



In January we kicked off the year with another trip to Japan. We were invited to perform at the Opening Event of the 2005 EU-Japan Year of People-to-People Exchanges in Tokyo, with Mugenkyo representing European taiko, Exeter-based Kagemusha Junior group representing European junior taiko, Tokyo-based Amanojaku representing Japanese taiko and Matsukawa Kyogaku Daiko representing Japanese Junior taiko. It was a very special event, not least because we were re-united with our old friends Amanojaku. Some of you may remember them from their intense performances at the Edinburgh Fringe several years ago.

The Mugen Taiko Dojo has been abuzz with activity recently, with weekend workshops, Project Taiko and the Taiko Academy regular sessions at the Dojo rehearsing for the Dojo Showcase, a major outreach project in Stoke-on-Trent and final preparations for the Dojo Opening (see Dojo page).



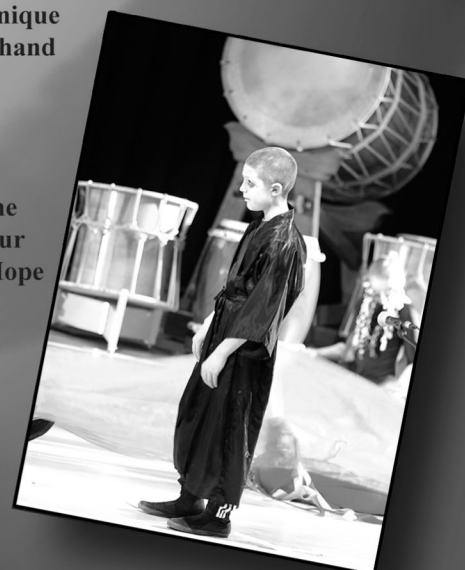
We are now finally ready to hold the Official Opening Event, with guests of honour Masaaki Kurumaya Sensei and the Consul General of Japan. Although the Dojo has been open for workshops for the last two years, at the same time we have been continually adding to the facilities, including a reception / dining area a year ago, and recently completing some final finishing touches, including some wonderful reclaimed oak church pews in the reception.

The pews are engraved with musical instruments and carol singers, and are originally from either side of a church organ. Another recent purchase has been a projector for watching taiko videos (goodbye to the rickety old telly!). A very special addition to the Dojo space itself has been the calligraphy painted for us by the Oshōsan monk at the Kongoin Zen Buddhist Temple in Takefu, Japan – kanji characters to inspire and guide us.

We have also been eagerly awaiting the visit by Kurumaya Sensei, who will be flying over especially for the Dojo Opening, and who will also be performing at concerts in Glasgow and Edinburgh (full report in next issue). As part of his visit, we have organised “guest teacher workshops” at the Dojo. We were overwhelmed with interest for the workshops, which filled up instantly. Kurumaya Sensei’s visit has been generously supported by the Japan 21 organisation.

One of the long term goals of the Mugen Taiko Dojo is to invite guest teachers from Japan on a regular basis. We believe that in addition to making Taiko accessible to all, it is also very important to provide the opportunity to delve deeper into the world of taiko. Guest teacher workshops enable taiko players in the UK to further develop technique and to experience first-hand the wonderfully varied traditions of taiko drumming.

Coming up in May is the main Mugenkyo UK tour (dates on back page). Hope to see you at one of the concerts!



## TAIKO TAIKO

The quarterly newsletter of Mugenkyo and the Mugen Taiko Dojo, publishing news on concerts, Taiko Dojo activities, the art form of Taiko, and Taiko events in the UK.

# MUGENKYO

Established in 1994, MUGENKYO is Europe's first professional Taiko drum group, performing at theatres, concert halls, festivals and events. MUGENKYO's aim is to develop Taiko as a European art form, through performance and collaborations across artistic disciplines.

[www.mugenkyo.com](http://www.mugenkyo.com)



### The MUGEN TAIKO DOJO

Located in rural Scotland it is the first purpose-built Taiko Centre in the UK. Here we introduce the art form of Taiko through residential workshops and regular classes. It is also the permanent base and training space for Mugenkyo. The Dojo's extensive outreach programme also brings Taiko to schools and communities across the UK.

[www.taikodojo.com](http://www.taikodojo.com)

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Thank you to those of you who sent in donations towards the cost of this newsletter:

**Mrs Audrey Devine, Paul Hopkinson,  
Jim Colley, Mr + Mrs J. Hill, Jain Wain,  
George + Yoko Mathers**

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

## CHICHIBU YO - MATSURI FESTIVAL

On the 2nd & 3rd of December, a spectacular night festival takes place in the small town of Chichibu in the mountainous region east of Tokyo in Saitama Prefecture. It is considered to be one of the "top three" festivals in Japan, and the festival music played is one of the classic taiko drum pieces. On the last trip to Japan, Neil & Miyuki had the chance to go to the festival, with Mrs. Ochi from the Miyamoto Taiko Museum as our guide.

The festival began 300 years ago in the Kamakura period. Six elaborate festival floats were built by the wealthy families of the town, one for each of the six districts. We were introduced to the head man of Kamimachi, the "downtown" district of Chichibu, who said that the exact reasons for the start of the festival were unknown, but were connected with prayers to the gods for the wellbeing and protection of the town.

These festival floats are pulled through the narrow streets of Chichibu by hundreds of people by means of long ropes. These floats are very heavy, each weighing between 10 – 20 tons each and are ornately carved from wood and decorated with gold. Within the float, a team of taiko drummers play a festival piece called the Chichibu Yatai Bayashi, consisting of a low Nagado drum, several high-pitched Shime drums, an Atarigane bell, and a Shinobue bamboo flute. Because the space inside the float is so small, a particular style of taiko playing has developed, playing sitting down with legs straddling either side of the Nagado drum. These teams consist of approx 23 drummers, who all climb up on rafters within the floats, taking it in turns to clamber up & down & play the taiko in relay, to keep the music going all through the night.

The rhythms have a special significance. When the float is being pulled along a straight road, the low Nagado drums beat out a driving rhythm to encourage the people pulling the float. When the float reaches a corner, a laborious process takes place to turn the float. The wooden wheels of the float don't allow it to turn corners, so the whole float is levered up by means of long poles and twisted around the corner. To accompany this, the high-pitched Shime drums play fast rolls until the float is ready to be pulled in a straight line again.

The festival actually starts in the day-time, with stages set up around the town for the teams of players who come from the outlying areas, who don't have their own local floats to play on. There are market stalls lining the streets with all sorts of delicious smells wafting through the air & all kinds of festival goods on sale. The six floats are pulled up & down their



respective neighbourhoods all day long, with a short break for dinner. As dusk falls the lanterns are lit & hung around the cart as an air of expectancy builds, and the senior drummers take over. The crowds gather – so much so that it's impossible to move. Last year's festival attracted about 200,000 spectators. We're lucky as we were given official "Kamimachi" hachimaki headscarves – obviously the Chichibu equivalent of a backstage pass! The police wave us on to follow the carts through the centre of the roads, saying "Hurry up, you're getting left behind by your float!" as they held back the crowds of spectators – an honour indeed!

The highlight of the evening is when all of the floats gather in the centre of town, and are pulled up the "dangozaka" to the central square. As each float is pulled up the steep slope in turn, all hundred of the pullers straining and groaning with the ropes, the drummers step up a gear, with the heaving crowds shouting encouragement, as a huge firework display provides an incredible backdrop to this amazing scene. It's enough to take your breath away. Once in the central square, the drummers & pullers take a rest while children's kabuki theatre plays on the floats which have been transformed into elaborate stages. There is much revelry, as the drummers & pullers eat and drink their fill, and the beer and sake flow freely.

After midnight, the rhythms inside the floats start to wind up again, and the floats disperse; one by one lowered gradually down the steep "dangozaka", the heavy floats straining at the ropes. We followed the floats til 2 am, until they went off to the outskirts of town, to be returned to their storage places until the next year's festival. Drifting to sleep in our futons, we could still hear that Chichibu rhythm going in the far far distance, the drums of encouragement ringing out from the floats for that last push home...





## Dojo Showcase Concerts in Glasgow and Livingston

A spectacular taiko drumming extravaganza with over 20 drummers. Students at the Dojo, Project Taiko and the Taiko Academy are joined by Mugenkyo Taiko Drummers for this special annual event.

Friday 22nd April Livingston, Howden Park Centre  
01506 433 634  
Saturday 23rd April Glasgow, Gilmorehill G12  
0141 330 5522



## "Taiko to Achieve"

- a schools project in Stoke-on-Trent project organised by the Action Zone -

Over the course of the winter months, Teresa and Adam made several trips to the Stoke area, teaching eight different taiko pieces to students at eight schools, culminating in the final concert at the Victoria Halls in Stoke-on-Trent in January. Each piece followed a theme: for example, one school performed "Ninja Daiko" accompanied by Ninja style movements, another school interspersed Japanese children's games with the taiko drumming. The students practiced on school instruments in-between visits supervised by their music teachers, in preparation for the big day. The final concert at the 1300 capacity Victoria Halls was a very special event: 450 students participating with Japanese songs, story-telling and dragon dances, and eight dynamic and energetic taiko drum pieces. The encore was a very moving moment, with the hall surrounded by every one of the students, waving glow sticks with the taiko movements co-ordinated with the final taiko piece performed on-stage by the young taiko players. Well done to all of you who participated in the event!



## The Way of the Drum Tour

In February and March, Neil, Miyuki, Adam and new trainee Georgie went on tour with the show "The Way of the Drum", leaving Teresa behind to hold the fort with the teaching work at the Dojo. "The Way of the Drum" introduces the history and traditions of taiko in an intimate and entertaining show. We were able to take the show into many far-flung corners of the UK, and to some venues where the Mugenkyo show doesn't get a chance to play.

We all enjoyed it very much.

The tour was such a success that we plan to repeat it again next year.

### Order Form

See overleaf for goods.

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T-Shirts £12 Quantity

Childrens - XL - Blue	<input type="text"/>
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Mugenkyo C.D's £12

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Total enclosed £

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**P.O Box 5124**  
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All prices include VAT, packaging and postage within the UK, (please allow 21 days delivery).

Please make cheques or postal orders payable to MUGENKYO.

# MUGENKYO TAIKO DRUMMERS MAY 2005 TOUR

## MAY

Tues 3	Harrogate Theatre	01423 502116
Wed 4	Tamworth, Assembly Rooms	01827 709618
Thu 5	Margate, Theatre Royal	01843 293877
Fri 6	South Shields, Customs House	0191 454 1234
Sat 7	King's Lynn, Arts Centre	01553 764864
Mon 9	Stafford, Gatehouse Theatre	01785 254653
Tues 10	Skegness, Embassy Centre	01754 768333
Wed 11	Hatfield, Univ. Weston Auditorium	01707 284004
Thu 12	Yeovil, Octagon Theatre	01935 422884
Fri 13	Tewkesbury, Roses Theatre	01684 295074
Sat 14	Newport, The Riverfront	01633 656757
Sun 15	Lowestoft, Marina Theatre	01502 532300
Wed 18	Carmarthen, Lyric Theatre	01554 774057
Thu 19	Bedworth, Civic Hall	024 7637 6707
Fri 20	Huddersfield, Lawrence Batley Theatre	01484 430528
Sat 21	Bangor, Theatr Gwynedd	01248 351708
Sun 22	Wrexham, New William Aston Hall	01978 292015
Mon 23	Pwllheli, Neuadd Dwyfor	01758 704088
Wed 25	Whitley Bay Playhouse	0191 252 3505
Thu 26	Whitehaven, Rosehill Theatre	01946 692422
Fri 27	Bury, The Met	0161 761 2216

## JULY

Fri 1	Bradford Alhambra Theatre	01274 432000
Wed 6 & 7	Waterford, Tall Ships Festival (DAYTIME, FREE)	00353 15309992
Fri 8	Marlborough Jazz Festival	01672 515095
Mon 11	Swansea Grand Theatre	01792 475715
Thu 21	Isle of Skye, Portree Hall	01470 521288

For additional summer festival dates, see Mugenkyo website  
[www.mugenkyo.com/tour.html](http://www.mugenkyo.com/tour.html)

The 2005 Mugenkyo line-up has now been expanded with new trainee, Georgie Harris – a member of the Taiko Academy at the Mugen Taiko Dojo. She has been training with the group since October 2003, performing on-stage at the Dojo Showcase concerts, at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2004 and at other occasional festival appearances. In February she joined with us on "The Way of the Drum" tour, and this coming May she will make her full debut with the Mugenkyo group.

Georgie originally hails from Oakham, near Nottingham, moving to Glasgow to pursue a music degree at Glasgow University, specialising in flute (western) and theatre studies.

With tuition from Teresa, Georgie has transferred her flute skills to the Shinobue bamboo flute as well as the taiko drums.

A natural performer with an intense and dynamic stage presence, Georgie is a welcome addition to the team.



## NEXT INTRODUCTORY WEEKEND WORKSHOP

The introductory workshop is more than simply learning to play a drum – it's a positive and uplifting experience at the Mugen Taiko Dojo, the UK's first Centre for Taiko Drumming. Experience playing these beautiful instruments, crafted at the top taiko factories in Japan, and learn more about this wonderful art form.

Suitable for adults of any age & fitness.

**3 / 4 September**

**£130 non residential**

(residential package available)

Contact Anna for an info pack:

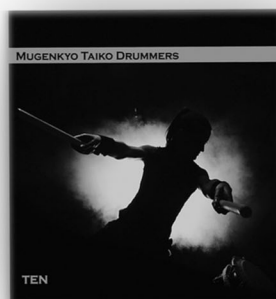
01357 522 008 or [mail@taikodojo.com](mailto:mail@taikodojo.com)

## Mugenkyo Merchandise



T-Shirts available in various sizes and colours - see order form on back.

### NEW C.D - TEN



Our latest C.D. Recorded last year and selling like hot cakes. With flute, bells, didgeridoo, voice and of course big booming taiko stompers...and a bonus C.D-rom of clips from our show.

### C.D - MUGENKYO



Don't forget our original C.D. Pure taiko at its most energetic!