

TAIKOz

Vol.2 No.4 December 2002

TAIKOZ ANNOUNCES ARRIVAL OF NEW ASANO TAIKO

November 6 was a momentous occasion for Wadaiko in Australia, for this was the day that the first complete set of Asano Taiko arrived on Australian soil. TaikOz is incredibly honoured to have the opportunity to acquire such wonderful instruments as these, and we wish to thank Mr. Asano for his great encouragement of our group through his extremely generous assistance.

The tone of Asano Taiko is very distinctive and audiences will undoubtedly notice a radically new sound made by TaikOz. Asano drums possess a depth of sound unequalled by other taiko - the coloration is varied and the volume is immense. They are also totally homogenous, so we are looking forward to further refining, blending and balancing the sound of TaikOz. Made as a "family" of instruments, the different taiko include numerous sizes and types including shimedaiko, okedodaiko, nagadoudaiko and Odaiko; their wood finishes are identical.

Asano Taiko are made from the wood of the keyaki tree and meari (a mix of woods) and are absolutely superb in construction and sound production. The finishes are lustrous in the extreme, deep and rich in colour. They are objects of beauty and I must admit that we spent the first day only looking at them! Riley said it's a bit like owning your first new car - you just don't want to get that first mark on it!

The Asano Taiko Company is based in Ishikawa Prefecture and is the largest taiko manufacturer in the world. They have a huge factory workshop and a number of warehouses used for drying the wooden shells in various parts of Matto Town. Their instruments are like the "Steinway" of taiko; they are made using only the finest handpicked materials by the most superb craftsmen. The company is also the oldest - the first Asano-san made taiko for the head of the Kaga clan, Toshiie Maeda, in 1609!!

Most taiko are made from keyaki, hinoki or meari. However, keyaki has become too scarce (and expensive) for the largest drums. Karaki wood is mostly used for O-daiko.

While most Big Drums measure around 110-130cms in diameter, bigger taiko do exist. In Ota-cho - the village where TaikOz trained in 2001 - the local group, Otaikoza-Myojin, possesses a beautiful instrument of over 2 meters at the girth!

Asano-san says about making the biggest taiko, "Making the body of the taiko begins with drying the wood for 1 year. Then a chain saw is used to cut and hollow it out, and it is once again let to sit for another 3 to 5 years. Since the depth of the body is longer than the chain blade, the body has to be hollowed from both the top and bottom, and so a craftsman must be able to draw a perfect circle and the slits from both sides must meet, otherwise it cannot be hollowed. Yoshiyuki Asano is the only person who can do this.

"You must concentrate your senses on the tip of the blade," he says reassuringly. "The slits would never meet if you wonder if they are going to or not. You must tell yourself that you will make them meet!"

Asano-san goes on to say, "The sound of the taiko calls up a certain nostalgic feeling in the minds of the Japanese. We not only hear it, we can feel the vibrations that travel through the air with our skin. The sound of the taiko is greatly affected by the moisture content in the wood and skin. New taiko sometimes crack due to dryness or the skin might contract too much, resulting in a high unsettling sound." Eitetsu Hayashi says, "Taiko used for years, like an elderly person, is emotionally steady and produces a good sound!"

PLAYING THE O-DAIKO

Eitetsu Hayashi is one of the greatest O-Daiko players and many of you heard him playing upon a superb Asano instrument at our Enmore Theatre concerts in August. You might've observed that he took some time before making the first stroke. This is because both mind and body must be correctly prepared in order to make that initial sound.

The rhythm began at a slow tempo and moved ahead only very gradually - like a large waking animal. The purpose of this rhythm is to "warm up" both the player and the taiko - remember that within the body of the O-Daiko there is a lot of air to move! This rhythmic figure is called oroshi and takes great practice and skill to perform correctly.

Eitetsu went on to perform an amazing solo of twenty minutes, demonstrating the full musical capabilities of this fascinating instrument. Eitetsu coaxes many colours from his O-Daiko. Like all great percussionists he makes the drum speak as melody - never rhythm alone. Through phrasing and nuance, the O-Daiko takes on soft, feminine qualities while remaining strong and positive in tone. In Japan it is said that the sound of the O-Daiko may lull a baby to sleep, for the mesmerising rhythms recall the sound of the heartbeat in the womb.

SYDNEY CLASS WRAP

Graham, Masae, Kelly and I would like to thank all of the regular TaikOz Wadaiko class members for their hard work and dedication during the year. We've enjoyed teaching you all, sharing our love and knowledge of Wadaiko. It was particularly gratifying to see everyone playing from their hearts at our mid-year concert and we look forward to presenting another one next year.

TaikOz will be taking a break over the New Year, but will be back, fresh and eager for more in 2003.

NEW SYDNEY CLASSES IN 2003

TaikOz is looking to establishing two new regular classes next year. These will be specifically for **YOUNG ADULTS** aged between **16 and 20 years**, and **CHILDREN** aged between **7 and 12 years**. TaikOz will send out information early in the New Year with details of time and cost. If you are interested in either of these groups, please give Graham or Ian a ring (see details above) for further information - it'd be nice to know what level of interest there is out there!

OFF TO JAPAN

Graham, Masae and I will be heading off to Japan at the end of the year. Graham and Masae will going specifically to see her family and old taiko group, Manno-Daiko, in Shikoku and I will be attending master classes with Eitetsu at Mie University in early December, visiting Chichibu for the annual Matsuri, seeing friends and colleagues and meeting with Asano-san. We will all end up in Ota-cho to attend a workshop with Eitetsu and see old friends at Otaikoza Myojin group.

Naturally I'm very excited by this, as it'll be great chance to catch up with Eitetsu again and learn more of his wonderful artistry. Eitetsu has also graciously given me an invitation to meet the teacher of the famed Chichibu Yataibayashi group in Saitama-ken. I will be attending practice of the group, culminating in the exciting Matsuri on December 3. I will also be catching up with our great friend Takumi Takano, as well as the wonderful members of Kobe's Matsumura-Gumi group.

Last, but certainly not least, I will be meeting with Asano-san in Ishikawa to talk about our beautiful new taiko. He is very interested to know about the development of Wadaiko in Australia and by supporting TaikOz, he is keen to see the Art of Wadaiko further established here.

SEE YOU IN THE NEW YEAR!