

the KODŌ beat

鼓童

On the Road with Kodo



Boston Taikoist Mark H Rooney is the assistant director of O-daiko New England. He worked as intern assistant tour manager for Kodo's North American Tour 2005 as part of a KASA programme intended to share professional tour management experience with North American Taiko groups.

One of my duties was to man the merchandise table before, during and after the performance. This gave me the advantage of having direct contact with the audience. I was able to answer a lot of the audience members' questions. I was also witness to how great an impression Kodo leaves on its audience. Some people were moved to tears as they thanked me for the concert. Some seemed to think I was one of the members. I felt a little uncomfortable taking credit for the amazing performance that Kodo delivered night after night. I was simply along for the ride.

As the tour progressed I started to see how each member was a cog in the wheel of a finely tuned machine. I came to see myself as one of those cogs. To see these guys unloading the truck of all their equipment is almost like seeing an elaborate dance. I felt I was in the way and mostly stood to the side and observed. But within a few days, I was able to jump in and I even knew where to direct the house crew by the end – they standing to the side to watch the dance.

By the end of the tour, I understood that I too was partly responsible for the performance. They can't do a good show if they don't get a good night's sleep which involves a speedy check-in to the hotel. Kodo can't afford to pay per diems if they don't sell merchandise. Audience members have many questions and appreciate that someone from Kodo takes the time to answer.

March 26, 2005 – Today was the end to my 'taiko fast'. I have not played since the beginning of the tour (although I was fortunate enough to learn a few things from some of the players – my legs still hurt from Yosuke-san's *Miyake* lesson three days ago). I haven't played or practiced my own music in two months. At first I didn't play because there wasn't enough time. I was new to this entire realm (being my first tour and managing not being my forte) and therefore it took me longer to accomplish everything, discovering my job



*Dobashi's head. What life on the road is mostly about.
photo by Motofumi Yamaguchi*

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15 minutes to curtain...

as it came. As I found more time between duties, I was still hesitant to play the drums in front of the performers, intimidated and feeling that I should not interrupt their more important personal practice time with my clumsy drumblings. After a couple of weeks though, it was Yoko-san - with her usual kindness - who spoke up on my behalf and mentioned that it was a shame that I didn't get to drum now, though I played almost every day in Boston. I was quickly given an official invitation by artistic director Motofumi-san to play the drums during personal practice times. Over the next week I desperately looked for time to explore the beautiful instruments I had been helping to load in and out of the truck. But



8 minutes to curtain...

circumstances worked against me. My frustration mounted until I had a conversation with Kazunari-san in Chicago at the tour half-way point. He reminded me that it is sometimes good to step away from something in order to gain perspective. From that point on, I decided that I was going on a 'taiko fast' - a way to gain perspective. What I found was that I learned as much about taiko from doing my job and observing others as I would have by playing, perhaps even more. One wouldn't think that setting up T-shirts on a table and dealing with hotel logistics and house commissions would make one a better taiko player. However I started to think of these errands as part of my training, a path to a better understanding of what makes a good taiko player. I was fascinated by the meticulous nature with which Tomohiro-san would spend considerable time cutting tiny pieces of tape for marking the positions of drums on the stage. He approached it like a surgeon. I started to recognize this

precision in his approach to the *odaiko*. The same gentle care that Yoshie-san took in preparing the green room was heard in the halls as she warmed up her voice. Kaoru-san's job of packing the truck after every venue was done with the same persistence and discipline as the musical fundamentals he devoted so much time to during the day. The key element to becoming a renowned taiko group could easily be attributed to the dedication with which every member devotes themselves to the task at hand. Whether they were setting up equipment or rehearsing their performance didn't matter. There is a passion for doing one's best that pervades the organization. Yet, I think that what makes Kodo so inspiring is that these are ordinary people calling upon their more extraordinary potential. Masafumi-san, the stage manager, was almost inhumanly tireless, but still the most laid-back guy you could hope to meet. Jun-san, the tour manager, worked with the highest level of professionalism yet had the greatest sense of humor and was always eager to joke around. Eiichi-san has a presence ten times bigger than any stage they performed on yet, is easily the most approachable man I've met in a long time.

For me, the greatest part of this tour was not about the show, but just seeing the realness of the people who put it together. Sharing a laugh, a drink, a meal, a memory - this makes it all the more incredible to witness the effect that Kodo has on the people who come from near and far to see them.

So today, as I stood on the *yatai* in front of that gorgeous *odaiko* and prepared myself to break my 'fast', I tried to reflect not so much on the technique I had been observing for two months, but on the humanity and humility which underlines it. It didn't



After the show.

Mini photo essay by Takeshi Arai

keep my arms from getting tired, and it didn't make my sound any prettier, but at least I felt that I was starting to understand something new about taiko. Thanks for the perspective Kodo.

Kodo Close-up:

Toshiaki Negishi, staff

The 29th in a series of profiles of individual Kodo members

Toshiaki Negishi was born in the suburbs of Tokyo on May 29th, 1963. He has one sister who is 3 years younger. His father is an electrician and mother a housewife and assistant in some of his father's varied business ventures. Toshiaki remembers a happy childhood playing marbles, war games and visiting his friend with a train set. He played soccer and baseball and rooted for the Tokyo Giants. His parents seemed to have taken a pretty *laissez faire* attitude towards his upbringing and throughout his school career he was able to coast by doing only as much work as was needed to pass. In middle and high school the centre of his life was the soccer club with an hour's practice beginning at 7 am and another hour or more after classes. His early musical experience was limited to a guitar bought for him in his early teens, which didn't develop very far. He listened to bands like *Led Zeppelin*, *Queen* and *Deep Purple*.

In school he became fascinated with Marxist thought through the writings of Leo Huberman. Further reading of John Maynard Keynes sparked an interest in economics because of its powerful influence on politics. He applied to prestigious Waseda University and – after failing entrance – spent a year at a crammer. He was accepted the following year. He soon found his poor math skills not up to the requirements of the economics department and so lost interest in his studies. He joined a small theatre club in second year which held meetings in the evenings so he would be able to attend the minimal number of lectures needed to graduate. He began doing backstage work for '*Gekidan Shin*' (The Forest Group) but soon found himself wanting to act. He was fascinated by the possibilities of drama. His stiffness on stage however relegated him to mostly minor roles. He also directed one show but was frustrated by the difficulty in getting actors to carry out his vision.

During university he worked part time at the *Parco* department store doing a multitude of jobs, from selling pianos to promoting and organizing events. He

once even played Godzilla where he engaged visiting kiddies in tugs of war. Much to their delight it was short work toppling Toshiaki in his enormous rubber suit. He lay helpless surrounded by gaggles of laughing children shrieking 'We beat Godzilla!' Toshiaki's greatest role. He also video-taped various events for an in-store news channel, and edited the raw footage, often till the wee hours of the morning. This job made Toshi think for a time he might want to be a reporter or work in TV.

The year after graduating from university he worked at a cram school teaching math, English and taiko, which he had learned at a 2-day workshop. This led to him going to a Kodo performance at Theatre Apple in Shinjuku.

He was surprised and impressed enough to go 3 times in a row and still want more. His excitement was more philosophical than musical. Yoshikazu on the *odaiko* seemed to represent mankind squeezing the last possible ounce out of himself for the sake of the challenge. It struck him as pure and intensely human.

That summer Toshi went to Earth Celebration '89, where he was swept up in the special energy and unique atmosphere of Ogi, crawling with foreigners, and beautiful Shiroyama Park. In October he attended a *Kodo Juku* workshop at the old Apprentice Centre on Sado's dramatic north coast. He was accepted as an apprentice and moved to Sado in April, but after 2 months was told he had no sense of rhythm and he could forget about becoming a player. He joined the staff instead and (in spite of his questionable math skills) worked at that job for 10 years. Toshi has also run the *Fringe* events at EC, a job he loved as he was able to meet so many stimulating people. He currently puts in about 12 hours a day, six days a week as the sales manager at *Otodaiku*, Kodo's retail arm. http://www.otodaiku.co.jp/index_e.html

If you plan to join us at this August's Earth Celebration you will find Toshi keeping things rolling smoothly at the Flea Market. Do stop him to say hello.



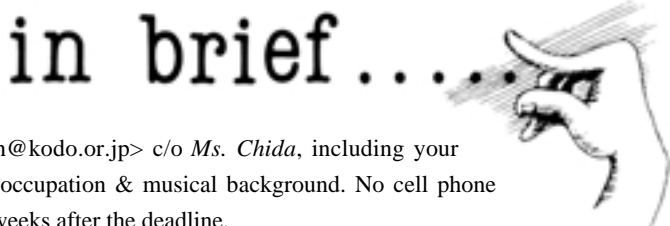
The next *Kodo Juku* intensive stayover workshop led by *Eiichi Saito* will be held on Sado Island from Sept 21-25, 2005. Application deadline: June 30. Open to 20 taikoists 15 years old & up. Cost: ¥55,000, room

& board included. Send a postcard or e-mail <zaidan@kodo.or.jp> c/o Ms. Chida, including your name, address, age, sex, telephone #, e-mail address, occupation & musical background. No cell phone mail accepted. Successful applicants will be notified 3 weeks after the deadline.

Sayo Tsuji will be taking over from *Yasuko Yamaguchi* as the new administrator of *Friends' of Kodo*.

Probationary member *Miwa Kinai* has joined the production staff and will be looking after the Japanese school tours.

For the most personal and up-to date reports and pictures of Kodo's latest goings on check out the *Weblog* on our website. All contributions are made by Kodo members. Mostly in Japanese, but Kaoru Watanabe contributes regularly in English.



upcoming performances

One Earth Tour Japan

May

14	Tochigi	Ashikaga Shimin Kaikan	0277-53-3133
15	Takasaki-shi, Gunma	Gunma Ongaku Centre	0277-53-3133
17-19	Saitama	Fukaya Shimin Bunka Kaikan	048-574-7075
21	Saitama	Saitama-shi Bunka Centre	048-866-4600
22	Saitama	Iruma-shi Shimin Kaikan	04-2964-2411
24	Tokyo	Hachioji Shimin Kaikan	042-334-8471
25	Tokyo	Hoya Komorebi Hall	0424-21-1919
27	Sagamihara-shi, Kanagawa	Green Hall Sagamiono	042-742-9999
28	Tokyo	Ota Kumin Hall Aprico	03-5744-1600
29	Kanagawa	Kawasaki-shi Kyoiku Bunka Kaikan	03-3201-8116

31	Chiba	Ichihara-shi Shimin Kaikan	0436-20-9900
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June

1	Chiba	Funabashi Shimin Bunka Hall	047-434-5555
2	Chiba	Inzai-shi Bunka Hall	0476-42-8811
4	Saitama	Misato-shi Bunka Kaikan	048-958-9900
5	Tokyo	Tiara Koto	03-5468-3282
6	Saitama	Tokorozawa Shimin Bunka Centre Marquee Hall	04-2998-7777
9	Ibaraki	Hitachinaka-shi Bunka Kaikan	029-275-1122
11	Fukushima	Haramachi Shimin Bunka Kaikan	0244-25-2763
13	Fukushima	Kitakata Plaza	022-771-1432
15	Yamagata	Yamagata-ken Kenmin Kaikan	022-771-1432
17	Akita	Akita Kenmin Kaikan	022-771-1432
19	Iwate	Kitakami-shi Bunka Koryu Centre Sakura Hall	022-771-1432
24	Fukushima	Fukushima-ken Bunka Centre	024-558-0066
25	Sendai-shi	Miyagi Prefectural Auditorium (Miyagi Kenmin Kaikan)	022-215-2545
28	Niigata	Shibata Shimin Bunka Kaikan	090-5434-3185

Aikawa Kozan Matsuri

July 27	Aikawa, Sado Island	0259-86-3630
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Earth Celebration 2005

August 19-21, Sado Island

Theme 'TATAKU'- to Beat a Rhythm

Shiroyama Concerts

Aug. 19 Kodo

20 Carlos Nuñez (Spanish Celtic music)

21 Carlos Nuñez and Kodo

Mini-Workshops & Seminars

Japanese Taiko, Traditional-Miyake Taiko,



Ranjosan's Japanese Flute Making, Edo Maturibayashi, Dancing to the Beat of Kodo, Kasuga Ondeko, Ogi Okesa Folk Dance, Hawaiian Hula, Celtic Culture

Multi-Day Workshop

Let's Play Samba! (August 16-18)

Exhibitions

Ainu Traditional Arts and Craft, Earth Furniture

EC Pre-Event

Taiko Taiken Juku (Free workshop series offered by Kodo throughout Sado in June)

Other Events

Kodo Village Open House, Fringe Events, Flea Market

EC ticket sales begin June 1. Workshop application deadline is June 24.

Details will be available on our website in mid-May.

Attention members of Friends of Kodo.

An EC ticket information leaflet will be sent to you in May.

EarthBeat Festival, Tokyo

A gathering of musicians, craftspeople, NGO/NPO groups and people interested in all things *organic*.

Venue: Tiara Koto

June 4 Concert - Aguri Ensemble (Ryutaro Kaneko, EPO and Haruhiko Saga) and Gocoo

June 5 Kodo

Two-day concert pass available. ¥6,500

Other Events: workshops, flea market, craft market, ecology garden exhibit, organic and ethnic cafe, etc.

Inquiries: Earth Garden Tel: 03-5468-3282

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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