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YAMATO

The drummers of Japan

Sunday, October 25, 2009 • 3 pm

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Arts Management Group, Inc.

Matsuri – Fiesta!

The Drum at the Centre of the Gathering

World Tour 2009 – 2010

PERFORMANCE NOTES

Ucho-ten

These three kanji characters ,and , literally mean ‘being,’ ‘top’ and ‘sky’ respectively. Together they form an expression that describes someone who is so happy he’s slightly out of his mind (or ‘high in the sky’). Let’s aim to get up there together, shall we? Forget about the world for a while and let your body go with the rhythm. Release your everyday tensions and we’ll scale the heights together.

Tone

These two kanji characters mean ‘distant’ and ‘sound’. This combination can be read as ‘to-ne’, which of course looks like an English word ‘tone’ (a coincidence we like). It is a distant sound from the past that lives quietly on in your memory. It could be a tune you hummed while walking alongside a riverbank one evening, or a familiar melody floating in from a distant hill...

Rekka

‘Fierce Fire’ It is two male versus two female drumming session, almost like a competition, by four highly trained drummers. Enjoy the sparkling tension and speed of lightning.

Garakuta

This song is performed not using drums but using small cymbal-like instrument called ‘Chappa.’ The highlight is the comical interaction of well muscled men with tiny musical instruments. Ancient Japanese thought that sound has a soul and call it ‘Oto-dama.’ ‘Dama’ also means ball and ‘Oto-dama’ can mean ‘Balls of sounds.’ We wanted to create a performance where balls of sounds bounce around. Catch our ball and soul of sound.

Yakara

Nara prefecture where we live is situated in Western Japan, called ‘Kansai’, and in Kansai, a certain kind of rowdy youths, in the full bloom of youthful arrogance, are called ‘Yakara.’ They may look insolent but we want to express their exuberance and their naivety

– **INTERMISSION** –

Rakuda

The first kanji character means ‘happy’ and the second means ‘strike,’ but when read together as ‘rakuda,’ it also can mean ‘camel,’ which is appropriate for us because we want to evoke the somewhat comical way that camels move. This is our trademark piece, which starts with the powerful yell: “Ikimasse!” (“Let’s go!”).

Otodama

Oto means sound and dama means soul. The ancient Japanese thought that when properly nurtured, a soul would develop a voice or word called ‘Koto-dama’. We want to create a new soul, and so coined the word ‘Oto-dama’. Interestingly, the word ‘dama’ can also mean ‘ball’. We like this coincidence because it can be used to explain Wadaiko music as a series of balls. How many balls can we keep in the air during a performance? Numerous, and all of them have souls.

Hanabi

Hanabi means ‘fireworks.’ Fireworks spread across the night sky at the end of a festival – so breathtakingly beautiful and colorful, but lasting only a few minutes. What do people see in them – past memory or future hope? Hanabi is usually written with (‘flower’) and (‘fire’) but we chose to spell it with , meaning gorgeous and glittering – a way of celebrating the beauty found in everyone.

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ARTISTIC NOTES

Festivals and Drums

The word Matsuri (“traditional Japanese festival”) comes from Maturu, which means “praying to the higher spirits”. The rituals of the festival – from giving thanks for a bountiful harvest to personal prayers for good health and peace – were called Matsuri. And at the heart of every Matsuri gathering, you would always find the traditional Japanese drum, the Wadaiko.

The Wadaiko is a primitive instrument made of animal skin and ancient trees (some of which are several hundred years old). It is an instrument created entirely from once-living creatures. Which is why its presence is more commanding than other instruments. Above all, its sound—how loud and deep a sound this simple hollow tree and cattle skin drum can make! Imagine; at the hands of a skilled craftsman, an ancient tree deep in the forest is reborn as a Wadaiko, several hundred years after its birth. A drummer arrives and strikes the hide surface with a long, heavy stick called a Bachi. The drum thunders. The tree and hide vibrate together. Immense sounds resonate throughout the space. The sound of Wadaiko enters your body – through your skin, not your ears.

When the drum and drummer become one, the sound becomes Oto-dama, “the soul of sound.” Oto-dama – a sound made up of souls and their aspirations – defies language and roars up to the sky. As it descends, it envelops all people on the Earth. The world starts to vibrate gently, and everyone along with it. The sound of the drum unifies the people with the Universe – the place where sky and earth, spirit and human, everything and every creature exist. This is the image of Matsuri we wish to evoke with our drumming.

The Drum at the Centre of the Gathering

Long has the drum has beat in the heart of the Matsuri, and long have people flowed round to hear. Since time unknown drummers have played To the high spirits, to their

listeners, and deep within themselves; They drummed till their hearts almost fell silent. Ever since then, people have cherished that sound, And joined in the celebration that shakes their hearts and souls. And long have the people gathered to hear it: The drum at the centre of the gathering.

Why Matsuri?

I thought the quickest route to the true spirit of Wadaiko would be to choose the word Matsuri as the central theme, even though the word may seem too obvious and corny to some.

Discover Wadaiko through Matsuri

In Japan, people think of Taiko, drum or drumming when they hear the word Matsuri, and vice versa. These two words, Taiko and Matsuri, are inseparable. Why has the drum always been at the centre of Matsuri? I thought long and hard about this. What makes people so inspired when they hear the sound of drumming? Does the sound make their hearts pound and resonate?

Then I thought that ‘resonate’ could also be an important word. ‘Resonate.’ Drums resonate: our hearts resonate. ‘Inter-resonance.’ Resonance is born, it multiplies and interacts, and the energy between them is the Oto-dama. People surely want to ‘inter-resonate’, don’t they? When I strike every beat, I will pray for my sound to resonate. Let the sky resonate with the Oto-dama, the soul of sound. That is my wish. That is our wish. That is the wish of all the people gathered here.

I will put my soul into drumming. I will put every ounce of my being into drumming, so our Oto-dama can rise and the Universe can resonate.

Let our Matsuri begin!

ABOUT YAMATO

YAMATO was founded by Masa Ogawa in 1993 in Nara, ‘the land of Yamato’, which is said to be the birthplace of Japanese culture. Based in Asuka Village, Nara Prefecture, the performers travel all over the world with Japan’s traditional taiko drums. They put their very souls into these unusual instruments whose sound stirs the hearts of people everywhere. Their performances are infused with the idea that the drum-beat, like the heartbeat, is the very pulse of life.

Taiko is a drum believed to have existed in many parts of the world.

Yamato is both the former name for Nara, the city where the group is based and for Japan itself. It is also a special word for the Japanese, evoking a peaceful and artistically important period of Japan’s history.

YAMATO brings a new and youthful vigor to taiko drumming. It is a never-to-be-forgotten experience, inspiring and intensely physical, with a beat resonating from the delicate tapping of falling rain to explosions of rhythmic exhilaration.

The World Tours

Since its formation 16 years ago, Yamato has played to more than a million people, giving over 2,000 performances in about a dozen different countries, and yet the performers’ enthusiasm remains undiminished. They continue to travel with several dozen large and small drums (including an Odaiko made from a huge tree over 400 years old), displaying the instruments’ versatility and instinctive appeal, both in extemporized street performances and in concert halls holding several thousand people. Besides their travels throughout Japan, they have been on numerous overseas tours to China, South Korea, Indonesia and Singapore, as well as to South and North America and Europe. YAMATO’s world travels began in August 1998, when they took part in the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. It was a huge success, and although the theatre was small, they performed to full houses and won the Spirit of Fringe award.

From February to May 1999, they toured Great Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Austria, giving a total of 70 concerts. In June of that year they were invited to the Israel Festival, performing five times in and around Jerusalem. They were invited back to the Netherlands in August, playing at the Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam. They made a third tour, from late August to October, this time to South America. It was an important year for them; traveling long distances and performing to more than hundred thousand people.

In the year 2000, after performing in Osaka and Tokyo in February, they had a challenging tour of Britain in March, with 27 performances in the course of the month. The tour was a great success, attracting 30,000 people. Back in Japan, they toured and performed in 60 schools between September and November.

The first year of the 21st century, 2001, was a memorable one for Yamato. They went on a world tour of 100 concerts. Their concert tour of Japan, in December, brought down the curtain on a very successful year. It was both the culmination of their previous activity and a fresh start.

In 2002, they performed in India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. This tour was organized to celebrate the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and Japan, and of the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between India and Japan, and Sri Lanka and Japan. In July and August 2002, they performed in Germany, Italy and Spain.

In 2003, they gave 170 performances in Europe, then went to the USA and CANADA for 26 more performances. In August Yamato performed in Japan to celebrate its TENTH ANNIVERSARY.

In 2004, Yamato traveled to 23 countries from January to September, Qatar, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Russia, Portugal, Spain, Germany, Slovene, Switzerland, Greece, Austria, and Holland. They gave 100 performances and 11 in Mexico in November and 5 in Hong Kong and Macau in December.

In 2005, Yamato visited 10 countries from February to September and gave 127 performances, then 25 more in the USA during October and November.

In 2006 Yamato traveled to the Philippines for the first time and gave, for 4 performances, then went to Europe from January to October and gave 163 concerts in 36 countries, then back to Mexico City for 13 performances.

“...a show of unbridled enthusiasm, much humor and great musical variety”

– *The Scotsman*

“If you’re looking for inspiring drumming and infectious dance rhythms, you’ll be disappointed. This is much, much more.” – *The Guardian, London*

COMPANY MEMBERS

Takeru Matsushita

We live in a world of great convenience. Without so much as raising our voices, we can speak to someone on the other side of the globe. Which makes you wonder: just how far could we actually communicate by shouting? One, two hundred meters? A bit further, perhaps? Despite this limitation, even when we strain our voices hoarse to reach a distant hearer, we will still desire to go further and further. I believe that before all these modern conveniences arrived, our ancestors would satisfy this desire with drums. Perhaps they beat their drums with a passion that carried their sadness and happiness as far as the gods in heaven?

Festivals occupy a special niche in the lives of the Japanese people, and drums are an inextricable part of festivals. The sound of the drum, imbued with the festive thoughts of those who have been summoned by the drummers, sends tremors through the air, the land and the people. That musicians gathered to play drums demonstrates perhaps their belief that the sound of drums could be harnessed to reach the other side of the globe. I profess my faith in this notion, and so I lead the life of a drummer in this world of convenience.

Akiko Ogawa

When speaking, you try to reach all the way to the soul of the listener. This is what is causing the soul to resonate.

The soul can be inspired when you look at a picture, read a book, see a play, or listen to a song. There are times when you can even be moved by the simple sight of someone. This too puts the soul into a state of resonance. And even when no conscious effort is made, the different ways people lead their lives will be absorbed by their souls.

Resonance, then, is the act of touching the soul.

We use the drums as our instrument of expression. I believe drums give forth immense sounds with a broad range of resonance. This resonance reflects the very soul of the drummer, and changes with every beat. When my soul echoes in the sound of the drums, resonating in harmony in space I share with the public, a surge of energy is created. I drum to feel the energy of the resonance that is born in these confluence of elements.

Mika Miyazaki

I strike my drum. The moment of contact between stick and skin releases a sound from inside that expands and reverberates throughout the space around me, lingering sweetly for what feels like an eternity.

A drum can change its tone. If I beat the drum with vigour, a deep booming sound will be made. If I beat it softly, a gentle tap is heard. A drum beat joyfully will produce a sound that excites. Drums can reveal what the drummer is feeling. Strike it anxiously, and an uneasy, sharp sound

will be produced. Though a sound will come from a drum no matter who beats it, the sound that comes forth exists as a dialogue between drum and drummer. In times past, it has been said that “the timbre of a drum differs depending on the drummer.” At first I gave no thought to this statement – I simply drummed with all my might; fifteen years later, I have come to understand the differences in tone that can be created. I am convinced now of the truth of this saying.

Satomi Ikeda

To resonate in the soul is to feel.

To feel is what happens when you are confronted with someone’s words or gestures, when you see a beautiful sunset, or when you come across a book, film or composition – sensations that would not occur if you were living in isolation.

It is in this moment, when someone does something for you or when something exists for you, that your soul resonates for the first time. The same can be said of drums, I think. For me, to resonate is to resonate together. The drum is an instrument that exists to convey expressions over long distances. I find it amazing that I can infuse my thoughts into drumbeats that can reach far away places and resonate in other souls.

Midori Tamai

When I first heard the word ‘resonance,’ I tried to imagine how to define it as a sound. As I probed further into the notion, I began to form a different impression of the word. I began to picture myself surrounded by resonance, like an ever-widening circle of ripples emanating from a single point, embroiling me in waves that had grown many times their original size.

Viewed in this way, resonance becomes a magnificent word for me, a truly appropriate word, because the image is exactly the same as the experience I have when I play. When I strike the drum, a sound emerges from within, swelling and expanding outwards around the listeners. This is the very essence of resonance.

The sounds I produce do not yet resonate with all their beauty, but I aspire to hone my craft so

that my drumming will be heard by people the world over.

Tetsuro Okubo

For me, resonance is the gift of making an audience feel good. That an audience exists is the most important thing: Alone, nothing you do can be communicated, and so it goes without saying that nothing will resonate; however, the moment there is an audience before you that you can enliven, and the moment that they have indeed been enlivened through your actions, then you can become one with your audience, and are likewise enlivened. Be they people or objects, when your audience is immersed in a positive resonance, you too will be enveloped in warm sensations.

I have been trying for a very long time to discover how best to express my music when I perform in front of an audience, play the flute in the mountains, or turn to my drum and strike it with a mighty blow. When I am at one with the soul of each member of my audience and begin to play, then I can surrender myself to the will of the moment; however, my inexperience often causes me to vaunt my own feelings instead, which prevents me from achieving a sound that can resonate fully. Unfazed by such limitations, though, I have been searching for these moments of happiness for a long time.

Tomoko Kawauchi

I believe that fireworks best illustrate the meaning of ‘resonance’.

As the rockets soar into the sky, accompanied by a plaintive, whizzing sound, a moment of silence is followed by a sudden explosion. Fireworks are characterized by a loud bang and the blooming of magnificent floral displays splashed across the sky. Fireworks resonate with my soul. And this is accomplished in a fleeting instant. I gaze up at the sky with eyes wide open. My mouth is agape. The dazzling profile of large fireworks is seared into my eyes and mind. It is then that I realize that thunderous sounds continue to reverberate within my soul. Even as the pyrotechnic petals scatter and descend from the night sky and disappear, they take their place in my memory. Large fireworks that once resonated with my

soul continue to linger and at times, I remember them, just like that. It brings me great joy and delight, and I yearn to see them again. I wonder if the sounds of the drums that I beat resonate with people in the same way that fireworks have resonated with me.

Saori Higashi

When I strike my drum with purpose, the sound clearly flows into my body. When someone beside me strikes a drum in the same way, the sound also flows into my body. When everyone on stage beats their drum in unison, a loud sound is generated, flowing into my body, into the bodies of all the drummers, as well as into the bodies of the spectators. On hearing the sound of a drum, there may be people who will feel secure, invigorated, or who are spurred to persevere (and there are even those who feel that it is a bit too loud for their taste). While the reactions are diverse, the fact that the hearer is moved means that the sound of the drum has resonated with him or her. Harnessing this resonance, the drummer penetrates the hearers' bodies and stir their hearts with his or her thoughts and feelings. If my soul could harness the resonance of the drum and penetrate your soul, I would like to see it live within you in a state of delight, joy and grace.

Takaoki Masui

I have always remembered this passage from an old Japanese text about the quality of resonance: "Two people sit on opposite sides of a dinner table, eating a meal. Between them resonate the sounds of pleasant conversation and clinking plates and utensils." For the ancients, the quality of a resonance can be described by a dinner table. This can only evoke admiration for the scope of their imagination.

Ever since, I have always associated resonance with the image of a pleasant dinner table, surely accompanied by delightful conversation. I would like to transform all the resonance that comes from my drum—sounds and vibrations—into the essence of a succulent dinner table. On the dinner table for tonight's performance, will be an array of delectable home-cooked meals I have prepared to the best of my abilities. I invite audience members to gather round and—if they are in the

right mood—let the conversation flow. I would love to see performers and spectators prepare the same dinner, enjoy this meal and the conversation that unfolds, and rejoice in the resonance of this veritable feast!

Marika Nito

I believe that resonance can be perceived both physically and spiritually.

The notion of physical resonance can be understood as a ball bouncing across the floor of an empty gymnasium. A sound is heard, like ripples spreading across the surface of water, with the ball at the center surrounded by ever-widening circles. With the sound, come invisible ripples that brush the skin. Resonance happens when this is perceived by the body. Whether this is pleasant or not depends on the significance and quality of the sound that is generated.

The notion of spiritual resonance is a different matter. In contrast to the spreading ripples of sound, this resonance is something that is conveyed to a person's soul. Communication between people occurs at the juncture where a dialogue of souls takes place. Mutual understanding signals the existence of spiritual resonance, whereas an absence of spiritual resonance means that mutual understanding has not been attained.

So what of the sounds created by the drum that I beat? Are they just pleasant ripples or are they the threads of resonant communication? To find out, I must hone my senses.

Gen Hidaka

Although it has only been a very short time since I first became involved with drums, I find myself constantly amazed at the power of the instrument. Sometimes audience members ask me if my ears are OK after striking at the drum so loudly. I usually answer them, "I am fine, probably because I am not really listening so much with my ears." In fact, this is how I actually feel. It is likely that I am not listening with my ears, but rather with my body. This is because the sounds of my drum resonate with my heart. I feel the booming sound of a single note reverberate throughout my body.

I am currently studying the depths of a drum's sound. If one were to mindlessly beat a drum, the resulting sound would no doubt be jarring. I am always aspiring to generate drum sounds that resonate with the soul, so I will beat my drum for you today with this goal in mind.

Misato Sugiyama

The word 'resonance' evokes an image in my mind of thoughts that communicate in overlapping layers. It can be likened to the act of mixing paints. Take blue and white, for example. As both colors overlap and begin to dialogue, overlapping with one another, they begin to come together as one. After some pushing, pulling (and the occasional sparring), a new color emerges from the exquisite balance that has formed between both parties. Perhaps it's a bit difficult to grasp from this example, but I believe that this is the essence of resonance.

Having been granted but one life to live, I would like to forge my days by unleashing my thoughts – no matter how minor or seemingly inconsequential – to others who have been blessed with life in this world, and receiving the thoughts of others as they return to me, then combining what we give and take. This process, which I love and value, I associate with resonance.

Takahiro Mon

When I hear the word 'resonance', I am immediately reminded of the sound that reverberates from the pit of my stomach throughout my body when a drum is struck. Ever since I was a child, I have felt myself attracted to the sound of drums, and I have never stopped thinking about them since. Now I beat my drum to bring out something of myself in the resonating music.

Souls dwell in the sounds that resonate in people's hearts: the voices of others, the sounds of insects, the sound of the wind, the sound of water and the sounds produced by drums. Many things resonate with sound every day. To which of these sounds will I be able to add my resonance, and what will I be able to convey in the future? I shall continue to beat my drum in order to resonate with as many people as I can.

And today, I will put my spirit into delivering my best performance possible.

Hisato Fukuda

The singing of birds, the murmur of a stream, the fragrance of the wind and the scent of a mountain always resonate with the soul. I live in Asuka, Nara Prefecture, a village nestled amid a bounty of natural beauty. Every morning, I start the day with a run. I can hear the sound of my beating heart in the middle of my body. I can hear the sounds of the life around me coming from the Asukan nature. These sounds combine to resonate, and my body is embraced by an indescribably good feeling, a source of positive energy that nourishes me for the rest of the day. I then funnel this energy into my drumming.

I eagerly strike my drum so that each beat reverberates.

Today, and every day, I will inject each movement with joy, anger, sadness, delight and my thoughts. What does resonance mean to me? It is a dialogue between souls.

My wish is that the resonance that is created when my thoughts are conveyed to another soul will be heard around the world—along with the resonance in my own soul from the feedback that I receive, and the resonance that is mutually perceived through a reconciliation of thoughts. In the hope of this, I shall strike my drum today, tomorrow and onward.

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