

the KODŌ beat

鼓童

Earth Celebration '05 *Galician/Celtic Heat*

aThe deluge began the moment the ferry carrying the last guests pulled away from the wharf, nearly drowning the sound and friends left behind. Just as the last taiko beat faded and the ship slipped into the mist, a crack of thunder roared...Mother Nature on her own drum. The sun emerged from the black sky, and Earth Celebration was over for another year.

EC '05's featured guests were the Galician bagpiper and flautist Carlos Nunez and his band who have brought the sound of Celtic music from Spain to the attention and the world. A strong visual element was added with the participation in the concerts of Japanese calligrapher Koji Kakinuma.

EC Artistic Director Kaoru Watanabe talks about this year's Earth Celebration with Kodo Beat.

How did I become director of this year's EC? Well, Hideyuki Saito left Kodo right after last year's festival, leaving the directing job open. At first I considered directing only the collaborative part of the concert



Kaoru & Carlos
photo by Maiko Miyakawa

with the guests, and have someone else direct the Kodo concert. But after a bit of thought and consultation I decided 'Why not? It's time for me to make mistakes, to take any and every opportunity that comes my way and run with it.' I wasn't particularly scared,



Nature expresses her displeasure at the departure of EC Guests.

photo by Hidehikosaemon Takeda

maybe out of stupidity. I don't really get nervous about things like this. For one thing, Kodo has been doing this for seventeen years and so have many of the technical staff. Considering that kind of experience backing me up, I figured I would just have to come up with a few ideas, and then leave them to take care of things. I knew it wasn't going to be a train wreck, so I just took it step by step.

This year's guests had pretty much been settled upon, though I had the right of approval. For the first couple of months I watched a lot of videos, previous EC videos, Carlo's live concert videos, and listened to a lot of CDs. I decided early on that one of the key themes for me was how to express a *massive sense of scale*. That started for me when I went to Europe last year to Ireland for a television show. The first shots were of us on the cliffs by the Giant's Causeway overlooking the ocean while being battered with wind

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and rain. I could see ourselves as being small figures atop these huge cliffs, struggling to project our sound, our very *being* against the forces of nature. I could



Sado's Ondeko at the Fringe showing us how it's done.

imagine Carlos with his bagpipes on top of Shiroyama with 2,000 people watching, a solitary man on this huge stage, yet overpowering everything with his massive sound.

I also read about the calligrapher *Koji Kakinuma* and looked at his art. All his work from large to small shared an extraordinary sense of movement. Each character seemed to have a single contained universe within. I thought he would be great at expressing visually the massive sense of scale I was looking for.



Confronting one's demons on the streets of Ogi.

I went back and forth through e-mail, sending Carlos mp3s of some of the pieces I wanted to perform together. I also sent him a set list of our performances with descriptions of each piece. Although he wouldn't really know what *Onikenbai* for instance was, I wanted

him to have at least a general idea that say, a dance piece was followed by a drum piece, followed by a piece in which a woman sang. He immediately responded with some good feedback. For example I wanted to use a very fast and energetic number of his called *Tro Breizh* as a finale or encore. However he felt that because it is such a difficult piece, instead of performing it at the end of the concert with a large group of Kodo members, he wanted it closer to the beginning with only a select few drummers. From his experience he knew the audience has to have fresh ears to get into that piece, so I took his advice and changed the programme order around.

When the calligrapher Mr. Kakinuma came to Sado in January, we discussed the number of works, their sizes and the timing of when each work was to be made. I spent a lot of time thinking about the positioning and presentation of his works and how to incorporate them into the concert. I even had a model of the stage built out of paper and styrofoam to help give me a sense of how things were going to look. It was a fascinating learning experience in design.

I also learned a lot about communication. For a long time I was trying to think everything through by myself - I tend to be that way in general-just imagining in my head how things would work out. Then (staff member) *Doba*



Former Sado English teacher returns to Celebrate the Earth.

told me I wasn't communicating with people enough. So starting the next day I just began blabbering to everybody and anybody about everything. I consulted with Kodo staff and players about every idea I had and especially talked a great deal with the technical people about sound and lighting. I realized that half the job of directing is dealing with movement, performance, concept, imagery and meaning, but the other half is properly communicating those ideas with the performers, the staff and the technical crew. Once I started to communicate better with people and getting lots of feedback, things opened up and really started to progress.



Carlos and the single drone of Galician Pipes in rehearsal.

Beginning in August, only a few weeks before EC, we were finally able to begin rehearsals. Some of the pieces were very complicated, so we practiced playing with Carlo's CDs, working out the tempo changes, and trying to internalize the rhythms and melodies. In the past we would often chose a number from our repertoire that seemed similar to a piece of the guest's and simply play them on top of each other. For instance, we would play *Zoku* for a few measures, then have the guest play a little, then we'd come back in with *Zoku* again. That was never very satisfying to me musically. What was the point of the collaboration if we were just playing something we always played?

One of the first things I said when I took the role of director was that I wanted to have as much rehearsal time with the guests as possible. I didn't want to just throw something together and perform. I wanted there to be an actual musical, mutual understanding, as deep a connection as possible among the artists. We had more joint numbers this year than last when we had four or five. This year we had ten. On the first day Carlos came we had four hours to work out nine numbers. I thought it was going to be impossible, but it went so smoothly that when we finished all the pieces, I looked at my watch and we had an hour and a half left! The day of Carlo's show we rehearsed together again for about an hour, and the day of the final concert we rehearsed for a few hours, so three rehearsals in all. A lot compared to last year.

Another key word for me was *balance*. Large ensemble pieces/solo pieces, fast/slow, masculine/feminine, light/heavy. I had traditional standard Kodo pieces like, *Chonlima*, and *Miyake*, but then I also had very experimental pieces like an improvisational one with Mr. Kakinuma, so they

would offset each other. I wanted everything during the three day event to be integrated, including the Kodo Fringe. I had Mr. Kakinuma do the big painting of the character *tataku* (to beat a rhythm) to our music and later had that piece appear on stage as part of the backdrop.

Another thing I wanted to do was collaborate on more than the one final show. Usually we hit once and when it's over, we always think '*If only we had one more chance, it would gel!*' So I wanted Kodo to perform on the second night as well. One of the pieces we performed on both the second and third night was *Tro Breizh*, the very challenging piece. At first I was hesitant to use *Masayuki*, a probationary member, in the piece because - while he had good technique - he lacked experience. During the dress rehearsal he was kind of nervous and rushing ahead a lot. Carlos asked me if he was OK and I said, he's young, but I think he'll be OK. Then Carlos went over to him and touched Masa's chest and said 'Passionate in your heart, Cool in your head.' It really hit Masayuki, I could see it in his eyes. He was still nervous in the first show but great in the final one.

I saw Carlos and friends in Tokyo a couple of days after leaving the island and they told me that they had had such a great time in Sado they were feeling a little depressed after leaving.

There is just so much that goes into the process of putting Earth Celebration together. I'm really grateful to everyone who contributed so much. *Otsukaresama*.



A guerrilla performance by Kodo members at Kisaki Shrine

On August 27 Kodo player *Yuichiro Funabashi* married his high-school sweetheart *Wakako Sato*. The ceremony was held at Nanzenji Temple in Kyoto.

On October 26, *Yoshikazu Fujimoto* will appear in the *Aoyama Taiko Kenbunroku* (Aoyama Taiko Festival) which features many of Japan's top taikoists. Call 03-3793-5678 for details. On November 10, Yoshikazu joins Tsugaru shamisen artist *Takahashi Chikuzan* for a dinner-show at the Hotel Royal Hill Fukuchiyama in Kyoto. Inquiries: 0773-27-0066



upcoming performances

One Earth Tour Japan

October

12	Okayama	Kuse Espace Hall	0867-42-7000
14	Hyogo	Yabu Shiritsu Viva Hall	Sold out
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	Sold out

'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)

¥6,000 Tickets are on sale now.

Inquiries: Kodo Tel: 0259-86-3630

December Concert Series

2,3	Sado	Amusement Sado	0259-86-3630
7-9	Niigata	Ryutopia	025-281-8000
11	Niiagata	Joetsu Bunka Kaikan	025-522-8800
14	Nagoya	Aichi Kosei Nenkin Kaikan	052-263-7171
17,18	Osaka	Osaka Kosei Nenkin Kaikan	06-6362-8122
20-23	Tokyo	Bunkyo Civic Hall	0259-86-3630



Check our website for our new Online Ticket Reservations (sorry, in Japanese only).

Attention: Friends of Kodo:

One day advance ticket reservations for Tokyo and Nagoya performances; Call Kodo Ticket Service at 0259-86-2330 on Oct. 13 for Tokyo and Oct. 18 for Nagoya between 9:30 - 18:00.

One Earth Tour Europe

January

29-31 Elizabethzaal Antwerp, Belgium

February

4	National Concert Hall	Dublin, Ireland
5	Waterfront Hall	Belfast, UK
8,9	Barbican Centre	London, UK
11	The Sage	Gateshead, UK
12	Bridgewater Hall	Manchester, UK
13	Symphony Hall	Birmingham, UK
16	Festival Theatre	Edinburgh, UK

18	The Anvil	Basingstoke, UK
20	Brighton Dome	Brighton, UK
22	Hall for Cornwall	Truro, UK
23	Pavilion	Plymouth, UK
27,28	Gasteig	Munich, Germany

March

2	To be announced	Nuernberg, Germany
4	CCH	Hamburg, Germany
5	Tanholle	Dusseldorf, Germany
8,9	Schouwburg	Rotterdam, Holland
10,11	Kursaal	Oostende, Belgium
17-19	To be announced	Lisbon, Portugal
24	To be announced	San Sebastian, Spain
25	To be announced	Santander, Spain

Yoko Fujimoto in 'The Triangle Project'

The Triangle Project is a three-woman ensemble made up of Kodo's *Yoko Fujimoto* and Japanese-American artists *Nobuko Miyamoto* and *PJ Hirabashi*. In the five years since the project began, the group has met several times to create and rehearse '*Journey of the Dandelion*' which will finally debut on October 26 in Los Angeles.

Oct. 26 (Wed) Univ. of California, Montley Bay
Nov. 5 (Sat) Aratani/Japan America Theatre, Los Angeles

Inquiries: Great Leap

Tel: +1-213-250-8800

E-mail: booking@greatleap.org

<http://www.greatleap.org>



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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