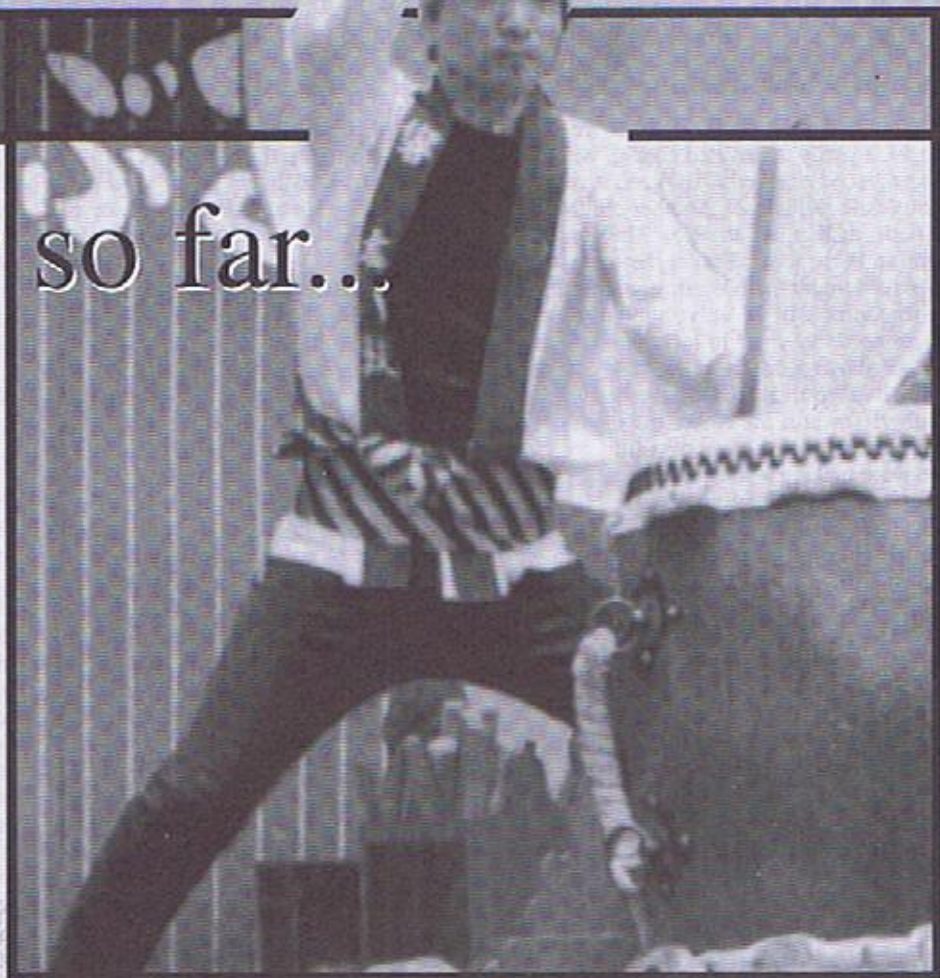


TAIKO TAIKO

AUTUMN '98

Issue No.7

The year so far...



April saw us relocate from big ole smoky London to the relative (!) calm of Glasgow. Almost immediately on our relocation, *Kurumaya-sensei* arrived at Glasgow airport to join us from Japan. We'd advertised for apprentice Taiko drummers in the Glasgow area, and out of the 400 people who applied, we took on two people to join us as trainee drummers. The rest of April saw us in heavy training, with our *sensei* and two apprentices on board, six hour rehearsals, jogging every day - after the lull of the winter, we really had to work to get into shape for the coming year. The year so far has been very special, as we've had the honour of having *Kurumaya-sensei*, our teacher from Japan, join *Mugenkyo* for a year initially, but hopefully longer. It's been quite an experience for him as well, getting used to the British way of life, and trying to learn both languages, English and Glaswegian! Our first gig of the year was in Hemel Hempstead, where a full house gave us a great reception (see review on back page). **May** took us to Ireland, where we spent two weeks touring the wonderful venues with so many hospitable people, on the bumpiest windiest roads we'd ever had the pleasure to drive on. A word of advice: if you're ever in Ireland, give yourself at least twice as long as you think you need to get anywhere! We were held up by tractors, herds of sheep, and stray cows... not to mention the odd stray pint of Guinness! We had such a fantastic time in Ireland, and we all agreed we couldn't wait to get back there just as soon as we could. The highlights were: St. John's Arts Centre in Listowel, a beautiful converted church, the scenery of Mulrany and Achill Island, and watching the Gaelic football on the way. The famous cliffs of Moher jutting out to the sea, were as magical as anything you can imagine, and after our performance in Letterkenny, the locals were dancing to our CD in the pub

afterwards. The tour culminated in two shows in Dublin, one of which was played in the main park in the centre of the city to over 2,000 people in beautiful sunshine. Ayumi-ya, the local Japanese restaurant, treated us to a sumptuous spread of Japanese delicacies in the evening. Neil won his annual "most injuries in a year" award, with his spectacular fall in Galway, leading to a sprained ankle. Just to make sure of hanging on to his title, he later fell over in Glasgow and damaged his wrist. Whatever will it be next?! At the end of the month, we played at the Fishquay Festival in North Shields, a huge free festival on the dockside. We forgot our bamboo sticks for this performance, and the 2,000 crowd were treated to a rendition of "Onsen" played with floppy plastic flag-tops (did anyone notice - please let us know!). The last day of May saw us at the Aberdeen Arts Centre. This beautiful old building is set to close, and in fact our performance was to be one of the last ever played there. We're keeping

our fingers crossed that we'll be able to go back there for a celebration of it's re-opening.

June... the World Cup! As all of us in *Mugenkyo* are football-mad, we managed to squeeze in watching quite a few matches anywhere there was a TV in between performances, or was it performances in between matches... I can't quite remember. King's Lynn Arts Centre was like a medieval banqueting hall, complete with cast iron chandeliers. I think it's true to say it's the oldest working theatre in England - over 400 years old! The next day we travelled to Devizes in the West Country, where we were due to play a performance in the town square. It looked like it was set to be another wash-out, but miraculously ten minutes before we were due to start, the clouds cleared and the crowds gathered, and we performed to over 3,000 people in the beautiful evening sunset - an unforgettable evening. Mid-June saw us on our mini-tour of Yorkshire, where the



highlight had to be the Halifax Square Chapel, a partly renovated chapel, with amazing acoustics i.e:LOUD) and a very enthusiastic full house. Another old theatre we performed at was the New Theatre Royal in Portsmouth. Earlier the same day, we played under the blistering sun on the seafront, probably the only sunny day we experienced this year! In fact many of our outdoor shows were cancelled this year due to the bad weather. BOO to the bad weather! Towards the end of the month, we were joined for two days by a film crew, who were making a short documentary on the group for a programme called "UK Today", broadcast in 120 different countries to over 400 million viewers. Unfortunately, it's not being broadcast in Britain, but you may see it if you're going abroad, or even on the aeroplane as in-flight entertainment on certain flights. Fortunately they chose the Paisley Arts Centre to shoot the live footage, which proved to be an amazing combination of rhythm and energy (and that was the audience!!). It was a magical evening for the second year running. The next day they filmed us on our daily jog, rehearsing, and eating sushi (but not all at the same time, thank goodness!) as well as interviewing members of the group. We were reunited with our ex-member Mark Alcock, and James Barrow from Reading that month at a school in York, where they had been teaching the kids Taiko for their "Japan Week", which

culminated in a performance by the students, and to top the evening, a two-hour show from Mugenkyo. Of course we were joined by Mark & James and some of the students at the end, for a completely mad encore.

Our producer friend from Marseille, Thibaut Pradier, has recently finished an experimental album called "Zgen: day 1". One of the tracks features Mugenkyo, although it's not Taiko as we know it!! We look forward to visiting his studio in Marseille in the not too distant future, look out for the Mugenkyo remix album!!

July... first of all, the Norwich Drum Camp: an amazing festival — only drums and drummers, not a musician in sight! There was samba and djembe and bodhran and congas and bongos and taiko! WOW - drummer heaven! We performed our full length show in a packed marquee on the Saturday evening in virtual darkness. The atmosphere was electric. The next day we held a massively popular workshop, with huge queues behind each Taiko drum, everyone waiting to "have a go". Fan of the year award goes to Margaret Berry, who travelled to the drum camp and other events from Sheringham in her wheelchair, for our performances and workshops — well done Margaret!

Next was the Greenwich Festival, played against the dramatic backdrop of the Cutty Sark ship, and this is where we ran into trouble... a burst radiator in the van.

Because of the time of day, we couldn't get it fixed, so we had to get a tow from London to Swansea at 6 am the next morning in

order to make the next gig. But, it poured with rain in Swansea, and our open air show was watched by only a handful of people sheltering in the doorway of McDonalds! That night, most of the group had to get the train to Bristol in order to get the night-bus back to Glasgow, while some stayed to wait the four days to collect the van. To top it all, we later locked the keys in the van and had to call out the RAC AGAIN!... the glamour of life on the road!!

Aberdeenshire was our next stop and a mini-tour of the area. Kurumaya-sensei couldn't believe that we were on our way to play in a barn (translated into Japanese: a place to keep cattle) in Banchory. In fact, it was an old stone barn made into a lovely arts centre, in the middle of some of the most beautiful countryside. The gig was a roaring success.... and the cows liked it too! The next morning, we called in at a local radio station for an interview, on our way to Huntly, where that evening we were joined on stage by a gang of children all wearing Mugenkyo T-shirts five sizes too large for them!

The maddest drive of the summer had to be Dundee to Milton Keynes in one day, resulting in a serious outbreak of the dreaded "van fever" amongst all the members... aarghh!

August saw really enjoyable gigs in East Grinstead and Alnwick, while the festival on Plymouth Hoe was without doubt the best festival of the summer, with the group playing a rousing set with an audience that were just mad for it!! Fantastic stuff!

Finally, at the end of August, we made the long trek down to the BBC studios in Shepherd's Bush, London, to record the Generation Game. It was a long and hectic day, with a rehearsal in the morning, dress rehearsal in the afternoon and filming in the evening — a fifteen hour day. The real contestants on the show aren't allowed to see what they've let themselves in for until the filming itself, so they have stand-ins for the dress rehearsals — can you believe there are people out there whose job it is to be a "full-time game show contestant stand-in"!! Anyway, luckily Jim Davidson's outrageous jokes during the rehearsals weren't repeated for the actual filming in the evening — I thought it was supposed to be a family show?! Don't forget to tune in on Saturday, 10th October (BBC1, around 6pm) and don't mention "soop" or traffic wardens... ! More tales from life on the road with Mugenkyo later on in the year...

TAIKO DRUM CLASSES

will be held in Glasgow this autumn and winter, with six week courses in December, January and February. If you live in the Glasgow area, there will be a separate flyer enclosed with this newsletter, with details on how to apply. If you haven't received one, drop us a line!

For those of you in the South, James Barrow is still running Taiko classes from his base in Reading. Call him on 0118 946 3317 for details.



Taiko drums make mushrooms grow

A villager on the Japanese island of Hokkaido, noticed that the national delicacy, shitake mushrooms, always seemed to sprout after a thunderstorm. So the local farm decided to improve production by fooling the fungi into thinking that a big storm was on the way by asking a local women's taiko group to bang their drums near the mushroom beds for several hours. The results were amazing. The women's efforts were simply then recorded onto tape ensuring that the village will never again be short of their favourite fungi!

Tartan Taiko

In Scotland we were blessed with lots of Taiko from Japan this summer, with YAMATO's three week run at the Edinburgh festival fringe, and a last minute concert by five members of KODO, also at the Edinburgh fringe. Following KODO's sell-out concerts at London's Royal Festival Hall in August, they came to the Edinburgh festival for a rare visit as punters instead of headliners. Out of the whole group, five members were persuaded to put on a low-key and hardly advertised concert, just for the sheer fun of playing. The stage was sparse, with only the "okedo" rope tied barrel drums, hand cymbals and flute used, but the technique



of the players was brilliant as always, with a set consisting mainly of KODO's version of Korean-style drumming. A highlight was definitely the cymbal solo, where the hand cymbals were

played with such sensitivity, they almost seemed to talk.

YAMATO's show, on the other hand, was big, loud and brash, full of energy and vigour, with superb stage presence especially from the female members of the troupe. Yamato originate from Nara, the ancient capital of Japan, and have been together for five years. They played two different sets on different days of the week throughout the festival, expressing the themes of "Spirit" and "Festival", both with a very different feel. The venue was

extremely small, but it gave the audience a chance to feel the power and energy of Taiko at very close range, and unsurprisingly the three week run was a complete sell-out. The Yamato style is definitely greatly influenced by Wadaiko Ichiro, who visited our shores last year, some would say to the point of plagiarism. However, some of their more original pieces were quite brilliant. You can expect to hear a lot more of them in the future, as they plan to take Europe by storm in the coming year.



a BIG thankyou



To those of you who sent in donations towards the cost of this newsletter!

Jason Ozin, Tony Yamada, Louis Page Webster, Marijke Voorluis, Sgt. George Boote, Steve Peake, Chris Bowes, David Hughes, Alan Taylor, Ken Bentley, S.E. Scott, S. reentfield, J. Hawkes, Jane Hill, Christine Booth, Brian Scott, Mr. M. Taylor, Helen & Phil Bainbridge, K.A. Marshall, Steve Scruton, Mr. Leeming, Vic Baxter, Christine & Roger King, Margaret Berry, Alex Potts, Mrs. J. Bannister, John Willis, John Horne, Patricia Thomson, Ann Ayling, S.G. The, V.J. Attwood, Lesley Raymond, Mr. B. Hoare, Eddie Laurence, Susan Cunningham, Andrew Batur, Denise Smith, Rana Partridge, Jane Hill, Cesar Urbach, and Stuart McCorkindale.

Please remember, it costs money to put out a newsletter. Please help us to continue by sending donations — any amount however large or small is greatly appreciated (first/second class stamps or cheques made payable to: Mugenkyo) Or alternatively, BUY OUR MERCHANDISE!

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Mugenkyo Cassette	£8	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mugenkyo T-Shirt	£10	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kodo Book	£23.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Total Enclosed		<input type="checkbox"/>

All prices include VAT, Packaging and postage within the U.K. (please allow 21 days for delivery) please send cheques or postal orders payable to MUGENKYO P.O Box 5124, Glasgow G76 9YA

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Autumn Dates

SEPTEMBER

25 Medina Theatre: Newport, Isle of Wight

01983 527020 7:30 p.m.

26 Brook Theatre: Chatham, Kent 01634 408965

8:00 p.m. (also school show at 3:30 p.m.)

OCTOBER:

7 Haybridge School: Hagley Wores. 7.30pm 01562 886213

8 Bewdley Festival: Bewdley High School, Bewdley, Worcs. 8:00 p.m. 01299 40335 (also school show in p.m.)

9 Playhouse Theatre: Weston-Super-Mare, Somerset 7:30 p.m. 01934 645544

10 GENERATION GAME: 6:05 p.m. BBC1

15 Northbrook Theatre: Worthing, W. Sussex 7:30 p.m. 01903 606162

21 Rhoda McGaw Theatre: Woking, Surrey 7:45 p.m. 01483 761144

23 Grand Hall: Dorking, Surrey 8:00 p.m. 01306 881717

NOVEMBER:

10 Rhyn Park School: St. Martins NR. Owestry 7.30pm 01793 366848 or 01743 244255

20 The Castle Studio Theatre: Wellingborough 7:00 and 8:30 p.m. 01933 270007

21 Magnet Leisure Centre: Maidenhead, Berks 8:00 p.m. 01753 859336



Mugenkyo in action at the Old Town Hall on Friday

Giving off good vibrations

An evening of ear-splitting drum-bashing beckoned me — it sounded all too likely to go horribly wrong but the Mugenkyo Taiko drum performance was a foot-stomping, wall-vibrating hit. The Mugenkyo group has been performing in Britain since 1994 and for this trip to Hemel Hempstead they were accompanied by their *sensai*, master drummer Masasaaki Kurumaya. This tiny man had an enormous presence and while sweat poured from his fellow, western performers he remained completely composed. His body was so compact that each movement seemed slight and controlled yet the power he put into the drums was phenomenal. Watching him was hypnotic — it is amazing the variety of tones and levels of noise that can emanate from one drum and the actions and movements of the

drummers are as much a part of the show as the sound.

One man sitting behind me remarked after the first song, "You'd have to be dead not to be moved by that wouldn't you?" I think he was right.

Taiko drumming is a folk art in Japan and can be seen at all of Japan's many festivals. It was originally used to call for rain, secure the fortune of a harvest or protect a village against plague and drought. Practitioners of the art believe that drumming puts you in touch with a life-force and reflects the rhythm of the heart.

Once you get over the fact that a six-foot European in 1980s tight jeans is performing this ancient Japanese folk art, the performance has incredible impact. Mugenkyo founder Neil Mackie drums for his life and has to fight to get his breath back to talk to the audience.

Jeni Connibeer

Dacorum Independent, April 29, 1998

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back is a stylized

Japanese character "kyo"

(as in Mugen-KYO), meaning

REVERBERATION,

incorporating the Taiko symbol.



BACK

SMALL

MUGENKYO

LOGO ON FRONT



NEW!... KODO BOOK

We are pleased to be able to offer

"Children of the Drum" (softback)

£19.85 + £4.10 p&p = £23.95

by Mark Coultts-Smith,

published by Lightworks Press

A must for all serious Taiko fans!

New Kodo book

A large format book of beautiful photographs and text, this is the first major publication about the Kodo Drummers in English. The author spent five years on Sado Island amongst this extraordinary community, where he was able to get closer to the legend of Kodo than any other Westerner. An introductory essay tells the complete story of how a 60's inspired commune became today's globe-trotting group, and explains how Kodo and Sado Island fit into the history of Japanese drumming. The 95 photographs offer a glimpse of an earthy physical Japan and provide a unique insight into the origins of Kodo's elemental power. "Stirringly beautiful... an intimate look at Kodo" This is a must for all serious Taiko fans! See order form opposite for details

