

Good news for Kodo 2010 soloists: Sunahata in “Gnosis” & Yoshii in “Babel”

In January this year, Akram Khan’s “Gnosis” which featured Yoshie Sunahata won the Dance Award at the [South Bank Sky Arts Awards](#), and Yoshie was honored by a nomination for the Critics’ Circle National Dance Award 2010 for Outstanding Female Performance (Modern) for her role in the production.

In February, we received further news that Yoshie has been nominated for the prestigious [Olivier Award](#) in the category of [Outstanding Achievement in Dance](#) for her performance in “Gnosis” at Sadler’s Wells in London in April 2010.

Shogo Yoshii was a musician in the cast of Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui &



Yoshie Sunahata drumming in Akram Khan’s “Gnosis”

Damien Jalet’s “Babel” (words) for its entire debut year in 2010, which has received two nominations for the Olivier Award for its performances at Sadler’s Wells in May 2010.

continued on next page

On Tour Now in Canada & USA



Here is a sneak peek at the programme notes for the current Kodo 30th Anniversary – One Earth Tour North America 2011.

continued on page 3



Shogo Yoshii (top right) drumming in Cherkaoui/Jalet’s “Babel” (words)

In This Issue

[Teaching in Australia](#) 4

[Memoirs of Kodo Apprentice](#) 6

[Performance Schedules](#) 8

Kodo Soloists

continued from page 1

The first nomination is for artist [Antony Gormley](#) for Outstanding Achievement in Dance for his stage art: the striking aluminium box frames used in “Babel” (words). “Babel” itself was nominated for [Best New Dance Production](#) for its Sadler’s Wells performance.

The results for the Olivier Awards will be announced on March 13. The award ceremony is to be broadcast by the BBC, and can be viewed online. For updates and results, you can follow the Olivier Awards on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Both “Gnosis” and “Babel” continue to tour internationally without Kodo performers this year, as we need all hands on deck for our milestone 30th anniversary year. Kodo is forever thankful to [Akram Khan Company](#) and [Eastman](#) for these wonderful opportunities and experiences in 2010 and looks forward to working with these superb companies again in the future.

Notice

Yoshie Sunahata stepped down from the Kodo stage at the end of the Kodo December Concerts in 2010, and she is now working as a Kodo staff member. Yoshie kept her maiden name, Sunahata, while still performing, and from now on she will go by her married name, Abe.

Photo credits: Richard Haughton, Alain Scherer (Gnosis); Milan Szytura (Babel)

鼓童



“Sunahata drummed, danced and sang in choreographer Akram Khan’s vision of blindness inspired by the Mahabharata story of Queen Ghandari.” (Olivier Award Nominee description)



Yoshii (right) and dancer Kazutomi Kozuki add Japanese to “Babel”’s eclectic mix of languages and cultures.

On Tour Now

continued from page 1

Artistic Director [Mitsuru Ishizuka](#) found his inspiration for this touchstone tour in the Kodo Rehearsal Hall, a pivotal part of [Kodo Village](#). The Rehearsal Hall is the bedrock of creation for Kodo performances and the starting point for the group's vigorous training program. Ishizuka designed this show to capture the atmosphere of this very special place—the enthusiasm, tension, stillness, breath, and fellowship felt between taiko and human being in this hallowed hall.

“The taiko clustered together on the stage, while based on the layout of the Rehearsal Hall, also conjures the scene of a Japanese shrine surrounded by large sacred trees,” explains Ishizuka. “People gather at a shrine to sing, dance, and drum so that their prayers may reach the heavens. In this same way, all of us at Kodo gather in our rehearsal hall and on stage day after day, singing, dancing, and playing the drum, in hopes that the sound of the taiko will reach as many people as possible.”

The ten-piece program features three new works that will make their North American debut, as well as classic compositions from the Kodo repertoire that have earned the group an avid following across the globe. Among the new compositions, “*Sakaki*” opens the program with a male solo dance inspired by an age-old Shinto ceremony. This somber piece is the proverbial calm before the taiko storm and also acts as a kind of purification ceremony for the theater. Another new addition to the Kodo repertoire is “*Stride*,” written by artistic director Mitsuru Ishizuka and designed to make use of all of the drums in the group's arsenal. This piece speaks of the “strides” Kodo has taken to date and the journeys that lay ahead as could only be portrayed through the youthful vigor of our next-generation



performers. In contrast, Kodo member [Shogo Yoshii](#) found his inspiration for “*Sora*” through the group's recent cross-genre collaborations that include contemporary dance and flamenco. This uplifting, rhythmical composition features the 3-stringed kokyū and Japanese flute, at once showcasing the influences of the music Kodo has encountered in their travels and capturing the aspirations of the group as it enters a new epoch.

Programme

Sakaki
Stride
Chonlima
Miyake
Monochrome
Jang-Gwara
Sora
Kumo no Namiji
O-daiko
Yatai-bayashi

Artistic Director
Mitsuru Ishizuka

Performers

Kazuki Imagai
Masaru Tsuji
Masami Miyazaki
Kenzo Abe
Shogo Yoshii
Kenta Nakagome
Tokio Takahashi
Tsuyoshi Maeda
Eri Uchida
Mariko Omi
Yosuke Kusa
Akira Takahashi

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Yoshikazu Fujimoto: Teaching in Australia

In late January Yoshikazu Fujimoto traveled to Australia to teach at the 5-day TaikOz January Taiko Intensive. Here are comments from Yoshikazu and Kodo staff Melanie Taylor who interpreted for Yoshikazu's workshops.

Yoshikazu Fujimoto, Kodo

"The participants at the TaikOz January Taiko Intensive spanned a wide range of ages from teens to people in their sixties. I think this shows the power and charm of taiko. The TaikOz members all were instructors, and I thought it was wonderful how they brought out every person's individuality through their all-inclusive content while keeping an overall sense of unity. To teach is also to learn for myself, and I had a very enjoyable time. I hope to be invited again!"

Melanie Taylor, Kodo Staff

"Meeting a range of taiko enthusiasts in Australia—including people who had never been to Japan, who had never seen Kodo, and even one or two who had never played taiko before—was such a good chance to open our eyes to what the appeal of taiko was to them. It was interesting, in many respects, to see the different approaches to learning taiko in



Yoshikazu teaches the fan and arm movements during an Onikenbai (Demon Sword Dance) workshop

Australia after having interpreted at workshops in Japan, and to observe the different teaching styles of the members of TaikOz.

Besides core classes for everyone in O-daiko and Onikenbai (Demon Sword Dance), Yoshikazu also taught an elective on Onikenbai flute, in which 10 participants listened to a long melody for the first time, then played along by watching his fingers and listening. The connection created by this type of group learning by eye and ear in real time was truly moving. They had to watch, listen, and learn by repetition. I think in the Western culture we often jump to asking

questions to learn before thoroughly observing to learn, the latter being a learning style that is still common in Japan to this day.

The Masterclass was something both Yoshikazu and I had never experienced. He was asked to critique people he had never seen play taiko, performing pieces he had never seen, and as I interpreted his comments and opinions to the nervous performers, I felt the forty or so years of his experience in the words coming out of my mouth, along with his humble manner and his love for taiko and sharing taiko with people. Through the eight workshops Yoshikazu taught, the things he stressed the most were "when I dance or play taiko, it's all or nothing, I can't do it half-heartedly," "the rhythm has to be in you for you to be on the beat" and "to play it, you must be able to sing it" (i.e. speak the rhythm).

The TaikOz members kept classes in time, similar to a conductor or a metronome, with clapping drumsticks, closed mouths, and concentrating eyes. But for Yoshikazu to keep people in time he used his voice as he moved



continued on page 5

TaikOz*continued from page 4*

his body and arms in time, spoke the rhythm phrase, or drew people in and onto the rhythms with his warm “join me” eyes. Kodo means both “heartbeat” and “children of the drum.” I think he embodies the heartbeat of Kodo, the physical and pulsating approach to this instrument, and also the child who wants to play what they love to their heart’s content. That is something that I hope the participants were able to experience first hand.

My favourite TaikOz-led classes were camp pieces, which to me were such fresh and exciting blends of global and Japanese rhythms, classical depth and flavour, and Aussie fun. But for me the most moving piece was born from the composition elective, and was called “Fireworks.” It was a narrative piece created by the students about a crowd gathering to watch a fireworks display.



The participants looked so “into it” that it was completely infectious and made the audience smile and groove. They looked excited, powerful, and the music had a really feel-good sound. It was a wonderful experience to travel from Japan to meet new

styles of taiko in Australia, and I learnt a lot about the “pulse” of taiko and getting music in your head, heart, and veins simultaneously.”

Photos by Karen Steains



Winter Memoirs of a Kodo Apprentice

We would like to share with you reflections on life at the [Kodo Apprentice Centre](#) during the colder months of the year by former apprentice from the USA, Joe Small. (Class of 2007-2008)

From mid to late-November and until early April, Sado becomes a world of leafless brown trees, a deep, nearly black sea, and a white-grey sky and snow. The grueling summer behind them, during this cold and dark time apprentices find their mental and physical capabilities pushed beyond what they thought possible. Everyone must find the motivation within themselves to not only endure, but excel despite the encumbering effects of the harsh climate on the body and soul.

Throughout December and into the New Year, the pressure is on for each apprentice to perform at their best during the culminating evaluation recital in early January, which determines if they will continue their training (for first year apprentices), or advance to junior membership (for second year apprentices). This time in winter becomes a moment



where apprentices share triumph and happiness, resignation and sadness, and resolution. The first year apprentices who pass take on the responsibility of running the facility alone during February and March and come to recognize the center as “theirs” to run and adjust according to the specific needs and goals of their cohort. Despite the introspection that comes from a sparse time, the bonds between apprentices grow stronger - they must truly rely on one another to push the level of excellence and to keep each others’ spirits from faltering. The pressure does not abate

with the departure of their *senpai* (seniors), as they must continue to learn everything they can at a feverish rate to prepare to teach and act as examples for the new group of apprentices arriving with the coming of Spring.

Looking back, many memories stick out – here is a choice selection: Reluctantly leaving the confines of a warm futon at 5:30 a.m. for the shockingly frigid air trapped in the uninsulated wooden structure of the apprentice center - the very act is a monumental achievement! The thuds of heavy feet on the stairs and the swish of layered sweatpants and tracksuits in the hallway as we lurch our way to the practice hall. Croaking “*Ohayo gozaimasu*” (“Good morning”) to each other through hoarse voices, sniffles, and coughs.

Engaging in morning calisthenics, our bare feet numb from standing on wooden floors as hard as sheets of ice. Cleaning the same floors by hand, and then dashing into the kitchen to run some warm water over those hands to bring back some feeling. Trotting down a mountain road under a starry sky, wary of slipping or stepping



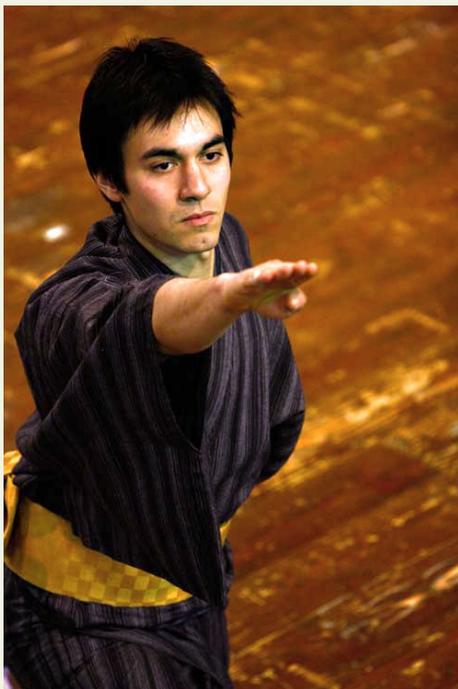
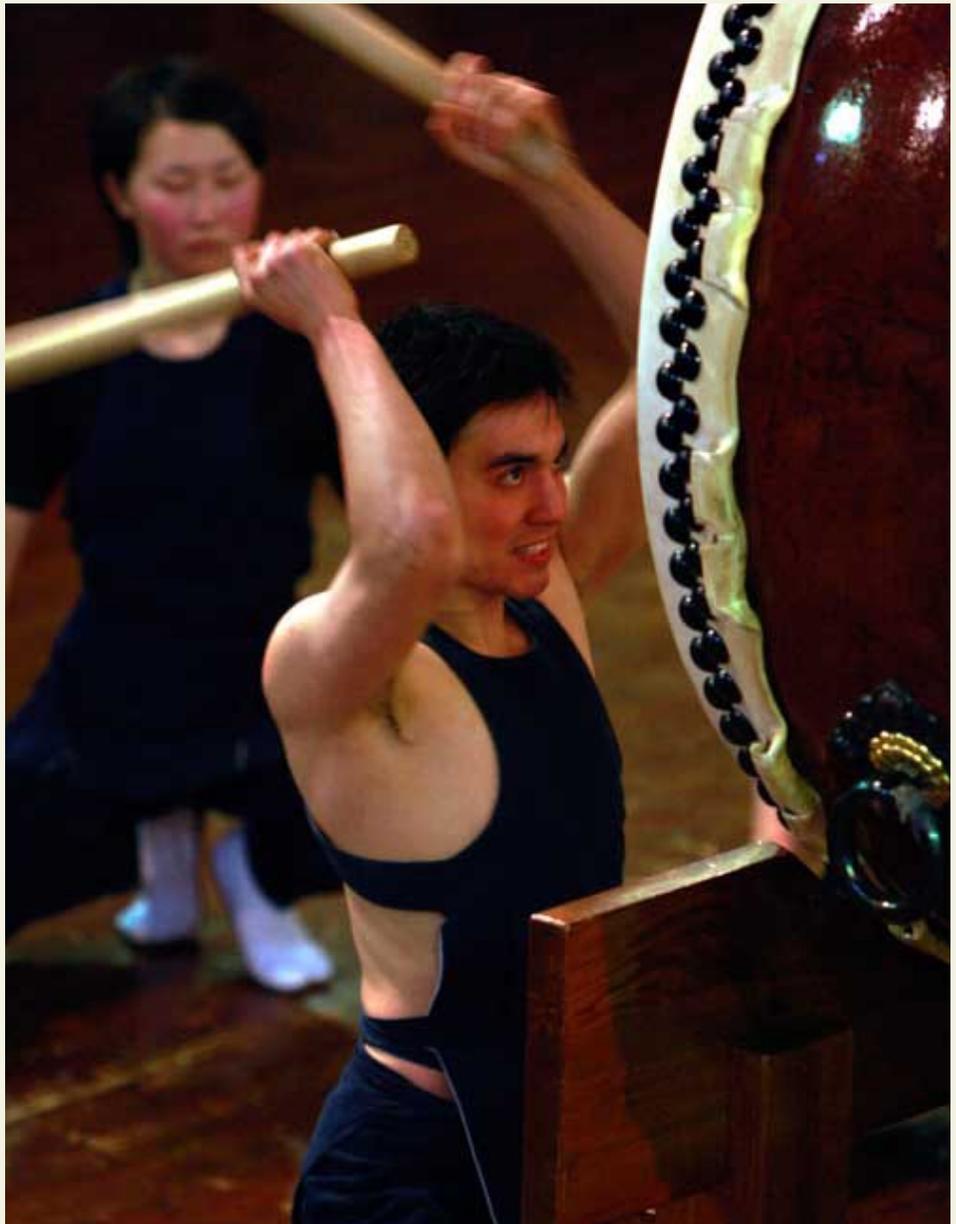
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Kodo Apprentice

continued from page 6

into shallow run-off ditch in the dark (I only fell in once!). Running along the coastal road hammered by waves (or blanketed in thick, wet snowflakes), the distant sun rises in a wild spectrum of pink and orange. A kind, elderly woman out for her morning constitution, grasping each of our hands in greeting as we hustle past. Making it back to the practice hall and feeling some warmth running through the body as we spend the last few minutes before breakfast singing, dancing, or at the taiko.

The dull rumbles or tinny clanks of the portable heaters that we huddle around while taking a break from rehearsal, maybe munching on a dried persimmon. The satisfying clatter of thawed ice sliding off the roof in the mid-day sun. An itchy head and the cockeyed hairdo that comes with wearing a winter hat for most of the day. Laundry hung on the line that still won't quite dry even after two days. Changing clothes as quickly as possible following practice so as not to catch a cold. Friendly neighbors stopping by to drop off boxes of locally-caught squid, yellowtail, or



crab which are then added to make steaming and delicious nabe (hotpots) that frequently appear at dinner, full of winter cabbage and daikon (large radish). Having one more bowl of rice than usual, just because it's something hot.

Happy surprise at the realization that the *Onikenbai* folk dance that used to reduce me a panting puddle of sweat almost feels as cozy as a cup of tea. Trying to fit in a little more stretching to relax our bodies which have naturally tensed up more than usual. Lugging heavy tanks of odorous kerosene to top off the portable heaters late at night. The snarl of

unseen *tanuki* (raccoon dogs) playing around the grounds of the center. Seeing my own breath as I drift to sleep, the warmth of a hot water bottle comforting my feet. Amusement that I can't clearly remember when we wore shorts and complained of the humidity. Wondering about what the future brings, and hoping Kodo always plays a part in it.

Joe Small is currently pursuing a Master of Fine Arts in Dance at UCLA, exploring the choreographic relationships between forms of taiko and contemporary dance.



Kodo Performance Schedule 2011-2012

KODO 30TH ANNIVERSARY - ONE EARTH TOUR

March: [North America](#)



May - July: [Japan](#)

Kyoto, Nara, Tokyo, Saitama, Tochigi, Gumma, Yamanashi, Nagano, Chiba, Kanagawa, Ibaraki, Yamagata, Akita, Aomori, Hokkaido, Fukui, Toyama, Niigata, Ishikawa, Hyogo, Miyagi

September - November: [Japan](#)

Kinki, Chubu, Kanto, Shikoku, Chugoku, Kyushu, Okinawa

December: [Japan](#)

Nagoya, Osaka, Tokyo (Aoyama Theatre), Nagaoka, Niigata, Sado Island

To be followed by a tour in Europe (early 2012).

Schedules TBA on the [Kodo website](#)

SCHOOL WORKSHOP-PERFORMANCE TOUR IN JAPAN

May-July, September – November: Niigata, Tokyo, etc

EARTH CELEBRATION 2011

August 19 (Fri) - 21 (Sun): Sado Island, Japan
(Details TBA May 2011)

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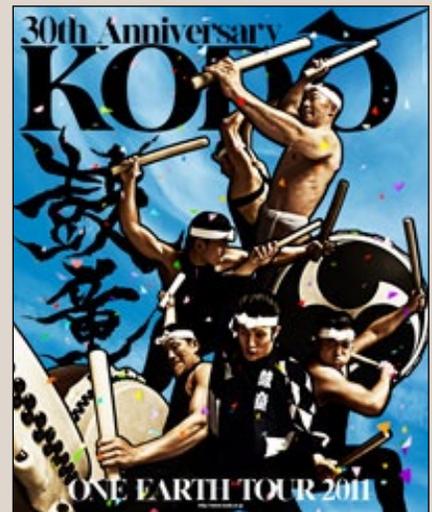


Kodo 30th Anniversary One Earth Tour 2011 North America (USA & Canada) March

Schedule is subject to change.
For up-to-date schedules and box office details, please visit [our website](#).

- March 1: Pittsburgh, PA
- March 2: Pittsburgh, PA
- March 4: Montreal, QC
- March 5: Montreal, QC
- March 7: Ottawa, ON
- March 9: Kingston, ON
- March 11: Toronto, ON
- March 13: Boston, MA
- March 17: Richmond, VA
- March 19: Morristown, NJ
- March 20: New York, NY
- March 22: Utica, NY

NEW Join us for a [Kodo 30th Anniversary Celebration](#) in New York on March 14th.



Through the "One Earth Tour," Kodo continues to bring the sound of the Japanese drum to the ears of the world, and with the taiko's unique ability to transcend the barriers of language and custom, reminds us of our membership in that larger community, the world.

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*Running shoes await their owners at
the Kodo Apprentice Centre.*



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