

the KODŌ beat

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2004 KASA North America Workshop Tour

The 2004 KASA North America Workshop Tour was a two-week whirlwind up and down the West Coast of the USA. Ten workshops were held in seven cities with over 250 participants and dozens of observers. Text and photos by tour manager/ interpreter Daniel Rosen.

In my over three years working with KASA, I have put together four workshop tours, but it wasn't until this year that I went on one I had organized. I book a hard tour.

Kodo veteran *Ryutaro Kaneko* led this, his first North American workshop tour, with stops in Sacramento, Cortez (CA), Emeryville (CA), Los Angeles, Portland and Seattle for a total of ten workshops hosted and co-hosted by over 20 groups.

Ryutaro's curriculum concentrates less on the taiko itself, than on preparing one's body to play, something many participants seem dubious about at first. Invariably they come away transformed. Relaxation techniques, breathing exercises, mental imagery, and exercises designed to help players find their centre of energy are some of the methods Ryutaro uses to raise awareness of the body in relation to the drum. This can not only be felt by the drummers, but can be heard by anyone in the reverberations of the drums. Even after the tenth workshop I was amazed by the difference in sound before and after the sessions.

The tour kicked off on March 17th in Sacramento with a workshop hosted by the *Sacramento Taiko Dan* whose dojo was still reverberating with the energy of the *2003 North American Taiko Conference*. Twenty-seven members of the group came out to make our



inaugural workshop a booming success, and group leader Tiffany Tamaribuchi was just one of the familiar faces that made us feel immediately at home.

The next day we were off to Cortez, CA for a workshop with *Stockton Bukkyo Taiko*. Their Artistic Director, Earle Fox is also a member of the *Sacramento Taiko Dan*, so he picked us up in Sacramento and took us all the way through to Cortez, about an hour and a half south of Stockton. In the early 1900's Japanese immigrants settled in the area to build a farming community that thrived for three generations. According to workshop coordinator Chris Kubo, in recent years the area has lost many young people to nearby cities, but judging from the gathering at the Cortez Buddhist Church of taiko participants and volunteers who prepared the soba afterwards, it's clear the Japanese American spirit is alive and well.

Right after Cortez we were back on the road to Emeryville. About two and a half hours later we arrived for a 1 am check in at the hotel, and were up again the next morning to prepare for the next workshop.

Emeryville Taiko is led by Susan Horn who was an

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summer 2004

apprentice at the Kodo Apprentice Centre the same year as Ryutaro, so no introductions were needed. Twenty-one of Susan's students came out for the workshop on Friday evening, and the next day she opened her *dojo* to the entire Bay-Area taiko community. With the help of local workshop coordinator Greg Clark, Saturday's full-day event gathered 28 taikoists from over ten area groups for this



Ryutaro getting down with Yoga Instructor Debbie Taylor.

unique open workshop. We left Emeryville feeling that the KASA workshop might help inspire further ties among the Emeryville taiko community.

Next stop San Jose, where old friends at *San Jose Taiko* welcomed us into their homes. After a good night's rest the morning workshop was dedicated to Ryutaro's regular curriculum while the afternoon session featured a special seminar in *chappa* and *sling okedo* as requested by SJT. This, Ryutaro's first specially-tailored workshop was a great success, ending in a *chappa-okedo* jam session with Ryutaro and the SJT members.

On Monday we hopped on a plane to LA where *Bombu Taiko* leader Bryan Yamami was at the airport to greet us. Bryan took us to my sister's home in West Hollywood where we would spend the next four days. After a short break we were off to Higashi Honganji Temple in Japan Town, where *Bombu Taiko* practices.

Tuesday brought us to the Venice, Santa Monica Free Methodist Church where *Isshin Taiko* leader

Mark Honda started the workshop with stretching drills to the count of *ichi-ni-san!* Members of UCLA's *Kyodo Taiko* also joined the mix to complete our seventh workshop in a row, surely a KASA record.

After a much-needed day off, Ryutaro and I were right back into the groove with a joint workshop between LA-based groups *Kinnara Daiko* and *Zenshuji Zendeko Taiko*. Kodo has a long history with Kinnara, so we were greeted by many old friends. Then a short plane ride brought us to Portland on Friday where *Portland Taiko* leaders Ann Ishimaru and Zack Semke had organized a workshop with PT performing members and trainees.

From the Expo Center we went directly to the train station and were soon on our way up the Pacific Coast to Seattle, the last stop on our tour. We stayed with *Northwest Taiko's* Charlotte Ohashi and *Seattle Kokon Taiko* leader Stan Shikuma joined us for dinner, giving Ryutaro and me the rare opportunity to discuss various issues surrounding North American taiko with leading members of the community.

The Sunday workshop was a full-house, with representatives of all seven of the area taiko groups present, as well as members of two Vancouver-based groups for a total of 30 participants. The workshop was hosted by the *Regional Taiko Groups-Seattle*, a cooperative organization which pools the resources of all seven Seattle-area taiko groups to produce projects each troupe could not support on its own. In my years with KASA I have seen many groups in one area divided by differences in philosophy and style, so it was good to see Seattle groups working so closely together to unite the community.

Our heartfelt thanks to everyone who invited us into their dojos and their homes. Many thanks too, to *The Japan Foundation, Los Angeles Office*, for their generous grant which helped to make this tour such a memorable success.

Remember everyone, as Ryutaro so often reminds us: RELAX!

After three years in Honolulu where KASA Program Director Daniel Rosen set up and ran KASA, the reigns now pass to Donna Ebata in Los Angeles. See the KASA website <www.kodoarts.org> for details.

Kodo Close-up:

Mitsuru Ishizuka, player

The 26th in a series of profiles of individual Kodo members

Mitsuru Ishizuka was born in Tokyo on August 6th, 1979. The Saitama Prefecture he was raised in just north of Tokyo was a lot more rural then. He has an older brother and younger sister and a half brother from his father's second marriage. His birth mother – who died when he was 14 – was a professional Japanese dancer. His father *Yutaka Ishizuka* (professional name: *Saburo Mochizuki*) is a traditional Japanese percussionist, who began his drumming career as a founding member of *Oedo Sukeroku Daiko*. His father then branched out into Japanese classical music, specializing in playing the *tsuzumi* in the *nagauta* tradition. The soundtrack of Mitsuru's childhood was Japanese classical music.

He was a slightly chubby and shy, average schoolboy who nevertheless enjoyed his school years, particularly music and gymnastics. The key to emerging from his shell was a very special teacher in grade 5, who took Mitsuru under his wing and instilled him with confidence. A year later a taiko group called *Hatoyama Koin-no-Kai* was formed locally and his father was asked to be the leader. Practices were once a week at first, then twice, and when that wasn't enough for several of them to slake their taiko thirst, they borrowed the local gym and practiced 3 more nights a week. He also belonged the taiko and dance club at school where he played a bit of *shinobue* (horizontal bamboo flute) and learned folk dance. He commuted 2 hours each way to a unique private middle and high school, the same one attended by Kodo drummer Hideyuki Saito. At *Jiyu-no-Mori Gakuen* there were no uniforms, tests, exams and class attendance was optional. Between his favourite Japanese lit. classes he would join on his guitar with students who could often be found jamming in the hallways.

In Mitsuru's 2nd year of high school a friend took him to Theatre Apple in Shinjuku for a Kodo December Concert. In the 7th row, centre he was close enough to see the faces of the players as they whaled away on the taiko strung out along the width of the stage. "That looks like fun!" he thought. He went to the concert again a year later and it was there, at the age of 18, that he made up his mind about his future. He had missed the deadline for application to Kodo however, so he had to wait another



year before that future would begin. Not one to let the grass grow under his feet, Mitsuru joined *Yukihiro Miyauchi*, an old friend of his father's and his group, *Wakon Daiko* and spent the year travelling about schools demonstrating the joy of *wadaiko* to young people.

The next January he set out for the bitterly cold and snowbound Sado to apply for a place among the apprentices. After filling out a questionnaire, in the huge and freezing gym with its unheated wooden floor, Eiichi began to teach them taiko in his bare feet. Mitsuru and number of the others reluctantly slipped off their heavy woollen socks too. The struggle had begun. That night they were invited to strut their stuff. Those with no musical experience merely talked about themselves; those who could play, did so, either solo or with other aspirants. One person sang while standing on their head. (They made the cut). Mitsuru went for broke and played a solo *Yataibayashi*. He obviously pulled it off too, as a month later he was accepted as one of the 10 apprentices. As a second generation taikoist who had been playing taiko much of his life, his biggest challenge was learning to adapt to Kodo's much more stripped-down style of drumming. No flourishes or movement allowed that aren't absolutely required to elicit sound from the drum.

Over his 2 year apprenticeship he studied tea ceremony, *kyogen*, *noh*, gardening, both Japanese and Okinawan dance, taiko, flute and song. Spread out over the second year were 4 graduation performances. Mitsuru directed their final one which was really a full dress performance in front of the Kodo members.

Now in his 3rd year as a full member, Mitsuru specializes in 'power taiko' pieces like *Yataibayashi*. His goals include playing the *odaiko* on stage, but before that comes about he has a more immediate task. On his last tour there were fewer than the usual number of players, so everyone had a larger role. They stood out, both their strengths *and* weaknesses. Before expanding his repertoire, the most immediate goal Mitsuru has set for himself is to play taiko much better than he does now.



photo by Masakazu Sakomizu

We sadly mark the death on May 18 of jazz drumming great *Elvin Jones* at the age of 76. Arguably the most influential drummer of the modern jazz era, he played with the legendary *John Coltrane Quintet* and alongside *Duke Ellington*, *Charlie Parker* and *Miles Davis*. Kodo was honoured to have him as a guest at our first EC in '88. The man and his music was, and remains an inspiration to us all.

in brief.....



upcoming performances

Aikawa Kozan Matsuri

July 27 Aikawa, Sado Island 0259-86-3630

Earth Celebration 2004

August 20-22, Sado Island

Shiroyama Concerts

Kodo, Fanfare Ciocarlia (Romania)

EC Theatre 'Yukiai'

As of June 30th we are accepting applicants on a first come, first served basis for three Mini-Workshops: '*Kasuga Ondeko*', '*Ushibuka Haiya Folk Dance*' and '*Hula 'Auana Intermediate class*' and a Multi-Day Workshop '*Let's Play Samba!*' (August 17-19). Tickets for Shiroyama Concerts, the EC Theatre event and workshops are on sale on the EC website <http://www.kodo.or.jp/ec/> or call the EC office at 0259-81-4100 and ask for a ticket application form.



One Earth Tour Japan

September, Hokkaido

| | | | |
|----|-------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| 11 | Sapporo Concert Hall | Kitara Dai Hall | 011-241-3871 |
| 14 | Asahikawa Shimin Bunka Kaikan | | 0166-22-5367 |
| 15 | Takikawa-shi Bunka Centre | | 0125-23-6330 |
| 17 | Monbetsu Shimin Kaikan | | 01582-3-6081 |
| 19 | Nemuro-shi Sogo Bunka Kaikan | | 0153-23-4705 |
| 22 | Kushiro Shimin Bunka Kaikan | | 0154-24-5005 |
| 25 | Tomakomai Shimin Kaikan | | 090-1522-9360 |
| 27 | Obihiro Shimin Bunka Hall | | 0155-23-9480 |

October

| | | | |
|----|-----------|----------------------------------|--------------|
| 6 | Niigata | Jyoetsu Bunka Kaikan | 025-522-8800 |
| 14 | Shiga | Hikone-shi Bunka Plaza | 0749-27-5200 |
| 16 | Hyogo | Kakogawa Shimin Bunka Kaikan | 0794-24-5381 |
| 18 | Tokushima | Tokushima Shiritsu Centre | 089-943-8083 |
| 19 | Kagawa | Sunport Hall Takamatsu | 086-224-6066 |
| 21 | Ehime | Niitama-shi Shimin Bunka Centre | 089-943-8083 |
| 23 | Ehime | Uwa Bunka Kaikan | 089-943-8083 |
| 24 | Ehime | Ehime-ken Kenmin Bunka Kaikan | 089-943-8083 |
| 26 | Kochi | Kochi Kenritsu Kenmin Bunka Hall | 088-822-1421 |

| | | | |
|----|----------|---------------------------|--------------|
| 29 | Oita | Oita Bunka Kaikan | 092-715-0374 |
| 31 | Miyazaki | Kiyotake-cho Bunka Kaikan | 0985-84-0181 |

November

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|----|-----------|-----------------------------|--------------|
| 2 | Miyazaki | Nango Heartfull Centre | 0987-64-0310 |
| 4 | Kagoshima | Kagoshima Shimin Bunka Hall | 099-226-3465 |
| 6 | Nagasaki | Shimabara Fukko Arena | 0957-74-5123 |
| 8 | Nagasaki | Iki Bunka Hall | 0920-47-0302 |
| 11 | Kumamoto | Hitoyoshi Culture Palace | 0966-45-4270 |
| 12 | Saga | Saga Shimin Kaikan | 0952-26-2361 |

| | | | |
|----|-----------|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| 13 | Fukuoka | Fukuoka Shimin Kaikan | 092-713-5321 |
| 15 | Yamaguchi | Ube-shi Watanabe Okina Kinen Kaikan | 0836-34-2384 |

December Concert Series

This year the concerts will be directed by (Wildman) Eiichi Saito. If you've been to one of his workshops you will know you can expect concerts burning with fun and passion.

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|--------|---------|---------------------------|
| 4, 5 | Sado | Amusement Sado |
| 9 - 12 | Tokyo | Bunkyo Civic Hall |
| 15, 16 | Nagoya | Aichi Kosei Nenkin Kaikan |
| 18, 19 | Osaka | Osaka Kosei Nenkin Kaikan |
| 22, 23 | Niigata | Niigata Kenmin Kaikan |

Details on the December Concerts schedule will be available in mid-August, and an advance reservation application form will be sent to Friends of Kodo members.

Ryutaro Kaneko, Aguri Tour

The *Aguri Tour 2004* schedule is finally out. Come hear sounds filled with warmth and nostalgia from a time long past...

Players: '*Aguri*' ensemble [*Ryutaro Kaneko* (taiko), *EPO* (voice, guitar and harp), *Haruhiko Saga* (horse-head fiddle, throat singing)]

| | | |
|---------|------------------|-----------------------------|
| Oct. 31 | Sado Island | Amusement Sado |
| Nov. 2 | Niigata-shi | Ryutopia Nohgakudo |
| Nov. 4 | Gifu | Kani-shi Bunka Sozo Centre |
| Nov. 7 | Hiroshima-shi | NTT Cred Hall |
| Nov. 8 | Okayama | Takahashi Sogo Bunka Kaikan |
| Nov. 9 | Okayama-shi | Nishigawa I Plaza |
| Nov. 12 | Kichijoji, Tokyo | Star Pine's Cafe |

Friends of Kodo members: Please call the Kodo Ticket Service at 0259-86-2330 or send an email to <ticket@kodo.or.jp> for Aguri tour tickets.

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 web site.

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

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