

the KODŌ beat 鼓童

Kodo Beat Bids Farewell

by Johnny Wales, Kodo Beat Editor.

Looking back through the dimming mists of time I only vaguely remember the idea of *Kodo Beat* first coming up. It must have been at the Daisho Elementary School. That rickety wooden building is perched 92 steps above the road, looking out to where the sun sets into Mano Bay. In those days all of Kodo was under that one roof. The classrooms were mostly divided into members' bedrooms, but one served as the office. On a winter's day the snow howled through the cracks around the windows and you could find the entire production staff in a very small circle around the stove facing outwards to warm their bottoms and holding cups of coffee or tea to warm their insides. It was a cold January day like this in 1987 that *Kodo Beat* was born. It was pounded out on typewriters and the paper

snipped to size with scissors. The articles and photos were pasted onto layout sheets provided by the printer. It seems impossible to believe now as I tap out these words on my laptop at home 33 kilometres away from Kodo Village. I am composing this right into desktop publishing software and when I am done, ZZZZIP! off it will fly electronically to Kodo Village.

Yet even this technology has had its day. Now in its 25th year *Kodo Beat* has come to its end, the age of news printed out on paper is, it seems, nearly over. *Kodo eNews* now provides your monthly Kodo fix online. And so the world turns.

As founding editor of *Kodo Beat* I want to thank everyone who contributed to the production of this small paper over the years. And 25 years from now – if you listen carefully – you may still be able to hear the echoes of *Kodo Beat* reverberating across the seas.



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Kodo Close up:

Johnny Wales, Kodo Beat Editor

I have been assigned the embarrassing task of describing what my connection with Kodo is. Someone else should be doing this but it seems I am the only who knows quite what I have been up to over the years. So here goes.

I don't suppose there are too many people who have worn quite so many hats as I have in working with Kodo. Here is the list: *Producer*: of their first concerts in Canada in 1976, *Investor*: I lent all my money to the group when I came to study Bunya Puppets on Sado in 1977, *Illustrator*: of posters, pamphlets, newsletter *Kikanshi* covers and more (This is my real job incidentally), *Translator*: Kodo's first photo book by Komaro Hoshino, *Puppet Teacher*: My sensei Moritaro Hamada had me teaching two of Ondekoza's members Bunya puppets in 1978, *Interpreter*: on numerous tours and occasions, *Lighting Director*: on 3 international



Lighting up Kodo in Scandanavia '84.

tours and in Japan, *Roadie*: *Everyone* is a roadie on the One Earth Tour, *Publicist*: I was front-man to the media before the group's arrival when living in Canada and on tour, *Editor & Writer*: founding editor and contributor to *Kodo Beat*, *Photographer*: always have my trusty camera on hand. *Videographer*: filmed the first EC in 1988, *Performer*: strangely I never touched a drum, but

as a puppeteer performed in the U.K. with *Hanayui*, *Mask Maker*: for Shogo Yoshii's *roso* character and for *Ubusuna*. That's about it I guess. And all this without ever joining the group. I think my unique position on the periphery is responsible for the longevity of our relationship.

When speaking of the group I don't think of Ondekoza and Kodo separately, to me they are two chapters of one long story.

It all started in 1975 for me. I was at the University of Toronto studying various odds and sods, including Asian studies. I applied for a nationally-sponsored three week long trip to Japan, wrote an essay about why I wanted to go and was chosen as one among about 35 people from all over Canada under 30 years old.

It was life changing. And just as it is so difficult to put into words why one falls in love with such and such a person, so it was with me and Japan – but whatever the reason – I was head over heels. What had till that time been an interest in Japan became a passion.

Most of the trip was in the traditional Japanese style, with every moment scripted, hustling about from one famous place to the next aboard buses. We visited Tokyo, Kamakura, Kyoto, Nara, Kanazawa and then came to Sado for two nights. This was the very end of the tour after which it was to be an 8 hour bus ride back to Tokyo, then home. We arrived at the Silver Village Hotel situated on a sandy beach and – though it was May – the tired and restless group of young Canucks made a beeline for the sea. To the astonishment of our Japanese hosts many of us plunged into the water and splashed about like the kids we mostly were. Japanese tend not to go near the ocean till July, but for us it was as warm as any Canadian lake in mid-summer. At dinner the next day's schedule was handed out and there was a collective groan when we saw it included an 8 hour bus tour of the island. Everyone had had enough of rushing around in busses and we wanted nothing more than to just unwind and hang out on the beach or wander about on our own. Who needed to see a gold mine, bath tub boats or a bunch of drummers? In talking to our young Japanese hosts we discovered that the five of them would be going on the bus tour without us. Arrangements had been made that couldn't be cancelled. Bearing in mind the speech we had been given before



Ondekoza in front of the Daisho Schoolhouse, c. 1980 (L. to R. Rear) Masafumi Kazama, unidentified, Yoko Umezawa, Johnny Wales, Yoshiaki Oi, Takao Aoki, Kazuaki Tomida, Toshio Kawauchi, Bart Chartlesworth (Johnny's friend), Katsuji Kondo. Front: Yoshikazu Fujimoto, Gon the dog, unidentified child, Chieko Kojima, Miwako Takizawa, Eitetsu Hayashi

the trip about us being 'representatives of Canada,' about 5 of us decided that it would be impolitic not to go and so resigned ourselves to our fate.

Well the gold mine was *pretty* interesting, and the scenery superb, but it was the tiny fishing hamlet of Shukunegi which swept me away. *Here* was the Japan of old that came closest to the romantic notions I had had of the place before my arrival. The old tiled, wooden houses and narrow lanes, elderly people still dressed in kimono and a tiny sign in the local folk museum that said in English 'Please touch the objects'!

After riding in the 'bath tub boats' – which turned out to be the wooden stave coracles unique to Sado – we stopped at the bottom of the 92 steps leading up to an old school house. I remember being led almost wordlessly down the wooden hallway and into the gym the size of a tennis court. We sat down on cushions on the shining wooden floor not 2 metres away from near-naked performers who were kneeling by their instruments in stoic silence. After they bowed, Hancho, Eitetsu and Tsutomu dug into their Tsugaru shamisen and we were immediately transported into a world never dreamed of before. When the last reverberation of Yatai-bayashi had finished echoing around the room and the performers bowed, there was only silence. Applause almost seemed inappropriate, like clapping

in church, but after a few moments, one by one we put our hands together and then our tiny group clapped as hard as our palms could bear. Broad smiles broke out on the faces of the players for the first time since we had arrived. Somehow we knew we would never be quite the same. This was one of the group's earliest public performances. While walking down the gleaming hallway towards the exit I found myself asking Riley Lee – their American shakuhachi specialist – how one went about becoming a member. He said there was no special way, and suggested I write a letter.

We came back to the hotel in a daze. At dinner we couldn't resist gloating and told everyone that they had missed the best day of the trip. Mr. Moritaro Hamada

performed Bunya puppetry for us that evening and to our astonishment asked us after his performance if we wanted to try the puppets out!

Back home I wrote Ondekoza, asking how I might go about joining them. Riley replied to say they were coming to run and play at the Boston Marathon, so could I set something up in Canada? So Tagayasu Den, Riley Lee and Ken Kochi arrived in Toronto, crashed at my student digs and I introduced them to the Harbourfront Theatre where I was stage manager and to the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre, both places they later played some unforgettable concerts. On my mid-term break I went to visit them one more time in Boston and there Mr. Den asked me to join the group and fly



Interpreting for Yoshikazu at a workshop in Toronto

home with them...*now*. As a varsity rugby player he was impressed by my speed, and running was fundamental to his philosophy for the group then. By this time though, I was beginning to get the sense that I wouldn't fare well in the pressure cooker of stoicism that was Ondekoza's style and declined. I was also in the middle of 3 jobs and 3 university courses. I was still keen to live on Sado Island though and I knew I didn't want to teach English, my plan being to go there to learn, not teach. I remembered how keen Mr. Hamada was for us to try out his Bunya puppets so I sent a letter off asking him if he would teach me.

And so in May of 1977 I found myself on the ferry again, heading for Sado Island.

All the money I had saved was in traveller's cheques which the confounded bank took over a week to process. When at last I was able to open an account Hanchō (Toshio Kawauchi) asked me if Ondekoza could borrow it all. 'Well, I guess that's O.K.,' I said, but on the condition Hanchō go to the bank and withdraw it *himself*. I wasn't about to. And so I became one of Ondekoza's first investors. It was paid back to me in the form of an allowance as the need arose.

Once I became proficient with the puppets I was assigned by Mr. Hamada and Mr. Den to teach two of

the members. And so began my working relationship with the group which has now spanned over 35 years. I doubt it would have lasted so long if I had joined the group that day in Boston.

My most intense experiences with Kodo were undoubtedly touring with them as lighting director and interpreter. I spent in total about one year on the road with the group, both abroad and throughout Japan, one tour in 1984 going right around the world. The great challenge of doing lighting on tour is to be as adaptable as possible to the enormous range of facilities (or lack of) one confronts. At our memorable trip into Guangzhou (Canton) on the Chinese New Year the theatre only had four washes of colour, for the stage, yellow, red, white and blue. To their way of thinking, as long as the stage was illuminated what more could you possibly want? I discovered an ancient and evil-looking gigantic pair of 2,000 watt lamps covered in dust backstage, and in plugging them in was amazed to see that they still worked. The Mao-suited stage hands had no notion of spot lighting, but gamely joined me in the crazy notion of creating at least one set of 'specials' for the Odaiko finale. We clamped the old instruments to a hefty wooden beam and tied the two ends to a fat manilla rope. We hoisted this contraption up over the



My 30th birthday on the road in Osaka, 1983 (L. to R. standing) Kazuaki Tomida, unidentified, Katsuji Kondo, Masafumi Kazama, Eiichi Saito, Yoshiaki Oi, Yoshikazu Fujimoto. (sitting) unidentified, Motofumi Yamaguchi, Hiroshi Tajiri, Johnny Wales, Hidemi Nakagawa, Shinichi Sogo, Jin Hiranuma

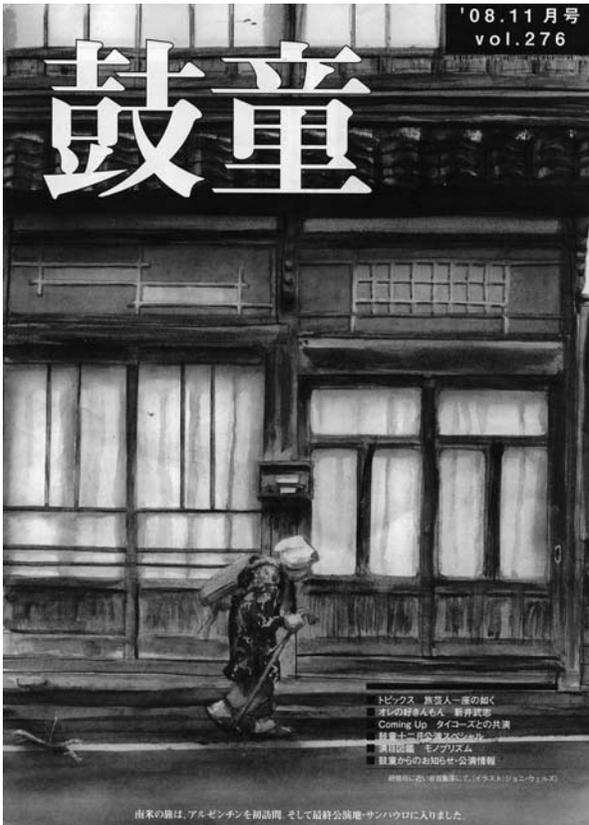


*At the LA Olympics, 1984: Back Row: Gary Tsujimoto, Tomiko Nozaki, Eiichi Saito, Ryuji Sato, Naomi Takahashi.
2nd row: Cheryl Fong, P.J. Hirabayashi, Motofumi Yamaguchi, Chieko Kojima, Yoshiaki Oi
3rd Row: Hidemi Nakagawa, Masafumi Kazama, Johnny Wales, Sharon Koga, Hiroshi Tajiri
Front Row, George Ken Kochi, Toshio Kawauchi, Yoshikazu Fujimoto, Kikuo Clifford Kochi, Sally Sakae Kochi, Katsuji Kondo, Shinichi Sogo*

stage and aimed them as best we could. I will never forget the amazement on the staff's faces when I turned on the 'special' and it dramatically lit up the Odaiko on its lantern-festooned wagon. Chinese officials had only granted our visas to enter the country the day before we arrived, and so the theatre had yet to sell a single ticket. Remarkably though, at show time the place was full and the performance went very well. Until the curtain call that is, when I brought up the house lights and to everyone's amazement the theatre was virtually empty, with the exception of about 10 very enthusiastic people from the Japanese consulate up against the stage holding out flowers and giving us a rousing, if miniature, standing ovation. Apparently in an effort to save official face, soldiers in their civvies had been pressed into service to pack the theatre. It being Chinese New Years Eve, it seems they had taken advantage of the cover of darkness during the performance and slipped off to

their respective celebrations. One can get spoiled when travelling with Kodo and grow to expect – as par for the course – full houses and standing ovations. This was a very good lesson for us all. And though the audience was small, they were very keen and wonderful to play for.

I was in Toronto in my usual impecunious state when Kodo was scheduled to play at the L.A. Olympics. I had to cross into America at Niagara Falls to catch the Buffalo, New York flight to L.A. The U.S. border guard asked me how much money I had on me and if I had a return plane ticket. Well, I only had a one-way ticket to L.A. as I was to fly on to Japan with the group afterwards and they had my ticket. I had about \$40 dollars in my pocket. 'Come with me.' said the unsmiling officer as he escorted me to an inner florescent-lit-government-issue room and asked, well *told* me to sit down. 'OK, what's the story?' 'Well,' I



Watercolour illustration for Kodo's Japanese newsletter cover

begin, 'It all started many years ago when I walked up 92 steps to an old schoolhouse on Sado Island overlooking the Sea of Japan...'

20 minutes later I finished my tale and this was followed by a stoney silence, broken finally when the officer said, 'No one could make that up'. And with the first smile I had seen that day he said, 'You can go now.'

On our 1985 tour there was a sudden cancellation of our gigs in Istanbul so we found ourselves in Holland with a week off, something unheard of on our normally hectic tours. Everyone took off in different directions and stage manager Masayan and I rented a car and drove to Venice. From there to Florence where I met Chieko from Tokyo. She knew of Kodo because her brother was a



Johnny Wales, current edition.

classmate at high school of Kodo's member Motofumi. Driving to Milano with us for the resumption of the tour Chieko pitched right in and helped me with the lighting for the next few days. I headed to Zurich for the next gig in the truck and Chieko went to our hotel where she met Motofumi who immediately recognized her because of her resemblance to her brother. The next day – less than a week after meeting – we got engaged on the shores of Lake Zurich and – to the amazement of the rest of the group – we married a month later in Tokyo. Chieko has worked with the group doing editorial work ever since.

Since marrying we have spent time in my hometown Toronto, Chieko's hometown of Tokyo, but the most time on Sado. As a freelance illustrator it used to be impossible to generate enough work to live on the island. All that changed though, with the proliferation of personal computers and the internet. Now we are able to get work from around the world while living in this beautiful place.

As for the future I will continue to contribute in various spheres including to *Kodo eNews*, and you can check out back issues of *Kodo Beat* on our website any time. Thanks everyone, it's been a great run.

Messages from Former K.B. Staff

Bob Ward, Denver, CO, U.S.A.

I remember my first contribution to the Kodo Beat was a first-person 'Day in the Life of a Kodo Apprentice' essay. That was about 100 years ago. I remember Johnny Wales telling me, "Don't just write about what you're doing, write about what you're feeling!" - a quick revelation of which one of us was the artist. The problem was that I was feeling like the elephant in the Far Side cartoon sitting at the grand piano on the stage of Carnegie Hall thinking to himself, "What am I doing here? I'm a violinist, not a pianist." I took over the editing job from Johnny while he returned to Canada for a few years, and found it was a great way to keep Kodo's fans apprised of the group's activities. The Kodo Beat's early years coincided with the early years of the Earth Celebration. Bringing international performers to Sado not only brought the world's musical traditions together to the quiet fishing village

on Sado's southern tip, it also gave me something to write about. Each festival would fill two issues, one beforehand to lure an audience, and one afterward where I would try to capture the mood of the days of concerts. I always found that hard – even when I tried to remember Johnny's advice to focus on the emotions stirred up.

After I left Sado, the *Kodo Beat* allowed me to keep in touch with the group.

Mark Coutts-Smith, Pune, India

I wrote, edited and took many of the photographs for *Kodo Beat* for three years up to 1995 and it has a special place in my heart because many of the photographs for my book 'Children of the Drum' began their life in *Kodo Beat*. I had dreamed about a great documentary photographic project since my twenties and, as so often happens, I suddenly found myself doing it when I had stopped looking for it. There I was, working away just providing photos for *Kodo Beat* and



I thought - 'Wait a minute. this is becoming quite a collection of photographs...!' While writing the text for my book, I spent many happy

hours in the Kodo office with the boxes of back issues, my grateful thanks to the editors and writers before me. And after I left Japan, *Kodo Beat* provided a perfect connection with the group's ever-changing life.

Sayo Tsuji, Kodo Village, Sado Island

I was a Kodo junior member before and went on the North America Tour in 1997. But since then, I have had no chance to visit other countries. I got married and now I have kids. I cannot go abroad like my husband, Kodo performer Masaru. But working as Kodo staff gave me a different point of view: 'going abroad' doesn't just mean physically. I found out that my heart could travel abroad as I send the *Kodo Beat* all over the world.

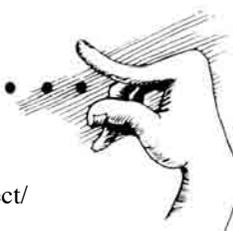


I am very proud of being a part of something which connected you and Kodo. I was very sad when I heard that it would end, but things have changed over the last decade. Now, our monthly e-journal, *Kodo eNews* is taking place of the *Kodo Beat* and sending information to a large number of Kodo fans. I will keep acting as one of Kodo's windows to the wider world. I hope to be a bridge between you and Kodo more and to travel with the Kodo One Earth Tour to meet you in a future.

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With our hopes for a speedy recovery for all those who suffered from the recent earthquake and tsunami disaster in north-eastern Japan, Kodo has begun the *Heartbeat Project* in their support. To start things off all the members have recorded a new tune called 'Tomorrow.' To learn more about the project or hear the tune go to: http://www.kodo.or.jp/heartbeatproject/index_en.html

in brief.....



Earth Celebration will be held from August 19th through the 21st. This year's Shiroyama Concert guests will be the 4 member *Ranaei Family* from Iran who play traditional Persian & Kurdish music. From Japan will be the male dance ensemble *KO no kai*. For details see the Earth Celebration concert website: <http://www.kodo.or.jp/ec/>

Kodo performers, the brothers Tokio and Akira Takahashi left the group in April for personal reasons. They send their best wishes to all those who have supported them over the years.

On March 21st, Sado Island Taiko Centre staff member Hirofumi Uenoyama and his wife Kyoko had a baby boy they have named Atsuto.

upcoming performances



Photo by
Taro Nishita

Kodo 30th Anniversary One Earth Tour 2011 Japan

May

- 21 Yamanashi Yamanashi Kenritsu Kenmin Bunka Hall
Sho-Hall
- 22 Nagano Matsumoto Shimin Geijutsukan
- 25 Chiba Chiba Shimin Kaikan
- 26 Kanagawa Green Hall Sagami-Ono Dai-Hall
- 27 Kanagawa Yokosuka Arts Theatre

June

- 1 Yamagata Yamagata-ken Kenmin Kaikan
- 3 Akita Akita Kenmin Kaikan
- 5 Aomori Towada Shimin Bunka Centre
- 8 Hokkaido Hokuto-shi Sogo Bunka Centre Kanaderu
- 11 Hokkaido Nemuro-shi Sogo Bunka Kaikan Dai-Hall
- 12 Hokkaido Kushiro Shimin Bunka Kaikan
- 15 Hokkaido Obira-machi Bunka Koryu Center
- 17 Hokkaido Sapporo Shimin Hall
- 18 Hokkaido Tomakomai Shimin Kaikan Dai-Hall
- 22 Fukui Tsuruga Citizen Culture Center
- 24 Toyama Niikawa Bunka Hall
- 26 Niigata Shibata Shimin Bunka Kaikan

July

- 6 Ishikawa Wajima-shi Bunka Kaikan Dai-Hall
- 7 Ishikawa Kaga-shi Bunka Kaikan
- 10 Hyogo Himeji-shi Bunka Center Dai-Hall
- 16 Miyagi Ezuko Hall, Ogawara

Earth Celebration 2011

August 19-21 Sado Island

Shiroyama Concerts

- Aug. 19 Ranaei Family (Iran) &
Kodo
- 20 'Shukusai'
Kodo, Ranaei Family,
& KO no kai (Japan)
- 21 Kodo

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



Kodo 30th Anniversary One Earth Tour 2011 Japan

September

- 10 Kyoto Kyoto-fu Chutan Bunka Kaikan, Ayabe
- 11 Hyogo Ono-shi Uruoi Koryukan Éclat
- 14 Shizuoka Act City Hamamatsu Dai-Hall
- 15 Gifu Gifu Shimin Kaikan Dai-Hall
- 17,18 Kanagawa Kanagawa Geijutsu Gekijo, Yokohama
- 19 Shizuoka Yaizu Bunka Kaikan Dai-Hall
- 23 Ehime Uchiko-za
- 25 Wakayama Shingu Shimin Kaikan
- 28 Okayama Okayama Shimin Kaikan
- 30 Tottori Tottori Kenritsu Kurayoshi Mirai Chushin

October

- 1 Okayama Kuse Espace Center Espace Hall, Maniwa
- 2 Kagawa Marugame Shimin Kaikan
- 7 Yamaguchi Star Pia Kudamatsu
- 8 Hiroshima Hatsukaichi Bunka Hall Sakurapia, Dai-Hall
- 15 Shiga Omihachiman Bunka Kaikan Dai-Hall
- 16 Mie Matsuzaka Shimin Kaikan
- 19 Fukuoka Fukuoka Symphony Hall (Acros Fukuoka)
- 20 Oita Iichiko Grand Theatre
(Iichiko Culture Center)
- 23 Shimane Shimane Geijutsu Bunka Center "Grandtoit"
Dai-Hall, Masuda
- 26 Saga Saga Shimin Kaikan
- 28 Miyazaki Miyazaki-shi Shimin Bunka Hall
- 29 Kagoshima Takarayama Hall, Kagoshima City

November

- 1 Kumamoto Hitoyoshi Culture Palace
 - 3 Nagasaki Arkas Sasebo Dai-Hall, Sasebo
 - 13 Okinawa Urasoe-shi Tedako Hall
- Schedule is subject to change. For up-to-date schedules and box office details, please visit our website.

<http://www.kodo.or.jp>

Notice to Kodo Beat Readers

This is the final issue of Kodo Beat. Thank you for your readership and support over the years. Back issues are available on the Kodo website. Please subscribe to *Kodo eNews*, our monthly e-journal, to keep in touch with Kodo from now on. *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 the latest information by postal mail, 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.



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