

the KODŌ beat

鼓童



*Eiichi warms up for the workshop tour at the Kodo Apprentice Centre.
(He's the one with the round, shiny head).*

photo by Eiichi Saito

KASA 2003 North America Workshop Tour

Kodo Arts Sphere America (KASA) is pleased to announce a month-long workshop tour led by 20 year Kodo veteran Eiichi Saito and assisted by young Masami Miyazaki. The tour will visit Montreal, Toronto, Stamford, Long Island, Raleigh, Austin, Phoenix, Morgan Hill California, and wind up in the Hawaiian Islands. See page 4 for details or visit our web site. The following are some thoughts on workshops by Eiichi.

I personally refer to these workshops as the *demae* workshops (*takeout taiko*). Just like pizza (or ramen),

we bring the service to your home. Until *demae taiko* began you had to come to Sado to take part. The curriculum on these 4 day, 2 day, 1 day and 2 hour versions will be the same as on Sado though.

We will be tying up with local taiko groups in each community and using their drums and facilities, so I expect most of the participants will have taiko experience. New players are more than welcome though, in fact I prefer a mix, veterans, and beginners, young and old. Whichever workshop you attend, whether 2 hours or 4 days, the aim is the same. Not to become

better, not to learn a new piece, but to learn *how to have fun playing*. I am sure most people *do* have fun when they play the taiko, but in my travels I have noticed a common problem with taiko groups. It goes something like this. You form a group. At first simply playing is great fun. After 3 or 5 years you improve and have concerts and enter contests. You rehearse like crazy for the show and it's all a blast. You do the event and love it. Then another show is planned and before long you are making a schedule and rehearsing in order to have enough good stuff to put on the stage. Your initial aim was merely to play the taiko, but now you are playing the taiko in order to fill up the events, which incidentally, you also have to practice for. Then

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because you are playing before an audience you start thinking '*I mustn't make a mistake*' and '*I have to learn that new piece!*' What started out as fun gradually becomes a grind and so you quit. To fill in the gaps new players come along but - because there is such a disparity in ability with the more experienced members - they can't fit in. After 5 or 10 years the groups begin to lose their way and new members find it hard to break in. Everyone is playing at a different level so how should you practice? These kinds of problems can lead to the disbandment of the group itself. Many of the workshop participants over the years have been senior members and leaders of local taiko groups who have encountered these kinds of problems. They come less to learn how to play than to pick up ideas on how to better teach the taiko.

As for the content of the workshop, I like to sum it up by saying: 'Let's go back to being beginners'. When I joined Kodo I thought the taiko was a very severe kind of instrument. I have learned over the years that it should be fun however, and I try to imbue the workshop with an appreciation of that discovery. We explore ways to go back to when we first picked up the *bachi* and played for the sheer joy of it.

We begin each workshop with stretching. It's important to know your own body. *Wa-daiko* (Japanese drums) are like dance, it's not a matter of simply playing a rhythm, so the *way* one moves one's body is also an important means of expression.

After limbering up we get down to the drums. One thing we do is play games. We make a circle and start a rhythm which each player beats in succession going one way around the circle. When I give the signal, the rhythm changes directions. Eventually we have 3 sets of the same rhythm working around the circle at one time. Then we might introduce a different rhythm into the mix so you have to listen carefully for which rhythm is coming your way.

This will be the first *demae* workshop with a

female assistant. In most taiko groups women outnumber the men so it seems appropriate that we should include Masami Miyazaki, a newly-minted professional female taikoist.

Having done these workshops for going on 9 years I would say that the most commonly encountered problem is that people tend to concentrate too much on keeping 'in-step' visually with the other members of the group. Right hands up together, the same height, the same angle, the same smile. But it shouldn't be just that. When you began playing you didn't worry about playing in perfect synchronicity, and it was great fun. People tend to worry more about 'the look' than the sound. But it so often happens that the players (who should be having more fun than anyone, they being the ones doing what they love) are looking stiff as boards trying to keep everything together.

Another problem that occurs and is perhaps unique to North America is the notion that playing taiko is a kind of religious thing, a ceremony or rite. Each pose is rigidly adhered to, as if you are afraid of incurring the wrath of the gods if you look like you're having too much fun. It is all very well for the first *kamae*' (pose or stance) to be all together and exact, but once the music begins the player should be thinking about making his music, rather than where his arm is in relation the person playing on either side. In Japan taiko has been inextricably linked since pre-history to festivals and religious rites, and the Japanese gods love the sake that is usually part of the celebration and taiko music. The first stage of a *shinto* rite is usually somber and highly stylized, but it normally evolves to a stage where copious amounts of sake are consumed so that the taikoist can play as if he is taken over by the gods. In North America sake is rarely part of the taiko scene. Whether you drink or not, it is important to understand this connection with the taiko and how it informs taiko music and playing.

During the workshops on Sado we sometimes get together for a jam after dinner and a few drinks. Who knows, that may well happen on this tour too. One way or another we are going to have fun leading these workshops and we hope to leave a trail of laughter – and a new appreciation for the joy of taiko – in our wake.



Workshop assistant
Masami Miyazaki
photo by SHIGGY

Kodo Close-up:

Kazuki Imagai, player

The 23rd in a series of profiles of individual Kodo members

Kazuki Imagai was born in 1975 in Wachi, a small mountain village an hour and a half by train north of Kyoto. This is also where Kodo's main *Odaiko* player Yoshikazu was born. Kazuki has 2 younger sisters. His mother worked in the home and his father at the city hall. His earliest memories are of going around the mountains with his gardener grandfather and watching him dig up trees to deliver to various customers in the area. He also remembers going with his father to fish in the mountain streams. There were only 30 kids in the entire school and 5 in his class so even if they wanted to play baseball there were never enough bodies to make up a game.

His father was very strict and Kazuki was often punished, sometimes being forced to go running in the mountains at night. His fear of his father is one of his most vivid childhood memories, though now he understands his father's thinking and claims to bear no ill feelings.

The family used to run a part-time inn from their home, so to provide for the guests they had a vast menagerie of carp, chickens, goats, ducks, and even the odd ostrich. His grandfather also took his dogs into the mountains to shoot wild boar and pheasant.

The local group *Wachi Daiko* has a long history stretching back to the 12th or 13th Century, but the current style is a post-war revival. The group would perform at the school but it was only when the students were in their 4th year that they were allowed to hold the drumsticks and begin to play. Kazuki's first experience with the taiko was playing in front of his classmates and - in spite of feeling confident he knew the rhythm he had been hearing for years - he messed it up completely, much to everyone else's amusement.

In middle school he chose soccer over baseball so he wouldn't have to shave his head.

In 1988 Kodo came to play at his school. Kazuki remembers having no particular expectations and going into the hall with candies, chips and a Coke. When the show ended he looked down and saw that he

hadn't touched a thing. After the concert he went with his dad to say hello to his father's old friend Yoshikazu. Kazuki stayed by his dad's side and cried. He then bought Kodo's CD and listened to it over and over.



Kazuki went to an industrial high school to study computer programming. In 1991 - together with a friend - he joined Wachi Daiko as the first ever high school students. Soon after they went to Berlin for 3 performances as part of a Japan festival. He didn't see much however because as he was too busy being a gofer. As the end of high school approached he thought about joining Kodo and so came to Sado in November for a look-see. He lived like an apprentice for 4 days, figuring he was up to the experience because of his soccer training. He was in for a shock. Up at 4:50 am, a brisk 10 kilometre run, tightening the *shime daiko*...he was exhausted...and he wanted to join.

His mother wasn't too thrilled at first, thinking he would be wasting his computer education, but she came around. On the day he moved to Sado his train was late and so he missed the ferry. When he finally arrived he had to make do with cold, left-over curry rice and he was assigned a cold and left-over bedroom. Not a very auspicious start.

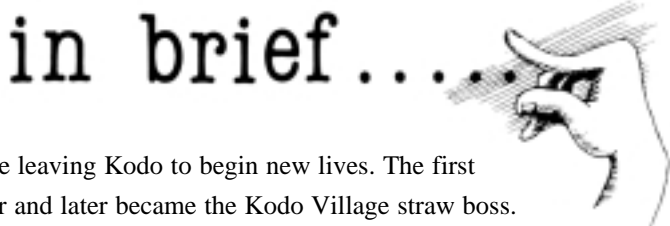
About 3 or 4 years ago he sensed he was losing his direction within the group and felt quite down. It was then that he was chosen to accompany Eiichi Saito on a school exchange tour. He learned a bit of management and a lot about Eiichi's approach to taiko. He became re-energized. Now he has begun composing. One of his pieces *Jayon*, (named after a woman in Korea) was once played as an encore.

In the future he would like to take part in more collaborative projects with outside musicians. This July he will make his directorial debut at the *Aikawa Kinzan Festival* in Sado. Kazuki is now having the time of his life. Check out Kodo's web site where he writes the Japanese version of the North American Tour Diary and takes many of the posted photos.

Kodo Staff members Yasuhiko Ishihara (*Gan chan*) and Masami are delighted to announce the birth of their first child in October, a boy called *Teruhiko*.

And the wheel keeps turning, two old hands are leaving Kodo to begin new lives. The first is *Ryuji Sato* who joined Kodo in 1981 as a player and later became the Kodo Village straw boss. Also leaving is Japan Tour Manager *Yuko Maeda (Peko)* - with the group since 1993 - she is going to travel for a bit before deciding on her next move. We wish them both all the best and happy trails.

We have installed a wood stove and hearth area in the dining room, just in time for the blizzard conditions on Sado this year. Very cozy...and everyone wants to hold their meetings there.



upcoming performances

One Earth Tour USA and Japan

February

- 12 Escondido, CA California Center for the Arts
- 13 Palm Desert, CA McCallum Theater
- 15 Tucson, AZ U of Arizona - Centennial Hall
- 16 Tempe, AZ ASU - Gammage Auditorium
- 19-22 Dallas, TX McFarlin Auditorium
- 25 San Antonio, TX Laurie Auditorium, Trinity University
- 27 Orange, TX Lutch Theater for the Performing Arts
- 28 and March 1 Houston, TX Jones Hall

March

- 5 New York, NY Carnegie Hall
- 6 Princeton, NJ McCarter Theater
- 7 New Brunswick, NJ New Brunswick CC / State Theatre
- 8 Newark, NJ Prudential Hall
- 10 Philadelphia, PA Verizon Hall
- 11 Boston, MA Symphony Hall
- 12 Amherst, MA University of Massachusetts Fine Arts Center Concert Hall
- 14 Purchase, NY Purchase College Performing Arts Center
- 15 West Point, NY Eisenhower Hall
- 20-22 Toronto, ONT Massey Hall
- 24-26 Ann Arbor, MI Michigan Theater
- 28 Milwaukee, WI PABST Theater
- 29 Madison, WI Wisconsin Union Theater

May

- 21,22 Nagano Usuda-cho Cosmo Hall 0267-66-3922
- 23 Nagano Nagano-ken Matsumoto Bunka Kaikan 026-223-8875
- 25 Ishikawa Ishikawa Kosei Nenkin Kaikan 076-262-2611
- 26 Toyama Toyama Kenmin Kaikan 076-262-2611
- 28 Nagano Mesena Hall 026-245-1800
- 30 Niigata Arai Sogo Bunka Hall 0255-72-9411
- 31 Niigata Kashiwazaki-shi Shimin Kaikan 0257-22-5898

June

- 1 Niigata Koide-go Bunka Kaikan 02579-2-8811
- 3-6 Niigata Niigata Kenmin Kaikan 025-228-5979
- 8 Niigata Hoppo Bunka Hakubutsukan 025-385-2001
- 14 Saitama Kasukabe Shimin Bunka Kaikan 03-3204-9933
- 16 Saitama Wako Shimin Bunka Center 048-468-7771
- 17 Tokyo Hoku Topia Sakura Hall 03-5390-1221
- 18 Tokyo Akishima Shimin Kaikan 042-546-1711
- 20 Tokyo Ota Kumin Hall Aprico 03-5744-1600
- 21 Tokyo Bunkyo Civic Hall 03-3201-8116
- 22 Tokyo Mitaka-shi Kokaido 0422-47-5122
- 24 Chiba Chiba-ken Bunka Kaikan 043-224-1710
- 27 Ibaraki Ushiku Shimin Center 0298-74-3111
- 29 Saitama Muse Marquee Hall 042-998-7777

Real Time Tour Report in English

For a window on the latest goings-on with the North American Tour check out St. Louis born player Kaoru Watanbe's *North American Tour Report* in the *What's New?* section of our web site at <http://www.kodo.or.jp>

North America Workshop Tour Schedule February

- 15,16 Montreal PQ *Arashi Daiko* (closed to the public)
- 18,19 Toronto Ont *Isshin Daiko* (closed to the public)
- 22 Stamford Ct *O-Tatsu Taiko* and *AAFSA Taiko*.
contact Sandra Shen at: info@tatsutaiko.com
- 23 Stonybrook NY *O-Tatsu Taiko* and *AAFSA Taiko*.
contact Sandra Shen at: info@tatsutaiko.com
- 25,26 Raleigh NC *Triangle Taiko*
contact Gayle Shimokura at: gshim@email.unc.edu

March

- 1,2 Austin Tx *Austin Taiko* (closed to the public)
- 4 Phoenix Az *Fushicho Daiko* (observers welcome)
contact Esther Vandecar at: esther@taikoaz.com
- 6-9 Morgan Hill Ca *Kodo Arts Sphere America*
contact Daniel Rosen at: KodoAmerica@hawaii.rr.com
- 12 Maui Hi *Maui Taiko* (closed to the public)
- 13 Maui Hi *Zenshin Taiko* (closed to the public)
- 14 Hawaii Hi *Kona Daifukuji Taiko* (closed to the public)
- 16 Honolulu Hi *Hawaii International Taiko Festival*
contact Chizuko Endo at: taiko@hawaii.rr.com

Attention members of Friends of Kodo:

Members' advance ticket information for the May & June concerts is included with this issue of Kodo Beat.

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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