

the KODŌ beat

鼓童



*Promoting taiko on the beautiful streets of Lisbon
photo by Taro Nishita*

European Tour '06 *A Company Manager's Tale*

Takashi Akamine, Kodo's Company Manger of 20 years, reports on this year's European Tour. Beginning on January 28th in Belgium, Kodo drummed its way through Ireland, England, Scotland, Germany, Holland, Portugal and wound up on March 25th in Spain. After 17 years on Sado, Okinawan born Takashi now lives in Cheltenham, England.

Supporting the 14 players on this tour were 3 tour managers, 2 stage managers, a lighting director and driver. My job is to coordinate the schedule with our agents in each country and then, once on tour, see that everyone arrives at each venue safely and in optimum condition to play. Then I must see that after the tour we all arrive home safe and sound. Fortunately there were no real emergencies or unfortunate 'happenings' to report this time - no news is good news from my point of view.

My work puts me in the unique position of being able to meet with the audience in the lobby. I often see people with Kodo T-shirts from past tours. It makes

me very happy to see these faithful supporters. In Antwerp there was an 85 year old woman who had *never* been to a concert in her life. *Any* concert. Having read about Kodo she decided to come to the show. She arrived in the lobby an hour early and the local agent invited her into the theatre for a private look. In Plymouth there was a woman who hadn't seen us since our last performance there. She said she had been waiting for 20 years and had bought the *first* ticket this time. In Portugal - a country we visited for the first time - a young man told us that upon seeing the concert his life had changed. The next day he travelled about 4 hours by car to our next performance in Figueira and then he went to our final concert in Santander, Spain. He said he began crying during the concert and couldn't stop. There was an English couple who missed the London concerts so they came to Hamburg to see the show. Stories like these gladden my heart.

Another of my responsibilities is to meet with the local press. They usually have read our press kits, and what seems to intrigue them most is our lifestyle. It seems to be poorly understood that Kodo is not a group stuck in tradition, but is continually evolving. In



*Think Different? Keeping in touch with Apples on the road.
photo by Tomohiro Mitome*

volume seventy-six

spring 2006

our early days it is true that everyone led a very 'Spartan lifestyle' as it is usually put, but nowadays that lifestyle is largely restricted to the Apprentice Centre. After one becomes a full member of Kodo, it is up to the individual to see that she or he is fit enough to appear on stage, just as it is with a professional ballet dancer for example. Married members live in separate homes and commute to Kodo Village like any other working person.

Also, when dealing with the press, one must keep in mind that *nothing* is off the record. A reporter from The Irish Times interviewed me before our performance date. She asked me about the apprenticeship programme. I said 'They wake up early and run, no TV, booze, cigarettes and *off the record*' I added, 'no hanky panky'. The headline blazed, '*No sex please, we're drummers*'. The show sold out.

Last summer one of Holland's top rock bands, 'BLØF' came to Sado and in one day we recorded with them a rock song they had composed. Well, this January that song, '*Aanzoek zonder ringen*' became #1 on the rock charts in Holland! So we appeared with them to help with promotion on Dutch TV.



Rehearsing for TV with 'BLØF'. photo by Tomohiro Mitome

Several years ago Monty Python alumnus Michael Palin visited us on Sado as part of his documentary series about travelling around the world. When he was having a go on the *odaiko* he gave it a few perfunctory taps. Eiichi Saito told him to 'Come on, let it have it!' To which Mr. Palin replied 'We British are taught not to make noise!' I thought at the time, yes, when you think about it, there is something socially unacceptable about making too much noise, especially as an adult. As children we all enjoy making noise very much, but we are gradually conditioned out of it. But I think making a loud noise is almost an instinctual urge. And when the vibrations of the taiko hit the audience they

experience a kind of ecstasy.

To the Western audience an exclusively percussion group is quite rare. In a Western orchestra or band the percussion is normally tucked away in a corner somewhere. They might have the odd 15 second solo. People who go to Kodo concerts - but not to rock shows - don't have this opportunity very often. Kodo's percussive sound is largely acoustic and doesn't seem as painful to the ears of most people as electronically amplified sound. It really is remarkable how often children fall asleep during the roaring climax of a Kodo concert. There must be some memory of and corresponding good feeling associated with that particular booming, acoustic beat.

In Europe and around the world taiko groups are flowering at an amazing rate. In Britain alone there are at least 20 taiko groups. After 20 years at this job - which seem to have just flown by - I have experienced things I never dreamed I would be able to do. I have met and worked with extraordinary people, been to unbelievable places. I consider myself very lucky. I want to be able to share some of that good fortune. I would like to pass on the some of the unique experience I have gained to young promoters and managers of taiko groups abroad.

When I talk to the Kodo apprentices I always tell them the same thing. It is no easy thing to live communally under one roof, but by it's very difficulty, it offers them a unique chance to learn the value of the word 'consideration'. That is my keenest hope for Kodo's young drummers. My thanks to all concerned.



Like the square peg in the round hole she is, Tsubasa buys a Portuguese square drum. photo by Tsubasa Hori



Takashi Akamine leads the way in Edinburgh. photo by Tomohiro Mitome

Kodo Close-up:

Masaru Tsuji, player

The 32nd in a series of profiles of individual Kodo members

Masaru was born on May 30th, 1976 in *Samani* on the southern coast of Hokkaido, about 4 hours southeast Sapporo. Mild by Hokkaido standards, the temperature rarely gets below minus 15 degrees celsius in the winter. This is the heart of Japan's racehorse breeding country. Masaru is the third of four boys. TV and computer games were off limits so they spent their free time exploring the surrounding countryside teaming with deer, rabbits, foxes and bears (which fortunately he never actually ran into). They kept goats and dogs as pets. Unlike his brothers, Masaru never rode as a child, though he did his fair share of getting up early to scoop the poop. His parents never pressured the boys to follow them into the business...or anything else. The two elder brothers now help their father look after the 20 or so thoroughbreds on their 30 hectare ranch.

Masaru began judo at the age of 4 and it remained the central interest in his life right through to the end of high school. He holds a second degree black belt. Gym and art class were the only thing he liked much about school, which was a 7 kilometre bicycle ride away (when there was no snow). He reports never fighting with his brothers. Whether this has anything to do with his judo ability remains unclear.

He always enjoyed listening to music and with middle school friends formed a Japanese punk rock band to perform at the school festival. Masaru - knowing nothing about *playing* music - borrowed a drum kit from a friend and became the drummer.

With high school coming to an end he knew he wasn't interested in university, but wanted to find a non 'head work' job in which he could use his body to earn his living and express himself. Judo - his most formative influence - also made him want to work at something uniquely Japanese.

His mother was a Kodo fan and took Masaru to a performance in 1989, when he was in elementary school. He remembers being impressed by *Monochrome* and *Yataibayashi*. After that, any time Kodo played in Hokkaido, Masaru would attend, seeing them about 5 times in all. During the summer holidays of his last year of high school he travelled to Sado for Earth Celebration. Now he was almost sure he wanted to join the group, and there was the added attraction of the chance it offered to see the world. He applied and was told to come to Sado in January for an interview. As with most people who visit the island in the winter, he was amazed at the unbelievable cold, not the temperature outside - which is considerably



Sayo, Shun and Masaru

warmer than in Hokkaido - but inside, where you can see your breath most of the time. People who live in places of extreme cold don't put up with the cold like they do on Sado, they protect themselves against it and avoid it whenever they can.

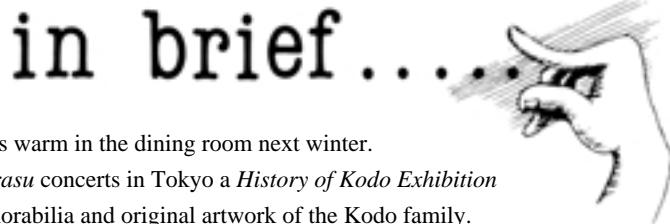
Another surprise for him was when one of the applicants (who had played since he was 5) blew them all away with a mini taiko performance. 'Do I belong here?' was his first thought. Obviously Kodo thought so, because Masaru was accepted. The day after he got the news he awoke early and ran, though those good intentions only lasted 2 days.

Upon arriving on Sado in April, Masaru was astounded by the richness of the local traditions. In Hokkaido most traditional culture is Ainu-based (Japanese aboriginal), as the Japanese have only been there in any numbers since the late 19th century. He had almost never even seen archetypal Japanese symbols like bamboo and clay tile roofs before. He felt as if he were visiting 'Japan' for the first time.

Apart from the touring, which he adores, learning and performing taiko for the last 10 years has not been easy for Masaru. He thought of quitting more than once. Fortunately that changed for him this year. With his recent practice on the *odaiko* and through performing in small venues with only a few Kodo players he has begun to really enjoy himself. Masaru feels that up till now he has depended too much upon being a member of the main Kodo group in order to define himself. He wants to develop his own unique way of expressing himself while working with smaller Kodo ensembles and a variety of outside artists. He wants to depend upon himself and have the wider world see what *he* can do. Now in his 11th year he feels he is making a fresh start.

Six years ago he married Sayo Asai, a fellow apprentice, who left Kodo after her probationary year. When not teaching english and raising their 3 year old son Shun, she runs *Friends of Kodo*, acts as one of Kodo's windows to the wider world and probably sent you this copy of Kodo Beat.

On April 5th everyone took to the woods surrounding Kodo Village for a good cleanup. With almost 70 people working, including the 10 new apprentices whom we all met for the first time, its amazing how much wood can be cut and split to keep us warm in the dining room next winter.



In celebration of Kodo's 25 years, during the *Amaterasu* concerts in Tokyo a *History of Kodo Exhibition* will be held in the lobby featuring posters, videos, memorabilia and original artwork of the Kodo family.

Also marking *Amaterasu*, kabuki great Tamasaburo will be appearing on TV Asahi's 'Tetsuko's Room' with players Tsubasa Hori and Mitsuru Ishizuka on May 2nd, from 1:20 pm - 1:35pm.

upcoming performances

Amaterasu

Kodo's 25th Anniversary
Commemorative Project Featuring
Tamasaburo Bando

May 11 - June 4

Setagaya Public Theatre, Tokyo

Tickets are on sale now.

June 9 - 25

Minamiza, Kyoto

Ticket sales start May 15.

See schedule below.



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	-	-	●	-	-

Aikawa Kozan Matsuri

July 27

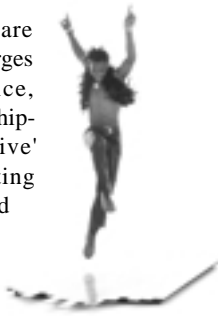
Aikawa, Sado Island

0259-86-3630

Earth Celebration 2006

August 18-20, Sado Island

This year's featured EC guests are 'Tamango's Urban Tap'. The work merges a broad range of free-style dance, including tap, capoeira, African and hip-hop, with a video montage born 'live' during each show and the exhilarating sounds of Haitian drumming, world percussion, didjeridoo, cello, trumpet, vocals and more. Tamango is 'one of the great tap artists performing today, a dancer of astonishing speed and lightness whose feet produce a rippling, richly complex cannonade of tap beats. He never ceases to surprise - don't miss him!' The NY Times



Shiroyama Concerts

Aug. 18 Kodo

19 Urban Tap with Kodo

20 'Celebration'; Kodo & Urban Tap

EC Theatre Event

Aug. 19 Ryo Watanabe Live

Mini-Workshops & Seminars

Japanese Taiko, Traditional-Miyake Taiko, Ranjosan's Japanese Flute Making, Dancing to the Beat of Kodo, Kasuga Ondeko, Ogi Okesa Folk Dance, Taiko Making (instructor: Asano Taiko), Universal Rhythm (instructor: Urban Tap)

Multi-Day Workshop Hula (August 16 and 17)

Other Events

Kodo Village Open House, Fringe Events, Flea Market

EC Pre-Event

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

Aug. 13 Hanayui, Hawai'ian Hula and Noh at Kasuga Shrine Noh Theatre in Aikawa

Aug. 17 Musicians from the *Saha Federal Republic*, Motofumi Yamaguchi & Ryutaro Kaneko at Amusement Sado

EC ticket sales begin June 1.

Workshop application deadline is June 23.

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

Attention members of Friends of Kodo.

Please find enclosed in this mailing advance reservation information for the September *One Earth Tour* in Japan. EC'06 ticket information will be sent to you in May.

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>