

A Memorable 25th Earth Celebration

Thank you to everyone who joined us from all corners of Japan and the globe for the 25th [Earth Celebration](#) (EC), August 17 through 19. This year we shared the Shiroyama Concerts with an audience of more than 7000 people over three days. The festival was blessed by sunshine and blue skies by day, and lightning on the horizon at night, as Mother Nature lent a hand to the concert atmosphere.

We warmly thank our Shiroyama Concert guest artists shamisen player [Hiromitsu Agatsuma](#), singer Anna Sato from Amami, and Akio Tsumura & sons from Miyake Geino Doshikai. We also give our sincere thanks to all of the fringe performers, Harbour Market stall holders, volunteers, staff, and enthusiastic participants who brought the celebration to life.

In this issue, we share a selection of photographs from the Shiroyama Concerts and Fringe stage by the sea. Stay tuned for a report by Johnny Wales in our October issue and the [EC Facebook page](#) for other stories.

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Kodo's first "Distinguished Members"

Four Founders Recognized as "Distinguished Members"

Kodo's founding veteran members Yoshikazu Fujimoto, Chieko Kojima, Yoko Fujimoto and Motofumi Yamaguchi have been recognized as "Distinguished Members."

These four performers have been part of the ensemble since the days of its antecedent group, *Sado no Kuni Ondekoza*. They laid down the foundations for Kodo's stage expression just as they paved new roads for the next generation. For many years, as the "face" of Kodo, each of them formed deep bonds with the people they met in their travels throughout Japan and across the globe, working tirelessly to bring their message of music around the world and build Kodo's core

audience.

By creating the title and position of "Distinguished Members," Kodo shows appreciation and respect for

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Distinguished Members*continued from page 1*

the lifetime of dedicated work of these longtime members. We also hope that bestowing this title on these members will encourage them to leverage the experience and skills that they gained over the years to continue their activities with Kodo in the way that best suits each individual. We kindly ask for your continued support of these members and they enter a new stage of their careers.

Yoshikazu Fujimoto

Yoshikazu Fujimoto turns 62 years old this year and is currently Kodo's most senior member. He has played taiko on countless stages, and after decades as the ensemble's featured *O-daiko* player and center-man for the *Yatai-bayashi* climax, he remains the quintessential "Mr. Kodo." It is his goal to play taiko forever and he wants to continue to meet other taiko lovers throughout the world for an exchange of ideas and music.

Chieko Kojima

Chieko Kojima has created her own unique world of dance and feminine taiko expression. In her solo project "Yukiai," as well as through collaborative works such as the Kodo Special Performances on Sado Island, she experiences joy through the deep connections and oneness her expression engenders with her audience. From her base on Sado Island, she will continue her various creative activities as she reexamines the origins of performing arts and her own mission in relation to these arts.

Yoko Fujimoto

Through song, Yoko has created deep ties between Kodo and countless people around the world. She has a special place in her heart for Sado, and she has made original songs about the island as well as holding workshops at elementary schools there for fifteen years. This year she even composed

and wrote the lyrics for a school song for one of those schools. In 2013, she will make a fresh start when she moves her base to her husband Yoshikazu's hometown of Wachi in Kyoto. She will travel back and forth between Wachi and Sado as she continues her esteemed career as a Kodo member.

Motofumi Yamaguchi

On a taiko-centered stage, Motofumi Yamaguchi established himself as a

self-taught bamboo flute player and performer of various instruments. Over the years, he has been at the helm of the musicianship of the Kodo ensemble, composing music and directing performances. In films, plays, and other projects, he has worked as a music director and written and performed various soundtrack music. From this point on, he wants to focus on his solo activities and teaching shinobue (bamboo flute) workshops.

Yoshikazu Fujimoto



Chieko Kojima



Yoko Fujimoto



Motofumi Yamaguchi





EC 2012 Shiroyama Concerts

Top: Hiromitsu Agatsuma with Kodo (left). Ayako Onizawa (right) took the stage with Kodo for the last time at Earth Celebration. She sends a very sincere thanks to all of our readers worldwide for your support over the years.

Middle: Anna Sato (left), Kodo "Dadan" Concert (right)

Bottom: Festive Kodo "Opening Night" (left), [final performance](#) for Ayako Onizawa and Kazuki Imagai (right)





EC 2012 Fringe Performances

Top: Wachi Daiko with Kazuki Imagai & Yoshikazu Fujimoto (left), Yoko Fujimoto in "Hanayui" (right)

Middle: Hamochi High School Folk Performing Arts Club (left), Miyake Taiko (middle), Namahage Taiko (right)

Bottom: Lively Fukushima samba team Ovo Novo with Ryo Watanabe

Kodo and their Schools

In June Johnny Wales made the hour-long slog over Sado Island's southern mountain range to the southern coast, driven by Kodo eNew's Melanie Taylor to visit the Kodo Apprentice Centre. It is situated in an abandoned wooden school perched on the side of mountain above a tiny hamlet called *Kakinoura*. Melanie's poor old car packed it in just as we drove up the long hill to the centre, the same hill the apprentices have to run up at the crack of every dawn of their two years here.

Kodo has a long history of adopting

old school houses. From the nascent Ondekoza's second home in the Daisho Elementary School overlooking *Mano Bay* in the early 70's — which is still used by the group occasionally — to the Apprentice Centre in *Kitatanoura* on Sado's northern coast, which was damaged beyond repair in a typhoon, a testament to its much exposed location to the elements on Sado's rocky, wild and stormy northern coast. There are several reasons for this long association with school buildings.

The first is their location. Schools naturally require a playing field so they were often built a distance away from the communities they serve, where open land is still available. For Kodo's purposes this distance serves as

a sound buffer between them and the village for the drums they are pounding constantly. In Japan in general — and especially on an island like this — good relations with the community are highly valued, essential really, for long-term survival.

The buildings themselves also lend themselves nicely to the group's communal lifestyle. There is plenty of room, one of Japan's rarest commodities. Classrooms can be variously used as a dinning/common room, storage or used for small-scale or individual rehearsal space. They can also be divided into separate sleeping quarters for the members. Vitally too, there is always a wooden gymnasium with plenty of space for large-scale rehearsals on an area as big as many of the theatre stages the group actually perform on.

None of this would matter if the buildings weren't readily available in the first place. And by available that means empty, inexpensive, and that the community is prepared to rent it to a bunch of outsiders. Fortunately all of these conditions can usually be met.

Empty, because like so many other places in the world, a marked decrease in the birthrate in Japan since the 1960's means there are many fewer children to enrol, and so schools are still closing at an alarming rate.

Communities are anxious to rent them out rather than leave them vacant because Japan's damp climate means that a wooden building left uninhabited for more than a year or two quickly begins to rot. A wooden building is like an organic being with lungs that needs to breathe, to have its windows opened to let the air blow through when it is dry, and then closed when it rains. So communities can often be persuaded to rent out these facilities for very little money so as to assure their preservation.



Kodo members at Daisho, thirty years ago in 1982



Cleaning the floors at Kitatanoura in 1986

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The Current Kodo Apprentice Centre in the hills overlooking Kakinoura

Kodo and their Schools

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Kakinoura Kodo Apprentice Centre Visit

This is a report on a conversation with veteran Kodo performer Eiichi Saito who was teaching that day.

Eiichi Saito on the Apprentice System

It just turned out that all the eight first year apprentices this year are male. Of the second year apprentices two are female. I come to teach about 5 or 6 times a month. I begin teaching the first year apprentices *Yatai-bayashi*, and then we move into *Miyake*, which we are working on today. Whichever

experienced player isn't on tour take turns teaching the apprentices. I have been teaching for about 25 years. I certainly don't dislike teaching, it's just that I am not sure I am so well-equipped for it. Frankly I prefer performing on stage. However the great thing about teaching is that ones *learns* so much. Because you have to first distil in thought, and then put into words what one has until that moment only understood intuitively, you actually come out the other end with a deeper awareness of what it is you know and do. When I joined Kodo there was no apprenticeship system, we sort of just drifted into the group. About 4 years after I joined though, the system was set up. There was no real methodical approach back then to teach new

members. We just joined in on the rehearsals of the regular members and did whatever we could to prepare ourselves to fit into the troupe for a stage performance. Now it is more like a school and we can teach from the very basics, and gradually build up. We can concentrate on carefully teaching technique.

There is a perceptible difference between the

apprentices 25 years ago and now. Those days were analogue and naturally the kids nowadays have grown up in a digital world. They are used to a more efficient method of learning. If they don't understand something they will ask you about it and — once they understand — they will proceed. In my day we were told 'Just do it!', so even if we didn't understand the reason, we were expected to go ahead and copy what we saw. That is really the traditional Japanese style of teaching. Now I think the kids take a more Western-style approach to learning and so our teaching has tended to follow suit. I say tended, because it really depends on the teacher. Probably when Yoshikazu teaches he does it old-school 'More Like this!' My guess is that there is something to be said for both styles.

They don't jog anymore in the mornings but instead do speed walking which was introduced to lessen the impact on their joints caused by too much running. I have done it with them a few times and I find it much more tiring than jogging. Your hamstrings get really tight.

I think in general the apprentices are enjoying themselves, ask them. Whether it is more or less than in my day, well...?



Eiichi Saito teaching Miyake 'one on one'.

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Kodo and their Schools

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Lunch with the Apprentices

Here are some of the remarks overheard while the tape was left running as we ate a truly delicious lunch with the first year apprentices. Much of the food they grew themselves. Anonymity was assured so as to elicit as much frankness as possible.

'We have been here about 3 months. Being here, there are times when it is hard going, but then there is lots of fun too. Of course we haven't experienced winter yet, except when we came for our interviews in January. It was freezing. So all we know about Sado is the mild spring. We really don't know how hot it will get in the summer and how cold in the winter.'

'It depends on who cooks as to whether the food is any good or not. There are very good days, and bad, you hit a particularly good one.'

'We are mostly from pretty urban areas of Japan. When I first came to Sado we went to see the local Hamakawachi festival and it made a big impression. I mean, we have a matsuri where I come from, but it isn't nearly as inclusive, with everyone taking part and some guy shouting at you, 'Hey you! You beat the drum too!' Back home there is a stage and you more or less stand around and watch. Here we followed the drums as they went through the village and stopped in front of each house. There someone you had never met laid out food and drink for you. You naturally fall into conversation with perfect strangers. I had never experienced that before in Osaka.'

'The hardest thing for me is *seiza* (kneeling on the hard wooden floor) all day long.'

'Me too!'

'Definitely!' (There seems to be universal agreement about this) .

'The thing that was most different from my expectations was the food. I was expecting simple gruel, like in a Zen temple, but there is meat and fish and plenty of vegetables and fruit. I was really surprised. As for bad surprises, it is the smell of sweat everywhere. My image of Sado is that it would be nothing but bracing fresh air but here at the centre. well...'

'I did sports before I came here but the experience has been less severe than I imagined.'

'When we came we were told that we wouldn't be able to use our mobile phones and I couldn't imagine what that would be like. It was a touch lonely at first, but now that I am used to it it's much easier *without* it. It actually takes up a lot of time answering mail and calls all the time. Some of us are actually writing letters for the first time and it is great fun. If you have a mobile it would never occur to you to write a letter. I realized how much time I wasted using a mobile up till now'. (There is, surprisingly, complete consensus on this point too).

'Me too! The time once spent using my mobile can now go to practising or just losing myself in my fantasies. And now I read the newspaper! For the first time!'

'If we had more spare time I would like to explore the Sado arts more deeply. But as it is we don't feel as if we even have enough time to practice the curriculum as it is completely. After the rain I love to go deep into the mountains. I love watching the mist rolling in off the sea.'



An abandoned school's classrooms became dorms...



...and the gym is now the rehearsal hall.



On this July 5th the day begins at 4:50 am.

Upcoming Performances in September & October

After spending August at home on Sado Island preparing for and hosting festival Earth Celebration, taking part in local summer festivals, and resting a little, we are now about to begin on our next lineup of domestic and international performances.

With our own performances, collaborations with other performing arts groups, and small ensemble concerts on Sado Island, we hope you'll get to see various sides of our group in various places over the next two months.

“Kodo One Earth Tour 2012: Legend” September-October in Japan

The domestic tour of the first work by newly appointed artistic director Tamasaburo Bando continues in Japan this fall. [Click here for details.](#)

“Taking experienced performers and coupling them with young talent, I dream of the expanding the legend of Kodo.”
Tamasaburo Bando



Kodo Appearance in Ballet Performance “Kaguyahime: The Moon Princess” in Montreal, Canada October 2012

In October 2012, Montreal-based ballet company Les Grands Ballets Canadiens will hold performances of “Kaguyahime: The Moon Princess,” which will feature eight Kodo performers. “Kaguyahime” is a legendary ballet production that fuses music by composer Maki Ishii with choreography by Jiří Kylián. [Click here for details.](#)

Photo: Damian Siqueiros

Dancers: Tetyana Martyanova and Yadiel Suarez Llerena



“Kodo & TaikOz in Concert” Australia Tour September 2012

Kodo joins Australia's leading taiko ensemble TaikOz for a thrilling collaboration of taiko and song featuring TaikOz's founding member and world-class shakuhachi player, former Sado no Kuni Ondekoza member Riley Lee. [Click here for details.](#)



Kodo Special Performances on Sado Island: Autumn October 2012

Yoshikazu Fujimoto, Chieko Kojima, Yoko Fujimoto and Motofumi Yamaguchi form the heart of this year's special concerts on Sado Island, filled with a deep gratitude for Sado and made possible by Kodo's three decades of activities. This autumn, they will be joined by Okinawan dancer Mitsue Kinjo. [Click here for details.](#)



For further concerts and schedules, please see [Page 9](#) and the [top page of the Kodo website](#).



Kodo Performance Schedule 2012 - 2013

KODO ONE EARTH TOUR 2012: LEGEND

September - October: [Japan](#)

Niigata, Iwate, Yamagata, Fukushima, Ibaraki, Shizuoka, Aichi, Shiga, Osaka, Hyogo, Shimane, Tottori, Yamaguchi, Fukuoka, Nagasaki, Miyazaki, Kagoshima, Nagano, Chiba

December: [Japan](#)

Sado Island, Niigata, Aichi, Hiroshima, Hyogo, Kanagawa, Tokyo

KODO & TAIKOZ IN CONCERT - AUSTRALIA TOUR

September: Brisbane, Adelaide, Canberra, Melbourne, Newcastle, Sydney

KODO IN BALLET PERFORMANCE "KAGUYAHIME: THE MOON PRINCESS"

October: Montreal, Canada

2013

NEW Kodo One Earth Tour 2013: Legend

February - March: U.S.A. (Details TBA mid September 2012)

SOLO & SMALL GROUP PROJECTS, SPECIAL EVENTS, WORKSHOPS,
NEWS & INFORMATION

Please visit the [top page of our website](#) and scroll down for details.

Kodo One Earth Tour 2012: Legend

~ JAPAN ~
September-October

Schedule is subject to change. For up-to-date schedules and box office details, please visit our [website](#).

- September 9: Kashiwazaki, Niigata **SOLD OUT**
- September 11: Kuzumaki, Iwate
- September 12: Kitakami, Iwate
- September 14: Yamagata City
- September 15: Koriyama, Fukushima
- September 16: Hitachinaka, Ibaraki **SOLD OUT**
- September 20: Shizuoka City
- September 23: Fuso, Aichi
- September 26: Hikone, Shiga
- September 27: Ibaraki, Osaka
- September 30: Yabu, Hyogo **SOLD OUT**
- October 2: Matsue, Shimane
- October 3: Tottori City
- October 6: Shimonoseki, Yamaguchi
- October 7: Kitakyushu, Fukuoka
- October 8: Unzen, Nagasaki
- October 12: Miyazaki City
- October 13: Kagoshima City
- October 21: Karuizawa, Nagano
- October 23: Narashino, Chiba



Kodo One Earth Tour 2012: Legend

Year-End Concerts

- December 5: Sado Island, Niigata
- December 8-9: Niigata City
- December 11: Nagoya, Aichi
- December 13: Hiroshima City
- December 15: Amagasaki, Hyogo
- December 18: Yokohama, Kanagawa
- December 22-24: Bunkyo Ward, Tokyo

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In the wake of disaster, Kodo started the Heartbeat Project, a multifaceted undertaking designed to support relief efforts and the people of the regions affected by the Tohoku Pacific Earthquake.

We are making new recordings and participating in charity concerts, fund-raising events, etc. Thank you for your continued support. For updates, please visit our [website](#).

KODŌ

Latest Album:
Kodo Akatsuki



Fireworks at Ogi Minato Matsuri are the grand finale of our summer season

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