

the KODŌ beat

鼓童

P.P.C. & cocon Tour



New Zealander Melanie Taylor has been in Japan 7 years, working as a teacher and translator. After volunteering at 2 Earth Celebrations she joined Kodo's staff 8 months ago. This is her report as tour manager for cocon and staff for P.P.C., Kodo's newest off-shoot groups.

I was keen to go on the two mini tours this December and January as a chance not only to see what these musicians would do when they directed themselves, but also to see how the audience would affect the way they performed in small and intimate venues, unlike the huge spaces Kodo normally plays.

P.P.C. is a new group formed within Kodo of 3 players, Yuichiro Funabashi, Mitsuru Ishizuka, and Yosuke Oda. The name is from the first letters of the sounds made by each of their trademark instruments which go 'Poku, Poku, Chin'. When these inseparable friends perform as a trio in Kodo shows they never fail to provide comic relief. They decided to put their own act together to make the most of their on-stage chemistry. This was a chance to showcase their very popular numbers and also some new tricks not seen before on the Kodo stage. The longer I work for Kodo, the more I realize that what you see in one show is just a small selection of what the players are able to perform. I was on lobby duty for the matinee and all I could hear were taiko, music and raucous laughter. I watched the second show and was in stitches myself. It was a blend of hilarious highs and feel-good



P.P.C.'s Yosuke, Yuichiro & Mitsuru.

photo by Wakako Sato

rhythms. Yuichiro, Mitsuru and Yosuke obviously enjoy sharing the stage. The energy and excitement they create together is infectious. Watching the audience feed off their music and energy was food for the soul. At the post-concert party the three players were beaming. It was exciting for me to see seasoned Kodo players looking nervous, excited and ecstatic through the course of what might seem to some as just another 'work day'.

cocon (yes, it begins with a lower case 'c') was



cocon's Yoshie Sunahata, Tsubasa Hori, Masami Miyazaki and Ayako Onizawa.

Photo by Kotori Kawashima

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The One Wagon Tour.

photo by Melanie Taylor

founded last year as an off-shoot troupe within Kodo. This 4 women group is the vision of player *Tsubasa Hori*, and its name comes from the French for 'cocoon' or 'chrysalis'. A chrysalis is similar to the uterus, the sacred chamber in which life is created and nurtured. She aspires to get in closer touch with their own humanity and gender, which can be covered up on stage by the masculine costumes and roles normally associated with taiko. *cocon* is envisioned as a platform for the women of Kodo to share and freely express themselves with the drums, song, dance and other instruments they usually travel the world with surrounded by their male colleagues on the Kodo stage. Together with Tsubasa is *Ayako Onizawa*, *Masami Miyazaki*, and *Yoshie Sunahata*. Normally the artistic director of Kodo is male, but when you think of the director as a puppeteer and how a man operating a female character is bound to move her in different ways, it was exciting to see how these players would perform when left to their own devices. They could



A reflective Masami & Aya.

photo by Melanie Taylor

explore new ways that suit their physical uniqueness using skills they have refined through years of performing with Kodo.

It isn't easy for Kodo players to find rehearsal time for extra projects, so the women of *cocon* found

themselves practicing day and night over the New Year's holiday to get everything right for the nerve-wracking opening night.

Kodo normally tours with 2 four-tonne trucks and a bus to transport the instruments, players and staff, so the idea of 5 girls, and a bunch of drums in a van conjured up images of a old-fashioned road trip rather than the usual logistical circus. All the shows were sold out with people standing in the back and sitting in the aisles. The costumes - designed by *Ai* and *Johnny Tanaka* - immediately established the look of a show quite different from a Kodo performance. They helped set the mood so the ladies could weave their unique brand of magic in music and dance. The audience was enchanted. In the small space of the 2nd Tokyo show the stage was shared with Okinawan musician *Kokichi*



The Yin of taiko.

photo by Buntaro Tanaka

Iramina, with whom they had rehearsed for the first time that very day. The feel-good Okinawan tunes (and one free drink) made a festive mood for the New Year's Party-themed show, as did the large bottle of Sado's *Hokusetsu* (Northern Snow) *sake* the girls shared with the audience.

I have no doubt that both these new projects, *P.P.C.* and *cocon* will help the 7 young performers inject a fresh wave of energy and inspiration into their work on the Kodo main stage.

Neither of these events would have been possible without the tireless volunteer efforts of *Wakako Sato*, *Tomoko Oda*, the *Itsumo Kokoro ni P.P.C. Committee*, *Yoshie's mother, Fujie Sunahata*, the *cocon in Kunitachi Committee*, and the *Kodo in Shibata Concert Committee*. Our many thanks.

Kodo Close-up:

Kazuko Arai General Affairs Manager

The 35th in a series of profiles of individual Kodo members

Kazuko Arai (née Ito) - the middle of 3 sisters - was born in the heart of Tokyo on November 13th, 1963. Her grandfather worked for a trading company which resulted in her father being born in Australia and growing up in Germany. As her businessman father was a scholar by inclination, Kazuko's home was filled with books. Able to read the bible in Hebrew, he was fascinated by religion and converted to Catholicism. Kazuko and her sisters were raised as Catholics and attended weekly mass, though Kazuko envied her friends who were out playing on Sunday mornings. She was told by her father that if she went to a Buddhist temple or Shinto shrine, rather than prey to their deities, she should simply say hello.

With teens of friends living near their small apartment, tomboy Kazuko had a wonderful time alternately playing and fighting with them all. In elementary school she swam and did gymnastics and took piano lessons until grade 4. This ended because boisterous Kazuko couldn't bear sitting still for practice.

At a private Catholic girls school she discovered a passion for basketball. She was tall for her age and played centre, until her teammates outgrew her and she was moved to guard. After high school she attended St. Paul's University to study law. Naturally she joined the basketball club which was then in the lowly 3rd tier. With a new coach and a fresh infusion of talent in her year the team moved into the 2nd tier for the first time in St. Paul's history and Kazuko rose to become the team captain.

While considering her future she toyed with the idea of becoming a policewoman, but eventually decided to work for Seiko watches in the foreign marketing department. After 5 years she was put in charge of the American department which was an almost overwhelming challenge because of her inadequate English. She studied to improve and grew into the job, but after 10 years at the company she began to bump into the glass ceiling. Though she considered her years at Seiko a valuable and formative experience, she began to reconsider her prospects.

About this time she saw her first Kodo concert and was deeply impressed. She read in the programme about a 5-

day taiko workshop on Sado and so off she went. It was her first time to even touch a taiko and she loved it. She had always thought of herself as a cog in a large wheel and now she reasoned, she may as well be involved in creating a project that is as appealing as Kodo's, rather than mere wrist watches. Though



Kazuko, Kentaro,
Ryunosuke & Takeshi

Kodo could only offer a part-time position, she decided it was worth the gamble and so quit Seiko and came to Sado in April of '96.

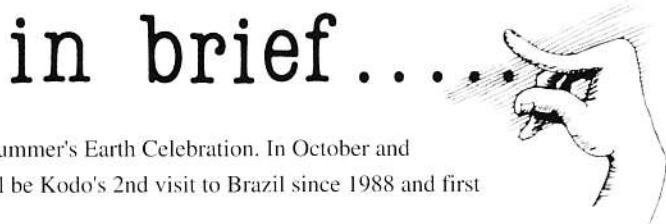
Her first year on Sado was fascinating, the work less hectic than at Seiko, and her endless commutes in Tokyo replaced with morning and evening drives to the beach for a quick swim. The biggest challenge was KP duty. At age 30 it was the first time she had ever cooked. In her 2nd, 3rd and 4th year she was an assistant tour manager in America and Europe. Though she enjoyed the travel, she felt she was under-achieving when having to work in English and asked to be excused from foreign tours.

Back on Sado in the fall of '99 she began living with player Takeshi Arai (see KB VOL. 55) and soon their son Kentaro was on his way. She returned to the office with the baby on her back and began doing the books for Earth Celebration. She later set up Kodo's general affairs department, coordinating things which had previously been done in an ad hoc way, like contracts, retirement planning, insurance, meetings schedules, and vacations.

In 2004 came their 2nd son, Ryunosuke. There was already a tradition of mothers in the office with children on their backs, or working in the parent/child room equipped with computers and cribs. Still with dad away two thirds of the year it is no easy task to be a working mum. Kazuko hopes to use whatever increase in free time she may get when her boys are in school to improve her English. And if they should want to play taiko? Her basic philosophy is that they should be able to do as they like. She would however, prefer they had a glimpse of the outside world, to know the advantages of both the city and the country - as she does - before they make that choice.

In celebration of the centenary of Japanese emigration to Brazil, 2008 will see a wide range of exchanges in the fields of politics, economics, culture, arts, science & sports between the 2 countries. In this spirit Kodo will be featuring artists from Brazil at this summer's Earth Celebration. In October and November Kodo will also tour South America. This will be Kodo's 2nd visit to Brazil since 1988 and first ever to Argentina.

On March 14th through the 16th members of Kodo will perform in Holland with renowned Dutch rock group *Blof* as part of the *UMOJA Project* (UMOJA is a Swahili word that means the spirit of togetherness) which is dedicated to increasing awareness of the world's problems through music. Members of Kodo will also make a recording with *Blof*.



upcoming performances

One Earth Tour Europe

February

2,3	National Concert Hall	Dublin, Ireland
5	Bridgewater Hall	Manchester, England
7	Symphony Hall	Birmingham, England
9,10	The Sage	Gateshead, England
11	Philharmonic Hall	Liverpool, England
16,17	Kursaal	Oostende, Belgium
19	Ethias Theater	Hasselt, Belgium
21,22	Elisabethzaal	Antwerp, Belgium
23,24	Philharmonie	Luxemburg
27	Congress Zentrum Hamburg	Hamburg, Germany
28	Tonhalle Dusseldorf	Dusseldorf, Germany

March

1,2	Philharmonie Munich	Munich, Germany
4,5	Kultur & Kongresszentrum	Liederhalle Stuttgart, Germany
7	AWD Hall Hannover	Hannover, Germany
8	Die Glocke – Das Bremer Konzerthaus	Bremen, Germany
10	Philharmonie Berlin	Berlin, Germany
12	BURGHOF Lorrach	Lorrach, Germany
14-16	Heineken Music Hall	Amsterdam, Netherlands
	Kodo with Bløf	
20,21	Montreux Music & Convention Center	
	Auditorium Stravinski	Montreux, Switzerland
23-27	Kultur- und Kongresszentrum Luzern	Luzern, Switzerland

One Earth Tour Japan

May

9	Ibaraki	Hitachinaka City Hall	029-275-1122
10	Tochigi	Nogi-machi Bunka Kaikan (ENISS HALL)	0280-57-2000
11	Saitama	Wako Shimin Bunka Centre	048-468-7771
13	Gunma	Shibukawa Shimin Kaikan	0279-24-2261
14	Fujioka-shi, Gunma	Mikabo Mirai Kan	0277-53-3133
15	Saitama	Tokorozawa Shimin Bunka Centre	04-2998-7777
17	Koshigaya-shi, Saitama	Sun City Hall	048-985-1112
20	Tokyo	Ota Kumin Hall Aprico	03-5744-1600
21	Chiba	Kimitsu Shimin Bunka Hall	0439-55-3300
22	Chiba	Togane Bunka Kaikan	0475-55-6211
24	Tokyo	Parthenon Tama Hall	042-334-8471
25	Tokyo	Higashiyamato Shimin Kaikan (Humming Hall)	
30	Tokyo	Katsushika-ku Bunka Kaikan	03-5670-2233

June

1	Shizuoka	Oyama-cho Sogo Bunka Kaikan	0550-76-5701
3	Shizuoka	Yaizu-shi Bunka Centre	054-627-3111

6	Shizuoka	Iwata-shi Ryuyo Naginoki Kaikan	0538-66-1111
7	Aichi	Koda Chomin Kaikan	0564-63-5181
8	Gifu	Tajimi-shi Bunka Kaikan	0572-23-2600
11	Tsu-shi, Mie	Mie-ken Bunka Kaikan	059-223-3380
15	Uwajima-shi, Ehime	Cosmos Hall Mima	0895-58-3312
18	Wakayama	Wakayama Municipal Auditorium	073-432-1212
22	Wakayama	Shingu Shimin Kaikan	0735-21-3722
25	Niigata	Nagaoka Shiritsu Gekijo	025-281-8000

KASA 2008 concert and workshop tour Hanayui in USA

Hanayui will team up with last year's Earth Celebration artistic director Kaoru Watanabe in workshops and concerts featuring traditional folk songs and dances, taiko and more.

Performances

March 2	Seattle	Broadway Performance Hall
8	Los Angeles	Japan America Theatre

Workshop

March 13	Alameda, CA	Rhythmix workshop
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Guest appearance

March 14,15 Portland Taiko Spring Concert

For more details see KASA website:

<http://www.kodo.or.jp/kasa>

Chieko Kojima in 'Japan in America', Seattle

March 22 Seattle Town Hall Great Hall
Players: Chieko Kojima (dance), Kaoru Watanabe (fue), Kenny Endo (taiko), Susumu Yamagami (shamisen) and local masters of taiko
<http://www.townhallseattle.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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