

the KODŌ beat

鼓童

Kaguyahime at the Opéra National de Paris

Modern composer *Maki Ishii's* musical suite *Kaguyahime*, which debuted in 1984, will be performed by the *Paris Opera Ballet* as a new production at the *Opéra Bastille* in June and July, 2010. Directed by *Jiří Kylian*, one of modern ballet's most celebrated choreographers, seven members of Kodo will join the Paris Opera Ballet, a group of Western percussionists, and a *gagaku* (Japanese court music) ensemble for this production. This will mark the first time for a taiko group to take the stage at the *Opéra National de Paris*.

The musical suite *Kaguyahime* was originally created as a comprehensive stage production including a Japanese percussion ensemble, a Western percussion ensemble, ballet, pantomime, and spoken word, making it an especially unique performance piece among Maki Ishii's numerous works. The story is based on the 10th century Japanese folk story, *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*. It tells the story of a mysterious girl called *Kaguya-hime*, who is discovered as a baby inside the stalk of a glowing bamboo plant.

The suite was first performed in 1984 at the *Berlin Opera House*, with music performed by Kodo and the *Opera Percussionists*. In 1985 a version incorporating ballet made its debut featuring the *Tokyo Star Dancers Ballet*, Kodo and the *Percussion Ensemble Okada of Japan*. In 1988 Maki Ishii and Jiří Kylian joined forces to bring *Kaguyahime* to the next level, creating a whimsical combination of Eastern and Western art that received great critical acclaim. This show first took place at the *Holland Dance Festival* featuring Kodo's



Kaguyahime as a ballet.

photo by Jacques Moatti

Katsuji Kondo, so it has been nearly 22 years since this remarkable international collaboration has been seen.

Following are some thoughts by a participant of the original performance, Kodo's musical director *Motofumi Yamaguchi*.

Kaguyahime was a fusion of Western and Asian percussion instruments that contemporary composer



(front row left to right) Kazuaki Tomida, Maki Ishii, Eiichi Saito, Katsuji Kondo & Shinichi Sogo.

(2nd row, from centre holding drumsticks to right) Motofumi Yamaguchi, Yoshikazu Fujimoto, Yoshiaki Oi and Hiroshi Tajiri with members of the Orchestra Percussionists in 1985 at the Berlin Opera House.

photo by
Yoko Umezawa

Maki Ishii composed for Kodo. Within the composition were included many techniques used in playing pieces composed for Kodo, like *Monochrome* and *Dyuhha*, as well as more traditional works like *Miyake*, *Yataibayashi* and *Gezanbayashi*. I remember Maki Ishii saying 'I can't imagine creating a new Kodo piece because I've used up all my ideas on them!'

For the debut presentation he wanted to not only tell the story with music, but to present it visually too. He used the percussion instruments as part of the performance, for instance, in the fight scene I remember Kodo players going over to play the Western instruments and the Western players playing the taiko.

Later – when dance was incorporated into the piece – it became Kodo's first experience playing for ballet. Even in contemporary ballet I think this kind of composition is quite rare. That it should be performed by an opera company is even more unusual.

It will be a great honour for Kodo to take part in this entirely newly-realized production with

such renowned ballet and opera companies, under such esteemed direction and at such a remarkable venue.

The performances will be on Friday June 11th through Thursday July 15th at the Paris Opera Bastille. If you are in the area please join us for this historic and exciting event.



Kodo checking out the Paris Opera Bastille in 2009.

photo by Taro Nishita

Kodo Close-up:

Shogo Yoshii, player

The 37th in a series of profiles of individual Kodo members

Shogo was born on August 12th, 1981 in Tokyo and grew up in a house in a bedroom community in Yokohama where his parents still live. His father is an architect, his mother a housewife and he has an older brother and sister. From his grandfather on down his was a *kendo* family and Shogo's first memory is of that sport. Though never particularly keen on it, he practiced it seriously right through middle school and he still does it occasionally. The athletic Shogo variously took up soccer, swimming, skiing, fishing and basketball, which he persued right through to his only year of university. Though not a particularly dilligent student he managed to get through his school work without breaking too much of a sweat.

As a boy he loved American black music, particularly *Michael Jackson*, and played a bit of blues harp. He began to feel however, that he was missing that key 'soul' ingredient, so when he discovered taiko in middle school he remembers thinking, 'Here is something I can play and sound *natural*'.

That was a period in Japanese schools when there was a great deal of bullying, with an epidemic of students refusing to go to school at all. When taiko was introduced Shogo was amazed to see kids who were normally bullied coming out of their shells as they drummed, and others who rarely came to school attending more and more often just to play the drums. He noticed that taiko seem to possess a strange power to bring people out of themselves.

In his suburban neighbourhood there were no local festivals or events to bring the residents together, and to create a link between kids and adults. He began to think that taiko might be a remedy for this and so formed a taiko group with 5 friends called *Shoryu Taiko* (Climbing Dragon). At first they played on borrowed drums, but gradually they earned enough money through appearances and donations to assemble their own instruments and costumes. *Shoryu Taiko* thrived and grew to over 30 members under his leadership. He played *taiko*, *fue* and *kokyū* in it till he joined Kodo at age 21. After high school Shogo went to university for



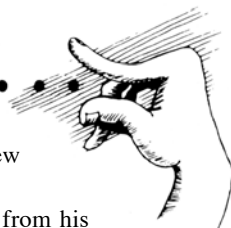
This interview was conducted using Skype between late-afternoon Sado and early-morning Belgium. Hence Shogo's 'just woke up' face. And so the world keeps shrinking.

a year, but it wasn't for him. Because he was fascinated by the ways in which mankind can live better in a natural environment he decided to join Kodo where he could combine that interest with his love of Japanese traditional performing arts.

As a player in Kodo, Shogo is noted for his *fue* and *kokyū* playing and energetic dance. Which brings us to why he is in Belgium now rehearsing for the production *Babel* with the renowned Belgian choreographer and dancer *Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui*, with stage design by British sculptor *Antony Gormley*. Shogo was probably chosen because he has quite a broad range of talents, not only as a dancer but on taiko, fue, and kokyū. After a month and a half of rehearsals *Babel* will tour for close to a year. As of this interview nothing but the cast and concept has been decided about the show and he has been doing mostly jazz dance and hip hop. The performance will grow out of the rehearsals. This approach is completely unlike Kodo's where the arrangement and choreography are pretty well set before rehearsals begin, after which it is a matter of everyone learning their parts. With Larbi there are no 'mistakes' or right or wrong. He looks at the performers and develops the show around what the performers do best and most naturally. No one is being told what to do or not do. It is a whole new world for Shogo.

Player *Kazunari Abe* – whose flute was long featured on the main stage – retired from Kodo in the autumn. Also, long time player *Tsubasa Hori* has decided to retire from Kodo to concentrate on raising her daughter *Mion* in her husband *Kurt's* native Belgium. We shall all miss both Tsubasa and Kazunari's unique and powerful contributions to Kodo and wish them all the best in their new adventures.

in brief...



Yoshikazu Fujimoto – possessor of arguably one of the most recognizable backs in the world from his many portraits playing *odaiko* – turns 60 this year, and he still overwhelms us with his drum.

In December of 2009 *Motofumi Yamaguchi* released his first solo album *Ikkon Fugetsu*. It is a collaboration with guest artists playing piano, guitar, and song. This is Kodo's first album featuring flute.

upcoming performances

One Earth Tour Europe

February

- | | | |
|-------|-------------|---------------------------------|
| 18,19 | Netherlands | Nieuwe Luxor Theater, Rotterdam |
| 22 | Finland | Savoy Theatre, Helsinki |
| 25 | Denmark | Tivoli Concert Hall, Copenhagen |
| 27 | Germany | Burghof, Lörrach |
| 28 | Germany | Congress Centrum, Heidenheim |

March

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|-------|---------|--------------------------------------|
| 2 | UK | Corn Exchange, Cambridge |
| 4 | UK | Brighton Dome, Brighton |
| 5 | UK | Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry |
| 6 | UK | De Montfort Hall, Leicester |
| 9 | UK | Hall for Cornwall, Truro |
| 10 | UK | Plymouth Pavilions, Plymouth |
| 11 | UK | The Anvil, Basingstoke |
| 13,14 | Ireland | National Concert Hall, Dublin |
| 16 | Ireland | Cork City Hall, Cork |
| 18 | Ireland | University Concert Hall, Limerick |
| 22,23 | Russia | International House of Music, Moscow |

One Earth Tour Japan

May

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|----|----------|---|
| 8 | Hyogo | Kobe Kokusai Kaikan |
| 9 | Shiga | Hino-cho Chomin Kaikan Watamuki Hall Niji |
| 11 | Wakayama | Wakayama Shimin Kaikan |
| 18 | Shizuoka | Act City Hamamatsu |
| 21 | Shizuoka | Mishima Shimin Bunka Kaikan |
| 23 | Chiba | Yachiyo-shi Shimin Kaikan |
| 26 | Tokyo | Chofu-shi Green Hall |
| 28 | Saitama | Wako Shimin Bunka Centre Sun Azalea |
| 29 | Saitama | Sun City Hall, Koshigaya |
| 30 | Saitama | Kumagaya Bunka Sozokan Sakura Mate |

June

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|----|-----------|--|
| 9 | Fukushima | Alios Iwaki Performing Arts Center, Iwaki |
| 12 | Iwate | Ofunato Shimin Bunka Kaikan Rias Hall, Ofunato |
| 18 | Hokkaido | Obihiro Shimin Bunka Hall |
| 20 | Sapporo | Hokkaido Sapporo Shimin Hall, Sapporo |

Kodo Ubusuna

In September '09 *Kodo Ubusuna Concerts* held in Osaka, Tsuruga, and Kyoto received the highest acclaim. We are pleased to announce further performances in March 2010.

Appearing: *Yoshikazu Fujimoto, Chieko Kojima, Yoko*

Fujimoto, Motofumi Yamaguchi, Eiichi Saito, Takeshi Arai, Masaru Tsuji, Kenzo Abe, Shogo Yoshii, Tsuyoshi Maeda & Yosuke Kusa.

March

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|----|----------|---|
| 7 | Ehime | Uchiko-za, Uchiko |
| 13 | Osaka | Settsu-shi Shimin Bunka Hall |
| 17 | Ishikawa | Hakusan-shi Tsuruki Sogo Bunka Kaikan Crane |
| 20 | Niigata | Shibata Shimin Bunka Kaikan |
| 22 | Iwate | Kitakami Bunka Koryu Centre Sakura Hall |
| 27 | Niigata | Joetsu Bunka Kaikan |
| 30 | Tokyo | National Theatre |

Kaguyahime

June 11- July 15 Opéra Bastille, Paris

Kodo Dadan

July

- | | | |
|----|----------|-----------------------------------|
| 10 | Niigata | Joetsu Bunka Kaikan |
| 11 | Kanagawa | Kanagawa Kenmin Hall, Yokohama |
| 15 | Chiba | Matsudo Mori no Hall 21 |
| 17 | Saitama | Iruma Shimin Kaikan |
| 19 | Kumamoto | Yachiyoza, Yamaga |
| 23 | Chiba | Kimitsu Shimin Bunka Hall |
| 24 | Shizuoka | Shizuoka Shimin Kaikan |
| 25 | Aichi | Aichi-ken Geijutsu Gekijo, Nagoya |

For concert details see Kodo's web site.

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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