

# TAIKO TAIKO

[www.mugenkyo-taiko.co.uk](http://www.mugenkyo-taiko.co.uk)



## HAPPY NEW YEAR!

**W**e hope you've all had a great holiday season and are not suffering from the millenium bug of the medical variety. Here at Mugenkyo HQ we are well into the swing of the New Year - getting the new theatre show together with our new line-up, and preparing for our first tour in February. The day starts with Chi Kung breathing exercises and Tai Chi, warm-ups, working out, a full hour of "jiuchi" base rhythms, office work, meetings... and that's before we start rehearsing! We're all raring to go and looking forward to the exciting and full-on year ahead. Hope to see you at one of the shows!

## WHAT'S NEW?

**S**ince our last newsletter there have been more developments and big changes at Mugenkyo. Last autumn was a sad and difficult time for the group, as we neared to the end of Masaaki Kurumaya Sensei's stay in the UK. He had been with us for over a year and a half, and had made a huge impact on the group with both his masterful and skilful playing and his powerful personality. So, the autumn concerts had a very special meaning to us. We were also saddened by the sudden departure of Shane Connolly, who had been with the group for about a year and a half. However, his departure opened the way for us to be re-united with ex-member Liz Walters, who toured with the group throughout the autumn. We were also very happy to have on tour with us Saori Kurumaya - the daughter of Sensei, who proved to us that drumming talent certainly does run in the family! So the autumn was both a happy reunion and a sad goodbye...



Right; Kurumaya Sensei says "See you amigos!"



## INTRODUCING... HEAR THE DRUM ROLL!...



Neil Mackie



Miyuki Williams



Sylvia Rome



Alison Roe



Al Hagger



Jane Hensey

### THE Y2K MUGENKYO TEAM:

#### Neil Mackie

The leader of the gang and also in charge of the group's bookings, Neil studied Taiko with Masaaki Kurumaya in Japan, where he lived for two years in Fukui on the west coast. His solid rhythms hold the songs together, and his solid vision for the future is the driving force of the group.

#### Miyuki Williams

Another founding member of the group, Miyuki is known for her "flying hair" style of Taiko. Her mother's Japanese, her father's Welsh, she grew up in the States and now lives in Scotland.

#### Sylvia Rome

Dreamy and starry-eyed is Sylvia the Pisces, with a strong affinity for the full moon. On tour she is the toughest of the tough, a strong and healthy farmer's daughter. Her playing forte is strong visual solos and graceful stick twirling.

*Below: Shin-Daiko from Germany in the Mugenkyo Dojo*

#### Alison Roe

Ali has been involved with the group since January 1999, and her promising talent made her the obvious hot new recruit for the group. Her previous job was as a psychic researcher for Edinburgh University. So, Ali, does Taiko heighten extra-sensory perception?

#### Al Hagger

Al is the newest addition to the team, fresh from returning from five years living in Fukuoka Japan, where he was learning and performing with the Taiko group "Tonin Daiko". He's a make-up artist by trade and is a magnificent chef.

#### Jane Hensey

Jane is the administrator in the team, who has been known to take to the stage with Mugenkyo in a narrator/storyteller capacity. Her charming personality and hard-working efficiency really make her a saviour in the Mugenkyo office.





## THE TOURING SEASON

The autumn of 1999 was the busiest touring season for us yet: between September and November we performed forty-six concerts! Here are the highlights of the concerts and the other events in between: The concert in Hexham Abbey was amazing: a magnificent abbey, with the capacity audience sitting in the pews, and beats of the Taiko reverberating throughout the hallowed stone walls. I think every-body could feel the Taiko spirit come alive there. It certainly felt strange leaping about in a demon's mask with gravestones under our bare feet!

At the Southport Arts Centre, Kurumaya Sensei, a massive Beatles fan, was delighted to find out that we were performing on the very same stage that the Beatles once performed on. The next day we all went on the Beatles tour in Liverpool - on the "magical mystery tour", winding up at the Cavern Club - the place of legends that Kurumaya Sensei had longed to go to ever since he'd seen the Beatles at the Tokyo Dome as a teenager.

At the Birmingham Arcadian Centre we shared the stage with old friends Joji Hirota, James Barrow and Mark Alcock, and at the end of the festival all eight of us played a joint piece together - unrehearsed but a whole lotta fun!

At the Phoenix Arts Centre in Exeter, we welcomed the Kagemusha kids group, who performed a short slot during our concert. Well done kids and well done to Jonathon Kirby for teaching and organising the only young persons' group in the UK!

We also returned to Ireland in the autumn - we love Ireland! The first performance was at the Japanese Ambassador's residence in Dublin, where we were very honoured to perform there at the invitation of Ambassador Kazuko Yokoo. Our next port of

call was the Cork Jazz Festival - three days of madness and mayhem at this wonderful Guinness-sponsored festival (which by the way meant unlimited supplies of Guinness for the performers, not that we do that kind of thing, of course). On the final day of the festival, we performed on the stage with the "millennium drum" - the biggest drum in the world. In Galway we performed at the Róisín Dubh - a pub (!) jam-packed with a couple hundred people who danced away to the groove of our festival song "Matsuri".

We then hot-footed it back from Ireland to meet the German group Shin-Daiko straight off a flight into Glasgow airport. They stayed with us for four days for an intensive course with Kurumaya Sensei, rehearsing for eight hours a day in our dojo (i.e. a cold, cold barn). It was great to be in the company of other

European Taiko players, and it was a tantalising taste of the huge potential of our new base out here in the Lanarkshire countryside.

At the Glasgow Concert Halls we performed our only home-town gig of the year - thank you to all our friends who came and made it such a magical night.

At the Blackfriars Arts Centre in Boston the entire audience sang "Happy Birthday" for Kurumaya Sensei. And in Halifax we performed two nights - the second night was Sensei's final concert in Britain. Right at the end, as Kurumaya Sensei took his final bow, the entire audience let off party poppers on cue, ending a perfect evening. What an exciting time it's been - so many memories...

We'd like to take this opportunity to say a very special thank you to Kurumaya Sensei for his time here and wish him the best of luck with his big homecoming concert in Fukui in March, and also for his future "Taiko Life" in Japan. Dekiru...Dekiru...



Above: The girls get ready!

Below: Happy Birthday to you! (Sensei with Saori, Sylvia and Liz)





## ONE MINUTE DRUM SOLO BY AL HAGGER

If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.' Henry

Thoreau's pithy maxim is well-known and often quoted, and I apologize for wheeling the dusty old git out again, but when I looked it up just now it struck me as being rather more slippery than I remembered. Is

it just a call for generosity towards the local misfit, an appeal for constraint before condemning the social outcast? Or is it all a bit sniffy and superior, suggesting society in general is more likely to be missing the beat than the individual? At

any rate, the point is conflict between two parties, so the drummer metaphor is a bit unfortunate. Drums unite people, as do the three other major food groups: sex, beer and fireworks. In no particular

order. And preferably all at the same time, pending the weather forecast. I tend to end up in this frame of mind when somebody asks me about learning Taiko drumming, a discipline I've been lucky enough to be involved in since 1998. During my time studying taiko in Japan, a fellow student asked me how I felt while I was playing, and I realized how difficult it was to express the physical pleasure of bashing a big drum in time with a lot of

other people I hardly know. I recommended she watch Alan Parker's movie 'The Commitments', wherein the lead singer of an Irish soul band sums up the music's raison d'être by giving himself a hearty

squeeze between the legs. Taiko and soul music are not one and the same thing but they do come from the same place, to be sure. And with Taiko you get to hit something, too. Sex and violence and no-one gets

hurt. Afterwards, you're left with a dreamy, sated-carnivore feeling, like a big fat lion that's bitten an enormous chunk out of a bull elephant but left it alive to live another day. And then there's the thrill of knowing you're doing something

which has been a part of Japan's culture for well over 1400 years. Taiko drumming as we understand it today is a fairly recent addition to Japan's cultural canon - the first professional Taiko group was formed

in the late sixties, and the genre has become internationally famous as a performance art only in the last twenty years or so. But drums have been part of Buddhist and Shinto ceremonies for centuries, and even represent the sound of Buddha's voice in some sects. Endorsement from the great drummer in the sky, no less. And I think I can be forgiven for stepping to music that far away...

*Our newest recruit Al wrote this article while in Japan.*



Top: ...with Joji, Mark and James  
Bottom: Sensei's last night

### ORDER FORM

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Items Ordered

Mugenkyo CD £12

Mugenkyo Cassette £8

Mugenkyo T-shirt £12

Kodo Book £23.95

Total enclosed £

All prices include VAT, packaging and postage within the UK. (please allow 21 days for delivery) Please send cheques or postal orders payable to ...

'MUGENKYO'  
P.O. BOX 5124  
Lanark ML11 0WA



## YAMATO TOUR DATES KODO TOUR DATES

**F**resh and exciting – Taiko from the heart. A return to these shores from one of Japan's newest exports. They were a big hit on their last tour. Don't miss!

### March

- 26 Chichester
- 29 Croydon
- 28 Bournemouth
- 29 Truro
- 30 Plymouth
- 31 Torquay

### April

- 1 Cardiff
- 3 Oxford
- 4 Basingstoke
- 5 Stoke Victoria
- 6 York
- 7 Nottingham Royal
- 8 Reading
- 9 Wycombe
- 11 Aberdeen
- 12 Edinburgh Festival Theatre
- 13 Harrogate
- 14-15 Blackpool
- 16 Bath (2 shows)
- 18 Eastbourne Congress
- 19 Warwick
- 20 Southend
- 21 Felixstow
- 22 Cambridge Corn Exchange
- 23 Northampton
- 25-29 Peacock Theatre, London

[www.wadaiko-yamato.com](http://www.wadaiko-yamato.com)

**P**recision and Power – the undisputed kings of Taiko – and with rare out-of-London dates. Book now if you don't want to be disappointed!

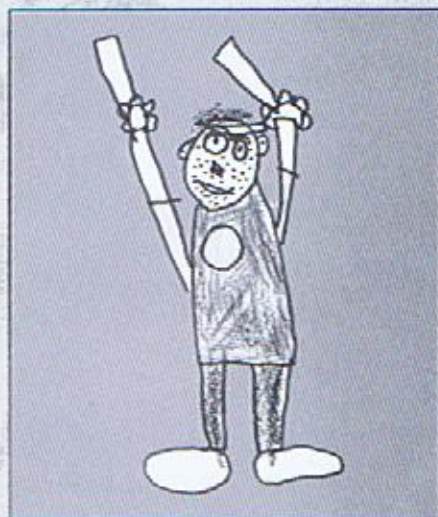
### May

- 27-31 Barbican Centre, London

### June

- 7 Bridgewater Hall, Manchester
- 9 Royal Centre, Nottingham
- 10-11 Symphony Hall, Birmingham
- 13 De Montefort Hall, Leicester
- 16 The Anvil, Basingstoke

[www.kodo.or.jp](http://www.kodo.or.jp)



Above; drawing by Sam, Harestaines Primary School

## A BIG THANK YOU TO...

Mr Beckett, Ms Hamblett, Ms McRorie, John D Heath, Mr Cunningham, Nan Maxwell, Scott Macleod-Collins, Jane Hill, Rana Partridge, Anne White, Gaye Jacobs, Margaret Berry, K J McKie, John Davies, J Grant, Anthony Woolston.

Please remember, it costs money to put out a newsletter. Please help us to continue by sending donations – a book of stamps, postal orders or cheques (made payable to Mugenkyo), and even cash gratefully accepted.

Or alternatively, buy our merchandise!

Background; drawing by Karina Williams, Cardigan Secondary School

## MERCHANDISE

### MUGENKYO CD/TAPE

£12 for the CD / £8 for the tape

(includes p&p) Running time approx 48 minutes

"Brilliant rhythmic precision"

"...the energy and power of Taiko thundering into your home"

### MUGENKYO T-SHIRT

£12 (includes p&p)

Available in grey or gold with black print

with the large Mugenkyo logo on the back (MED & XL)

### KODO BOOK

£19.85 & p&p = £23.95

We are pleased to be able to offer "Children of the Drum" (softback)

by Mark Coutts-Smith, published by Lightworks Press. A must for all serious Taiko fans!



Back of T-shirt



## MUGENKYO CONCERT DATES



### February

- 5 Sunderland Football Stadium
- 11 Town Hall, High Wycombe, (01494 512 000)
- 12 Nettlefold Hall, London, (0171 926 8070)
- 13 Theatre Royal, Bath, (01225 448 844)
- 14 Southampton University, lunchtime concert
- 16 Central Theatre, Chatham (01634 842 984)
- 18 Octagon Theatre, Bolton, (01204 520 661)
- 19 Wyllyots Centre, Potters Bar, (01707 645 005)
- 22 Watersmeet Theatre, Rickmansworth, (01923 771 542)
- 23 Wakefield Arts Centre (01924 211 311)
- 24 Guildford, Civic Hall (01483 444 555)
- 25 De La Warr Pavillion, Bexhill on Sea (01424 787 949)

### March

- 8 Theatre Brycneiniog, Brecon (01874 611 622)
- 9 Cheltenham, Everyman Theatre (01242 572 573)
- 10 Queens Hall, Widnes (0151 424 2339)
- 18-19 St. Patrick's Day Festival, Dublin (TBC)

### April

- 20 Borough Theatre, Fife (01873 850 805)
- 27 Picture Playhouse, Beverley East Yorks (01482 868 033)
- 28 Brewhouse, Burton on Trent (01283 516 030)
- 29 Roots.Net @ The Old Jam Factory, Oxford (01865 725 077)
- 30 Marine Hall, Fleetwood (01253 770 547)

### May

- 3 Fairfield Hall Croydon (0181 688 9291)
- 12 Disneyland, Paris
- 19 Castle Hall, Hertford (01992 589 026)
- 21 Gourrock Town Hall, Inverclyde Festival (01475 715 666)



Above: Rehearsals in the Dojo

## MUGENKYO CLASSES IN GOUROCK

We will be running a six-week course in Gourrock, leading up to a performance at the Inverclyde Festival on Sunday, 21st May. There will be one class for beginners, and one for "level 2" - open to all who have attended previous classes in the Glasgow/Gourrock area.

**Dates:** Mon 3rd April • Mon 10th April • Mon 17th April • Tues 25th April  
Mon 8th May • Sun 21st May

**Place:** Gamble Halls, Gourrock

**Price:** £30 / £20 (half the fee is refundable on completion of the course)

**For further details please contact:**

Catrina Henderson at Inverclyde Council - t. 01475 715 666

**For Taiko classes in London:**

contact Mark Alcock on tel: 0958 949 023 or email: mark@alcock.com

**For Taiko classes in Exeter:**

for both adults and young people (12-16), contact Jonathan Kirby on tel: 01392 494 486 or email: info@kagemusha.com

**For Taiko classes in Reading:**

contact James Barrow on tel: 0118 946 3317 or email: taikojb@globalnet.co.uk