



# TAIKO TAIKO



The definitive source of information on Taiko events in the UK from Britain's foremost Taiko drum group.

Spring 1998

issue 6

Mugenkyo would like to extend a very special welcome to their teacher and inspiration,  
*Kurumaya-sensei* of the legendary "Hibiki Taiko Drummers",  
who has just arrived for an extended stay in the UK.

His performing career spans the last 30 years, and he has played a major part in reinvigorating Taiko in Japan and turning a traditional festival music into a highly polished art form. In Japan he is one of the top Taiko masters, reknown for his originality and vision, and he has pioneered new and exciting combinations of Taiko with other instruments and forms of music. Kurumaya-sensei has put all of his activities in Japan on hold - performances with Hibiki Taiko, teaching six different Taiko drum groups, solo performances with other musicians, in order to come to Britain to spread Taiko with Mugenkyo through workshops, classes and performances. We are extremely fortunate to have him here in the UK. He believes that Europe is the next frontier for Taiko drumming, and will be playing a major part in spreading Taiko in Europe.



Kurumaya-sensei

## MUGENKYO'S ACTION PACKED SUMMER DATES:

### APRIL

24 Hemel Hempstead, Old Town Hall, 7:30 **SOLD OUT!**

### MAY

1 Shropshire, Bridgnorth Leisure Centre, 7:30 01743 244 255

### IRELAND DATES

7 Listowel, St. John's Arts Centre, 7:30 pm 068 22566  
10 Sligo, Hawksell Theatre, 8:00 pm 071 61526/62167-  
12 Letterkenny, Letterkenny Arts Centre, 8:30 pm 074 29186  
15 Belfast, Newtonabbey, Courtyard Theatre, 8pm 01232 848287  
16 Dublin, St. Steven's Green, Grafton St., 3 pm (free)  
17 Dublin, Tallaght Community Centre, 2 pm (free) 01 4621501

21 Goring by Sea, Northbrook Theatre, 7:30 pm 01903 606230

23 Inverclyde, Megawatt Festival (free)  
at Battery Park, Greenock, 1 pm and 3:30 pm

25 Middlesbrough, Fishquay Festival 0191 2005157  
World Music Stage, 1:30 pm, (free)

30 Aberdeen, Aberdeen Arts Centre, 8:00 pm 01224 641122

### JUNE

11 Norfolk, King's Lynn Arts Centre, 7:30 pm 01553 773578

12 Bromyard, Conquest Theatre, 8:00 pm 01885 488575

13 Devizes, Devizes Festival, 7:00 pm (free)

17 Rotherham, Rotherham Arts Centre, 7:30 pm 01709 823621

18 Burnley, The Mechanics Arts Centre, 7:30 pm 01282 30055

19 Halifax, Square Chapel, 7:30 pm 01422 349422

21 Portsmouth, New Theatre Royal, 7:45 pm 01705 649000

### JULY

3-4 Norwich, Drum Camp 01603 872 402

11 Swansea, Castle Square, 2:30 and 3:30 pm (free) 01792 635455

18 Dundee, Summer in the City 01382 434 067  
Festival City Square, 2:00 pm

19 Milton Keynes Festival, 3:00 pm (free)

23 Huntley, Aberdeenshire, Stewartshall, 7:30 pm 01466 792780

24 Fraserburgh, Aberdeenshire, Dalruple Hall, 7:30 pm  
01261 833819 or 01346 515145

### AUGUST

1 East Grinstead, Chequer Mead Arts Centre, 7:30 01342 30 2000

6 Peterborough, National Play Day  
Embankment, 1:00 pm and 3:00 pm (free)

## MUGENKYO: The Story So Far...

It all began when Neil and Miyuki went to Japan in the summer of 1992, Miyuki to take up a teaching post in her mother's native country, and Neil to travel and see the country. Little did they know how this seemingly small step would change their lives. When in Fukui, on the underdeveloped west coast of Japan, Neil, an ex-rock drummer happened to chance upon a concert by the magnificent Hibiki Taiko Drummers, a local legend. The power of the drumming left Neil spellbound. "It was as if a lightning bolt had struck me". On meeting Kurumaya-sensei, the leader of the group, the master drummer shook Neil's hand and said, "You will be a Taiko player... in Britain." Neil was unconvinced, but nevertheless felt very grateful when Kurumaya-sensei offered to teach him this ancient art. Hibiki Daiko are based at the Daienzenji Zen Buddhist temple on the outskirts of Fukui, and it was here that Neil was made to practice on a cardboard drum in the early days, for hours on end, to learn the form. Running and weight training was also part of the discipline. The more Neil learned, the more he was drawn into the world of Taiko, and when his tourist visa ran out, he applied successfully for a cultural visa, which enabled him to stay for two years to study Taiko drumming. To start with, the language barrier was not a problem, but as Neil progressed, it became more difficult for Kurumaya-sensei to communicate the subtler points of the lesson. So, Miyuki began going along to the lessons to translate. Gradually she too became more and more interested in Taiko, and eventually asked Kurumaya-sensei to teach her too, a big decision, as nothing less than 100% commitment would be accepted by the sensei (teacher). Their lessons continued, but never for a moment did they think that it would be possible to continue playing Taiko in Britain. At the end of their stay, they managed to buy a set of drums (thanks to a lot of hard work, help from their friends and supporters in Fukui, and a big discount at the Taiko factory) which they brought back to London on their return in autumn 1994. And so, Mugenkyo was born.

### HIGHLIGHTS

1995

**MAY Brighton Festival**

Our first UK performance and the scene of those immortal words uttered by an elderly man, "I can't stand this bloody noise, either you go or I go!" Luckily, we decided to carry on and not give it all up there and then.

**JULY James Whale Show, ITV**

Our first TV appearance.. it's amazing how many people watched that programme.. haven't they got better things to do on a Friday night?! - we were invited back in November due to popular demand.

**SEPT Taiko Classes**

Neil begins several Taiko courses, discontinued due to noise complaints!

**SEPT Mugenkyo School Show**

Neil and Miyuki begin touring a show for children, introducing Taiko drumming in a cultural context. Since their first year they have performed the show to over 20,000 children throughout Britain.

**NOV Paul Robeson Theatre, London**

Our first full length concert - one and a half hours and only three drummers. Eat your hearts out Kodo!

1996

**MAR Bridge Lane Theatre, London**

A joint concert with Hibiki Daiko from Japan - a historic event: the first time a Japanese and British group have performed together. It was an amazing experience, the air was alive with electricity!

**APRIL Union Chapel, London**

We were shocked to discover that part of the ceiling had fallen down during the show. This has happened quite often since then! Mugenkyo bring the roof down!

**APRIL "The Radiant Life", London**

A collaboration between Japanese composer Katsuhiko Uemura, Mugenkyo and a contemporary dance troupe at the Turtle Key Theatre, repeated again the following year.

**MAY "Sargeant Kabuki Man NYPD"**

We performed in Leicester Square at the film premier of this tacky B-movie, with actors dressed up as the "Kabuki-man", monsters and a page 3 girl!

**JUNE Taiko Festival, Dusseldorf, Germany**

The first Taiko festival in Europe took place over two days, in which four groups took part: *Mugenkyo* from the UK, *Tentekko* from Germany, *Hanadon* from Holland, and *Sacramento Taiko Dan* from USA.



MU = NO

GEN = LIMIT

KYO = REVERBERATION

**JUNE "Japan Festival Award"**

Mugenkyo were presented with an award for "outstanding achievements in furthering the understanding of Japanese culture in the United Kingdom.

**JUNE "Taiko Transformed", London**

A project involving four schools where students were taught a Taiko piece, culminating in a performance at the Lillian Baylis Theatre using Taiko drums they had made themselves.

**JULY Rhythm Sticks Festival, London**

A festival held outside the Royal Festival Hall - the thunderous sound of the Taiko could be heard right up and down the Thames!

**OCT Mugenkyo return to Japan**

A five week stay for study and performances, including a guest spot at Hibiki Taiko's 15th anniversary concert.

1997

**FEB Belfast Waterfront Hall**

The first show of the year and also the first in a series of sell-out theatre concerts.

**APRIL Scottish Schools Tour**

Neil and Miyuki tour the school show around schools in the Glasgow area, thanks to a grant from the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation.

**JUNE Glastonbury Festival**

... a mudbath! We performed to a packed audience of eager festival people, determined not to let the mud dampen their enthusiasm. Afterwards the van had to be pushed out of the mud by eight people!

**JULY Scotland Tour**

A two week tour of Scotland kicked off with a sold out show at the Paisley Arts Centre, a magical evening where we were joined by a piper for the encore. Glenuig Hall was undoubtedly the highlight of the tour - the crowd was three times the population of the village! The temperature was hot and the reception quite overwhelming. Even the midges dance in Glenuig!

**JULY Henley Festival**

From mudbath to evening dress and champers - Mugenkyo do it all!

**JULY Norwich City Festival**

We performed to a heaving crowd of 4,000 - Norwich Rocks!

**JULY Phoenix Festival**

Scorching sun... Mugenkyo and David Bowie (but not on the same stage!)... and the RAC to fix our broken van.

**AUG Recording our First Album**

Four days sweating it out in the studio: an old converted church in south London - a perfect setting to record Taiko drums. CD and cassette available now!

**AUG New Buckenham Castle, Norfolk**

A two hour show under what felt like the hottest sun this century, after having had to transport all the drums one by one to the stage by tractor. It's the first time we ever had the pleasure of a castle for a changing room!

**NOV British Embassy, Tokyo**

Mugenkyo return to Japan for a prestigious concert at the British Embassy in Tokyo.

**1998**

**APRIL Kurumaya-sensei Arrives**

**APRIL Mugenkyo Relocate to Glasgow**

After three years of being based out of London, the Mugenkyo base has moved to Glasgow. We aim to make Scotland the centre of Taiko in Europe! But of course we'll still continue to tour every corner of the country with our performances & workshops. Here's to the future!

**NEW ADDRESS:** MUGENKYO  
P.O. Box 5124  
Clarkston  
GLASGOW  
G76 9YA

**A SUMMER OF TAIKO...**

*(See over for Mugenkyo Dates)*

**OTHER TAIKO EVENTS:**

**KODO**, a group who need no introduction, the hugely popular Kodo Drummers will be performing in London this summer at the Royal Festival Hall Book early, as it's likely to sell out!  
August 12, 13, 14, 15 Royal Festival Hall, 7:30 pm  
ETBA box: 0171 960 4242

**TENNON DAIKO** We'd like to welcome Tennon Daiko from Wakayama, in the south of Japan, who are visiting Britain for a few days this summer. Catch them at the Broadstairs Folk Festival on Friday, 14th August. For details call Mark Alcock on 0181 747 9145

**AKATSUKI DAIKO**, the group of Japanese students from Reading will be performing a few dates this summer:  
Sun, 3rd May Wycombe Carnival, Bucks  
Sat, 13th June Donnington Grove Society Festival, Newbury  
For details, call James Barrow on 0118 946 3317

**TAIKO DRUM CLASSES IN THE SOUTH OF ENGLAND**

James Barrow is now teaching Taiko classes full-time from his base in Reading, Berks. He specialises in the Hiroshima style of Taiko. For details, call James Barrow on 0118 946 3317



**BRITISH Ambassador David Wright (center) introduces Neil Mackie, leader of Mugenkyo, a U.K. taiko group, to Prince and Princess Takamado during a taiko performance and reception hosted by the ambassador Tuesday at his residence. Bancho Matsuri Daiko, the embassy's team, and a Japanese team, Hibiki Taiko, also joined the performance.**

A huge thank you to all of you who sent in donations towards the cost of this newsletter (full list of names in next issue). It costs us £400 to put out each issue of TAIKOTAIKO. Please help us to continue by sending donations - any amount however large or small is appreciated (stamps or cheques made payable to: Mugenkyo) Or alternatively, buy our merchandise!

Thanks also to all of you who sent in comments & suggestions for future issues. We'll do our best! If you have any suggestions at all, please to write to us. We'd love to hear from you!

Earlier in the year, Mugenkyo advertised for apprentice Taiko drummers in the Glasgow area. We had an overwhelming response: 400 people applied for two places, and we could hardly keep up with the phone calls!. We're sorry that we weren't able to offer everyone interviews or auditions. We'd like to thank everyone who did apply, and hope that we can see you at the Mugenkyo Taiko classes, which will be starting in the autumn (details in future issues of TAIKOTAIKO) We will be recruiting again in the future - mainly through the newsletter and classes, so if you're keen, please do apply again.  
**WATCH THIS SPACE!**



**THE KODO DRUMMERS** (Photo courtesy of Mark Coutts-Smith, from his book Children of the Drum, available through Mugenkyo soon.)

# Dazzling display of art from the heart

UNLIKE South American, African and Asian societies, drum culture has no importance in modern-day Europe, but Neil Mackie and his group Mugenkyo are determined to change that.

Mugenkyo is Britain's only Taiko drumming group and will perform its dazzling show at the Old Town Hall, Hemel Hempstead, on Friday.

Neil explains to PAUL CHRONNELL the philosophy behind Taiko drumming and why he believes it has a universal appeal

Mugenkyo, Britain's only Taiko drumming group, brings this dynamic and captivating artform to Hemel Hempstead on Friday

"It was the most amazing thing I'd ever seen," said Neil. "It just blew me away and I decided I had to learn it. I didn't expect to stay for two years but that was just the way it worked out."

A big bonus for Friday night's Hemel Hempstead audience will be the presence within the group of legendary Taiko performer Masaaki Kurumaya.

The group's teacher since it was formed in 1994, Kurumaya is the leader of one of Japan's most famous Taiko groups, Hibiki

Daiko, and is one of the most respected Taiko performers in the world.

Neil is thrilled by his arrival. "Everything I learnt, I learnt from him. It is an unbelievable privilege to have him join Mugenkyo," he said.

The group goes back to Japan to tour and learn every year and last year had the honour of performing in front of members of the Japanese Royal Family, an occasion which was broadcast on national TV.

Taiko, which means drum, was first played at village festivals, temples and shrines and was used as part of ritualistic rice planting ceremonies in which villagers prayed for rain and protection from plagues, famines and other natural disasters.

It has only become a performing art during the past 30 to 40 years. Concentrating on movement and rhythm, the large drums nevertheless dominate the proceedings.

"The drumming is very

powerful and your whole body is taken over by their sound when you are playing," said Neil.

The performance on Friday, April 24, starts at 7.30pm and tickets, priced at £7, are available from the Old Town Hall box office on 01442 228091.

Mugenkyo is putting on a matinee performance and teaching session for primary schools on Friday at 2pm. Interested parties should contact the Old Town Hall education office on 01442 228098.

TAIKO symbolises the heartbeat, which Neil Mackie calls "the natural rhythm of life".

"When we are in the womb, we grow with the constant beating of our mother's heart. We are born with a natural rhythm but as we grow our primal senses withdraw," believes Neil.

"Taiko drumming has its own life force and when this life force and the true spirit within us meet, the basic natural rhythm within us all is awakened."

Britain's first professional Taiko drum group, Mugenkyo has been collecting rave reviews as it drums its way around the country purveying its intriguing mix of dynamic rhythms and visual art.

Having performed at venues such as The Crucible in Sheffield, The Bristol Old Vic and at the Glastonbury and Phoenix summer festivals, Mugenkyo brings the ancient traditional folk art of Taiko drumming to a new audience.

After witnessing his first performance in the Japanese city of Fukui, founder member Neil Mackie spent two years learning Taiko before heading back to these shores to form Mugenkyo in 1994.

## NEW ADDRESS:

MUGENKYO  
P.O. Box 5124  
Clarkston  
GLASGOW  
G76 9YA

back



## MUGENKYO MERCHANDISE

MUGENKYO CD £12 (includes postage & packaging)

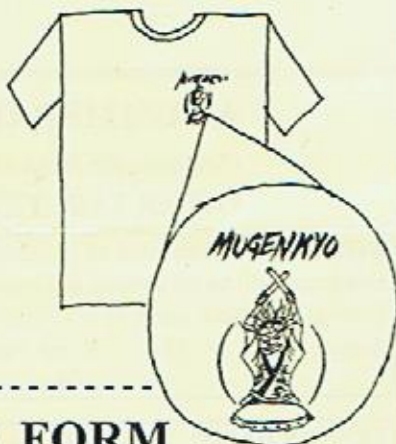
also available on cassette £8

running time: 48 min

"... brilliant rhythmic precision..."

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

front



T-SHIRT £10 (includes postage & packaging)

high quality black cotton T-shirt with yellow writing

sizes: S, M, L, XL (sorry no children's sizes)

The symbol on the back is a stylized Japanese character "kyo" (as in Mugen-KYO), meaning REVERBERATION, incorporating the Taiko symbol.

## MUGENKYO MERCHANDISE ORDER FORM

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

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

Post Code: \_\_\_\_\_

ITEMS ORDERED:

Mugenkyo CD (£12) \_\_\_\_\_

Mugenkyo cassette (£8) \_\_\_\_\_

T-shirt (£10) \_\_\_\_\_

- please specify size (S, M, L, XL)

TOTAL ENCLOSED: \_\_\_\_\_

All prices include VAT, packaging and postage within the UK (please allow 21 days for delivery)

Please send cheque or postal order payable to: MUGENKYO, P.O. Box 5124, Clarkston, Glasgow G76 9YA