

the KODŌ beat

鼓童

Amaterasu

Kodo's 25th Anniversary
Commemorative Project
Featuring *Tamasaburo Bando*

Celebrating the 25th anniversary of the group's foundation, Kodo presents Amaterasu, Two years in the making, this collaborative performance features and is directed by world-renowned Kabuki luminary Tamasaburo Bando. The following are excerpts from a November 24, 2005 press conference in Tokyo.

Tamasaburo Bando

The Amaterasu project marks the first time I am to share the stage with Kodo. When I first came to know Kodo, I wanted to learn more about the group and how they approached the taiko. I took my first of several trips to Sado Island in 2000, and directed the *Kodo One Earth Tour Special* in 2003. Immediately after that project was over, I thought, 'Next time we'll take to the stage together.' and discussed the idea with the group. We thought that the best theme for this project would be Japanese mythology, and thus *Amaterasu* was born. Both the members of Kodo and I are extremely dedicated to this project, and we hope it will leave a lasting impression.

It's difficult to describe my attraction to Kodo in a few words, but the one thing I think we share, and which I can really respect, is their dedication to their craft. Even when it comes to one simple beat, each time they face the drum Kodo members consider that sound and the feeling behind it. I felt something in



Tamasaburo (extreme right) directs at the Rehearsal Hall. photo by Taro Nishita

common with them there. As a performing artist, I always try to refine my craft, and meeting a group of people with this same frame of mind was significant for me.

More than focusing on directing the group, I looked at my time with Kodo as an exchange where we could discuss the nuances of the simple beat of the drum, and the fact that there is also music in silence.

When I first visited Sado Island I wondered, 'Why do these people have to live and work on Sado?' However, over the course of many visits I began to understand, 'It has to be here.' Having a secluded home base where time and space can be dedicated solely to study and practice is extremely important, and Sado's unspoiled natural splendor is also big factor. Right around the time I first visited Sado, I had begun to have doubts about my life in the big city. At this point in my life, I thought it was very important for me to feel the warmth of other human beings and nature in

volume seventy-five

winter 2006

my creative process. This past 5 to 6 years have given me the opportunity to think about what kind of life I want to lead, and what kind of work I want to create from now on. I think it was nothing short of fate that brought me to Sado.

It is certainly not easy for a performing arts group to continue for 25 years. Kodo president Takao Aoki once said to me, 'I want Kodo to be a group that continues to celebrate its 50th and 100th anniversaries.' And so I feel that the significance of my joining the group to mark their 25th anniversary is in helping them to create something that will be passed down to the next generation.

Ryutaro Kaneko (Kodo)

For *Amaterasu* I will be the musical director rather than a player. Kodo members will not simply be performers, but also actors telling a story, and figures in a mythological narrative. So I'm not just concentrating on the music itself, but also on how to help create a work where the music, movements and space as a whole are harmonized. I'd also like to help create something that sends the audience home feeling energized to face their own goals the next day.

Kodo's stage work already involves pieces adapted from traditional performing arts that find their roots in Japanese mythology. We interpret traditional arts from a contemporary perspective, and I see the *Amaterasu* project as a continuation of this process. I'm not interested in ignoring Kodo's past and trying to recreate the group for this project, but in adding to the rich experience we already have. These days when most people think about 'old Japan,' the image of the Edo Period (1600-1868) comes to mind, but I am looking to rediscover more primitive sounds that were lost before that time.

Yoshikazu Fujimoto (Kodo)

I am the oldest performing member of Kodo. In *Amaterasu*, I will be playing the role of *Susanoo*. In Kodo, we are not assigned to any certain roles on stage, so this is a first for me. Under Tamasaburo's guidance, I am eager to take up this new challenge. Every comment he made was easy to understand and always right on target. He pointed out the things we were lacking, and things we needed to pay more

attention to; his criticisms were straight and to the point, and they encouraged the group.

Tsubasa Hori (Kodo)

When Tamasaburo directed the *Kodo One Earth Tour Special*, he made me think about how I could express myself as a woman on the Kodo stage where so much of the expression is very masculine. For *Amaterasu*, I want to continue to explore and hopefully find the core of this expression. I hope to be able to absorb the energy he emits on stage, and be able to respond to that in some meaningful way.

Tamasaburo has this mysterious, almost frightening ability to identify things inside myself that aren't even clear to me.



Tamasaburo as Amaterasu

photo by Kishin Shinoyama

Mitsuru Ishizuka (Kodo)

When I first started playing with Kodo, I was only concerned with getting the loudest, most powerful sound possible from the taiko, but Tamasaburo taught me to find the finer nuances of the drum. It is as if he can pull out a new person hidden inside. This time while performing on the same stage as Tamasaburo, I hope to find a new side of myself there as well. When I first joined I was just watching everything from a distance, but Tamasaburo taught even the newest members with great passion and helped us all to discover the potential inside of us. For the new members he was like a father figure, so I feel like *Amaterasu* is a chance for his 'children' to work hard and make their 'father' proud.

Kodo Close-up:

Kazunari Abe, player

The 31st in a series of profiles of individual Kodo members

Kazunari's earliest memories are of being yelled at by his teacher and having a red X drawn on his forehead. He can't remember why.

He was born February 23, 1974 on the island of Shikoku. He has a brother 2 years younger. His father was a sailor who quit life at sea when Kazu was 3 or 4, and moved the family to an apartment in Tokyo where he took up life as a businessman.

During Kazunari's elementary school years he swam, did kendo, calligraphy and took art lessons. He was also sent to violin and piano lessons but hated them so much on the first day, his early music education ended before it had begun. He first became interested in music in his 3rd year of middle school after seeing a Beatles documentary in class.

Kazu was an outstanding student till the end of middle school, when, after arriving at the elite public Hibiya High School he suddenly found himself to be exceedingly average. Still, he enjoyed the freedom and university-like atmosphere and extra-curricular activities the school provided.

After a ski holiday a good friend told him about being able to see mountains in the middle of the city of Sapporo - which sounded irresistible to a Tokyo-bred boy, so he decided to attend university in Hokkaido. He applied but didn't pass the entrance exam and so spent a year as a *ronin* (masterless samurai), time he put to good use as it taught him the art of independent study.

He gained admittance to Sapporo U. on his second try and went into Japanese history. He joined a club called *Wadachi* (wheel track) which was influenced by the famous *Warabe-za* folk song and dance group. Here he first encountered the taiko. By the end of the 2nd year he was more involved in his club activities than his studies, and only went to enough lectures to assure his not flunking out. That year Kodo had a performance near Sapporo. Someone had half-price tickets so he went with some *Wadachi* friends. They sat at the front and *Yoshikazu's Odaiko* made an enormous impression (though he admits to falling asleep during the solo). In the programme he read that Kodo were accepting applications for apprentices and he thought 'Why not?' He wrote down that he was greatly moved and he thought it would be wonderful if he were able to move others the same way.

Invited to Sado, he made the seasickness-inducing journey in January and upon arriving was amazed at how cold it was because - unlike Hokkaido - there is a very casual attitude towards home-heating. In the morning he awoke at 5:30 with snow blowing around

the floor of the loft where he slept. After a workshop, an interview and lunch they returned to their respective homes. From that moment his resolve to join became stronger but at the same time his doubts about his ability to go through with it had increased.

Soon after he was delighted to receive his letter of acceptance. His parents felt he should finish university first, but he told them if he didn't do it now, he may never, so *now* was the time. He calmed their doubts by instead of actually quitting university, only taking the year off.

In April he and the other 11 apprentices moved to Sado where it was still unseasonably cold, and so for the first 2 weeks he wanted to go home. That year was pretty hard going. The atmosphere was very competitive. There was almost no privacy so his favourite time was the 40 or 50 minutes on his own during the early morning 10 kilometre run when his mind could travel freely. Though he wasn't nearly as good a taikoist as some of the other apprentices, he managed to carve a niche for himself by specializing in the *shinobue* (transverse bamboo flute). He became attracted to the instrument after hearing Kodo's Music Director *Motofumi Yamaguchi* play '*Michi*' for them.

Accepted as a probationary member, Kazunari quit university and made his first Kodo appearance, starting off his career - as he continues to this day - playing the shinobue. He still enjoys every chance he gets to play taiko on stage, but the flute is his bread and butter. It's attraction to him is that his breathing is turned almost directly into sound. Of course breathing is vital with the taiko too, but not in such an immediately audible way.

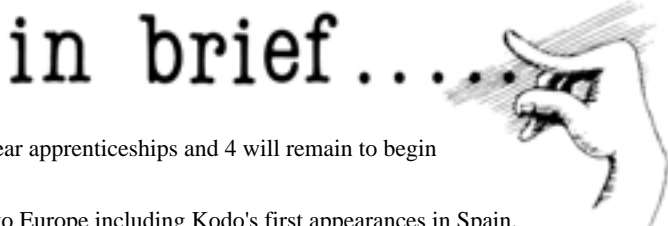
Kazunari spends a lot of time now thinking about how he can learn to breath more easily, whether playing the flute or not. His long-range goal is to play the shinobue with completely natural breathing. When he is about to play in a real performance, he finds himself winding up for the big push. Ideally he wants the listener to not only appreciate the sound that emerges from his flute, but - when he has achieved the art of playing totally naturally - to have the listener respond to his breathing itself.

Kazu loves the exchange of energy he experiences with the audience each night, and being able to see a bit of the world while doing it makes it even better.



photo by Taro Nishita

This year we celebrate our 25th year under the name *Kodo* and 35 years since the group began as *OndeKOza*. We look forward to another 25 years playing taiko around the world and deepening our roots on Sado.



On January 21st 8 young people completed their 2 year apprenticeships and 4 will remain to begin their career as Kodo players.

The touring players have set off on a 7 country visit to Europe including Kodo's first appearances in Spain. Yoshikazu Fujimoto set off a bit early to play *odaiko* at the opening of Toyota's new research facilities in Brussels.

Eichi Saito will be holding his ever-popular 5 day stayover taiko workshop at the Kodo Apprentie Centre on Sado from Sept 20th-24th. Application deadline June 30th. For details: zaidan@kodo.or.jp

upcoming performances

One Earth Tour Europe

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	Meistersingerhalle	Nuernberg, Germany
4	CCH	Hamburg, Germany
5	Tonhalle	Dusseldorf, Germany
8,9	Schouwburg	Rotterdam, Holland
10,11	Kursaal	Oostende, Belgium
16,17	Casino de Estoril	Lisbon, Portugal
18	Coliseu do Porto	Porto, Portugal
19	Cae Figueira da Foz	Figueira, Portugal
22	Auditorio Ciudad de Leon	Leon, Spain
24	Centro Kursaal	San Sebastian, Spain
25	Palacio Festivales Cantabria	Santander, Spain

Amaterasu

May 11 - June 4

Setagaya Public Theatre, Tokyo
Ticket sales start February 18.

June 9 - 25

Minamiza, Kyoto
Ticket sales start May 15.

See details opposite.
Attention Friends of Kodo members: An advance ticket reservation form for Kyoto concerts is included with this mailing.



Tokyo: 23 performances

May	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed
15:00	-	-	●	●	●	●	●	-	-	●	●	●	-	-
19:00	●	●	-	-	-	-	-	-	●	-	-	-	●	●

May	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	June	1	2	3	4
	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed		Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
15:00	-	-	●	●	-	-	-		-	-	●	●
19:00	●	●	-	-	-	●	●		●	●	-	-

Kyoto: 16 performances

June	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
13:00	-	●	●	●	●	●	●	-	●	●	-	●
18:00	●	-	-	-	-	-	-	●	-	-	-	-

June	21	22	23	24	25
	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
13:00	●	●	-	●	●
18:00	-	-	●	-	-

KASA Workshop Tour in North America

Eiichi Saito & Masami Miyazaki will reprise their taiko workshop tour during February & March.

Feb, 18 Seattle, 19th Vancouver, B.C., 21st Portland, 23rd San Jose, 24-26th L.A., 28th & March 1st Honolulu, 2-5th Maui, 7th Kauai

For details: www.kodoarts.com

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.

Kodo Village, Ogi, Sado Island 952-0611, Japan

Tel.0259-86-3630 (Fax:3631)

e-mail: heartbeat@kodo.or.jp

Kodo's official web site: <http://www.kodo.or.jp>