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As Japan's most internationally acclaimed performing arts ensemble, Kodo creates contemporary expressions that are firmly rooted in tradition. Informed by countless musical influences garnered through extensive international travel, the group's musical vision is also shaped by its home of Sado Island and a way of life based on living, learning and creating.

Introducing Kodo

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Exploring the limitless possibilities of the traditional Japanese drum, the taiko, Kodo is forging new directions for a vibrant living art form. In Japanese the word *Kodo* conveys two meanings: Firstly, "heartbeat," the primal source of all rhythm. The sound of the great taiko is said to resemble a mother's heartbeat as felt in the womb, and it is no myth that babies are often lulled asleep by its thunderous vibrations. Secondly, read in a different way, the word can mean "children of the drum," a reflection of Kodo's desire to play the drums simply, with the heart of a child.



Kodo History

1970s

In 1971, a handful of young men and women gathered on Sado Island to establish *Sado no Kuni Ondekoza*, a group that provided Japanese youth a way to learn traditional Japanese performing arts and craft. In order to support the group financially, the original Ondekoza members began to study and perform taiko, eventually taking the sound of the drum around the globe on world tours. Members lived communally in an abandoned elementary school and spent much of their time practicing the taiko and training to run marathons. After debuting internationally in 1975, Ondekoza emerged as a professional performance group that became highly acclaimed among European and North American audiences.

1980s

As time went by, many of the members began to feel that the philosophy and goals of *Ondekoza* leader Tagayasu Den no longer reflected those of the group. Eventually Mr. Den left Sado, taking the name *Ondekoza* with him. The members who remained on Sado reorganized and founded *Kodo* in 1981. Although performances became the primary focus of Kodo's activities, the initial dream to establish a centre to study Japanese traditional performing arts and crafts has never been forgotten. The first leader of Kodo, Toshio Kawauchi, envisioned "Kodo Village," a creative space where Kodo members could explore new possibilities and interact with artists from around the world. In 1984, the *One Earth Tour* became the ongoing banner for Kodo's mission of bringing the sound of the taiko to the ears of the world, and in 1988 the dream of Kodo Village became a reality.

1990s

As the number of concerts increased, both domestic and international performances received the highest acclaim. More members with a background in music joined the group, and events such as Earth Celebration enabled more exchange with other cultures and musical genres. As taiko culture spreads internationally, Kodo emerged as an authority in the field and solidified its identity as a musical performance group. In 1997, the Kodo Cultural Foundation was established to facilitate more educational and outreach programs.

Kodo in the New Millennium

Looking for new ways to explore the profound subtleties of taiko, Kodo begins to explore richer levels of stage expression. The Kodo Cultural Foundation supports both local and international activities through social-education and outreach projects designed to give back to local communities. In 2011, Kodo will celebrate its milestone 30th anniversary. Tours in North America, Europe, and throughout Japan have been planned for this commemorative year.

One Earth Tour - Kodo Performance Activities

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Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris (2009)

The world is a kaleidoscope of people and cultures. In this age of exploding populations and lightening-fast communication, it is more important than ever that diverse cultures learn to understand and accept each other so that all may share our increasingly shrinking planet in harmony. Since ancient times the taiko has been a symbol of community, serving as a link among people, as well as a link between people and the heavens. Through the *One Earth Tour*, Kodo has given over 3,300 performances in 46 countries around the globe, making the group Japan's most internationally acclaimed performing art ensemble. Kodo will continue to bring the sound of the Japanese drum around the globe, and with the taiko's unique ability to transcend the barriers of language and custom, remind us all of our membership in that larger community -- the world.



Carnegie Hall, New York (1998)

The Elements of Kodo Performances

There are three principal elements in the make-up of a Kodo performance.

The first type is based upon traditional folk arts, learned from local people throughout Japan. Our intention is not simply to replicate, but, in rearranging them for the stage, attempt to capture their universal spirit and energy as they filter through our bodies.

Art forms rooted in the soil are developed through an intimate relationship between people and their art and between art and nature. Therein lies irreplaceable treasures laden with hints for people living in a bewildering age.

The second element of our performance is made up of compositions of friends and mentors of Kodo. These include composers Maki Ishii and Shinichiro Ikebe, Kabuki musicians Roetsu Tosha and Kiyohiko Semba, and jazz pianist Yosuke Yamashita.

The third element consists of original compositions by Kodo members themselves, who have used their exposure to the rhythms and sounds of the many people and places they have visited as grist for their own creations.

Our performance begins with the blending of these three elements with our lives amid the sights and sounds of Sado Island. It is then forged into shape on the anvil of rehearsal.



Odeon of Herodes Atticus, Acropolis, Athens (1995)

Foreign Press Comments



"It should be a monotonous instrument, but because of the extraordinary variety of playing styles they achieve an unbelievable range of changes in tonal quality that thrill the audience. This is made possible because of Kodo's deep research and creativity." — *Beijing Evening News (China)*

"Indeed, if there is such a thing as perfection in music, Kodo comes as near to it as any group in the world." — *Boston Globe (USA)*

"Traditional rituals recast as theater, and contemporary thoughts about ancient instruments both figure in Kodo's performance, which includes ancient and modern compositions. Yet with tense, angular postures, with stylized, frozen gestures and, in one playful piece, with animal-like scampering and slithering, Kodo reminds its audience that, above all, its music is a matter of flesh and blood, wood and stretched skin. Kodo can raise the roof, but the group can also show extraordinary finesse." — *The New York Times (USA)*

"The members of Kodo, who live, train, and work together on as a collective on Japan's Sado Island, have performed and toured in an effort to remind audiences of their membership in that much larger community: the world. That reminder was clear and mesmerizing." — *Los Angeles Times (USA)*

"Superlatives don't really exist to convey the primal power and bravura beauty of Kodo." — *Chicago Tribune (USA)*

"Excitingly varied, marvelously theatrical, fascinating from start to finish, with moments of vivid physical excitement, this programme by a small group of dancers and drummers, remaking performance arts into a modern theatrical experience, was a model of what can be done with folk art." — *The Sunday Telegraph (UK)*

"Balancing a deadly aggression with utter tranquility, their sound stretches from the lightest of rainfall to cataclysmic thunderclaps, from pleasant laughter to discordant fear and from silence to - just once here - a wall of sound, as high, frightening and impregnable as a mountain. Musicians, theatre directors and all interested in the sheer power of sound to feed emotions should take note." — *The Guardian (UK)*

"The drum as a martial art, as a circus act, as an athletic discipline, even as a phallic symbol. These are just some of the impressions offered by the formidable Japanese drumming ensemble Kodo..." — *Il Sole 24 ORE (Italy)*

Kodo Connections

Kodo has had the honor of meeting and working with some of the brightest stars in the world of contemporary music and dance, as well as performing at some of the world's most renowned performing arts venues. We are both humbled by the many amazing artists who have influenced our creative direction and proud to have become a formidable influence in our own right. Below is a short list of some of the important connections we have made in our near three-decade journey.

Work with producers including **Bill Laswell, Mickey Hart, & Tamasaburo Bando**, **DJs** including **DJ Krush & Jazztronik**, and **recordings with musicians** including **Zakir Hussain, Giovanni Hidalgo** and **Airto Moreira**.

Work with composers including **Maki Ishii, Vangelis, Isao Tomita, & Tan Dun**, as well as with **renowned conductors** including **Seiji Ozawa & Tatsuya Shimono**.

Orchestra collaborations with the **Boston Symphony Orchestra (USA)**, **New Japan Philharmonic**, & **Orchestra of the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia (Italy)**.

Work with acclaimed dance companies including **Paris Opera Ballet, Akram Khan Company** and **Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui – Eastman**.

Participation in festivals including **Edinburgh International Festival, Les Nuits de Fourvière, & Athens Festival**.

Performances at world-class halls including **Opéra Bastille (Opéra National de Paris), Carnegie Hall, & Berlin Philharmonie**.

Live collaborations with solo artists including **Max Roach, Elvin Jones, & Evelyn Glennie**.

Credited for inspiring performance groups including **Blue Man Group, Stomp, and Cirque du Soleil**.

Numerous television appearances worldwide including the **David Letterman Show**, the BBC Documentary "Full Circle with **Michael Palin**" and **Beat Takeshi's** "Takeshi no Daredemo Picasso."

Collaborations and Special Performances Broaden Kodo's Expressive Horizons



Amaterasu with Kabuki luminary Tamasaburo Bando. Premiere season in 2006, with encore performances in 2007

In tandem with the *One Earth Tour*, Kodo also works intensively on collaborations with leading artists from a wide range of genres including world music, classical, jazz, rock, and dance. The group is also invited to perform in countless international events, ceremonies and festivals.



Kodo *Ubusuna* (left) and Kodo *Dadan* (right) (2009 -2010)



Monoprism with the New Japan Philharmonic in Tokyo (2008) and with Italy's highly acclaimed Orchestra of the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome (2009). Ballet *Kaguyahime* at Opéra national de Paris Bastille (2010) Photo: Christophe Pelé / Opéra national de Paris



Yoshie Sunahata in Akram Khan's *Gnosis* (2009-2010) Photo: Alain Scherer
Shogho Yoshii in Cherkaoui/Jalet's *Babel* (2010) Photo: Milan Szipura

Special Projects in the New Millennium

2000

First performance in Korea; a collaboration with Taejeon Municipal Dance Troupe.

2001

First Japanese artists invited to perform in Nobel Peace Prize Concert (100th Anniversary Concert), featuring international artists including Paul McCartney, hosted by Liam Neeson and Meryl Streep.

2002

Participation in the Recording of the Official Anthem for the FIFA World Cup™ KOREA/JAPAN and performance at the Official Concerts. Participation in the recording of the soundtrack for the Chinese film "HERO" under the direction of composer and musical director Tan Dun.

2003

25-show run of the Kodo *One Earth Tour Special* concert, directed by Kabuki luminary Tamasaburo Bando and held in Japan.

2006

Amaterasu collaborative performance series with Tamasaburo Bando held in honor of Kodo's 25th Anniversary in Tokyo and Kyoto. Appearance at *Fuji Rock Festival '06*, the largest outdoor music event in Japan. *One Earth Caravan* begins with a visit to Russia.

2007

Amaterasu project with Tamasaburo Bando performed at the historical Kabuki-za theatre in Ginza, Tokyo. *Horaikitan* collaboration with Kyogen performers, directed by Tadashi Ogasawara.

2008

Collaborations with samba-reggae percussion ensemble Olodum in Japan and Brazil. Three sell-out concerts with Dutch super group BLØF at Heineken Music Hall, Amsterdam.

2009

Kodo *Dadan* Performances directed by Tamasaburo Bando. Kodo *Ubusuna* Performances feature the founding members of Kodo.

2010

Performances of *Kaguyahime* in collaboration with the Paris Opera Ballet at Opera Bastille. Yoshie Sunahata performs in *Gnosis* with renowned dancer Akram Khan. Shogho Yoshii performs in Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and Damien Jalet's contemporary dance project *Babel*.

Kodo's Home of Sado Island

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Since 1971 Sado Island has been our home and the platform from which we reach out to the world. With nature's warm embrace evident in each of her four seasons, Sado is an extraordinary place where traditional ways of life and the island's indigenous performing arts still thrive today. This island is the fountain of our inspiration and the guiding force behind our creative lifestyle. Our goal is to find a harmonious balance between people and the natural world. Each time we venture off the island we encounter new people, customs, and traditional performing arts that are ingrained in the lifestyles of each locale. Both similarities and differences prompt us to pause and reflect upon the importance of the varied and rich cultures that color our world. These life lessons permeate our very skin and become an invisible source of our expression. It is through this process of "Living, Learning, and Creating" that we cultivate a unique aesthetic and sensitivity, reaching out toward a new world culture rooted in the rich possibilities of a peaceful coexistence between humanity and nature.



Onidaiko (Demon Drumming)

Sado Performing Arts



Noh Theater



Sado Okesa Folk Song & Dance



Bunya Puppets

Kodo Village



Despite years of international touring and the constant infusion of global influences, Kodo is fiercely dedicated to its home of Sado Island. In 1988, we built our own Village not far from the original schoolhouse by the sea, which over the years has grown to include living, practice, recording and office spaces, farm land, and carefully tended forests. The lives of 50 Kodo members from throughout Japan are centered in this village. The group also maintains two buildings and surrounding grounds in other parts of Sado Island: One houses the Kodo Apprentice Centre, and the other, formerly Kodo's home-base, still serves as an alternate rehearsal venue.



International Music Festival Earth Celebration

<http://www.kodo.or.jp/ec/>

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Shiroyama Concerts are the main event at Earth Celebration, Japan's longest running outdoor festival which keeps the audience coming back year after year.

Every year since 1988, the rich natural splendor of Sado has set the stage for Earth Celebration (EC), Kodo's international arts festival that seeks an alternative global culture through musical and cultural collaborations with artists from around the world. Produced by Kodo in cooperation with the people of Sado Island, EC is the nation's longest running music festival, described by the New York Times as "Japan's leading music event." In 2009, in recognition of the organization's "notable contribution to the promotion of Japanese traditional culture and to the revitalization of the local community," the Earth Celebration Committee was awarded the Tiffany Foundation Award for the Preservation of Japanese Traditional Arts and Culture in Contemporary Society.

Earth Celebration Featured Artists Between the Years of 1988 to 2010 Include the Following:

Elvin Jones (USA), Yosuke Yamashita (Japan), Drummers of Burundi (Burundi), Hamza El'Din (Sudan), Love, Joy & Peace Ensemble (USA), Pung Cholam (India), Suar Agung (Indonesia/Bali), Aja Addy & Adjeley Mensah (Ghana), Milton Cardona & Eya Aranla (USA), Doudou N'Diaye Rose Percussion Orchestra (Senegal), Renegades Steel Drum Orchestra (Trinidad & Tobago), Kangsadan (Thailand), Costa Caribe (Venezuela), Seoul Kamuraku Performing Arts Company (Korea), Bulgarian Voices "Angelite" (Bulgaria), Babatunde Olatunji (Nigeria), Donal Lunny Group (Ireland), Kazumi Watanabe (Japan), Red Willow Dancers (USA), Huun-Huur-Tu (Russia/Tuva), Kim Duk Soo's Samul Nori (Korea), Jacky Micaelli (France/Corsica), Zakir Hussain (India), Giovannii Hidalgo (Puerto Rico), Airtto Moreira & Flora Purim (Brazil), Badenya les Freres Coulibaly (Burkina Faso), Fanfare Ciocarlia (Romania), Carlos Nunez (Spain), Tamango's Urban Tap (USA), Olodum (Brazil), BLØF (Netherlands), A Filetta (France/Corsica)



a

a, c: Shiroyama Concerts, featuring Kodo & international guest artists
b: One of the many EC workshops, taught by Kodo members and guest instructors
d: Sado Performing Arts Special Fringe Event



b



c



d

Education and Community Outreach



Workshops

Kodo workshops are not about teaching new pieces of music or polishing technique. The goal is rather to provide a situation where each participant can experience the joy of expressing their individuality through music. In addition to the multi-day *Kodo Juku* held at the Kodo Apprentice Centre, School Workshop-Performances are given throughout Japan. Recently, with the opening of the Sado Island Taiko Centre, Kodo has been able to take its local community outreach work to the next level, sharing the tradition of taiko through hands-on workshops and various cultural-exchange events.

School Workshop-Performances

Since 1999, in addition to their regular appearances, Kodo has held a number of School Workshop-Performances taking place mainly at junior high schools. Kodo hopes this experience serves to introduce young Japanese people to their own traditional culture and perhaps even contribute in some small way to their own self-discovery.



Kodo Juku

With the backdrop of Sado Island's natural splendor, the Kodo Juku offer participants the rare opportunity

for an intimate multi-day live-in workshop experience with Kodo members. Participants are invited to gather on Sado Island for a short retreat where the goals are simply to live, learn, and create.

KASA/MIX

Organized by Kodo Arts Sphere America (KASA) and held biannually, the KASA/MIX tour brings participants to Sado Island to live at Kodo's Apprentice Centre and study taiko, dance, and song together with Kodo members. Conducted in English mainly for taiko enthusiasts from abroad, the KASA/MIX tour gives participants a taste of Japan and the Kodo way of life.

Lecture/Demonstrations

Kodo offers special educational shows where the music and instruments are explained in between songs. There is even a section where audience members can have a go at playing the drums on stage. Lecture/Demonstrations are offered as options in tandem with One Earth Tour bookings.



Kodo Cultural Foundation

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Thanks to the support of many friends, the Kodo Cultural Foundation was established in 1997 in order to increase Kodo's capacity for outreach projects on our home of Sado Island. Its primary mission is to carry out non-profit activities focused on social education and the notion of giving back to the local community. The Kodo Cultural Foundation is committed to the cultural and environmental preservation of Sado Island and oversees many ambitious projects. From the conservation of local habitats to the revitalization of rare craft traditions and Noh theaters throughout Sado Island, the highly collaborative Kodo Cultural Foundation supports many vital initiatives. If Kodo's performances were likened to a garden, then the foundation would be the roots of the plants growing there. Its activities include holding workshops, planning the annual Earth Celebration, creating a research library, managing the Kodo Apprentice Centre and the Sado Island Taiko Centre, and carrying out research in the performing arts.



"O-daiko" performance at the Kodo Apprentice Centre commemorating the birth of the Kodo Cultural Foundation in 1997



Friends of Kodo

Friends of Kodo is a support group maintained by the Kodo Cultural Foundation established to bring Kodo closer to its audience and fellow taiko enthusiasts. Membership is available to all. As well as receiving the Kodo Beat, our quarterly English newsletter, members also get special advance ticket reservations for selected concerts in Japan, the chance to buy original goods available only to members, and selected discounts on a range of Kodo goodies. They are also given priority placement in certain Kodo workshops. Through this group, we enjoy getting to know the people who support our activities by name.

Earth Furniture

Kodo cares deeply about the natural environment of its home, including Sado's lush forests. To create a model of how a local resource could be sustainably managed, Kodo designs and manufactures interior furnishings from native, renewable timber. Cured by the sea, built by hand, and designed by Kodo Cultural Foundation chairman and renowned designer, Makoto Shimazaki, it is sold under the name Earth Furniture.



Kodo Apprentice Centre



Practicing traditional dance

In a converted schoolhouse in Kakinoura on Sado Island, the young people who will continue and expand on Kodo's traditions are trained, not just in musical technique but also in all matters of body and spirit. Beginning in April, apprentices live communally and train for two years. From this group, probationary members are selected in January of the second year. These chosen few spend one year as junior members, and if they are successful, they then become full Kodo members. Kodo seeks people of all backgrounds who are interested in becoming apprentices, and perhaps the next generation of Kodo players and staff. Apprentices live communally in the Kodo Apprentice Centre as they learn taiko, dance, song, and other traditional arts in the rich natural and cultural surroundings of Sado.

Apprenticeship Details

As well as learning to live communally, apprentices learn about certain basics of traditional Japanese culture and how to develop the body and mind specifically to play taiko and dance.

Curriculum content includes:

Music lessons (drumming, dancing, singing, playing flute, etc.), lectures on Sado's environment, culture, history and traditions, farming (rice culture and vegetable gardening), cooking, tea ceremony, Noh/Kyogen, film appreciation, experiencing Sado's local festivals, physical training, on-site training through assisting taiko workshops, staffing Earth Celebration and Kodo concerts on Sado... and more. Participants are challenged to develop practical skills by participating in Kodo's everyday activities.

Apprenticeship Requirements

- * Any healthy person over 18 years of age may apply.
- * Advanced Japanese required. (All instruction is given in Japanese.)
- * Men and women of all backgrounds, experiences and nationalities are welcome.



Rice planting



Daily physical training



Taiko practice

Sado Island Taiko Centre



In 2007, the Sado Island Taiko Centre, located right next to the Kodo Village, was completed. Designed to provide learning materials and hands-on experience in the ancient art of taiko, this facility was made possible by the Sado municipal government working in cooperation with the Japanese Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism. It is operated by the Kodo Cultural Foundation.



In addition to providing a venue for practicing taiko and other traditional performing arts, the facility also includes classrooms for cooking classes, an exhibition space, and meeting rooms. The two-story wooden building was made from all local materials from Sado Island, and uses "Earth Furniture" made from Sado timber.

Elementary and junior high school student groups from both on and off the island, as well as the general public, are invited for workshops and gatherings at the centre. It is hoped that this facility will grow to be a place to experience the rich performing arts culture of Sado Island, as well as a place to pass on a "culture of creation" to future generations. Kodo also uses this facility as a venue for exchange with people from Sado and all over the world. We hope that we can share some of the knowledge and experience we have gained through our activities on the island and through our travels over the past three decades.

URL: <http://www.sadotaiken.jp/>
For inquiries and bookings, email info@sadotaiken.jp

Kodo Arts Sphere America (KASA)



Established in 2002, KASA is a United States nonprofit corporation designed to encourage, enable and support programs and opportunities for North Americans to study and understand the traditional and contemporary Japanese music of the taiko and its related performing arts. Its primary goals are to facilitate communication among community taiko groups both in Japan and North America, to perpetuate the taiko tradition and all of its related art forms, and to shed light on the inherent power of this ancient instrument to positively shape the world in which we live.



For information, visit <http://www.kodo.or.jp/kasa/>

Yoshikazu Fujimoto and Yoko Fujimoto teaching taiko and song on the 2009 Kasa Workshop Tour in the USA & Canada.

Kodo eNews

The Monthly Journal of Kodo Culture



Keeping you connected to Kodo all year round, our full color, interactive PDF journal is sent to friends, fans and supporters throughout the world every month.

Kodo eNews features profiles, photo essays, travel logs, special events, performance schedules, merchandise, Kodo Village, Earth Celebration, the Kodo Cultural Foundation, Sado Island, the Kodo Apprentice Centre, new releases, and creative collaborations, and much more. eNews gives you insight into all things Kodo as never before.

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