

# the KODŌ beat

# 鼓童

## *prism rhythm: Home-made CD*

*Kodo's 20th CD 'prism rhythm' will be released by Sony Classical in Japan on July 20th, 2005. This article is based on a conversation with Kodo's staff sound man and go-to computer guy, Takuro Susaki, who joined Kodo in 1988. This project was his baby, start to finish.*

I think there is a certain image of Kodo held by our listeners. There is this backbone that is our music, but Kodo is an evolving entity, as the members grow and change and fresh blood is introduced, our direction subtly changes. I wanted to see and appreciate how the Kodo members who are performing *now* on stage grasped the idea of Kodo, what kind of music should they as members of Kodo play?

My first job was to gather together the music that was to appear. There is a different composer and arranger for each piece. We asked the players to come up with a composition about a year before the recording. I asked mostly younger players to create



Kodo's 20th CD, *prism rhythm*, cover art by Yukari Miyagi

something that could, in time, become part of Kodo's standard repertoire. Most of our CDs to date have been centered on the work of senior members. Uniquely, four of the songs are composed and arranged by women



members, which very much adds to

Takeshi Arai and his *head-phones*  
photo by SHIGGY

the freshness of the sound. Jun Akimoto - who is a foreign tour manager - wrote the piece called *floor*. This is the first time a recording has been on our CD composed by a production staff member rather than a player. *Shishi no Tani*, *Attate Kudakero* and *Morikomori* are already being used on stage, we did *Kuyurage* at EC and *Renka* is going to be used in a performance with Okinawan dancers in Okinawa in the fall. So it looks as if the members successfully fulfilled their brief in creating a fresh infusion to Kodo's repertoire.

This was the first time I have had so much direct creative control over a project, my normal role being more technical. But to me - whether I am a producer, technician or director - there isn't such a great distinction. For instance, when I am the sound engineer at a concert, the brain I use to figure out how to get the best sound from the drums to the ears of the

## volume seventy-three summer 2005

audience is not so very different from the one I use to get the music in the head of the composer on to the CD. So actually this project didn't feel like completely new territory to me.

Another unique aspect of this album is that it is our first recorded at Kodo Village. Most of the previous CDs have been recorded either at Sony's studios, live in concert, or in empty concert halls. The Sony engineer brought his gear to the Village and we used both his and our equipment. This is also the first time we have recorded in our own recording studio. The tapings were all done over the space of a week. The equipment was in the studio and the music was largely made in the adjoining Rehearsal Hall. The taiko is a big instrument, with big sound. Now Sony's studio is pretty large for a studio, but still small for taiko, and is much smaller than our enormous wooden hall. The materials of the space are important too, our hall being made of wood, while studios are often made of concrete. This is good for sound separation but something of the full rich sound of taiko is missing. Wood absorbs much of the deepest and loudest sound instead of bouncing it back into and around the room, as happens with a harder surface. The sound that does come back from the walls is warm and rich. To capture this important environmental texture I arranged the mics as you would for a classical recording. I put up 4 omni-directional mics away from the instruments and around the hall. These picked up the sounds of the hall responding to the instruments. The instruments themselves were recorded with uni-directional mics placed nearby to clearly capture the detail of each performance. These are blended together in the CD. No matter how skilful you are in the recording and post-production though, if you didn't capture great music to begin with, well, you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

Each composer was given freedom to do with their creation as they saw fit. They were given advice but not directions. Up till now most of the melodies in Kodo's music was provided by the *fue*. Here we have included everything from grand piano to toy ones, from *kokyū* to the sound of wooden clogs. During the recording, the composer and the players would come up with new ideas one after the other, and the piece

gradually took shape through trial and error.

The recordings were made July of 2004. It was hot and humid in the evenings and the cicada would take up their song, making taping impossible. Everything would ground to a halt for 3 or 4 hours, so people would wander off, take siestas or whatever until the bugs had finished their mating call for the day. Sometimes if we got tired or things weren't going well, we could just crash out the doors and escape, breath in the fresh air, or lie down in the grass under the shade of a tree. You really could get a refreshing break. Being in our normal workplace also made for less distractions, and to be surrounded by so much nature was obviously a great plus. We could also change instruments and equipment if they didn't seem suited to a particular passage or piece, something we couldn't do if we were not at home.

After the recordings I spent a very intense 5 days in Tokyo directing the mixing being done by a Sony engineer. Each composer would be there for her or his own number. As it was the first experience for many, sometimes they would find themselves thinking too much and the piece wandering off in all directions. I was there to keep things on track and offer suggestions where needed.

Many members have joined Kodo since I left the stage. As they are touring for 2/3rds of the year I haven't had many chances to talk with the younger ones. This was a great opportunity to have a bit of intensive time together and get to know each other.

The performers on this CD do spend a lot of time with each other on the road or on Sado Island making music. So even though this CD was made by a number of different individuals, there is a certain common air that makes the CD hang together. There is plenty here for hardcore taiko fans, yes, but I'm sure it will have a much broader appeal. Just listen.



Takuro in the Kodo studio

## Kodo Close-up:

**Yasuhiko Ishihara, Kodo Apprentice Centre Head**

*The 30th in a series of profiles of individual Kodo members*

Yasuhiko, or *Gan chan* - as he is universally known - was born near Kyoto on December 3rd, 1966. His father worked for a bank and his mother kept their home. He has 2 elder brothers. He enjoyed playing at sumo with his friends and doing routines on a chin-up bar. In elementary school he discovered his life-long passion for table tennis which he competed in seriously right through university.

When choosing a high school he wanted to find one that took its sports and academic programmes equally seriously, so he made the highly unusual choice of a religious school run by Soka Gakkai (*Known as Nichiren Buddhism outside Japan*) He was the only student from a family not belonging to the sect, but soon made friends among the less ardent believers.

After high school Gan entered the Chinese department of the Osaka University of Foreign Studies. In his fourth year he studied for a year at Shandong, near Beijing. The Tiananmen massacre took place just before he left. Returning to Japan he was considering a career in journalism when he went to a Kodo concert. His immediate reaction was 'This is what I have been looking for!' Kodo's appeal was less musical to him than physical.

He travelled to Sado for the first time to take part in a 3-day Kodo stayover workshop. This strengthened his resolve to join the group, but he had already been accepted to work at the same bank as his father. When he told his parents that he wanted to join Kodo instead - a group they had never heard of - they were furious. Bending to the prevailing winds, he decided to give the bank a try for a year, after which however, he still wanted to join Kodo. After another uproar he promised to give the bank 2 more years. When at the end of 3 years he announced again that he wanted to pursue his dream, his dad said 'Do whatever the hell you want!'

Though Gan did on occasion go to Kodo concerts, during his 3 years at the bank he never once mentioned his intention to join Kodo to anyone in the group. He felt somehow certain that if he applied he would get in. It was important to him that when he approached Kodo he must already have broken his ties to the bank and not keep it in reserve as a poor second choice. So he quit the bank,

applied to the Apprenticeship Programme, and was accepted.

He enjoyed the first year immensely. Now he was finally doing what he wanted. He loved playing the taiko but found them more technically difficult than he had anticipated. At the end of the year he was shattered to learn that he



Gan chan and son, Teruhiko.

was not accepted, so he asked if - as a precedent - he could stay on for another year. This he did, but at the end of his second year as an apprentice he was turned down again and Gan said. 'Just let me stay on till March'. His tenacity paid off and he was made a probationary member. He made a few minor appearances on stage that year and his father - in seeing him and the group perform - began to come around to accepting his son's choice. After his year on probation he was again told he wouldn't be accepted as a player, but would he be interested in looking after the new Apprentices Centre?

And so began his real work with Kodo, looking after both the apprentices and the facility itself. On this - his 10th year on the job - he was officially made the head of the Centre and has under his charge 10 first year and 10 second year aspiring taikoists.

With his wife Masami and their son Teruhiko they have just moved into a new light-filled wooden house in Ogi from which he now commutes to the Centre.

His advice to any of you who might be thinking about joining up?

'If you have lot's of energy, come to Sado! Don't try to intellectualize the process, just come, stick with the programme and *DO IT* with all your might and heart.'

Gan has completed 10 triathlons and says that if he were out to break records it would be tough going, but because he goes at his own pace, it's not so bad. Perseverance must come in pretty handy too, because that is something Gan chan has shown he has plenty of, and to spare.

Ryutaro Kaneko will join this year's EC special guest *Carlos Nunez* and *Yasukatsu Oshima* for a performance at the *Sennan Geijutsu Centre Ezuko Hall* at Okawara, Miyagi on Aug. 28. Ryutaro will also be giving a taiko workshop the day before the concert. Inquiries: Ezuko Hall, Tel: 0224-52-3004

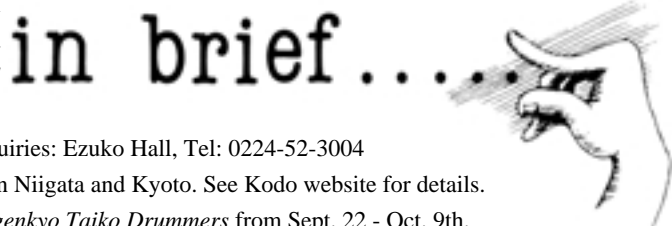
*Chieko Kojima* will give performances this August in Niigata and Kyoto. See Kodo website for details.

*Hanayui* will be touring the UK with Scotland's *Mugenkyo Taiko Drummers* from Sept. 22 - Oct. 9th.

For details: <http://www.mugenkyo.com/> Tel/Fax (in Scotland) :01357 522 008

Former KASA director *D.H. Rosen* will have a solo ceramics show '*Incarinations*' at *SuperDeluxe*, Tokyo, Aug. 5-11. Special guest performances by *Ryutaro Kaneko & Ryo Watanabe*. For details see Daniel's website: <http://www.dhrosen.com>

An exhibition of Kodo Beat editor *Johnny Wales'* paintings will be held in Aoyama, Tokyo, Sept 3-10. Call the *Piga Gallery* in Tokyo (03) 5411-1428 or check out Johnny's website: <http://www.ocn.ne.jp/~wales> for details.



## upcoming performances

### Aikawa Kozan Matsuri

July 27 Aikawa, Sado Island 0259-86-3630

### 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

#### Seminar

*Celtic Culture* by Carlos Nuñez

**Tickets are on sale now by contacting Kodo's office or online at:** <http://www.kodo.or.jp/ec/>

Applications for the following workshops are still being accepted on a first come, first served basis. Contact Kodo.

#### Mini-Workshops

Traditional-Miyake Taiko, Edo Maturibayashi, Kasuga Ondeko, Ogi Okesa Folk Dance, Hawaiian Hula

#### Multi-Day Workshop

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

#### Exhibitions

Ainu Traditional Arts and Crafts, Earth Furniture

#### Other Events

Kodo Village Open House, Fringe Events, Flea Market

## One Earth Tour Japan

### September

11 Nagano Chikuma-shi Kamiyamada Bunka Kaikan  
026-275-0500

13 Aichi Kariya Shimin Kaikan 0566-21-2071

15 Kyoto Bunka Park Joyo Plum Hall 0774-55-1010

16 Wakayama Wakayama Shimin Kaikan 090-3037-8560

18 Wakayama Shingu Shimin Kaikan 0735-21-3722

23 Hyogo Kobe Kokusai Kaikan Kokusai Hall  
078-231-8162

24 Osaka Settsu Shimin Bunka Hall 072-635-1406

26 Osaka Ibaraki-shi Shimin Kaikan Yuai Hall  
072-625-3055

28 Okayama Takahashi Sogo Bunka Kaikan 0866-22-1040

29 Okayama Okayama Shimin Kaikan 086-224-6066

### October

2 Ehime Saijoshi Tanbara Bunka Kaikan 0898-68-3555

4 Hiroshima Fukuyama Geijutsu Bunka Hall 084-928-1810

- |    |                     |                                     |               |
|----|---------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| 5  | Hiroshima           | Hiroshima Kosei Nenkin Kaikan Hall  | 082-249-1218  |
| 6  | Yamaguchi           | Hofu-shi Kokaido                    | 0835-22-1990  |
| 8  | Mito-cho, Yamaguchi | Mito Junior High School Gym         | 08396-2-5555  |
| 9  | Yamaguchi           | Kikukawa-machi Fureai Kaikan Avenir | 0832-87-0302  |
| 12 | Okayama             | Kuse Espace Hall                    | 0867-42-7000  |
| 14 | Hyogo               | Yabu-shi Viva Hall                  | 079-664-1141  |
| 16 | Shiga               | Omihachiman-shi Bunka Kaikan        | 0748-33-8111  |
| 18 | Kyoto               | Kyoto Kaikan Daiichi Hall           | 075-211-0261  |
| 19 | Mie                 | Matsuzaka Shimin Bunka Kaikan       | 090-6074-1383 |
| 21 | Niigata             | Mitsuke-shi Bunka Hall              | 0258-63-5321  |

**Attention: Friends of Kodo:** Included with this mailing you will find info about advance ticket reservations for the October *One Earth Tour*.

### 'Shima-musubi' (Linking of Islands)

### Kodo with Okinawan Music and Dance

November 5 18:30 start

6 15:00 start

Kokuritsu Gekijo Okinawa (Urasoe-shi)

Ticket sales start Sept. 12th. ¥6,000

Inquiries: Kodo Tel: 0259-86-3630

## 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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