

the KODŌ beat

鼓童



Zakir Hussain & the TAAL Ensemble

photos: Susumu Yoshida

Earth Celebration 2001

It was almost irresistible to those of us at the rear of Shiroyama park to lay back in the cool grass and evening heat and look up to the stars. We let the mesmerizing sounds of the Zakir Hussain TAAL Ensemble wash over us. Exotic at first and then right, and absorbingly familiar. Even Sado's cicadas sang along.

And so it seemed with all three days of this year's Earth Celebration, an almost seamless fabric of as many colours and patterns as the rare Indian textiles on display. In the sun-drenched heat of the port of Ogi people from around Japan and the world drummed, sang, ate, drank, danced and laughed with each other. A confluence of strangers feeling less alien towards each other than before. If it wasn't from India, then it

was Tiger Espere bringing the magic of the Hawaiian Islands in lei-making, *Haka* dancing and chant. Under the cooling pines of Kisaki Shrine a beautiful Javanese dancer's hands twisted and curved in echoes of the upswept lines of the stone lanterns behind her. A Japanese *butoh* dancer in white with a Canadian percussionist. Japanese playing Samba and West African drums and dance. Festival celebrants dancing in



the night beneath the lantern-festooned back streets of Ogi together with the young and old of Sado. The reverberations and fusions were everywhere. And never far away the sound of drums. Kodo playing at a wild *Fringe* event by the sea, or using taiko to relax, not arouse their listeners in the *sound foREST*. Taiko unleashed and unrelenting on the lush green of Shiroyama or searching for connections with the

rhythms of the raga masters. Taiko sounding as only it can on Sado Island at EC.

Next May we will gather again, to explore and fuse beneath Sado's spring skies. Do join us.



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The Mickey Hart Interview

Mickey Hart, former drummer of the Grateful Dead and world music authority, talks about the creation of his joint CD with Kodo, *Mondo Head* to be released October 11th on Sony Records in Japan and in the spring of 2002 in the USA.

You said you would take Kodo on a journey, meeting artists from all over the world. Where did that idea come from?

Well, actually, that's a very good question. Of course, I always wanted to record Kodo properly. Because the first time I recorded taiko was...live at the Kabuki Theatre in 1975, so I never had a real proper chance to record Kodo. Then this new medium of *Surround* is happening and I have been working in it for 3 years. So I have always heard Kodo in surround, in my mind, especially *Monochrome*. I thought that was a perfect percussion piece for Surround. But then I thought it has already been recorded, and some day I would like to record it in Surround. And then Kodo and Sony came to me to do the intro to the *Live at Acropolis*. And that renewed our friendship. Yoshikazu and I played at the LA Forum at the end of the 80's. That was the next time we met. And he came up to the stage and played with me. And then they called me for the Acropolis, and the Surround thing was starting to happen. And that's where I got the idea of proposing a journey through this *forest of percussion*, of assembling all of my percussional instruments and all of Kodo's - not all of mine, some of mine and some of Kodo's instruments, and bringing in Airtō, Zakir, and Michael Hinton, and Giovanni Hidalgo, and me and Kodo and just play free, and then take the best parts of that as basis for a work, a new work and take Kodo 'out of the box' as it were, take them out of the strict taiko and to get new influences in and have some fun with them. Just enjoy rhythm with them and make a new art form out of it. Not only an art form, but a new listening medium for the people. I thought that it would be important for people to be in the *middle* of Kodo. I will mix this SUPER AUDIO CD (SACD) as if you are in the middle, the centre, or the heart of Kodo. So that was the basis of the original inspiration.

I must say it was a really unique experience for us and really taking Kodo 'out of the box'. It was an eye-opening experience ... collaborating with musicians of that stature.

But it wasn't just the drummers, the second part of that was, my thought was to combine the drums with a vocal component, some of

the finest vocalists from around the world to join Kodo. The dream was in 2 stages, it was the Planet Drum percussionists, from my band to join them, and then to find the *sympatico*, the vocalists that would - spirit vocals - ecstatic vocals that would play well - mix with the spirit of Kodo. That was the inspiration.

Did Kodo's participation at Studio X go as you imagined it would?

It went exactly as I anticipated. Because I know Kodo, I am familiar enough with the style to know what it can do and what it can't do. The idea was to put them with improvisational players. These players are improvisational in nature, they improvise, they jam. The notion was that Kodo would catch that spirit, they would loosen up and be able to go with the flow, not *have to be Kodo*, they do not have to be anything they were. Here they were meeting people they've heard about but never played with. I set the arena, the stage, for this kind of magic to go down. Because that's what I wanted, I didn't want compositions, I didn't want people reading, I didn't want pre-determined pieces. I wanted just to be in the room together and start a groove and play. We played a lot, I do not know how many hours that we had on the tape, it was maybe like over 20 hours of music. I knew that if we have got 20 hours of playing together we would have 1 hour of great stuff. I am very pleased about how it turned out



photo by TAO

but, I have to say that I am not surprised that it turned out this way. That was the dream. Some dreams don't work - but this worked.

It was a process of adding Kodo ideas to your basic tracks. What are your thoughts, impressions?

I thought some of the ideas were very good, I thought some of the ideas were not so good. It is like any jam, with anybody, sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn't. When you do multi-track recording you always have the ability to do two things: one, to leave it off, completely or, re-do it. So a lot of the parts that we play, we came here to Tokyo. I said 'OK hear those *chappa* (small Japanese cymbals) parts? They were sloppy, let's do that.' The chappas were a great idea, and parts were interesting parts, but we weren't all together on it, you guys weren't all



Mondo Head CD Cover

together, 'Lets play proper chappas okay?' And so what we did is took those ideas, some of those ideas, and played them properly in the studios here. Because they were isolated there, some of the time, some things were in the big room, that we couldn't take away, but other things were like, I put chappas upstairs in the isolation room, and so they didn't get into the mics of the *chudaiko* or *hirado* or whatever, or the *shime*. That's the way I worked it. I thought, 'That idea...*ehh*...that didn't really work, forget about that. Let's go and do something else. Here we've got some good root, a good base rhythm and we've got a nice *shimedaiko* part. Okay, let's take that and expand that here, now in Tokyo. After I edited the basic tracks, the jam session, I made an edit and I sent Kodo a CD of the edit, and I said to them 'Okay now be Kodo. Now you guys make up, compose over the top of this jam. Voice, flute, *shamisen*, whatever. Alone, together, whatever you want, and then we'll try *that* out when I get to Tokyo.' Now, when I got here we tried that out and most of it worked, some of it, I didn't think worked and I said 'Well I don't think that this works' and so then we tried something different until we all agreed. So this is like

one of those kind of things that they call *collaboration*. So we had to agree on it. You know, I wouldn't want to force anything on Kodo and Kodo was kind enough not to force anything on me. We had, I would say, a shared vision.

We gained so much from this experience - maybe 'influence' is not the perfect word, what kind of change would you like to see in Kodo?

I really want Kodo to be Kodo, whatever they want it to be. I'm just offering some alternative and some variations to the mix. I am offering up some of my friends, like my *rollerdex*, my phone book, some of the people I play with. I say call them up because all these people I know. I want you to meet. I introduce people to other people. That 's one of the things I do. I'm sort of a connecting rod. You can call it *fusion*. *World fusion*. I would like Kodo to meet Airto. I arrange for people to meet each other and maybe have a collaboration. That's all you can do. Some of it may not work and then you just say 'Well it doesn't work' but *everything* so far, on this project has worked which is very, very unusual, even on my projects. You don't normally get 100% success. Everybody who has come to play on this SACD, that I have invited, is on that tape, nobody is on the cutting room floor. Everybody made it. That says two things. It says Kodo allowed it to come in, and that I chose correctly. Those are two things of success.


Where does Kodo go from here? That's up to Kodo. That has very little to do with me. This is just a recording. Maybe we will play this some day. I hope someday maybe we'll play this live and it becomes popular, people like to hear that. I can see this happening live. But it's just a record but, it's *more* than that, as well. Also Kodo will never be the same again. Because once you are exposed to another culture, you are little bit different. You put the food down on the table, you don't have to eat it, but if you do eat it, you might like it. And some of it you might like more than others. But it's at least, it's a journey, it's an exploration. So Kodo has now gone on an expedition, to find new grooves, new influences, new tastes from around the world. That's about all. That's what it *really* is about.

The 3rd North American Taiko Conference in June was especially memorable for Kodo, not least because we performed with the drummers of *Hachijo Island*.

In September 20 American taiko enthusiasts, including members of the percussion group *Rhythmix*, came to Sado to do workshops in taiko, song, dance and Bunya puppetry.

A 350 year old *keyaki* (Japanese zelkova) tree was brought from the Niigata mainland. The plan is to one day make our own taiko from it.

Kodo's new CD *Mondo Head*, produced by Mickey Hart, will be released on Sony Records on October 11th in Japan and in the spring of 2002 in the USA. Release dates in other countries will be announced shortly.

in brief... 

upcoming performances

One Earth Tour Japan

October

13	Tochigi	Tochigi-ken Sogo Bunka Centre	028-622-4101
14	Tochigi	Ashikaga Shimin Kaikan	0284-72-8268
16	Tokyo	Bunkyo Civic Hall	Sold out
17	Tokyo	Amyu Tachikawa	03-3201-8116
18	Saitama	Tokorozawa Shimin Bunka Centre	Sold out
20	Niigata	Niigata Kenmin Kaikan	Sold out

One Earth Tour Europe

November

4	De Montfort Hall	Leicester, UK	44-116-233-3111
5	Symphony Hall	Birmingham	44-121-780-3333
7	St David's Hall	Cardiff	44-29-20-878444
10	The Anvil	Basingstoke	44-1256-844244
12	Bridgewater Hall	Manchester	44-161-907-9000
13	Philharmonic Hall	Liverpool	44-151-709-3789
16-18	Barbican Centre	London	44-20-7638-8891
21-22	Philharmonie	Munich, Germany	49-89-936093
24	Festspielhaus	St. Pölten, Austria	43-2742-908080-222
25	Brucknerhaus	Linz	43-732-775230-237
26	Kultur & Kongresszentrum	Rosenheim, Germany	49-8031-3659365
30	ICC Berlin Saali	Berlin	49-030-23088230

December

2	Philipshalle	Dusseldorf	49-0180-5570000
3	Jahrhunderthalle	Frankfurt	49-089-1340400
5	Liederhalle, Hegel-Saal	Stuttgart	49-7031-711-26
6	Burghof	Lörrach	49-7621-94081-11
11	Nobel Prize 100th Anniversary Concert	Oslo, Norway	
15-16	Savoy Theatre	Helsinki, Finland	358-9-169-3703
18	Vanemuine Concert House	Tartu, Estonia	372-7-442272
19	Estonia Concert Hall	Tallinn	372-6-147760

One Earth Tour Japan (Feb.-Mar. 2002)

February

5-6	Amusement Sado		0259-86-3630
10-12	Tokyo Kokusai Forum Hall C		03-3201-8116
15	Aichi Kosei Nenkin Kaikan		052-263-7171

16-17 Osaka Kosei Nenkin Kaikan 06-6362-8122
After the concert in Osaka on Feb. 17th the Feb-Mar 2002 One Earth Tour will take us to the Chugoku, Shikoku and Kyushu regions. Please check our website for details.

Nobel Peace Prize

100th Anniversary Concert

Commemorating 100 years since the first Nobel Prize was given in 1901, an anniversary concert will be held this year in Oslo. The date will be December. 11th, the day after the anniversary of Alfred Nobel's death (1833- 1896). Kodo has been invited this year to appear. Kodo is the first ever Japanese group to perform at the Nobel concert. Last year's concert's guests included Bon Jovi and Natalie Cole. Attending together with recipients of this year's prize will be a number of past Nobel laureates.

Our thoughts go out to the victims of the terrorist attacks in the United States. It is inconceivable that the Wintergarden at the foot of the World Trade Center, where Kodo played taiko in 1988, is now at the bottom of that ghastly pile of rubble. It is our fondest hope that on this, the 100th anniversary of the Nobel Peace Prize, this terrible event leads the world not into war, but *somehow* into greater cooperation and understanding.

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.

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