



# TAIKO TAIKO



The definitive source of information on Taiko events in the UK from Britain's foremost Taiko drum group.

January 1998

issue 5

Happy New Year! Welcome to issue 5 of TAIKO TAIKO & many apologies for the delay in getting this issue to you. On the performing front, it's been very quiet recently, and will continue to be for the next few months as we are taking a break while we plan for some exciting new changes in 1998. It promises to be a very eventful year for the group. We are searching for new premises, outside of London, in order to expand our activities, which will mean more classes and workshops, more Taiko-related events, and a more permanent base for the Mugenkyo group... more will be revealed in the next issue!

Anyway, we hope that 1998, the year of the Tiger, will be a fantastic year for everyone. Make it happen in 1998!

## SINCE THE LAST ISSUE...

In September at last our T-shirts and CD's arrived - we'd actually advertised them in the last newsletter expecting them to arrive right away, but a holdup in the printing meant a nail-biting few weeks! Apologies to everyone who had to wait to receive them! The highlight of September was the mini-tour of the Far East... Far East of England, that is!: Grantham, Sheringham, Pulham Market and Hunstanton were all sell-outs with overwhelmingly enthusiastic audiences. Our thanks to everyone who came & we're certainly looking forward to getting back there this year. The lowlight was undoubtedly the Cumbernauld Theatre in Scotland, where all eight members of the audience were Neil's relatives. What a disaster! Wales featured heavily last autumn, with great gigs in Harlech, Newtown, Aberystwyth and Pontardawe. The scenery of the Welsh mountains was stunning... but our poor little van is still recovering from the experience!

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It is rumoured that the KODO drummers will be performing in London this summer - details yet to be confirmed... watch this space!

A major event for Taiko in Britain was Kodo's appearance on TV - Michael Palin's "Full Circle". One of Michael Palin's destinations on this popular programme was Sado Island, off the west coast of Japan, the home of the Kodo Drummers, no doubt the best known of all Taiko drum groups. They live communally in their very own Taiko village on this cold and windswept island, where enemies were exiled a long time ago. For six months of the year the group tour the world, the other six months spent in rigorous training. It's a very hard life, and few people make it through the apprenticeship. Their Taiko drumming skills are renowned throughout the world, and justifiably so. Every year they hold a three-day festival on their island called "Earth Celebration", usually held in August, although this year it's being held in the spring. A few years ago we were lucky enough to go, and it was an amazing experience. If you didn't get a chance to see the few minutes of them on "Full Circle", don't despair, as there are rumours that they will be performing in this country this summer. We'll let you know as soon as it's confirmed.

## REVIEW from the Sheringham Observer, September, 1997

### MUGENKYO TAIKO DRUM PERFORMANCE

Sheringham Little Theatre played host to this incredible drum outfit who took the Theatre by storm. Taiko drumming is a traditional, energetic, expressive folk art of Japan spanning many centuries.

It is difficult to put into words how amazing these four people were (3 women and 1 man) - it was live, raw energy, it was powerful, dynamic, exciting: for almost 2 hours we were hypnotically transported away by these primal rhythms. It was a fantastic performance of skill, stamina, ritual, dance, aggression, humour and story telling through rhythm.

At one point three of the drummers adopted characters by using traditional masks - a skeletal mask, a warrior and a fat fool. This was for the Demon Dance. The dance originally comes from the West Coast of Japan and was inspired by the famous Gojinja Demon Drummers. Legend says that in the feudal era, a small village was under siege having no means of defending themselves, the villagers put on demon masks and used sea weed as hair and played the Taiko drums in a furious and crazed manner thus scaring away the besieging army! It was pretty scary in the Theatre!

The audience loved the show, showing their appreciation wholeheartedly after each piece. The group have been together five years and for two of these years they studied Taiko drumming in Japan under one of the greatest Taiko Masters in the country.

I just couldn't get over the power being created on the stage. I don't know if you've ever tried drumming for any length of time...? These people had incredible stamina. Some of the sticks they used were like sawn up broom handles and the drums would have been big enough to get inside!

We are very lucky to have performances of this quality coming to Sheringham and despite the problems with the seats the Theatre was almost full, showing an incredible support for the slightly more diverse shows coming to Town. I would have gladly stood throughout the entire performance in order to not miss this absolutely and outrageously mind blowing show. It was a great idea to bring Mugenkyo here - on a scale of 1 - 10 its got to be 10!

The only problem I had during the evening was with a digital pet that sang happy birthday and then needed the toilet...!!

I really was only looking after it!

Don't forget to book your tickets for forthcoming events at The Theatre and watch this space for news and reviews.

Ed.





## MUGENKYO'S TRIP TO JAPAN - NOVEMBER 1997

November saw Mugenkyo return to Japan in what has become an annual pilgrimage. Immediately after setting foot in Japan, we were met at the Osaka airport by Ichiro from the *Wadaiko Ichiro Drummers*, and whisked off to a four hour rehearsal with the group - only an hour after setting foot off the plane! As you can imagine we had problems staying awake thanks to a serious case of jet-lag, and found it impossible to keep up the pace! We stayed for an intensive few days with Ichiro, rehearsing, going to the classes he was teaching, and meeting lots of people, including the famed Mr. Kashiwagi, one of the founders of *Ondekoza* (the group who are now known as the *Kodo Drummers*), now running a bar in downtown Osaka, where Taiko posters cover the walls, and a Taiko CD is always playing.

Our next stop was Wakayama in the south, where palm trees grow and November is still T-shirt weather. Here we were re-united with Mark Alcock, who used to play with the group. We were there to perform with Mark's ex-Taiko group in Japan *Tennon Daiko*, at their 15th anniversary concert. We arrived three days before the concert to rehearse and drink copious amounts of sake with Tennon, who assured us that it was the tradition in this part of Japan. In Wakayama they certainly believe in working hard and playing hard! Our only form of transport in Wakayama was the "charinko" bone-shaker bicycles with no gears - oh yes, Mugenkyo certainly get around in style! The line-up for the concert also included *Fimanfa*, a Korean drumming group, and *Katsuji Kondo*, the former frontman of the Kodo Drummers. It was a memorable show, in front of 750 people. Tennon Daiko will be visiting Britain in August, and we hope that they will find time to play at least a couple of dates, between their pub-crawls and sightseeing (only joking, Tennon)!

After the concert, Liz, Neil & Miyuki headed up to Fukui on the west coast, for a joyful reunion with *Masaaki Kurumaya-sensei*, our teacher, and his family, who we were to spend the next two weeks with. The next day we headed up to *Asano Taiko Factory*, where most of the Taiko drums are made. There we joined in a rehearsal with *Hono Daiko*, the three-woman group based at the factory, and talked with the factory boss. The rest of the afternoon was spent trying out & choosing the drums for our next shipment, or should I say, drooling over all the drums we can't afford!

The next few days saw intensive rehearsals with *Hibiki Daiko*, our teacher's group, in preparation for the big event: a Taiko concert at the British Embassy in Tokyo. We had been invited by the ambassador Sir David Wright, to perform along with Hibiki Daiko and *Bancho Matsuri Daiko*, the group of the British Embassy staff. It was a really memorable event. There were 250 invited

guests, including the Prince & Princess Takamado, and many people from the Taiko world. National Japanese TV and newspapers were also there to cover this unique event. While in Tokyo we also met up with *Katsuhiko Uemura*, the composer who we collaborated with in the Kamui Project last April, and who was training with the group earlier in the year. To celebrate our reunion, we went out to a restaurant and ordered sashimi (raw fish). For those of you with nervous dispositions, please do not read this next paragraph. When the dish arrived, the fish meat was beautifully arranged on a bed of ice, with the remains of the fish held together with a bamboo skewer, neatly placed in the middle of the dish as decoration. Suddenly, the fish jumped, along with Miyuki, who screamed at the same time - she may be half Japanese, but this was too much, even for her! We were stunned. They had actually cut the flesh from the fish while it was still alive, and yet it was still squirming. The waiters couldn't understand the commotion & seemed to think we were very strange when we shouted at them to put the fish out of its misery. All of us will never forget that scene as long as we live. Surely that's enough to make anyone a vegetarian! The moral of this story is: whenever you're in a Tokyo restaurant, don't ask for fresh fish! But don't let this story put you off - Japanese food is delicious - usually!

The next day Liz flew back to London (on an empty stomach), and Miyuki went to visit her grandmother in Gumma prefecture, just north of Tokyo. For this she had to catch the train in Asakusa station in Tokyo. Tokyo train stations are spotlessly clean, and extremely busy at all times of day. But you can be sure that the trains will always be on time - you can set your watch by them. Amazing!... especially after coming from Britain. The next day we visited the *Miyamoto Taiko Factory*, who had kindly donated the group two drums last year, and the *Miyamoto Drum Museum*, where Ochi-san, the curator, showed us the new additions to the most amazing collection of drums anywhere in the world. Then it was back to Fukui, where Neil & Miyuki joined in a concert with the fantastic Hibiki Daiko, our favourite Taiko Drum group in Japan. The tickets went on sale a week before, and had actually sold out in just two hours! The concert was highly charged with emotion, and was a tearful occasion, as it was time to say goodbye to our Taiko family in Fukui.

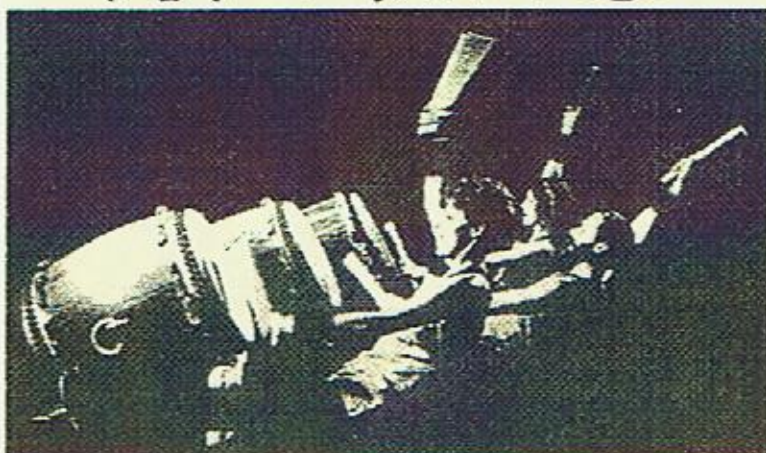
Our last day we went to Osaka, to go to a concert of the Taiko group from Okinawa, *Zampa Ufujishi Daiko*, with special guests Wadaiko Ichiro. Of course we'd seen Wadaiko Ichiro many times on their tours of Britain, but it was the first time for us to see Zampa, a young and talented group from Okinawa, an island to the far south of Japan, which as a distinctive identity and history. They were obviously strongly influenced by Wadaiko Ichiro, but still retained their Okinawan roots, using brightly coloured costumes, and dance, carrying the drums out into the audience to play, while they whistled loudly (typical from Okinawa). At one point a "lion" appeared on stage, and danced around acrobatically in time to the Taiko, before launching itself into the screaming audience! At the end, girls in brightly coloured kimonos and elaborate hats walked through the audience singing, to end the show. While the audience left the concert hall, the group played in the foyer, to send them on their way. What a memorable last night in Japan! Afterwards we were invited to the after-show party at a local restaurant, where thirty Taiko players gathered for a raucous drunken evening. We all promised to meet up again sometime soon, in Japan or Britain... who knows what the future will bring?





# OTHER TAIKO GROUPS - U.K. AND EUROPE

## TENTEKKO



*Tentekko* were the very first Taiko group to be formed in Europe, in 1991. Group leader Monika Baumgartl was also responsible for organising the first European Taiko Festival held in Germany in 1996. She started studying Taiko in 1988, from many different Taiko groups both in Japan and the U.S., the most famous being Kodo, Oedo Sukeroku, Hono Daiko, Hibiki Daiko, San Francisco Taiko Dojo and San Jose Taiko. A large mixed group, Tentekko also make their own Taiko drums.

Contact: Monika Baumgartl, Nierster Str. 101, 4005 Meerbusch 3, Germany. Tel 00 49 2150 5046 or Fax 00 49 2150 2282.

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*Hanadon* from the Netherlands was formed by dancer Jeannette Van Steen, after studying the Oedo Sukeroku style in Tokyo, and several workshops with Kodo. They are a six-piece group, who play regularly in the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany. Two years ago, Hanadon were invited along with Mugenkyo, to perform at the first European Taiko festival in Germany. Jeannette says: "To me, the most important thing has always been to carry out the spirit of the Taiko in which exciting rhythms, silence, and dynamic powerful movement, all play an equally important role." (We couldn't agree more!)

For more info, contact: Jeannette Van Steen, Egelantierstracht 72-3 1015 RM Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Tel/Fax 00 31 20 623 6851.



AKATSUKI DAIKO

暁太鼓

THE WADAIKO CLUB OF  
GYOSEI INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE IN THE UK



*Akatsuki Daiko* were the first Taiko group to be established in Britain, and their name means "Rising Sun Taiko". They are based at the Gyosei International College in Reading, and are made up mostly of Japanese students studying at the college. The group founder, James Barrow, studied Taiko and Yokobue flute for four years in Japan under the Hiroshima Taiko Preservation Society. As a result, most of the rhythms performed by Akatsuki are from the Hiroshima area, and many are quite ancient, traditional rhythms. The new group leader, Yoshio Shimazaki, has studied Taiko from groups in Japan and the U.S., and hopes to include more original compositions in their set in the future. This March they celebrate their fifth anniversary.

Contact: James Barrow on tel 0118 986 1389 or fax 0118 975 5595.

... and not forgetting Japanese percussionist *Joji Hirota*, usually a soloist, but who occasionally uses a group of Taiko drummers as a backdrop for his contemporary and original style of solo playing. Originally he came to Britain as a percussionist with the Red Buddha theatre company from Japan, and later joined the Lindsay Kemp dance company. Joji's greatest Taiko influence comes from Hokkai Daiko in Hokkaido, the northernmost of the four main islands of Japan. Last year Joji's teacher from Hokkai Daiko sadly passed away, and since then, as a tribute, Joji has been transcribing the traditional rhythms he learnt from the group.

Contact: Joji Hirota on 0181 586 0240.



We've also heard of groups in Italy, Sweden & France, and new groups springing up in Germany.

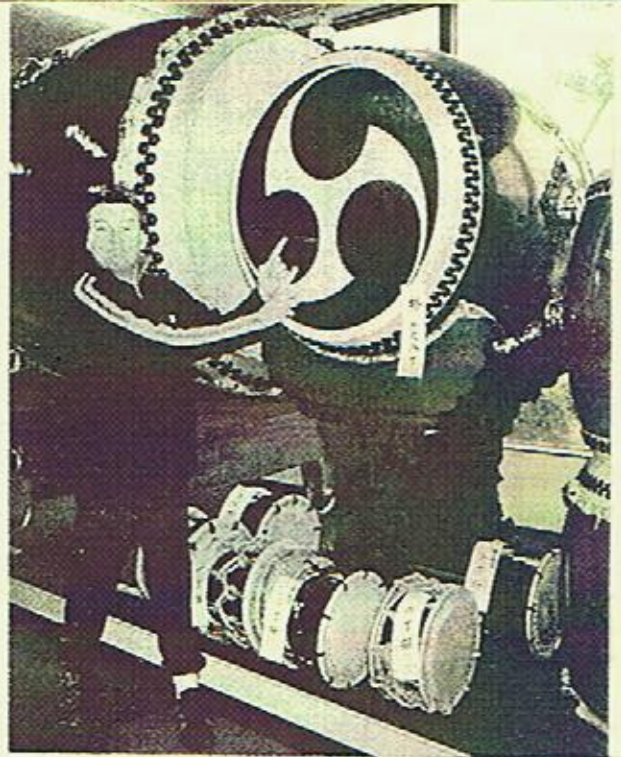
**We're heading for a European Taiko boom!**





Fimanfa (Korean drummers), Mugenkyo and Tennon Daiko in Wakayama

"I'll take four of these and seven of those!" - Neil in the Asano Taiko Factory Showroom.



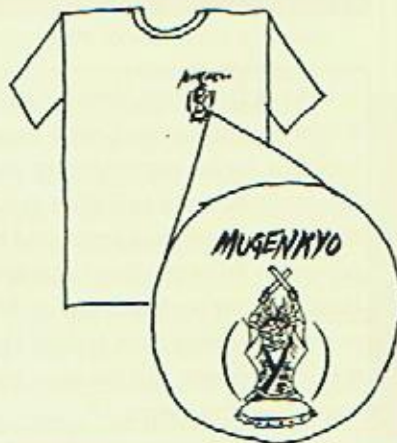
**T-SHIRT - £10** (includes postage & packaging)  
 high quality black cotton T-shirt with yellow writing  
 sizes: S, M, L, XL (sorry no children's sizes)  
*in case anyone asks you....*

The symbol on the back is a stylized Japanese character "HIBIKI", meaning "reverberation", which can also be read as "kyo" (as in "Mugen-KYO"). Hibiki is the name of our teacher's group in Japan. It's our own design which also incorporates the Taiko symbol. →



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A BIG THANK YOU to those of you who sent in donations towards the cost of this newsletter:

Susan Cunningham, Adam Leek, Martin Gerrish, D. O'Gara, David Fraser, J.A. Couldridge, Dee Dolan, Margaret Hardwick, Chris Umney, Jane Hill, Brian Scott, Judith May, Fraser Old, Roger Drew, Jenny Gray, Louis Page Webster, D.J. Barrow, Jeffrey Hogg, S.G. Lane, Graham Lever, R. Shears, Gillian Campbell, J.W. Seabrook, B.A. Cunningham, Paul Bowman, Jeanne Montague, and Josy Van De Berghe.

Please remember, it costs money to put out a newsletter - about £300 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) Or alternatively, buy our merchandise!

**MUGENKYO CD - £12** (includes postage & packaging)  
 also available on cassette - £8  
 running time: 48 min

**WARNING:** A Taiko recording is never a substitute for a live concert, as the sound waves from the Taiko are meant to be FELT, not heard!... to recreate a Mugenkyo concert in the comfort of your own home, turn up your stereo as loud as you possibly can, and ENJOY!

## MUGENKYO MERCHANDISE ORDER FORM

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Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
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Post Code: \_\_\_\_\_

**ITEMS ORDERED:**

Mugenkyo CD (£12) \_\_\_\_\_

Mugenkyo cassette (£8) \_\_\_\_\_

T-shirt (£10) \_\_\_\_\_

- please specify size (S, M, L, XL)

**TOTAL ENCLOSED:** \_\_\_\_\_

All prices include VAT, packaging and postage within the UK (please allow 21 days for delivery)  
 Please send cheque or postal order payable to: MUGENKYO, 44 Vince Court, Charles Square, London N1 6HN