

TAIKOz

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TAKANO-SAN, ARIGATŌ GOZAIMASHITA!

First of all, I would like to send a big “Thankyou” to our recent guest, Takumi Takano. I’m sure that those of you who saw and heard Takano-san would agree that he made a fantastic contribution to TaikOz performances in Adelaide and Sydney. Takano-san is a man of great humour, wonderful musicianship and deep knowledge and it was a privilege for the members of TaikOz to have the opportunity to work with him. I’m pleased to say that Takano-san likewise had a ball playing for everyone and will be back! We’ll keep you posted.

ONDEKOZA REUNION

It was certainly a special bonus for Sydney audiences to hear Takano-san and Riley Lee playing together at The Studio. These guys were both original members of the legendary Ondekoza of the 1970s and therefore played an important part in the internationalization and modernization of taiko practice. Ondekoza was largely responsible for the recent worldwide expansion of taiko. Taiko players everywhere owe a lot to this incredible ensemble.

Formed in the late sixties, Ondekoza was led by Den Tegayasu and lived communally on the island of Sado. Although he did not play the taiko himself, Den-san was a formidable leader and true visionary. He insisted on the highest standards from his young, idealistic recruits and worked them rigorously and without remorse.

Up at 4am, players began the day with a 10km run and, on occasions, full marathons. Music rehearsals and more cross-country running followed warm-ups and study of technique. This regime continued day in day out, six days a week.

Although taiko became the most popular aspect of Ondekoza’s performance, all members studied other instruments and artistic forms – even Western-style ballet! Riley of course concentrated on the shakuhachi and became the first non-Japanese to attain dai-shihan (Grand Master) status; Eitetsu Hayashi was a top-notch dancer and shamisen player; Takano-san was selected as the lead yokobue player.

The group came to international attention when all the members ran the Boston Marathon, only to play a concert at the finish line! (Mr. Den was also a great entrepreneur, I think!) They went on to perform throughout the United States, Canada, Europe and, of course, Japan to great acclaim.

Riley, Takano-san and Eitetsu Hayashi have all gone on to establish themselves as great artists in their own right. As for TaikOz – we see ourselves existing in the musical line established by Den-san and Ondekoza, and wish to carry on the work of establishing Wadaiko as a true art form that can speak to people of all ages and nationalities.

TAKUMI TAKANO – A REMINISCENCE BY RILEY LEE

“I have many fond memories of living with Takumi Takano in the 1970s on Sado Island. We were both members of the group now called Kodo. Takumi was the troupe’s main yokobue - horizontal flute – player, and one of its main drummers. He was special, not just in terms of my friendship with him. Takumi is special by anyone’s definition.

For example, one very hot and very humid summer’s day, we ran a 53km race around Sado. The leader of our troupe, Den-san, had decided that having us run 53kms, and running it without drinking any water along the way, would be good training. The theory was that this would help us run our next marathon, a mere 42kms, faster and with less effort.

Takumi was the first in the group to finish that day. But what I most remembered about that race was that Takumi ran it barefoot. No blisters. And his feet weren’t callused to begin with. Years later I asked him how he did it. He replied all he knew was that he couldn’t do such a thing now, as he had come to think that such things are supposed to be impossible.

In the winter, Takumi slept with only one sheet. This was exceptional because the old abandoned school building, which served as our home and headquarters, was unheated, with temperatures inside usually hovering around five to zero degrees during the day and minus five or less at night. I asked Takumi why he slept with only one thin sheet. He just laughed his unforgettably infectious laugh and said something like ‘just to tease everyone’. I asked Takumi HOW he did it. He laughed again and said, ‘I sleep very lightly!’

There are many more “Takumi Stories”, such as the time he left the group in Paris for 3 days - no passport, no money, no knowledge of French and only a little English. He left to voice his philosophical differences with the way the group was being run. He returned in good health, and somewhat subdued. At least temporarily.

Takumi has strong ideas about his art, his teaching and about life. The three, for him, are all the same. The strength of his convictions is easily seen in his taiko playing and his flute playing.”

GREETINGS TO ADELAIDE & BATHURST TAIKO ENTHUSIASTS

I would like to extend my greetings and thanks to all of the people who attended our Adelaide Fringe concerts and Bathurst Memorial Hall concert. We had a great time in both places and particularly enjoyed playing in the beautiful Elder Hall. While we cannot offer Wadaiko workshops or classes at the moment, we do like to gauge the level of interest to see if we can set something up in the future (as we have in Brisbane for 2003). In the meantime we will keep you posted about upcoming events and things of interest.

Q & A

I seems that people have many questions about Wadaiko – the music, the styles the instruments, the training and the history. In future editions of the Newsletter we will talk about some of the many fascinating aspects of Wadaiko performance.

You may also be interested to check out some terrific web sites, too. Try the official Kodo site www.kodo.or.jp for background information on this great ensemble. The American “Rolling Thunder” site has many interesting sections about taiko playing and instruments. Their address is www.taiko.com