



NOVEMBER 1996

ISSUE 1

Welcome to the first edition of the quarterly Mugenkyo newsletter & the definitive source of information on Taiko events in the UK. Taiko drumming is relatively new to Britain, and not much is known about it. We hope to change all that with this newsletter, by spreading information on upcoming Taiko concerts, features about the history of Taiko in Japan, styles of playing, Taiko groups in Japan (after all, there are over 4,000 of them!) & anything else that readers may be interested in. If you have any suggestions about what to include, or any questions at all, please drop us a line! We also need a title - please send in suggestions!

Future issues will include information on:

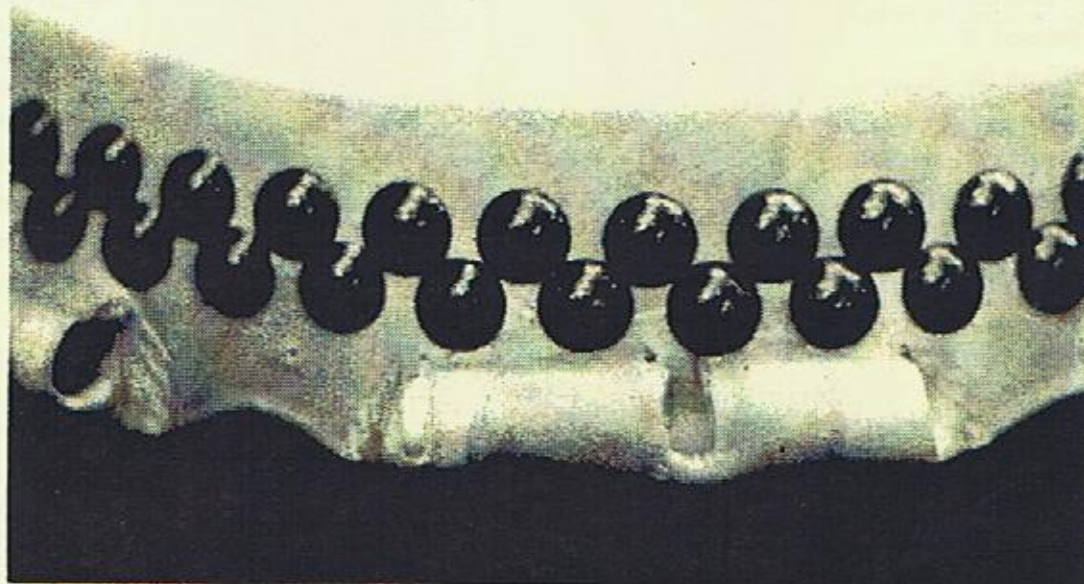
- all Taiko groups touring UK
(Wadaiko Ichiro, the exciting Taiko group from Japan who toured Britain last winter, will be playing 40 dates in the UK next spring - full tour schedule to be published in next issue)
- upcoming Mugenkyo performances
- features on Taiko history, groups, etc
- all about the drums, styles of playing
- upcoming Taiko courses and workshops
- readers questions answered
- and much more!

Unfortunately, it costs money to put out a newsletter - about 50p per copy for photocopying and postage... as we plan to publish quarterly, expenses alone would total more than £1,000 in the first year! Please help us by sending donations (first/second class stamps, or cheques made payable to: Mugenkyo) - any amount would be appreciated. Thank you!

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Please note that Mugenkyo will be performing again from February 1997 - until then we will be concentrating on our school shows, training new members and writing new material for our busy 1997 schedule - dates to be published in the next issue in February.



HOW IT ALL STARTED...

It all began when Neil and Miyuki went to Japan in the summer of 1992, Miyuki to take up a teaching post in her mother's native country, and Neil to travel and see the country. Little did they know how this seemingly small step would change their lives. While Neil was visiting Miyuki where she worked in Fukui, on the underdeveloped west coast of Japan, he happened to mention to a new-found friend that he had played drums in numerous rock bands in London. This friend asked Neil if he had seen any Taiko drumming, and on finding out that he had never even heard of it, she urged him to go and see the magnificent Hibiki Daiko drummers, a local legend. The power of the drumming left Neil spellbound, "It was as if a lightning bolt had struck me". On meeting Kurumaya-sensei, the leader of the group, the master drummer shook Neil's hand and said, "You will be a Taiko player... in Britain." Neil was unconvinced, but nevertheless felt very grateful when Kurumaya-sensei offered to teach him this ancient art. Hibiki Daiko are based at the Daienzenji Zen Buddhist temple on the outskirts of Fukui, and it was here that Neil was made to practice on a cardboard drum in the early days, for hours

on end, to learn the form. Running and weight training was also part of the discipline. The more Neil learned, the more he was drawn into the world of Taiko, and when his tourist visa ran out, he applied successfully for a cultural visa, which enabled him to stay for two years to study Taiko drumming. To start with, the language barrier was not a problem, but as Neil progressed, it became more difficult for Kurumaya-sensei to communicate the subtler points of the lesson. So, Miyuki began going along to the lessons to translate. Gradually she too became more and more interested in Taiko, and eventually asked Kurumaya-sensei to teach her too, a big decision, as nothing

less than 100% commitment would be accepted by the sensei (teacher). Their lessons continued, but never for a moment did they think that it would be possible to continue playing Taiko in Britain, for the cost of the drums seemed insurmountable.

Well, to cut a long story short, they did manage to purchase a set of drums (thanks to a lot of hard work, help from their friends and supporters in Fukui, and a big discount at the Taiko factory) which they brought back to London on their return in autumn 1994. And so, Mugenkyo was born. In May 1995, they gave their first British performance as a two-piece at the Brighton Festival. In July 1995, they were joined by Mark Alcock, who had also studied and performed Taiko in Japan, with the Tennon Daiko drummers in Wakayama prefecture. He has since been reunited with Tennon Daiko on an Australian tour in 1995, including a performance at the Sydney Opera House. His teachers in Japan included Katsuji Kondo, the former frontman of the "Kodo" drummers. Since joining Mugenkyo, he

has earned the nickname of "Chappa-man", because of his expertise on the chappa hand cymbals.

Liz Walters was an avid Taiko fan, and could be spotted at more Taiko concerts than the members of Mugenkyo (ask her anything about "Wadaiko Ichiro" and she can give you the answer!) It was only a matter of time before she became a member of the group. In March 1996 she became the first person to successfully complete the Mugenkyo training programme, and has since furthered her training in Japan.



HIGHLIGHTS

1995

- MAY Brighton Festival**
Our first UK performance and the scene of those immortal words uttered by an elderly man, "I can't stand this bloody noise, either you go or I go!" Luckily, we decided to carry on and not give it all up there & then.
- JULY James Whale Show, ITV**
Our first TV appearance... it's amazing how many people watched that programme... haven't they got better things to do on a Friday night?! - we were invited back in November due to popular demand.
- SEPT Taiko classes**
Neil begins a Taiko course at the City Lit, which unfortunately has come to an end due to all the complaints from other classes and the office workers in adjacent buildings - new venue to be found soon.
- SEPT Mugenkyo School Show**
Neil and Miyuki begin touring a show for children, introducing Taiko drumming in a cultural context. In their first year they visited over 70 schools.
- OCT Circus Space Cabaret**
What a line-up: Mugenkyo, fire-jugglers, trapeze artists... and the Bastard Son of Tommy Cooper! (yes it's true)
- NOV Paul Robeson Theatre, London**
Our first full length concert - one and a half hours and only three drummers (and a poet and a guitarist). Eat your hearts out Kodo!
- NOV Van**
Our very cramped estate car is replaced by a van, which after the conversion, seats six and carries all the drums.

1996

- MARCH Neil dislocates finger**
... in a pub but completely sober (honest!). We cancel gigs for a couple weeks, after which Neil continues playing despite the dislocation. OUCH! Mark also sprained his ankle this month (running away from the manager of Kodo would you believe!) Beware the ides of March! Next year we'll be on holiday.
- MARCH Hewlett Packard photo shoot**
A lucrative corporate job enables us to buy more drums from Japan - hurrah!
- MARCH Bridge Lane Theatre, London**
A joint concert with Hibiki Daiko from Japan - a historic event: the first time a Japanese and British group have performed together. It was an amazing experience, the air was alive with electricity!
- APRIL Union Chapel, London**
We were shocked to discover that part of the ceiling had fallen down during the show. Mugenkyo bring the roof down!

- APRIL "The Radiant Life", Turtle Key**
A collaboration between Japanese composer Katsuhiko Uemura, Mugenkyo and contemporary dance troupe "i-i" - the combination of Taiko, dance and Katsuhiko's atmospheric music worked brilliantly together - watch out for another joint project next year.
- MAY Stirling University, Scotland**
After our performance an elderly man came up to us, tears streaming down his face, and said, "I have experienced many things in my life, I have even lived through a World War, but nothing has moved me like this before." We've all experienced this feeling - the power of Taiko!
- MAY "Sargeant Kabuki Man NYPD"**
We performed in Leicester Square at the film premier of this tacky B-movie, with actors dressed up as the "Kabuki-man", monsters, and a page 3 girl!
- JUNE Taiko Festival, Dusseldorf, Germany**
The first Taiko festival in Europe took place over two days, in which four groups took part: "Mugenkyo" from UK, "Tentekko" from Germany, "Hanadon" from Holland, and "Sacramento Taiko Dan" from USA, with special guest Chisato Arakaki from Japan. A taikotastic event, hopefully soon to be followed by a huge festival here in the UK! (sponsors welcome)
- JUNE "Japan Festival Award"**
Mugenkyo were presented with an award for "outstanding achievements in furthering the understanding of Japanese culture in the United Kingdom"
- JUNE "Taiko Transformed", Lillian Baylis**
A project involving four schools where students were taught a Taiko piece, culminating in a performance at the Lillian Baylis theatre, using Taiko drums they had made themselves.
- JUNE Stoke Newington Festival, London**
A scorching hot day & we forgot our costumes, but with the help of the most enthusiastic crowd of the summer, we played a storming set.
- JULY Rhythm Sticks Festival, London**
A festival held outside the Royal Festival Hall - the rain held off, and we were later told that the thunderous sound of the Taiko could be heard right up & down the Thames!
- JULY Warrington Festival**
Apart from the guy taking his dog for a walk, and the two winos... nobody came! Aah... success!
- JULY Stourhead Festival, Wiltshire**
A four-day festival with an oriental theme, where the 4,000 guests each night dressed up in oriental costume and gave us a rousing reception.
- OCT Mugenkyo return to Japan**
(details in next issue)

WE ARE EXPANDING

DO YOU HAVE A GOOD SENSE OF RHYTHM?

At the moment we are looking for a potential male Taiko player, to join the group after 6 months training.

- No previous experience of playing Taiko or drums necessary.
- You don't have to be able to run a marathon, but you must be relatively fit.
- Must be willing to travel & able to make time commitment

If you think you're a potential Taiko player, call Neil or Miyuki on 0171-251-8550.

TAIKO PLAYERS WANTED

An apology to all the people who have been waiting for a new Taiko course... due to our unexpectedly hectic summer & autumn schedule, our trip to Japan, and training new members, we are unable to offer any courses before early next year (details in next issue).

MUGENKYO means "unlimited reverberation", and was named in honour of Hibiki Daiko, our teachers group. The character for "kyo" in Japanese is an alternative reading for "Hibiki" (reverberation). The name expresses our feeling that there are no limits to what can be done with Taiko.

We would like to take this opportunity to say a big "THANK YOU" to all the people who have helped Mugenkyo in its first two years: Kurumaya-sensei and Hibiki Daiko for all their inspiration, our "fairy godsister" Kazuyo Tanaka, Mr. Asano and family, Miyamoto Unosuke Taiko Shop and Ochi-san at the Drum Museum in Tokyo, Asano Taiko Factory, Ichiro & Miyuki Inoue, Akira Kanda from NHK, Phil & Allison & Chris & everyone at Tattooist for the rehearsal space, Michael Brown for looking after our bookings, Robert Farquar the Taiko stand maker, Thibaut Pradier for engineering our demo tape, Harumi Williams for costumes, Sybil Mackie for doing our books, Lindsay Bainbridge for our business cards & a big sorry to anyone we've forgotten to mention. Thank you all for your help, we couldn't have done it without you!



MU = NO

(also the character for the zen concept of nothingness, the ideal state of mind during meditation)

GEN = LIMIT

KYO = REVERBERATION

HAVE A TAIKOTASTIC XMAS & NEW YEAR

NEXT ISSUE FEBRUARY 1997