

One Earth Tour: Legend in Japan and USA

We are currently on tour in Japan with [Kodo One Earth Tour 2012: Legend](#). Our December tour started on Sado Island and our first stop was Niigata City. The tour continues to Nagoya, Hiroshima, Amagasaki, Yokohama, and ends with three matinees in Tokyo just before Christmas. For the year's finale, the cast has expanded to include [distinguished members](#) Yoshikazu Fujimoto and Chieko Kojima and four members who performed in our collaborations in Australia and Canada this fall: Eiichi Saito, Masayuki Sakamoto, Mariko Omi and Yosuke Kusa. If you can join us for one of these performances in Japan, we are sure you will agree that this special version of "Legend" proves the saying, "The more, the merrier!"

Since the first work by our new artistic director Tamasaburo Bando began touring in May, the cast has included our five junior members. We are delighted to announce that all five of them will become fully-fledged Kodo members in the New Year. They are Shogo Komatsuzaki, Akiko Ando, Yosuke Inoue, Yuta Sumiyoshi, and Tetsumi Hanaoka. Thank you very much for your support to date and in the years to come of these new members of the Kodo group. All five will make their foreign debut in [Las Vegas on February 1st](#) when *Kodo One Earth Tour 2013: Legend* starts a two-month tour around the USA. February

continued on page 2



Tamasaburo Bando dances to music performed by Kodo at Japan's oldest Kabuki theater, Kanamaru-za

Kodo at Kanamaru-za

A report by staff member Melanie Taylor featuring a conversation with performer Shogo Yoshii

In November, Kodo was invited to join the "[Tamasaburo Bando Special Performances](#)" at Kanamaru-za in Kagawa Prefecture, Japan's oldest Kabuki theater. These performances featured exquisite dances by Tamasaburo in three acts and Kodo appeared in the third act entitled "Ibuki."

The performances were sold-out from early on and the audience was a wonderful mix of Tamasaburo Bando aficionados and patrons of this special, historic theater. People had traveled from around Japan to see Tamasaburo

perform in this historic venue. By their applause, I'm sure many of them enjoyed Kodo's performance, too, and the theater certainly made the taiko echo wonderfully, the sounds of our natural instruments resonated clearly off the wooden walls and bamboo ceiling.

continued on page 2

In This Issue

"Kaguyahime" in Paris	4
Kodo Close-up: Masayuki Sakamoto	5
Kodo Juku 2012	7
2012 - 2013 Schedule	9
Contacts & Information	10

One Earth Tour: Legend in Japan and USA
continued from page 1

1st will be a special occasion in its own right as Kodo's first ever performance in the self-proclaimed "Entertainment Capital of the World."

Our members are especially looking forward to the 2013 USA tour because it will be the first time we have visited America with a production directed by Tamasaburo Bando. We are looking forward to sharing this program and new pieces with our friends and supporters there and introducing them to the new faces on the Kodo team. The performers and artistic director have spent six months refining the "Legend" production and we know it will continue to evolve on the road with every performance.

"Legend" will tour in the USA from

February 1st to March 29th, and then it returns to Japan for performances from May to June. From July to October, Kodo will take part in a brand new season of *Amaterasu* performances with Tamasaburo Bando. We will also hold School Workshop-Performance tours in Japan in 2013 and special performances on Sado Island.

Thank you all for reading Kodo eNews this year and supporting Kodo's various activities. We wish you all a wonderful holiday season and all the best for the New Year. The next issue of eNews will come out in February 2013. In the meantime, please keep in touch with Kodo by visiting our [website](#) and joining us on [Facebook](#).



Kodo at Kanamaru-za
continued from page 1

"Ibuki" featured seventeen Kodo performers performing *Jingi no Taiko*, *Tama Musubi*, *Morikomori*, *Itoshiki Mono-e*, *Uzushio*, *O-daiko*, *Onidaiko* and of course, *Ibuki*. The cast featured [distinguished members](#) Yoshikazu Fujimoto, Yoko Fujimoto, and Motofumi Yamaguchi with the core cast of "Kodo One Earth Tour 2012: Legend." Some scenes involved accompanying Tamasaburo while he danced, some were interactive performances with him, and others featured Kodo performing alone.

I asked performer [Shogo Yoshii](#) how it was for the Kodo members to perform with Tamasaburo on stage at Kanamaru-za. He said that accompanying dancers is a great challenge, but to perform with an artist of Tamasaburo Bando's caliber, it is both an honor and a real test. You have to play the score properly so the dancer can perform, but *how* you play it can either make the dance come to life or

get in its way. So you have boundaries, and you can be free within the limits to add your own sensibilities and you can test your intuitions within those lines. It is like being put in a box and seeing how free you can be inside it. It demands control and helps you learn to make very subtle changes to your performance to make your music better and that music your own.

This lead me to ask Shogo a big question. Reflecting on this year when Tamasaburo became Kodo's artistic director, and I asked Shogo to explain to our Kodo eNews readers why he thinks it is so special for Kodo to have Tamasaburo as its artistic director. Here is the first point he made: Kodo is a taiko performing arts ensemble, but the art of taiko performance is still young. When our antecedent group

Sado no Kuni Ondekoza put taiko on stage in the seventies, it was new for people to see taiko on stage and in a theater rather than at a local festival. Tamasaburo Bando is at the top of one of the oldest performing arts traditions in Japan, Kabuki. Kabuki has a long history, the art has been refined over centuries of practice, and there are definite rights and wrongs. Taiko performing arts is still a new genre, so when Tamasaburo brings his performance sensibilities to Kodo, there are many lessons we can learn.

continued on page 3



Kodo at Kanamaru-za

continued from page 2

His unique eye, and the Kabuki eye, for stage aesthetics, for simple yet effective movement, for theatrics, etc, brings skills the world of taiko performance has not been influenced by at this level ever before. His way of refining our “young genre” is often to simplify it and remove anything in excess. He sees things about our performances that we never saw, so each day is full of eye-opening moments.

Without a doubt, with each production, collaboration, and rehearsal with Tamasaburo Bando, Kodo is being challenged to think, grow, and excel. After seeing the energy in the collaboration at Kanamaru-za, I am confident the 2013 Amaterasu performances, in which Kodo will share the stage with him, will take our stage craft and our performers to a new level.



Kanamaru-za has seating in the stalls in traditional box style, each box seats five people. The long “hana michi” runways down either side allow the performers to enter and exit through the audience. The ceiling is made of criss-crossed bamboo rods and the theater is adorned with paper lanterns. It certainly feels like stepping back in time when you sit in the audience and wait for the curtain to open.

This board called a “chakutoban” in Japanese, literally “arrival board” It features the concert title and the names of all of the performers. Each day when a performer arrives at the theater, he “punches in” by putting a red peg above his name.



Kodo joins Tamasaburo Bando for the curtain call of his “Special Performances”



“Kaguyahime” at Opéra National de Paris’ Palais Garnier

Photos: Jean-Pierre Delagarde / Opéra national de Paris

In February 2013, we look forward to our guest appearance in ballet performances of “[Kaguyahime](#)” held by France’s leading opera and ballet ensemble, Opéra national de Paris. Kodo will make history as the first taiko ensemble to perform at the world’s highest-ranked theater and home of the Paris Opera, the celebrated Palais Garnier. We hope you will join us at this very special venue for these performances. For further details, please see our [website](#).

About Opéra National de Paris

[Opéra national de Paris](#) is the national opera house and home to France’s leading opera and ballet company. The Académie royale de Danse (Royal Academy of Dance) was founded in the late 17th century by Louis XIV with the purpose of training dancers and formalizing choreographic art. Well-known as the Paris Opera house today, the Palais Garnier was inaugurated

in 1875 and is the thirteenth theater to house the Paris Opera.

The Paris Opera is where the occupation of “professional ballet dancer” was first created. Ever since, the Paris Opera ballet has boasted a wide repertoire from classical ballet to contemporary productions and continued to lead the global world of ballet.

In 1989, the new Opéra Bastille theater was completed, and ever since Palais Garnier hosts mainly ballet performances and Bastille hosts the opera performances. Currently, Opéra national de Paris has over 150 dancers, which is a lineup of elite dancers selected through fierce competition.

The Ballet actively tackles new pieces and also commissions works from external choreographers. One could say this production of “Kaguyahime” is one of such works and a part of the Paris



Opera Ballet’s attempts to broaden their forms of expression.

“Kaguyahime’s strong point is definitely its musicality. Les Grands Ballets had to call over eleven Japanese musicians (eight are in the Kodo ensemble and three in the Gagaku ensemble) to play the music for the performance. Their presence is essential and gives all of its meaning to the story. The powerful sound of the drums adds a great deal of dimension to the choreography.”

– *Le Journal de Montreal (Canada, October 2012. Performances with Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montreal)*



Kodo Close-up: Masayuki Sakamoto, Performer

The 40th in a series of profiles of individual Kodo members by Johnny Wales.

For other profiles, see “The Kodo Beat” archive on our website.

Masayuki Sakamoto was born the youngest of three sons in Tsuyama, Okayama in Western Japan on August 1st, 1984. His dad is a banker, his mother a nurse. They lived deep in the mountains on their grandparent's farm. Wild boars ran through the hills. Masayuki walked to his primary school three kilometres away, biked over mountainous roads seven kms to middle school and to his high school which was twenty kms each way! During snow storms he remembers arriving three hours late for school.

Inspired by his guitar-playing brother, Masayuki took up drums in primary school. His older cousin played both drums and wadaiko, so when Masayuki approached him for advice he was encouraged to not only play drums, but to join the Kakuzan Sakura Daiko, too. And so his career in drumming and taiko began at the same time. The only instruction he received for pop drumming was during the thirty-minute rides to taiko practice when his cousin would talk about music. On the car stereo they listened to a variety of music and his mentor would ask, ‘What do you think of this guy?’ or ‘Listen to this phrase, it’s very cool’. In high school Masayuki joined a band and they would rent a studio space which had its own basic equipment. He wanted to use his own snare and pedals though, so — together with his school bag — he would carry the snare under one arm and pedals in another bag and bike the twenty kilometres to town. He can’t quite remember when he first considered becoming a drummer full time but he later came across a questionnaire from when he

graduated from primary school. In the space asking ‘What do you want to be?’ He wrote one word: ‘Drummer’.

Near the end of high school Masayuki went to a Kodo concert. Until then he had never thought of traditional Japanese music and taiko as being particularly cool, but now he changed his views and decided to apply as an apprentice. When most of his cohorts thought about their futures they dreamt of the big city and gravitated east towards Tokyo, Nagoya or Osaka. What the hell was he doing considering heading even deeper into ‘the backside of Japan’ to Sado Island? As for his parents, they figured if he spent a couple of years doing nothing but taiko he would soon get fed up and see the wisdom of taking his life in a more productive direction. Well, he was accepted — and not knowing what to expect — headed off to Sado. Upon arrival he was surprised to find himself spending so much time farming! For his fellow (mostly city-slicker) apprentices this was all new and exciting and they seemed to be having



Masayuki Sakamoto

a ball. For Masayuki though, it was all too reminiscent of his days bringing in the harvest back on the farm. What was he doing here, wouldn't his time be much better spent practicing taiko? His discontent apparently showed because at the end of the first year he was told that he wouldn't be able to proceed to the next. The reason given was that he hadn't changed over the course of a year. He was pretty depressed. What would he say to the wadaiko group back home who had all chipped in to buy his bullet train ticket to Sado? Their final words still rung in his ears, ‘Don’t come back ‘cause we’re only springing for a one-way ticket!’

That was the hardest time in his apprenticeship. Ironically, at that time what revitalized him was the time he spent getting his hands dirty in the earth. His attitude changed dramatically and he found himself suddenly fitting in with the rest. The change was noticeable enough that he

continued on page 6

Kodo Close-up: Masayuki Sakamoto*continued from page 5*

was allowed to move on to the second year. He began to learn from Sado Island, too. When he went to the local Onidaiko (demon drumming) practice in the nearby village he noticed the young people listening and talking to their seniors rather than making fun of them as was often the case back home. He felt that in this day and age that kind of continuity was quite rare in Japan.

The next year proceeded more smoothly and after two years he was accepted into the group and joined the tour almost immediately. He noticed that the sound produced by the veteran players was different and bigger than the new members. To this day what makes him happiest is that moment — when after struggling to improve his taiko, song or dance — it all comes together successfully in a performance. That's when he feels he has really created something.

During the taiko boom years, groups sprang up all over Japan and the world. People could feel pride at taking part in the rediscovery of Japanese culture, and that was a very good thing. Masayuki doesn't feel that is enough anymore. Taiko needs to be made to feel fresh and relevant for a new age. It's not enough to feel 'cool' putting on a loin cloth, happi coat and headband and pound on the drums just as you were taught by your elders. One of the great things Masayuki appreciates about Kodo's artistic director Tamasaburo Bando's new direction is, for example, when he has them out of those happi coats and headbands and he says 'Even without the uniform you still have to show you are Kodo'. It has forced them to reconsider the uniform and traditions and what they really mean. What in fact, does it mean to be Kodo?



Relaxing with the locals during the 2012 Australia tour



Masayuki playing with TaikOz's drum kit during collaboration rehearsals in Sydney, September 2012. Pictured left to right: Graham Hilgendorf (TaikOz), Yosuke Oda, Masayuki Sakamoto, Anton Lock (TaikOz).

Eat, Play, Love

A report on Kodo Juku 2012 by staff member Melanie Taylor

This autumn we welcomed twenty participants to the Kodo Apprentice Centre for [Kodo Juku](#), an annual live-in workshop that offers five days of fun with taiko and an escape from one's daily life. It was my 5th Kodo Juku and I was there working behind the scenes. Helping facilitate the life work of [Eiichi Saito](#) is up there among the top reasons I love my job. Each time, I find myself revitalized by the fresh air that flows into the Apprentice Centre, and perhaps the island itself, when twenty people who have never met each other join us from offshore to eat, sleep and play taiko. Last year, Kodo celebrated its 30th anniversary and a busy nationwide tour meant the Juku took an unprecedented break for a year. In 2011, Japan was hit hard by the Tohoku earthquake, tsunami and Fukushima nuclear power plant damage and we were all forced to think about what's important. 2011 made some people's decision to come to Kodo Juku in 2012 all the more important to them. One participant from Fukushima told us "My life since March 11, living on the border of the Fukushima danger zone, has been a life out of the ordinary. I came here to escape that and think about something else."



The meals were prepared by the second year Kodo apprentices. The final night's dessert included Japanese sweets (right) that looked like Sado Okesa hats (kasa) and a fruity pound cake.



Feel-good taiko with Eiichi Saito

This year we had participants from as far north as Fukushima and the southernmost from Okinawa. There were high school students considering their future paths, twenty-something's reconsidering their chosen paths, and mid-lifers looking for a soul recharge. Of course, some simply wanted to play taiko everyday, others eagerly hoped to learn the secrets of good taiko from Juku leader Eiichi Saito, and we even had a few who had watched Kodo on stage and wanted to try taiko themselves for the very first time. I got the feeling many were happy to

break free from their "electronic leashes" for while, too, leaving behind their computers, mobile phones, emails, and the world wide web. It was only the students who clung to their smart phones, for the first two days at least.

The taiko boomed, laughter roared, and hearts beat loudly.

Everyone did warm-up stretches to loosen up their bodies to play taiko, but from what I saw, their faces relaxed the most of all. Everyone got back to basics, starting with caring for their bodies and then caring for each other, the new-found friends who were strangers getting off the same ferry just days before. The sound of their taiko *felt* better with every day as their hearts opened to each other. Everyone came for different reasons but they all left connected. The comments the participants shared with us at the end were about simple things that really hit home.

"Thank you to the apprentices for cooking us such delicious meals. I was so moved by your kindness. I want to be actively kinder to others because of it."

"Thank you all for talking to me. I'm shy and never approach people, but I was so happy and grateful that you all came up and talked to me."

"Thank you for cheering me on. I'm not good at playing taiko, but you made me feel

continued on page 8

Eat, Play, Love

continued from page 7

good about my taiko playing.”

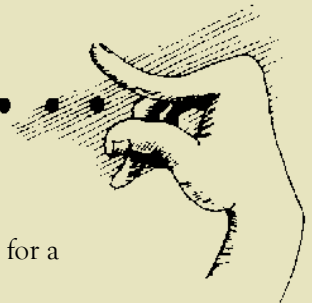
“Thank you for everything. I really needed this. Now I have good memories to help me through tough days in my life.”

I want to say a big thank you to all of the participants, too. They reminded me that strangers are often just friends we haven’t met yet. And that when you put your heart and soul into it, taiko sounds better, meals taste better, and most importantly, life feels better.

Morning stretches in late Autumn before jogging in the mountains



in brief.....



As we mentioned in our September issue, performer [Yoko Fujimoto](#) will move her base to her husband’s hometown of Wachi in Kyoto in 2013. She will travel back and forth between Wachi and Sado as she continues her work as a Kodo member. Stay tuned for a special message from Yoko in the next issue of Kodo eNews in February.

The Kodo family has a grandchild! The first couple in the Kodo group to get married were founding members Yoshiaki Oi and Kiyoko, who met on Sado when they joined *Sado no Kuni Ondekoza* in the seventies. On November 22, their daughter Hiroko, the first “Kodo kid” to marry, had her first child in Tokyo, a girl called Kaede, which means maple tree. Even at one week old, the resemblance to Kiyoko is striking! Congratulations to Hiroko and the Oi family!

Public relations, translation and foreign concert production staff member Melanie Taylor is going to move to Australia in early 2013 to pursue studies in translation and interpreting at university. She will continue to do translation work and Kodo eNews production for Kodo from Melbourne. After twelve years in Japan, Melanie looks forward to living closer to her home country New Zealand and hopes that her new base in Australia will lead to more opportunities for Kodo to perform down under in the future.



Kodo Performance Schedule 2012 - 2013

KODO ONE EARTH TOUR 2012: LEGEND

December: [Japan](#)

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

2013

KODO ONE EARTH TOUR 2013: LEGEND

February - March: [U.S.A.](#)

Nevada, California, Washington, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, South Carolina, North Carolina, Florida, Ohio, D.C., West Virginia, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Connecticut, New York

May - June: [Japan](#)

Ibaraki, Shizuoka, Aichi, Nagano, Kyoto, Osaka, Toyama, Niigata, Kanagawa, Saitama, Tokyo

KODO IN BALLET PERFORMANCE “KAGUYAHIME”

February: Opéra National de Paris Palais Garnier, Paris, France

AMATERASU

Collaboration by Tamasaburo Bando & Kodo

July-October: Tokyo, Fukuoka, Kyoto

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 2013: Legend

~ U.S.A. ~
February - March

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

- February 1: Las Vegas, NV
- February 3: Berkeley, CA
- February 5: Los Angeles, CA
- February 7: Davis, CA
- February 9: Seattle, WA
- February 10: Seattle, WA
- February 13: Chicago, IL
- February 15: Ann Arbor, MI
- February 17: Minneapolis, MN
- February 19: Des Moines, IA
- February 21: Milwaukee, WI **NEW**
- February 23: Greenville, SC
- February 25: Chapel Hill, NC
- February 28: Gainesville, FL
- March 2: Clearwater, FL
- March 7: Fort Pierce, FL **NEW**
- March 8: Boca Raton, FL **NEW**
- March 9: Miami, FL
- March 11: Naples, FL
- March 14: Columbus, OH
- March 16: Washington, D.C.
- March 18: Morgantown, WV
- March 20: Easton, PA
- March 22: Princeton, NJ
- March 24: Newark, NJ
- March 25: Philadelphia, PA
- March 27: Storrs, CT
- March 29: Schenectady, NY

Kodo One Earth Tour 2012: Legend

Year-End Performances in Japan



- 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



Persimmon is on everyone's table at this time of year on Sado Island

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