

the KODŌ beat

鼓童



The finale with Chae Hyung Soon and the Taejon Municipal Dance Troupe in Korea

photos by Junichi Ohta

East Meets East: Kodo in Korea and China

After discussing the possibility for years, this March and April we made our first trip to Korea, with two performances each in Soeul and Taejon. Under the leadership of President Kim Dae Jung, laws restricting the importation of Japanese culture to Korea have begun to relax. Last year for instance, some Japanese movies were screened in Japanese. Taking advantage of this opening we have just released *Tsutsumi*, *Warabe* and the *Best of Kodo* CDs. We were invited by Chae Hyung Soon, our guest at Earth Celebration '94 who appeared then with the *Seoul Performing Arts Company*. On this occasion we rehearsed for 3 days with her group of 30 or so mostly female drummers and dancers of the *Taejon Municipal*

Dance Troupe. In our time-off we were introduced to the fundamentals of their dance style, visited a traditional drum maker, were feasted sumptuously, and even got in a bit of sight-seeing.

Korea is both strangely familiar and foreign to us. It is odd to not be able to read any of this, the most closely related language to Japanese, and yet be able to understand at least partly signs in most other places in the world that use the alphabet or Chinese characters.

Our hosts opened the show and we followed with a set in the second half. We wound things up with a rousing joint encore of *Irodori* and a Korean folk tune. Though verbal communication with the group was challenging - aided though it was by our very handy Pointing-Conversation books - once on stage the barriers disappeared. It was an emotional farewell at the airport.

Back briefly to Japan and then on to Beijing and

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Chieko Kojima and Michiko (Riko) Yanagi with 3 members of the Taejon Municipal Dance Troupe backstage.

Shanghai for some concerts on our own. This was our first trip since a memorable performance 16 years ago in Guangzhou (Canton). On that night, when the lights went up, there were only 7 people left in the audience. Unsure of how we would go over this time, the performances opened with a now almost forgotten Chinese tradition called *108 Beats*; 12 players hit the taiko 9 times each as a form of greeting. During the encore we also added an old Chinese tune on the flute to the crowds' delight who shouted 'Hao!' (Good) at the bits they liked best.

On then to Shanghai where, though only mid-May, it was very hot and humid. The sound of the language is much faster than in Beijing and the bicycles, cars, people, buses and carts all seemed faster too,



Shime age; tightening the drums in Beijing

competing for the same bit of space on the street, with huge modern buildings cheek by jowl with ancient little ones. Very different from the broad avenues and monolithic architecture of Beijing.

Travel teaches you as much about yourself as it does about the place you visit. When working in both China and Korea we were sometimes frustrated by the slower pace of work and lack of printed schedules. Upon reflection though, one can't help but wonder if Japanese aren't a touch too earnest in this regard.

A happy bonus to these trips was the appearance of people wanting to study taiko with Kodo. Two dancer/drummers - one a member of the Korean



The Big Cheezes unwinding at a Seoul kitchen: Stage Manager Masafumi Kazama, Tour Manager Atsushi Sugano, Artistic Director Motofumi Yamaguchi and (standing) Managing Director Takao Aoki.

National Theatre - are planning to come to Sado next year to practice for three months and join us on our school performance tour. The leader of a drumming group in Shaanxi in the west of China also plans to come. What they are most keen to study is the way Kodo infuses traditional material with a contemporary feel. It seems that in both China and Korea (often in Japan for that matter too) traditional culture is either slightly looked down upon or else regarded as sacrosanct, and mustn't be changed at all. If it is modernized, then it's way over the top - with lasers and synthesizers - thereby losing the refinement of the original material. Chae Hyung Soon told us she invited us specifically so Koreans could see how much could be done with traditionally-based music and dance. We hope these trips to China and Korea signal a much belated flowering of exchange with our cultural cousins and closest neighbours.

Kodo Close-up:

Shinichi Sogo: Staff

The 16th in a series of profiles of individual Kodo members.

Shin-chan or *Shin-no-suke* (as he prefers to be called) was born in Osaka in 1957. His mother, a nurse, supported the family. His papa was a gambler man. He has a sister a year and half younger.

Shin-no-suke wasn't particularly fond of school but was involved at various times in the science club, karate, soccer, and he played a bit of violin. He spent 3 years after graduation from high school drifting from one job to another looking for an 'easy' way to make money; trying his hand at pachinko and mahjong. He even considering joining the yakuza and spent a year at school learning to be a hairdresser. In the end none of these paths suited, or else turned out to be more work than a regular job.

At 21 he joined the Self-Defence Forces in Hokkaido. They shot guns once in a while, but more often than not they were digging trenches, helping at the scenes of fires, or searching for lost people - more like a rescue team than the army. Though he thrived for 2 years, he was beginning to feel that world was too narrow for him. It was then he heard about a local concert by Kodo (then called *Ondekoza*) whom he remembered from seeing in high school and he thought, 'Gee are these guys still at it?' What he saw at the concert so impressed him that he followed them around Hokkaido for a week. Then he headed to Sado to attend a summer session they were offering to get a closer glimpse. At the end of this he decided to throw his lot in with the group - in those days a much more organic process, or perhaps haphazard is a better word. This was in 1981 during the transition from *Ondekoza* to *Kodo* - a time of great flux for the group.

Settled in his new room Shin-no-suke remembers overhearing endless discussions in the common room below him - so heated that he dared not interrupt by going through the room to the WC. He wondered if perhaps he had made a mistake, but in the end he returned to Osaka, packed up a few possessions and joined the group at a performance in Niigata.

'Here you do the curtain!' said director Hanchō. Shin hadn't the slightest idea what he was doing and as a result found Eitetsu Hayashi shouting at him,



photo by Johnny Wales

'What the hell was that!'

'It's the new guy!' someone answered.

And so began his new life, moving to the old schoolhouse in Mano. Unlike most new members though, he was used to the spartan lifestyle of the group, thanks to his hitch in the army where he would be kept awake and hiking for 2 and 3 days at a time. Though his base had been in the coldest part of Japan - where it regularly is minus 20 or 30 C - the toughest part for Shin about Kodo was Sado's winter. There was only heating in the common room so it was about minus 1C everywhere else. He remembers many a sleepless and miserable night wanting to bail out, waking up with snow on his face that had blown in through the cracks. One resourceful young player pitched his tent in his room and slept in that.

Shin-no-suke performed on stage for about 10 years. He describes himself as a competent, though not brilliant drummer and feels he didn't have what it takes to be a leading player or soloist. A series of aggravating injuries (he once played *Miyake* with the drumsticks taped to his hand as he couldn't hold them otherwise) and a serious allergy to dust made touring increasingly difficult. Like most players he also wanted to spend more time with his family on Sado - fellow Kodo staffer Sachiko and their two boys, Ryosuke 13 and Shimpei 5.

Shin-no-suke works for Kodo's *Otodaiku* in production, where he most enjoys organizing and helping to teach at various workshops. Much of the rest of the time you are apt to find him out jogging on the roads of Ogi Peninsula or in the back of his home next to Kodo Village, digging in his organic garden.

Once one of the liveliest squares in Europe, Potsdamer Platz found itself after the war in the wasteland separating East and West Berlin. On June 14th Kodo helped mark its return to prominence in the heart of Berlin by performing at the opening of the new Sony Centre.

in brief...



On July 10th a performance was held at Kodo Village with raconteur *Rokusuke Ei* with *Nobo Fukuo* on percussion and vocals and members of Kodo's School Performance troupe.

A Mini-Concert will be held in Osaka at the Japan Folk Crafts Museum at 5 pm on Sept. 26. Call us for details.

We are very saddened to have to pass on the news of the death from cancer on May 31st of *Duane Ebata* of the Japanese American Culture Center in Los Angeles. The world of taiko has lost a dear friend.

upcoming performances

Europe July

11	Milan, Italy	Auditorium Milano	+39-2-83389201
14	Venice, Italy	Teatro Verde	+39-041-5218898
16	Rome, Italy	Rome Ostia Antica	

Aikawa Kinzan Matsuri

July 27	Aikawa, Sado Island	0259-74-2220
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Earth Celebration 2000

Aug. 18-20	Ogi, Sado Island	0259-86-3630
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Japanese Taiko

Sep. 2-3	National Theatre, Tokyo	03-3230-3000
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(Kodo appears in the 2nd half with Kim Duk-Soo SamulNori)

Japan Tour

September

10	Niigata	Kashiwazakishi Sogo Taiikukan	0257-21-2311
11	Niigata	Oshima-mura Fureai-kan	02559-4-3201
12	Niigata	Joetsu Bunka Kaikan	0255-25-8200
14	Nagano	Naganoken Kenmin Bunka Kaikan	026-223-8875
15	Nagano	Kawakami-mura Bunka Centre	0267-97-2000
17	Gifu	Mizunami-shi Sogo Bunka Centre	0572-68-5281
19	Kyoto	Kyoto-fu Chutan Bunka Kaikan	0773-42-7705
20	Kyoto	Kyoto Kaikan Daiichi Hall	075-211-0261
21	Wakayama	Katsuragi Sogo Bunka Kaikan	0736-22-0303
23	Hyogo	Akatonbo Bunka Hall	0791-63-1888
24	Hyogo	Kakogawa Shimin Kaikan	0794-24-5381
25	Hyogo	Yabu-cho Viva Hall	0796-64-1141
27-28	Osaka	Osaka Kosei Nenkin Kaikan	06-6362-8122

October

1	Ehime	Uchiko-za	0893-44-3305
3	Okayama	Okayama Symphony Hall	086-224-6066
4	Okayama	Kuse Espace Land, Espace Hall	0867-42-7000
6	Yamaguchi	Tokuyama-shi Bunka Kaikan	0834-32-5111
7	Yamaguchi	Sanyo-cho Bunka Kaikan	0836-73-2525
8	Yamaguchi	Hagi Shimin Kan	0838-25-3333
11	Oita	Oita Grand Theater	092-715-0374
12	Fukuoka	Fukuoka Shimin Kaikan	092-715-0374
13	Fukuoka	Munakata Yurix Event Hall	0940-37-1483
15	Nagasaki	Obama-cho Taiikukan	0957-74-5123
18	Fukuoka	Peo Port Amagi	0946-24-6758
21	Kumamoto	Hitoyoshi Culture Palace	0966-47-0315

22	Kumamoto	Arao Sogo Bunka Centre	0968-66-4111
24	Kagoshima	Kagoshima-ken Bunka Centre	099-226-3465
25	Miyazaki	Kushima-shi Bunka Kaikan	0987-72-6333
28	Kagoshima	Tanegashima Colina	09972-7-3711

Kodo 01 November-December

Making a fresh start for the new millenium we won't put on our December Concert Series this year and instead hold 'Kodo 01' (Kodo Zero One). *Zero* represents *nothingness* and *One: existence*, symbolizing the interconnectedness of all things. New concept, new venues. For further information please call the Kodo office.



Advance ticket order forms will be sent to members of *Friends of Kodo* in August.

Nov.22-Dec.3	Tokyo	Setagaya Public Theatre
Dec.8-10	Miyagi	Sendai-shi Seinen Bunka Centre
13-14	Niigata	Niigata Shimin Geijutsu Bunka Kaikan
16-17	Shiga	Biwa-ko Hall
21-22	Sado	Amusement Sado

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 website.

For those readers who only want the newsletter, an on-line version is available on the Internet.

Kodo Village, Ogi, Sado Island 952-0611, Japan
Tel: 0259-86-3630 (Fax:3631) e-mail: JDC03000@nifty.ne.jp

Kodo's official website: <http://www.kodo.or.jp>