

the KODŌ beat

鼓童

Kodo Has a Cow

In November 2007 Kodo became the proud guardian of Kikuko (Chrysanthemum Child), a 10 month old black female wagyu calf. Kodo's Managing Director Takao Aoki explains why. It was after all, his idea.



*The calf auction on Sado's northern coast when Kikuko was bought.
photos by Taro Nishita*

In 2000 or 2001 we planted zelkova trees (*keyaki* in Japanese) at Kodo Village. This is the preferred wood for making taiko, but nowadays these trees of a large size are rare and expensive. It isn't as if I am likely to be around when the trees are big enough to become drums, that might take 100 years, but I want the players to raise their awareness about where the material for their drums comes from. Because Kodo's main instrument is the taiko I think – as professionals – we owe it to our audience to have a really profound understanding of our drums. I worry that we are disconnected with the instruments, just as there is a disconnect with food

these days. People have little understanding where it comes from. That is one reason Kodo apprentices are encouraged to do gardening. Rather than us just using words to explain, I want them to have direct experience, to think deeply, both about the source of the food they eat and also about where their drums come from. So we

planted the zelkova trees and walk past them each day and see them grow. As we gain a more profound understanding of the wood that becomes the drum, so too I hope for the hides. Last fall I went to the cattle auction on the north coast of Sado where ranchers come from all over Japan to buy breeding stock. We bought *Kikuko* for around ¥430,000 (about \$4,300). She was born on December 31, 2006 and already came with her officially registered name of Kikuko. Her board and upkeep will run about ¥30~¥350,000 a year.

We have friends who run the family-operated *Ikeno Ranch* with over 50 head of cattle on Sado's northern coast. They will look after Kikuko and breed her. I should

point out that just as none of the current Kodo players will actually use the wood from the trees we have planted, neither will Kikuko be sacrificed to become a drum. In spending time and caring for her – as with living with the trees as part of our daily lives – we will be deepening our understanding of them, as the source materials for the instruments from which we express ourselves, live our lives and earn our keep. Kikuko will be left to breed. In fact we are waiting for word about whether she is pregnant right now. If so, she will have her first calf near the end of the year. We may put that calf up for auction next year to help recover our costs.

She might sell for between ¥400,000 to ¥500,000. After she has had her first calf, Kikuko can be put out to free range pasture. I definitely plan to be there for the birth. When she goes into labour the Ikeno's are going to call me no matter what time of day.

I would prefer the cows live here together with us at Kodo Village, so we can look after them, to be part of our daily lives, our family, but as things stand we really can't manage that responsibly. You need someone to specialize and be there for them all the time. The Ikeno Ranch in Nyugawa is an hour and a half away by car and because everyone is so busy here, I plan to bring Kikuko to Kodo Village once a year. Some of us make periodic trips to the ranch to see the work involved and get a bit of an idea as to what will be required to care for them properly. Eventually, I can see them at the Apprentice Centre down on the southern coast of Sado. There is always someone there and the young apprentices are up at the crack of dawn anyway. I think it would be very beneficial for them to look after cattle as a part of their daily routine. This year, for the first time, we are going to take all the apprentices up to spend a day working at the ranch.

For drum skins, cows are superior to bulls, the skin being softer and smoother. And they should preferably have given birth once or twice. The ideal age for slaughter is between 3 and 4 years old. Also – if you really want to go into the drum business and sell the skins – you should keep the cows penned up rather than have them wandering about, because you want to protect the hides from scratches. We are not in the drum-making business though, and I want to think in a more environmentally holistic way, so we would like



Takao Aoki visiting with Kikuko at the Ikeno Ranch.

the cattle to be free to roam. Better a few spots on the apples and leave the birds and bees.

Ideally we should be part of the process of slaughtering the cow and preparing the hide for the drums. It turns out however, that is not such an easy thing to do in modern Japan. You have to send live stock to be killed in an abattoir, and there are none left on Sado. This has meant sending the animals to the mainland in Niigata, which has made raising livestock here unprofitable. This has actually had an unforeseen and detrimental effect on the environment of the second highest mountain on Sado, Mt. Donden, where the free range cows traditionally roamed. They were not only a picturesque addition to the landscape, but they acted as grounds keepers. Now in their absence the area is becoming congested and overgrown with weeds. A man called *Mr. Jumonji* has started *The Osado Trust* to try to revive the grazing of cows on the mountain. We discovered a common interest and so Mr. Jumonji bought a calf at the same time we bought Kikuko. Just one more merit of this project has been how it has helped connect us more closely to other Sado Islanders who are concerned about the island's environment. Incidentally, it is no easy thing keeping track of cattle roaming over a very large mountain. Mr. Jumonji is thinking of fitting them with GPS collars so he can keep find them more easily.

If you were to buy a skin from the drum maker for a 3 *jaku* 8 *sun* taiko (115 cm. or 45.3 inches) and have it fitted, it will cost you about ¥1,500,000 (roughly \$15,000) for 2 sides. So this project may not make too much sense economically, but we are not in this to save money. The most important thing is to raise the level of Kodo's performance. These days apprentices seem very quick to pick up drumming technique. But technique alone is not enough. This is an issue with present-day Japanese society in general, we need to be more aware – especially environmentally – of the world around us. This will enrichen us both practically and spiritually.

I have already learned something in the little time I have had to spend with Kikuko. When I first saw her, she looked like all the rest of the black cows there. Now I can pick her out in a second.

Yoko Fujimoto's First Solo CD

Morisa Komorisa (Lullabies)

A member since 1976, Yoko Fujimoto's haunting voice can now be heard by itself on this CD, due out in Japan in June. Contact us for copies. Here are notes from Yoko and the album's producer, Derek Nakamoto.

Why did I make this an album exclusively of lullabies? The short answer is that I wanted to hear them. Some lullabies directly express the warmth of feelings between a mother and her child. There are others that reflect the difficulty, sadness and frustration of young children from poor families sent to care for other people's children, when they still are still of an age they should be basking in the love of their own mothers. Both kinds of songs are beautiful in their own way.

I remember being raised to the sound of lullabies. In my singing I can hear my mother's voice, proof of the bond of love between parent and child. I feel the tranquility of returning home. This is the power of the lullaby.

I met the widely talented and sensitive *Derek Nakamoto* 5 years ago. He was the musical director on the Triangle Project. Not only did he create the wonderful musical backdrop for that production and CD, but he was – and continues to be – a great musical and spiritual support. He told me 'I want to work with your voice', and so this album was born. Derek not only brings the best out in the performer, but he expands the field to be explored by the listeners' imagination. He is a musician whose mind is as broad as he is spiritual.

I have wanted to make a CD for over 10 years. During that time Kodo's sound engineer *Takuro Susaki* put in a huge amount of work to make it technically possible. My deepest thanks to everyone who helped on this project and particularly to these two true friends. — Yoko

I had the pleasure of meeting and working with Yoko Fujimoto in Los Angeles while she was part of an artistic collaboration called 'The Triangle Project' which included my good friends *Nobuko Miyamoto* and *P.J. Hirabayashi*. They both had told me of Yoko's extraordinary vocal talent and it was my work with The Triangle Project that gave me an opportunity to experience her gift closely. At that point, I expressed deep interest in working on a project with her

showcasing her voice.

Yoko came up with the concept of recording her favorite lullabies from the different prefectures in Japan and I loved the idea. She spent a few months collecting the songs and on a trip to Los Angeles May 15, 2007 we started recording her vocals at my studio. It was to be the beginning of a wonderful journey.

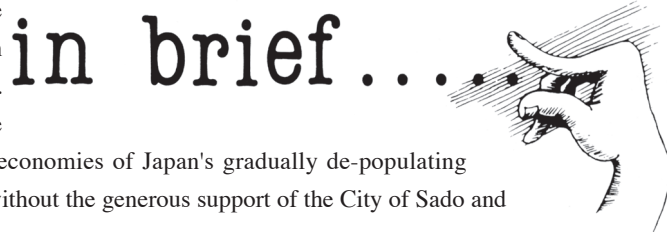
When I received the English translations of the traditional lullabies, what impressed me was the similarity of the stories with lullabies from different cultures. More than often – hidden behind the sweet comforting melodies – were lyrics of a wide range of emotions felt by a mother, sung to her infant child to comfort them. These emotions reflected joy, happiness, hardship, sadness and hopefulness that the child will come to appreciate the difficulties and challenges a parent goes through raising them. This inspired the music to reflect these emotions and sensibilities, to be simple and yet subtly complex, a mix of the classical and world music flavors in a way that was not overbearing to Yoko's tender and at times fragile vocal interpretations.

I am deeply honored with the trust given to me by Yoko to travel this – what I feel is – her maiden voyage stepping out as a solo vocalist. She is an ambassador of the rich tradition KODO has created and still presents around the world. — Derek



*Yoko Fujimoto at Sobama Beach near Kodo Village.
photo by Taro Nishita*

Our annual Earth Celebration has been awarded the Grand Prize of the *Furusato Event Taisho* (Hometown Event Prize) by the Japan Ministry of General Affairs. This prize was established to recognize and make better known events which stimulate the spirit and economies of Japan's gradually de-populating countryside. This award couldn't have been possible without the generous support of the City of Sado and all EC volunteers and celebrants.



We are about to embark on a tour of Japan directed by *Mitsuru Ishizuka* which he describes as 'getting back to basics' after a run of experimentation. He aims to exploit both the power of the men and the delicacy of the women.

Probationary members *Tokio Takahashi* and *Tsuyoshi Maeda* have become full performing players. *Hirofumi Uenoyama* and *Yuko Shingai* have become production staff members. *Hiroko Shimauchi* (player) and *Narumi Matsuda* (production) will spend one more year as probationary members.

upcoming performances

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)	042-590-4411
30 Tokyo	Katsushika Symphony Hills	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	0564-63-1111
8 Gifu	Tajimi-shi Bunka Kaikan	0572-23-2600
11 Tsu-shi, Mie	Mie-ken Bunka Kaikan	059-223-3380
13 Nara	Kashihara Manyo Hall	0744-29-1300
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
26 Niigata	Tainai-shi Sangyo Bunka Kaikan	0254-43-6400

Earth Celebration 2008

In celebration of the 100th anniversary of Japanese emigration to Brazil this year's EC theme will be Brazil. Among this year's workshops will be the ever-popular Odaiko, Women's Taiko, Voice Circle, Shinobue-making & Miyake along with a Brazilian Percussion Workshop, lecture and exhibitions. Tickets and workshop reservations will go on sale on June 2nd. They sell out fast so we suggest you get right on it. The official EC website will go online

on May 11th. <http://www.kodo.or.jp/ec/>

This year for the first time, the main Shiroyama concerts will be held rain or shine and only cancelled in the event of a typhoon or other natural disaster.

EC Pre-Events

This year's events will be held on the 3 days previous to EC (Aug.19-21) This will include Noh drama by firelight at 3 of Sado's beautiful and historic Noh theatres around the island. For details call the Sado Tourism Association at: 0259-27-5000

Autumn Kodo Juku (Sleepover Workshops)

Eiichi Saito's Taiko Workshop

Sept. 19th~23 Kodo Apprentice Centre, Sado Island. Room & Board & Bachi: ¥55,000

Apply before June 30th.

Yoko Fujimoto Voice Circle

October 23~26 Kodo Village.

Room & Board at Hananoki Inn, ¥50,000

Apply before August 10th.

Reservations by e-mail to Ms. Chida at: zaidan@kodo.or.jp

Attention members of Friends of Kodo

Advance ticket reservations for Kodo's autumn Japan Tour will begin in May. We will be in touch with details.

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>