

The definitive source of information on Taiko events in the U.K. from Mugenkyo, Europe's foremost Taiko drum group

TAIKO TAIKO

Spring Issue

Issue No.9

Hello and happy New Year to all you taiko fans, we hope you are fully into the swing of '99 and are all sober enough to experience much more thunderous taiko drumming this year. In the winter months, we took our annual break from our busy touring schedule, in order to teach Taiko drum classes. Whilst Neil and Miyuki started these Shane took the opportunity of a cheapish ticket to Japan!.....contacts eh! Here's his story

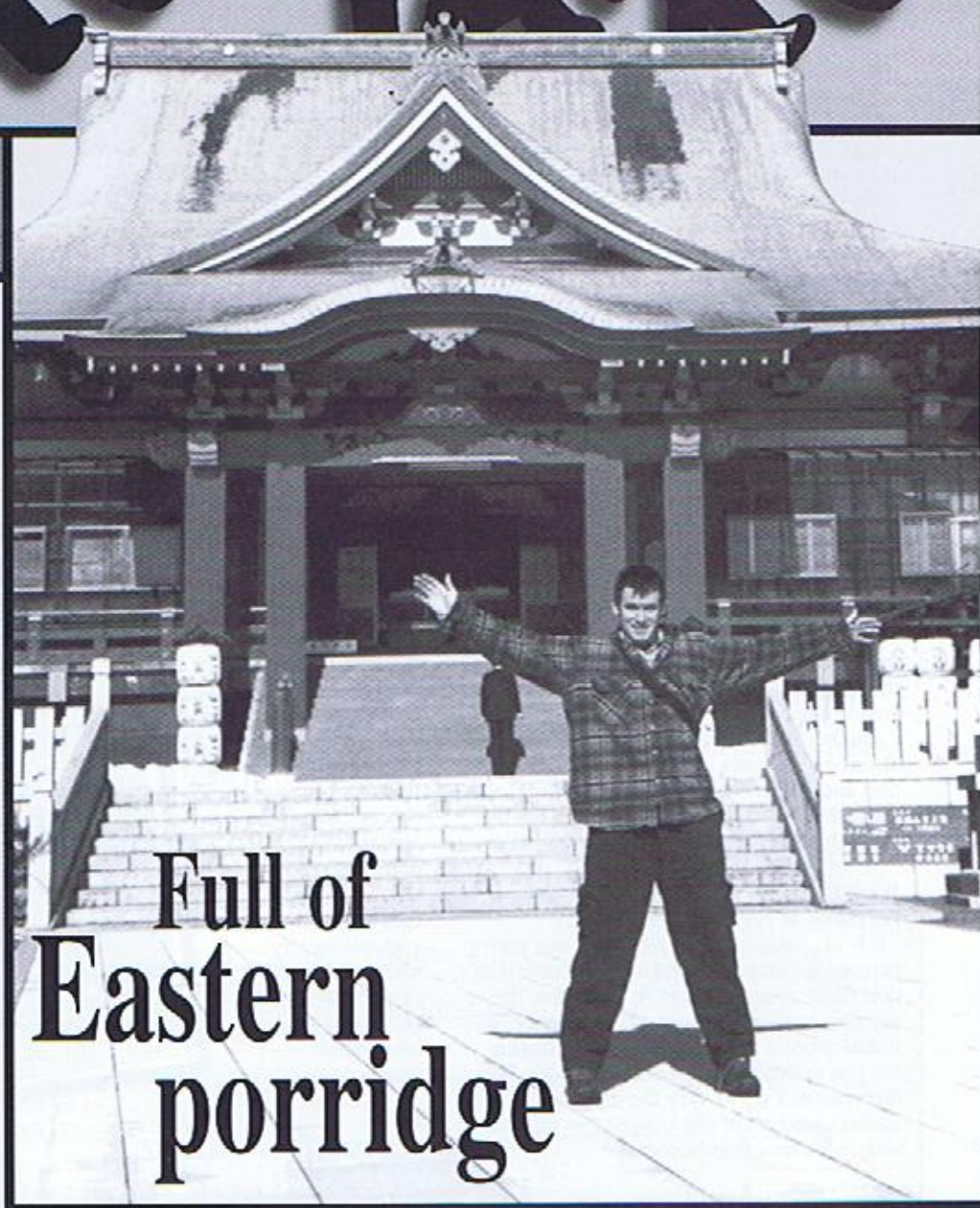
After serving my apprenticeship and touring throughout Britain and Ireland with Mugenkyo last year, I took a lot of pleasure and felt deeply honoured to be able to play these incredible instruments, we were taking taiko to so many people, most of whom were experiencing it for the first time, this was immensely rewarding and fulfilling for me. At the end of the year however I knew that the seed Mugenkyo had planted was now growing and my hunger to improve as both a drummer and performer was paramount. To understand fully such a traditional and indigenous form of music could only mean experiencing it first hand from the Japanese themselves.

I was incredibly lucky to have this opportunity as our sensei and current team member Masaaki Kurumaya had offered me an invitation to join him during his pre season stay at his family home in Fukui, the *hot-bed* of taiko.

In preparation for this relatively short trip I thought it would be an idea to prepare my body clock, and adjust my sleeping patterns to coincide with Japan's 8 hour time difference. Easier said than done as I spent three nights prior to flying wide awake in excited anticipation of my bussmans holiday, this was only to be capped with a cold overnight National Express (50mph) bus journey from Glasgow to London. Jetlag was most definitely round the corner.

As I flew into Tokyo's Narita Airport The pilot announced that Mount Fuji was visible on our descent, and sure enough there he was, this incredible snow-capped monument stood alone, gloriously striking in all its splendour - that is until I remembered the story of the telephone and Coca-Cola machine perched on top, but I was convinced that this omen would be a sign of good times ahead, and sure enough it was.

After a smooth 180mph train journey



Full of Eastern porridge

through city sky scrapers I was beginning to wake up. My destination was Kyoto where I would meet with Kurumaya Sensei at 2.30pm this went to plan as my train arrived at 2.29 and 30 seconds, after a warm welcome from sensei and a quick apology for the train being early (30 seconds is only just forgivable here), we took another train to Fukui during which KS explained my schedule for the next ten days.

On arrival to the Kurumaya household I gave out my gifts for Sensei's family and settled down to a well earned, far travelled bowl of porridge oats which KS had insisted I brought him. We had lots of catching up to do and I was now really looking forward to all the taiko that was in store for me.

It was an early start the next day and off

to Osaka where I was due to watch my first taiko festival, and check out a venue which Sensei's group Hibiki Daiko would be performing at later in the week. The indoor festival in Osaka's Castle Hall couldn't have been much better with a 6,000 strong audience, one of Japans greatest odaiko players Eitetsu Hayashi, the incredible energy of Zampa Ufujishi (three lions) and their two animated sisters, plus the astounding acrobatics of Eisa Taiko. All this for £16 and I even managed to bump into the 'pretty' fantastic Yamato girls in the theatre lobby.

I could definitely get used to this.

We hope you can wait till the next issue of *Taiko Taiko* when Shane will reveal more about this performance and many other taiko related events.

The following interview is from January's *Japan Newsletter* published by the Japanese embassy. With Mugenkyo's source of inspiration Mr Masaaki Kurumaya

How did your interest in Taiko begin?

My first involvement with music was through Western instruments such as the trumpet and guitar, and I used to play in both brass and jazz bands during my high school years. When I first saw a Taiko performance at the age of 18, I was struck by something which I hadn't experienced before. Watching the players dressed in traditional happi and hachimaki, playing with so much energy was like catching a glimpse of an entirely different world and I immediately wanted to try it for myself. When I started to teach myself taiko drumming, I discovered that there was in fact a connection with Jazz music, that's why I became so fascinated by it.



had never met Neil, I might never have given up my job in Japan to follow a dream of spreading taiko music throughout the world.

Why do you think taiko has become so popular in Britain?

I think taiko drumming has a universal appeal, partly because of its similarity to the human heartbeat, the style of taiko which Mugenkyo performs is also quite distinctive, in that it combines a familiar sound with a different approach. If it was just a matter of making a noise you could play a drum sitting down, but taiko music is about expressing ki or energy, and for that you need to use your whole body and spirit. It is a two-way process: when the audience see us putting so much into our playing, they respond enthusiastically which then inspires us to perform with even more energy.

Interview by Caroline Lewis

A class act

In the winter months, we took our annual break from our busy touring schedule, in order to teach Taiko drum courses. We seemed to attract quite a bit of media attention in the process. Here's what the papers had to say...

It is no ordinary music lesson. Pupils are told about the history of Taiko drumming, learn Japanese customs and language and watch a video of Taiko drumming. Each class begins with a warm up at the beginning with participants taking part in strenuous exercises. And the drummers are taught to work as a group, producing one big sound rather than several individual ones.

West Lothian Courier

Gourock resident Stuart McCorkingdale was one of the first to sign up for the workshop. He had already been on a drumming course hosted by Mugenkyo in Glasgow.

Stuart said: "The drums are great. The very action involves amazing energy. You really feel every hit you make. It's wonderful at taking out all your frustrations. The sound is deafening and it's basically a lot of fun."

So what's it all about? The drum itself is carved out of a single tree trunk with a cowhide stretched across the top and held in place by tacks. The emperor of the taiko drum - the nagado - originally came from China to Japan with the advent



Yabada Yabada Yamato

The dynamic and exciting YAMATO from Japan's ancient city of Nara will be on tour in Europe from February to May, with concert dates in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Austria and the U.K. The group made a huge impact at last year's Edinburgh festival and are sure to attract full houses on their return to Britain. Sadly their only U.K. dates are in London. Book early!

17th - 23rd May Peacock Theatre, Sadler's Wells, London (box office: 0171 314 8800).

Greeno



drums and percussion part 2

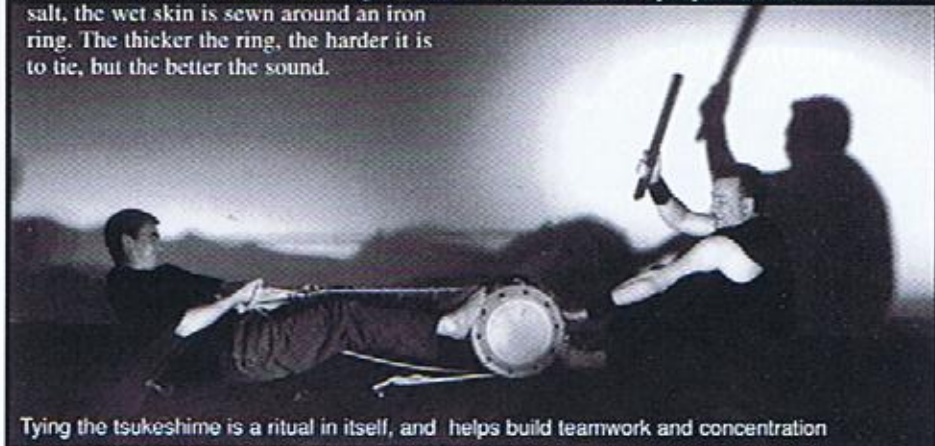
Tsukeshime Daiko - tied drum (or "shime" for short)

The high pitched tsukeshime is the smallest in the family of Taiko drums, and the name itself means tied drum. The shime is traditionally used more on the east coast of Japan, played sitting down as part of the hayashi festival drum and flute ensembles — and as accompaniment to folk song and dance.

The body, like the nagado, is one solid piece of keyaki (Japanese elm), and the skin is also cowhide. After treating it with salt, the wet skin is sewn around an iron ring. The thicker the ring, the harder it is to tie, but the better the sound.



The rope is tied up before use, the loosened afterwards, otherwise the skin would be damaged because of the high tension. The rope is made from hemp or linen, for maximum friction. The skins are attached by means of an intricate tying system, which takes two people half an hour to tie.



Tying the tsukeshime is a ritual in itself, and helps build teamwork and concentration

of Buddhism.

In Japan you can see the nagado in Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines. They are played for ceremonial reasons as well as on stage and in festivals.

Throughout the six-week course Inverclyde's budding Japanese drummers will be taught enough of the skill to be able to play a rhythm completely on their own.

Neil said: "Everyone should get a great deal out of the course and by the end of it they will have achieved something which is that bit different."

Greenock Telegraph

The four-piece ensemble, who are based in Glasgow but have members from America, Japan and Britain, are increasingly upheld as the UK's most spectacular drum group and were the first professional Taiko drummers on these shores. Their energetic and powerful perfor-

mances have generated great enthusiasm - which is what founder member Neil Mackie is hoping will inspire the people of West Lothian to learn the beat of the East.

"Taiko is something which has to be seen to be believed," says Bristol-born Neil. "It uses an inner energy and is very visual. The rhythms are not extremely complicated but they are very highly choreographed movements and very powerful to watch. The

drums go right through you. It is a very moving experience."

Edinburgh Evening News



Name: _____

Address _____

Post Code _____

Items Ordered

Mugenkyo CD	£12	<input type="checkbox"/>
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

MUGENKYO

Mugenkyo in March

- 5 Howden Park Centre, Livingston,
7:30 pm, 01506 433 634
- 9&10 The Old Town Hall, Hemel Hempstead,
8 pm, 01442 228 091
- 11 Solihull Arts Complex, Solihull,
7:30 pm, 0121 704 6962
- 12 Square Chapel, Halifax,
7:30 pm, 01422 349 422
- 13 Assembly Rooms, Derby,
7:30 pm, 01332 255 800
- 15 Theatre Mwldan, Cardigan,
7:30 pm, 01239 621200
- 19 The Mill, Banbury,
8 pm, 01295 279 002
- 20 Assembly Rooms, Ludlow,
8 pm, 01584 878 141
- 28 Festival Theatre, Chichester,
7 pm, 01243 781 312

TOUR DATES

TAIKO WORKSHOPS IN READING

Experience the power and exhilaration of Taiko drumming with the Gyosei Taiko School based at the Gyosei International College in Reading.

Sunday, 28th February
Beginners Level

Saturday *27th or Sunday *28th March
Intermediate Level

Saturday, 3rd April
Beginners Level

All sessions run from 10:30 am to 5:30 pm with an hour for lunch, and will be held at Gyosei College in Reading.

To book a place on the course, send a cheque for £22 payable to James Barrow to:

34 Scott Close, Emmer Green,
Reading, Berks RG4 8NY
tel/fax: 0118 946 3317
e-mail: taikojh@globalnet.co.uk

"TAIKO to TABLA"

with Joji Hirota and Peter Lockett

A percussive explosion exploring drums and rhythms from all over the world, from the rhythmically talented duo.

March 30	Rotherham Arts Centre
March 31	Brewery Arts Centre, Kendal
April 1	Eden Court Theatre, Inverness
April 3	Dalrymple Arts Centre, Fraserburgh
April 9	Civic Theatre, Chelmsford
May 9	MAC, Birmingham
May 13	Corn Exchange, Newbury
May 29	Fish Quay Festival, North Shields
May 30	Spilsby Theatre

A big thank you and a sorry



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

G. Farrier, Noriko Ito,
Mr. BW Scott & Mrs. JA
Scott, Simon Webb, Jurgen
and Masami Kita-Geerlings, Meg and Anne,
Pauline Allen, Rosalind Megson, and Adam Leek.

MUGENKYO CD

£12/cassette £8
(includes p&p)

Running time: 48 mins
"brilliant rhythmic precision"
"... the energy and power of Taiko
thundering into your home"

T-SHIRT £10 (includes p&p)

High quality black cotton
with yellow writing
SORRY XL ONLY!

The symbol on the
back is a stylized
Japanese character "kyo"
(as in Mugen-KYO), meaning
REVERBERATION,
incorporating the Taiko symbol.



SMALL
MUGENKYO
LOGO ON FRONT



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 Coultis-Smith,
published by Lightworks Press
A must for all serious Taiko fans!



An apology... to the South West Anglo
Japanese Society. We forgot to mention them in
our last newsletter for putting on the very wonderful
event at Longleat late last year where we played a joint
concert with Joji Hirota and Shakti. Godfrey and the
team work very hard at promoting all kinds of Japanese
performing arts in the Southwest. If you're interested in
finding out more, call: 01749 850 928

Please remember, it costs money to put out a newsletter
We receive no financial backing.
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!**

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