

# the KODŌ beat

# 鼓童

## *Kodo School Workshop- Performances*

*Masami Miyazaki tells us about playing in and directing the School Workshop-Performances in Japan*

Though Kodo has performed in schools nearly since its inception, the *School Workshop-Performances* programme began in 1999. What makes it unique is that a taiko workshop is included for 20 members of the audience as everyone else looks on. We normally do one tour in the spring and one in the fall and hold two performances a day. Participating Kodo players change every year and consist of a mix of veterans and younger taikoists. Seven or eight players take part, seven being the minimum number required for our *Yatai-Bayashi* finale. We go to schools with classes from grade one, elementary right through high school and sometimes

to special events like parent/child meetings where adults might also participate. We take turns driving a mini van that seats eight, and a truck for hauling the 20 *okedo* drums for the workshop, 3 *chudaiko*, one large *hirado* (we call it the Big Mac, it really does look like a hamburger) and a selection of smaller drums which will vary from tour to tour depending upon the pieces we play in the performance part of the show.

In a typical school appearance we perform all but one of our numbers and then do the workshop, after which we finish off with a finale performance of *Yatai-*



*Masami one on one.  
All photos by Taro Nishita*



*Bayashi*. We used to pick the workshop participants from volunteers in the audience but that became a bit chaotic with hundreds of paper, scissors & rock games going on at once to choose the winners. This chewed up valuable time so now we ask the school to work out who can participate ahead of our arrival.

On previous tours the general pattern for the workshop has been for the participants to first get used to handling the *bachi* (drumsticks) and then begin by making single hits on the taiko. Then we play what we call the *Yamabiko Game* where they play a series of small phrases after the Kodo players. Eventually they learn the whole piece and earn a real sense of accomplishment by playing an entire composition supported by a bass rhythm played by Kodo.

There is much to be gained for both the players *and* the audience from the School Workshop Performances. During a full show on the *One Earth Tour* the audience is in a dark auditorium and usually quite a distance away, while the players are bathed in (blinding) bright lights. Though the performers can *sense* the audience's presence, they can't see their faces, the kinds of expression, or what sort of feelings the audience have as they listen to the music.

On the school tours however everyone shares the same revealing daylight of a gym, with the players and students cheek by jowl. They can look at each other eye to eye. The drummers can *see* the reactions of the children who – unlike adults – tend to be much more straightforward. If they love the show they lean forward into the music, if they are bored they look around, yawn, even fall asleep. It becomes a real challenge for the players to work out how to excite the audience right then and there, *as it is happening*. It forces the players to look at each member of the audience as an individual rather than an amorphous mass reacting at the end of each number or at the end of the show after the lights come on. What the audience loses in dramatic impact because of the lack of theatrical lighting, it makes up for being only inches away and eye to eye with the drummers.

When we began these school tours about 10 years ago there were many serious problems in the Japanese school system, particularly in middle school with

bullying, truancy and even suicide. This was a huge social problem. Over the years we have heard from many young people that they felt they had received power and energy from Kodo, as if their batteries felt recharged. With the school tours we hope not only to introduce students to the Japanese performing arts, but to be an inspiration, imbue the children with a sense of



power and joy of life, to give inspiration to the children, especially the ones who are struggling. To get through to the children on any level we can. Sometimes after the show we see particularly scruffy and or unhappy-looking kids hanging around the drums as we pack up to go. You can tell they are working up the courage to ask if they can help. It is really times like those when I sense we have gotten through. It makes me very happy.

This next tour will be my first in a couple of years so I wonder how the students will react. Except for Kyushu, the southern-most large island of Japan, we have travelled the length and breadth of this country. I really hope that someday soon we will be able to reach further, to visit young people around the world and broaden the chances to learn from each other on their home ground.

## Michael De Roo, Conductor of *Kaguyahime*



*Michael DeRoo, self described 'nomadic cultural entrepreneur' and long-time friend of Kodo is the musical director of the upcoming ballet version of Kaguyahime in Paris this June & July*

I come from a family of musicians in The Hague and became a professional percussionist at age 17. My group *Circle Ensemble* (now *Circle Percussion*) wanted to know about every single drum in the world and when I first saw *Ondekoza* (Kodo's earlier incarnation) I was overwhelmed by two things. First the sound of the taiko, especially the *shimedaiko*, and the second was the piece *Monochrome*. That was the first time I had heard a Maki Ishii composition. In 1984 the director of the *Holland Festival* asked me to do a concert in the *Royal Conservatory* in the large hall to play an evening full of percussion music. The theme of that festival was Japan. I phoned Kodo and I explained to Hancho (Toshio Kawauchi) that I wanted to borrow some taiko. I remember him laughing when I said 'We want to perform *Monochrome* and we don't want to become Japanese drummers, we want to integrate these instruments into our field of instruments, which already include many non-western instruments, however no Japanese ones yet.' 'All right.' he said, and that's how it all started and why I'm sitting here on Sado today.

The first time I personally played with Kodo was at the *Berlin Opera*, the world premiere performance of Maki Ishii's *Kaguyahime*, the concert version without the *gagaku* or ballet. I was there with percussionists from the Berlin Opera and two guys from the Berlin Philharmonic. The most memorable part of that experience was meeting the Kodo members. I had never met a bunch of people that were so consummately

dedicated to doing something. Here was this troupe of guys who were extremely serious, working very hard, doing something which was fantastic. Performing together was just a joy, I can't say anything else, it was great.

Kaguyahime combines what Maki Ishii describes as 'The sounds of two worlds,' the East and West. It is not a very complicated composition actually, as it is intended to be an accompaniment to ballet.

As for the origins of *this* performance of the ballet version of it at the Paris Opera, here is what happened. In Tokyo years ago we were able to arrange with Kodo and Maki Ishii and the gagaku people a studio session where we recorded the whole thing. I took that recording back with me and told my close friend, Czech choreographer Jiří Kylián, that I have something he had never heard before and he said 'What do you mean?' He took it home and listened to it and a month later called me and said 'We are going to do this!' For this all-new production in Paris I will be conducting 3 Gagaku players, 7 Kodo taikoists and 7 French percussionists from the Paris Opera plus a few free-lancers. I know Paris will love it. And the Paris Opera has so much confidence in the production that they have booked it for the 3,200 seat opera house for 16 performances! The attraction of one of the world's most renowned choreographers together with Kodo performing and the prestigious Paris Opera company and venue will I am sure be a stunning success. All we have to do now is to do our best.



*Michael De Roo conducting a rehearsal at Kodo Village on May 1st.*

The DVD of *kabuki* great Tamasaburo Bando's direction of Kodo members in *Dadan* will be released on May 10th.

This year's Earth Celebration will be held from August 20th-22nd. The featured guests will be the Corsican male polyphonic group *A Filetta* singing sacred and folk music.

EC's official English language site will appear on My 20th and tickets will go on sale June 1st.  
<http://www.kodo.or.jp/ec/>

Kodo's principal *shinobue* player Motofumi Yamaguchi's solo CD *Ikkan Fugetsu* is now available for download online at the *iTunes Store*. <http://itunes.apple.com/jp/album/id370207572>

# in brief...



## upcoming performances

### One Earth Tour Japan

#### May

- 16 Gifu Hida Sekai Seikatsu Bunka Centre  
Hida Geijutsudo
- 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 Koshigaya, Saitama Sun City Hall
- 30 Saitama Kumagaya Bunka Sozokan Sakura Mate

#### June

- 5 Tochigi Nikko-shi Imaichi Bunka Kaikan
- 9 Fukushima Iwaki Performing Arts Center Alios
- 12 Iwate Ofunato Shimin Bunka Kaikan Rias Hall
- 16 Hokkaido Wakkanai Sogo Bunka Center
- 18 Hokkaido Obihiro Shimin Bunka Hall
- 20 Hokkaido Sapporo Shimin Hall

### *Kaguyahime* at Opéra Bastille, Paris

June 11- July 15

### Kodo *Dadan* Encore Performances

Directed by Tamasaburo Bando, this hit performance by Kodo members has been brought back by popular demand.

#### July

- 10 Niigata Joetsu Bunka Kaikan
- 15 Chiba Matsudo Mori no Hall 21
- 17 Saitama Iruma Shimin Kaikan
- 19,20 Yamaga, Kumamoto Yachiyoza Theater
- 23 Chiba Kimitsu Shimin Bunka Hall
- 24 Shizuoka Shizuoka Shimin Kaikan
- 25 Nagoya, Aichi Aichi-ken Geijutsu Gekijo

### Aikawa Kozan Matsuri

July 25 Sado Island

### Earth Celebration 2010

August 20-22 Sado Island

### One Earth Tour Japan

#### September

- 10 Tokyo Kodaira Shimin Bunka Kaikan Rune Kodaira
- 11 Tokyo Ota Kumin Hall Aprico
- 12 Kanagawa Harmony Hall Zama

- 17 Gunma Ooizumi-machi Bunkamura
- 19 Chiba Ichihara-shi Shimin Kaikan
- 20 Tokyo Musashimurayama Shimin Kaikan

### One Earth Tour Europe & Israel

#### October

- 1- 8 Israel
- 11 Edinburgh, UK
- 12 Aberdeen, UK
- 15 Gateshead, UK
- 16 Liverpool, UK
- 17 Manchester, UK
- 19 Bristol, UK
- 20 Cardiff, UK
- 21- 23 UK
- 25 Munich, Germany
- 28 Rosenheim, Germany
- 30 Stuttgart, Germany

#### November

- 1 Nuremberg, Germany
- 3 Nijmegen, Netherlands

### Solo Projects

May - July Yoshie Sunahata in Akram Khan's *Gnosis*

May - Dec Shogo Yoshii in Cherkaoui/Jalet's *Babel*

*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 online version is available on the Internet.

Editor: Johnny Wales

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

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

e-mail: [heartbeat@kodo.or.jp](mailto:heartbeat@kodo.or.jp)

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