



Welcome to the second edition of the quarterly newsletter of Mugenkyo, Britain's first professional Taiko drum group. This is 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 through this newsletter. If you have any suggestions about what you would like to see in future issues, or any questions about Taiko drumming or Mugenkyo, please drop us a line!

## MUGENKYO DATES

- 22 Feb Merlin Theatre, 7:45pm 01373 465949  
Bath Road, Frome, Somerset  
**ONLY 60 SEATS LEFT!**
- 12 Mar The Wakeman, 7:30pm 01743 356246  
Abbey Forgate, Shrewsbury or 01743 244255
- 25 Mar Minster Theatre, 8:00pm 01636 814000  
Nottingham Road, Southwell
- 26 Mar Taiko lecture-demonstration, 7:30 - 9:30pm  
contact Paul Burwell on 0171 515 4279 for details  
on venue (east London) and prices
- 4 Apr "Radiant Life II"  
Cockpit Theatre, London 0171 2627907  
Following on the success of last years show, here is another exciting collaboration between composer Katsuhiko Uemura, and Mugenkyo, incorporating drumming and traditional Japanese dance, with a theme based on an ancient legend.
- 6 Apr Chertsey Hall, 3:00pm 01932 571654  
Heriot Road, Chertsey, Surrey
- 2 May Norwich Arts Centre, 8:00pm 01603 660352  
Reeves Yard, St. Benedict's Street, Norwich
- 4 May "Streets Ahead" (free event) in Stockport, 2 - 5pm  
Market Place, Mersey Way and Underbank areas
- 5 May "Streets Ahead" (free event) in Bury, 2 - 5pm  
Market Street and surrounding area

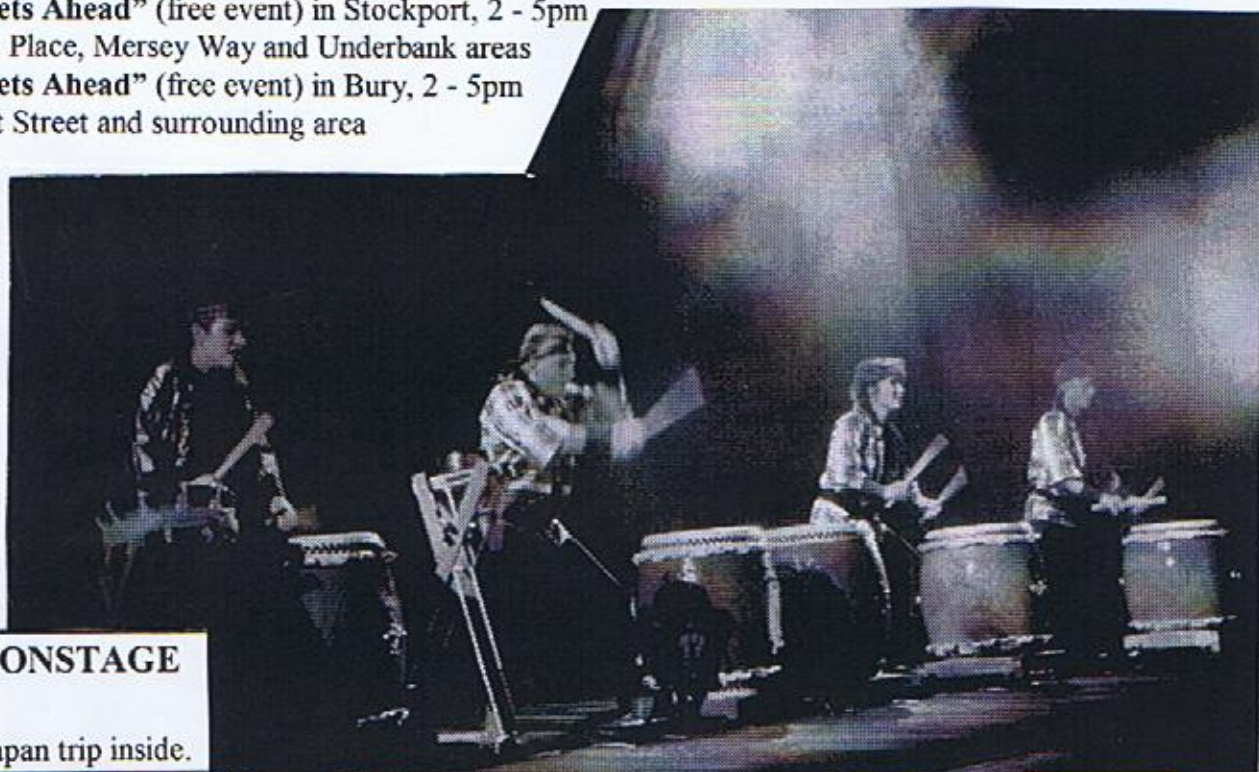
## SCOTTISH SCHOOLS TOUR

Neil and Miyuki will be performing the "Mugenkyo school show" at schools in Scotland for three weeks between 7<sup>th</sup> April and 25<sup>th</sup> April, 1997, thanks to a grant from the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation.

## TAIKO DRUM CLASSES

A chance to try out Taiko drumming! There will be a 6-week introductory Taiko class on Wednesday evenings starting on 30<sup>th</sup> April, 1997 at a venue in north London. The fee will be £45 for the six sessions (includes Taiko drum sticks). For details/ to apply, please call Neil on 0171-251-8550. Limited places available - call now to avoid disappointment!

Apologies to those of you who saw the entry in the Goldsmith's college prospectus - this was published in error, so unfortunately there will not be a class at Goldsmith's.



MUGENKYO ONSTAGE

- Osaka, Japan.

Full story of our Japan trip inside.



# MUGENKYO'S VISIT TO JAPAN

- a personal diary by Liz Walters

We left London on October 15<sup>th</sup> in the early hours of the morning, match-sticks under eyelids and hardly able to believe that we were going to be in Japan in a few hours. I was both excited and terrified about the trip. Being a chatterbox and not being able to speak more than a few words of Japanese was going to be difficult. Our arrival in Japan was somewhat of an indication as to what the rest of our trip was to be like. In the first hour, we managed to leave the group wallet with its entirety for the 5 weeks, on the train. Neil tore off in one direction, Miyuki the other and no one knew quite what to do. A few minutes later, a station guard approached to tell us that it had been handed in at the next station. We all practically collapsed with relief and disbelief that someone hadn't run off with it! It's almost guaranteed in Japan, that if you leave something lying around, you can expect to find it in the same place when you return. Hard concept to get used to, coming from Britain. Later that night, we finally got to see our beloved Kurumaya-sensei, our teacher in Fukui. We'd all been beside ourselves with excitement and anticipation. We had two days until our first performance at the Fukui International Centre with Hibiki Daiko, the Taiko group Neil studied with, so there was no time for jet lag. It was straight down to meeting Hibiki and rehearsals. Personally, I was terrified of performing Taiko to the people of the country of its origin. "Like taking coals to Newcastle" someone had said. The night of the performance was incredible. The theatre was packed out with an audience who were both warm and receptive. What with their eager response and the ever felt and boosting presence of Hibiki Daiko when it was our turn to play, the performance was one of our best ever. Many flower presentations and interviews later, we packed down and headed off for an exquisite celebratory dinner laid on for us by Hibiki. It was here that I was first introduced to drinking, Japanese style. You never fill your own glass (as it's considered bad manners), everyone spends the whole mealtime filling everyone else's, so your glass is always full anyway!! What a wonderfully polite way to get slaughtered! My previous communication inhibitions went straight down the chute with lots of beer, as sign language and laughter took its place. I then discovered about second and third parties - the night had only just begun! It was straight across the road to the nearest Karaoke bar. I silently dreaded the microphone making its way down the line of people in my direction, but once I had it, I didn't want to let go! The following day, we gave a Mugenkyo lecture-demonstration at the International Centre, again packed out and it went down a storm. It seemed rather odd for us British folk to be telling the Japanese all about Taiko, but they loved it! I must just give the toilets at the Centre a brief mention. Whilst contemplating my navel, I noticed a sensor on the wall with a picture of a running stream next to it. I assume it's for people who wish to cover up any embarrassing noises with the sound of a river. Personally, I'd find it more embarrassing to be heard using the noise machine! At the end of the week, Mark departed to go to Wakayama where his original Taiko family are.

**WEEK TWO** - We begin the week with a visit the Asano Taiko Factory that I'd heard so much about. As we rounded the corner to the entrance, the widest and tallest trees I'd ever seen, loomed up in front. They were at some stage, going to be crafted into future Odaiko's (big Taiko) - every Taiko group's dream! Here we are, standing inside the carved out barrel of what will be the biggest Taiko drum in Japan! We looked around the museum, stood with our jaws on the floor, drooling at all the drums and percussion for sale in the shop and were then asked if we'd like to look around the



INSIDE the biggest drum in the world

factory! What an honour! The middle of the week consisted of heavy and much needed rehearsals and time with Kurumaya-sensei. There is always so much to get excited about with one another! So many plans and ideas! At the weekend, we all went to rehearse at a gym in Echizen Kaigan, another stunning part of the Japanese coastline. We were greeted by a gang of highly excitable women, who had come to watch us rehearse having previously been taught Taiko by Kurumaya-sensei. They invited us for a huge, sumptuous meal afterwards (groan.. life is such hard work!) which turned into the wildest dinner party I've ever experienced. It was here that I was introduced to the "ikki ikki" game. Basically, you drink your beer down in one to the wicked encouragement of "ikki ikki". Again, my difficulty with the lingo seemed to disappear! We ended the week by playing at a hotel wedding reception in a space the size of a single bed...somehow!

**WEEK THREE** - It's TOKYO!!! We travelled the four hour journey to Tokyo on the Shinkansen (bullet train) that I'd heard so much about. It certainly does almost fly and is so smooth, you can't appreciate the speed, but it also costs an arm & a leg. Back to the toilets... to flush the toilet, you just pass your hand over a sensor, to wash your hands, you just pass your hand... yep! It seems everything in Japan is designed to make everyday life just that little bit easier. Tokyo!! What an incredible place. The city that never sleeps. Crammed full of people that live in rabbit hutches, that might as well be the capsule hotels you hear about. We stayed in a friends flat (one room) that you couldn't swing a sausage in! We visited the Miyamoto drum factory where we were presented with a stunning donation of two Taiko, for our contribution to spreading Taiko culture in Britain. What an unbelievable and totally unexpected surprise!! Again, we were privileged to look around the Taiko factory and allowed to see the many processes involved to craft a Taiko drum. All this thanks to Ochi-san, the museum curator. Midweek, we paid the British Ambassador in Tokyo a visit which he had requested after being impressed by one of our



performances in London months ago. Whilst we were there, we met the resident Embassy Taiko group, who gave us an enthusiastic demonstration of Tokyo style playing. We also met with the All Japan Taiko Federation who were very supportive of our activities in Britain. Later we went to "Piss-pot Alley" in downtown Tokyo - a long narrow alley given this name because of its completely run down and dilapidated appearance. Minuscule, dirty and seedy looking bars with years worth of grease and slime dripping down the walls, but emitting an endless variety of food smells beyond your wildest dreams. Thoroughly recommendable! At the end of the week, we visited the brilliant Tokyo group Amanojaku at their rehearsal and were introduced... well... made to participate actually... to a series of training exercises that our tortured muscles wouldn't let us forget for well over a week!



Neil and Kurumaya-sensei on the Echizen coast



In the rehearsal room at Asano Taiko Factory

Asano Taiko factory. Neil and Miyuki were used to this from coverage during their previous time in Japan, but I wasn't used to being followed so closely by a big fluffy microphone and camera. So it was rather off-putting and difficult to act normally. They filmed us the following day as all of us left for Osaka. The following morning, there was some unbelievable and shocking news during breakfast. Kurumaya-sensei had been taken extremely ill and had collapsed due to severe exhaustion. He was rushed to the hospital leaving a somewhat bewildered group behind. But preparations for the show had to continue as normal. Everyone pulled out their resources in the hope that the show would go on, but deep down, we all feared the worst. At 3pm that afternoon, to our utmost astonishment, Kurumaya-sensei appeared after discharging himself from hospital looking half dead and hardly able to speak or stand. At 7:30pm that evening, he gave one of his best performances as did all of us, as much for Kurumaya-sensei as anyone else. An evening we'll never ever forget. What an amazing human being! All three shows at the 650 seat theatre in Osaka were sold out and went down a storm. After packing down, it felt like a balloon being slowly deflated. We were all feeling a little sad and empty after all the excitement and emotion. Mark left us to return to London. Hibiki and the stage crew returned to Fukui, so the rest of us... well... we just had to hit the nearest bar for a few drinks and a few tears. Before our return to Fukui, we visited "Matsuri-shu" from the Kyoto Taiko Centre, as they were performing at a school. A very bewitching and exciting performance that magnetised both the children and us. It was almost time to leave Japan and return to England. On our last night, we spent a few special hours with Kurumaya-sensei, and were all extremely choked up, even though we'd all see one another again. We then stayed up most of the night cramming our suitcases and backpacks with things we knew wouldn't fit. After two hours of sleep we had to get up for the train to leave Fukui. It was very early in the morning, but there were a group of special friends waiting to wave us off at the station. I have never met that amount of hospitality, kindness and emotion from so many people in such a short space of time. It was only on our return in England that I realised quite how overwhelming the whole experience had been. It had been a completely intense, exhausting and crazy five weeks, and it was time to return to a quiet life... in London!?!

**WEEK FOUR** - We performed again with Hibiki Daiko at a truly remarkable event at the Daienzenji Temple (where Hibiki are based) to celebrate the opening of a new Zen meditation centre - high up in a mountain on a glorious summers day in November! More extremely intense rehearsals during the week. Later in the week, we travelled to Kaga, to meet Ichiro and Miyuki Inoue of Wadaiko Ichiro (details of their UK tour in this issue), where they were teaching the hotel Taiko group. The manager of the hotel laid on a meal for all of us fit for a king (life seems to be getting harder!) We returned with Ichiro the following day to his home in Osaka where we rehearsed with him for three hours solid and were further rewarded by Ichiro & Miyuki's home made Okonomiyaki pancake (the speciality of Osaka). Not just brilliant Taiko players, they're excellent cooks! The next morning we departed (after a "special English breakfast" cooked for us by Ichiro) for Wakayama where we were to meet up with Mark again and to be introduced to Tennon Daiko, his family Taiko group. Whilst it was drizzly and cold in Osaka, we were nearly bowled over by the heat and humidity of tropical Wakayama. Tennon were a really relaxed and friendly bunch of people. We rehearsed together and then Tennon took us out for a slap up meal, another civilised beginning that turned into a wild party as usual with endless alcohol. Boy the Japanese sure know how to have a good time! The second party was... yes... a rented Karaoke room for a couple of raucous hours. One of Tennon's members who can't speak a word of English gave the most incredible rendition of "Love Me Tender". He sounded more like Elvis than Elvis!! We ended the evening in the early hours of the morning on the Ramen Bus, a clapped out, rusty old coach used for an all night noodles bar. Three hours sleep later, we all had to return to Fukui for a strenuous rehearsal with Hibiki, a very important rehearsal for the forthcoming concert in Osaka, to mark Hibiki's 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.



Mugenkyo with the master, our teacher Kurumaya-sensei

**WEEK FIVE** - We agreed to let NHK television film part of our trip to Japan. On the first session, they filmed us rehearsing at



# WADAIKO ICHIRO DRUMMERS TOUR

March and April sees the return of the very wonderful Wadaiko Ichiro Drummers. If you missed them on their last tour of Britain last November, you absolutely cannot miss them again. If you did see them last time, you will know why we give this group such a strong recommendation. We are pleased to welcome our good friends, Ichiro and Miyuki Inoue and the group, who have been an inspiration to Mugenkyo, and have always given us their great support. Ichiro's Odaiko (big drum) performance is legendary in his own country, and will take your breath away. From delicate melodies on the Japanese flute to the thunderous drumming, the Wadaiko Ichiro Drummers will enthrall you with their two-hour spectacular show.

**UNMISSABLE!!!**

*"... prepare to be enthralled by this modern Japanese sensation"* Time Out

*"Flamenco for the arms instead of the feet... the energy lifts you so that you want to jump up and say: 'Hey, let me try that'"* Evening Standard

## MARCH

4	Glasgow Royal Concert Hall	0141 287 5511
6	Cambridge Corn Exchange	01223 357 851
7	Croydon Concert Hall	0181 688 9291
9	Edinburgh Festival Theatre	0131 662 1199
10	York Grand Opera	01904 671 818
11	Reading Hexagon	01734 591591
12	Northampton Derngate	01604 24811
13	Nottingham Royal Concert Hall	0115 948 2626/2525
14	Warwick Concert Hall	01203 524 524
15	Rhyl Pavilion	01745 330 000
17 - 22	London Sadlers Wells at the Peacock Theatre	0171 314 8800/9002
24	Brighton Dome	01273 709 709
25	Basingstoke Anvil	01256 844 244
26	Leicester De Montfort Hall	0116 233 3111
27	Bradford St George's	01274 752 000
29	Birmingham Symphony Hall	0121 212 3333
30	Chichester Festival Theatre	01243 781 312
31	Crawley The Hawth	01293 553 636

## APRIL

1	Southampton Mayflower	01703 229 771
2	Cardiff St. David's Hall	01222 371 236
3	Dartford Orchard	01322 220 000
4-5	Wycombe Swan	01494 512 000
6	Blackpool Grand	01253 28372
7	Aberdeen His Majesty's	01224 641122
10	Bristol Colston Hall	0117 922 3686/3683
11-12	Barnstable Queen's Theatre	01271 24242
13	Guildford Civic Hall	01483 444555



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Know anyone else interested in receiving our newsletter? Drop us a line or give us a call to be included on our mailing list!

**A BIG THANK YOU** to those of you who sent in donations towards the cost of this newsletter: Martin Axon, Christine Davis, Christopher Dawkins, Steve Derby, Jenny Gray, Jeanne Montague, Mr. Old, Jane and Michael Steward. Thank you!

Please remember, it costs money to put out a newsletter about £250 per issue for photocopying and postage! Please help us to continue by sending donations - any amount however large or small is appreciated (first/second class stamps or cheques made payable to: Mugenkyo). Thank you!