, IL
- 23 University Musical Society, Hill Auditorium, Ann Arbor, MI
- 25 Indiana University Auditorium, Bloomington, IN
- 27 Clowes Memorial Hall of Butler University, Indianapolis, IN

March

- 1,2 Byham Theater, Pittsburgh, PA
- 4,5 Place des Arts, Montreal, QC
- 7 National Arts Centre - Southam Hall, Ottawa, ON
- 9 Grand Theatre, Kingston, ON
- 11 Sony Centre for the Performing Arts, Toronto, ON
- 13 Symphony Hall, Boston, MA
- 17 Landmark Theater, Richmond, VA
- 19 The Community Theatre at Mayo Center for the Performing Arts, Morristown, NJ
- 20 Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY
- 22 The Stanley Theater, Utica, NY

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seasoning your life - One Earth Tour 2011 North America

Kodo 30th Anniversary One Earth Tour 2011 Japan

May

- 7 Kyoto Kyoto Kaikan Daiichi Hall 075-211-0261
- 8 Nara Nara Centennial Hall 0742-34-0111
- 12 Tokyo Tachikawa Shimin Kaikan (Amu Tachikawa)
03-5774-3030
- 17 Saitama Tokorozawa Civic Cultural Centre MUSE
04-2998-6500
- 18 Tochigi Tochigi-ken Sogo Bunka Center, Utsunomiya
0277-53-3133
- 20 Gumma Maebashi Shimin Bunka Kaikan 0277-53-3133

- 21 Yamanashi Yamanashi Kenritsu Kenmin Bunka Hall,
Kofu 055-235-3975
- 22 Nagano Matsumoto Shimin Geijutsukan 026-223-8875
- 25 Chiba Chiba Shimin Kaikan 043-224-1710
- 26 Kanagawa Green Hall Sagami-Ono, Sagamihara
042-742-9999
- 27 Kanagawa Yokosuka Arts Theatre 046-823-9999
- 29 Ibaraki Hitachinaka-shi Bunka Kaikan 029-275-1122

June

- 1 Yamagata Yamagata Kenmin Kaikan 0259-86-2330
- 3 Akita Akita Kenmin Kaikan 018-888-1857
- 5 Aomori Towada Shimin Bunka Centre
- 8 Hokkaido Hokuto-shi Sogo Bunka Centre
- 11 Hokkaido Nemuro-shi Sogo Bunka Kaikan
- 12 Hokkaido Kushiro Shimin Bunka Kaikan
- 15 Hokkaido Obira-cho Bunka Koryu Center
- 17 Hokkaido Sapporo Shimin Hall 011-241-5161
- 18 Hokkaido Tomakomai Shimin Kaikan 090-7059-1884
- 22 Fukui Tsuruga Citizen Culture Center
- 24 Toyama Niikawa Bunka Hall, Uozu 0765-23-1123
- 26 Niigata Shibata Shimin Bunka Kaikan

July

- 10 Hyogo Himeji-shi Bunka Center
- 16 Miyagi Ezuko Hall, Ogawara

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. Members 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.

This newsletter also has an online version available on the Kodo web site.

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