

Regional Taiko Gathering delivers unforgettable performances to Portland audience

By Maileen Hamto
The Asian Reporter

For the first time ever, Portland Taiko played host to some of the nation's most renowned and respected taiko pioneers and influential emerging artists at the fifth annual Regional Taiko Gathering, held at St. Mary's Academy in downtown Portland.

Throughout an entire weekend, taiko enthusiasts had the opportunity to work with nationally recognized taiko leaders, such as Kenny Endo, Russel Baba, and Jeanne Mercer. Taiko ensembles from the Pacific Northwest and Canada came together to deliver two very powerful and memorable sold-out concerts.

Learning and networking opportunities were plentiful for taiko players and groups from all areas of experience and performance styles. Some 115 conference attendees from more than 35 taiko groups took part. From the local community, 40 volunteers and 26 Portland Taiko staff, board members, and performers worked together to ensure success of the biennial event.

Taiko players from across the region attended workshops that focused on enhancing their understanding of the drum performance art form, said Michelle Fujii, co-artistic director of Portland Taiko.

"One of the most rewarding parts of the weekend is being able to strengthen the taiko community through meaningful conversations and dialogue about the art form. We also were able to reinforce long-term relationships with other performance groups," she said.

Adult community workshops for beginners provided an introduction to the roots of taiko and the evolution of the art form in North America. A workshop for



TREASURING AND TEACHING TAIKO. Young taiko enthusiasts had the opportunity to hone their drumming skills at a workshop headed by Kristy Oshiro of Portland Taiko and Kelsey Furuta (center) of Tsunami Taiko, based in Seattle. (AR Photo/Maileen Hamto)

members of taiko youth groups provided emerging taiko players a chance to hone their skills through drills and jams.

Two sold-out concerts highlighted the rich diversity of taiko performance styles. On Saturday, three northwest professional taiko groups — Portland Taiko, One World Taiko of Seattle, and Uzume Taiko from Vancouver, B.C. — combined unique performance styles to present "Changing Landscapes," a new composition by Masato Baba, one of the fast-rising stars of the national taiko scene.

According to Baba, "This song was inspired from a tour I did on the Big Island of Hawaii with Kenny Endo and Shoji Kameda. The Big Island has a vast array of landscapes due to being the youngest island in the Hawaiian island chain; parts

of it are still being formed.

"The song expresses the feelings I had when I passed through each of these environments, starting with the volcanoes, jungle, mountains, grasslands, and ending with the ocean."

Fujii said executing Baba's vision for the composition was a surprisingly pleasant learning experience. "We've never worked as a three-group ensemble before, and we were able to get together and inspire each other in the process. We brought distinct stylistic characteristics to the composition, which involved a continuous brainstorming process," she said.

Bringing a diverse group of taiko performers to the Portland stage is one of the most important takeaways from the regional gathering, said Teresa Enrico, co-artistic director of Portland Taiko.

"We're always striving for artistic excellence and strong ties to our community. One of the best things about the gathering was being able to offer our Portland audience a chance to experience different taiko performance styles," Enrico said. "The concerts show that we're part of a larger taiko community. Being in the presence of taiko greats was a wonderful experience for us as performers, as well as our audience."

Heather Lyman, operations coordinator for Portland Taiko, was among the staff members at the helm of organizing the Regional Taiko Gathering 2006. For Lyman and her husband, Jay, and six-year-old daughter Aleta, Portland Taiko is a family affair.

"The RTG event was a raving success! By bringing taiko groups together to appreciate each other and show the public a broad sampling of what taiko has to offer, we were able to celebrate the greater taiko community while furthering Portland Taiko's mission to affirm Asian-American pride, inspire audiences, build community, and educate about our culture and heritage. These are the things that cannot be measured in numbers," she said.

A benefit banquet for Portland Taiko will be held on Wednesday, August 2 at Wong's King Seafood Restaurant, 8733 S.E. Division Street in Portland. A no-host bar opens at 6:00pm, and dinner will be served at 7:00pm. For taiko fans interested in trying out their drumming skills, Portland Taiko hosts community workshops and classes for children, youth, and adults. Youth camps will be held during the week of August 14 to 18. For more information, or to obtain a schedule of upcoming classes and events, contact Portland Taiko at (503) 288-2456 or visit <www.portlandtaiko.org>.

Terrible and necessary shortcuts

The Presidency of Alberto Fujimori

The Fall of Fujimori: An Incisive Study of Power and Corruption

By American Documentary
Written and directed by Ellen Perry
Produced by Ellen Perry
and Stephen Moffitt
Presented by P.O.V.
Broadcast by PBS/OPB at
11:00pm on July 18, 2006

By Polo
The Asian Reporter

For us living in *El Norte*, up north, at some distance from Latin American politics, the past 50 years have brought news of all kinds of drama "down there." We've read accounts of awful excesses of state violence, we've seen news footage of ecstatic episodes of hope, both driven by charismatic leaders. In the background, there's always *la gente*, the people: enduring, patient, optimistic. To us observers, those passionate and stubborn masses seem to have counted for very little while political elites took turns having their way with poor Peru.

That relationship appears to be shifting. Substance is evidently overtaking speeches as a measure of national leadership. The case of Peru's President Alberto Fujimori has been all that — terrific drama, terrible violence, stirring social and economic advances. All of it driven by a professor turned politico; a Peruvian of Japanese parents; an outsider affectionately called *El Chino* (The



EL CHINO. Former Peruvian president Alberto Fujimori campaigns in indigenous dress during the 2000 election. (Photo/Stardust Pictures, courtesy of P.O.V.)

Chinaman) by Peru's newly engaged disenfranchised poor and indigenous communities.

Filmmaker Ellen Perry's thoughtful documentary *The Fall of Fujimori* takes us into Alberto Fujimori's almost mythic decade in Peru's Presidential Palace, and into the mind of a very complex man. The former she does with archival local news footage, interviews with Peruvian journalists and public figures, and secretly shot videotapes. The latter is accomplished in quiet moments, during the disgraced president's self-exile in

Japan, between reflective comments where pauses and gazes say so much more. As awesome as the President's story is, Ms. Perry's work is just as breathtaking. As compelling as President Fujimori's Shakespearean tragedy becomes, her work is up to his stride. "How did she capture that angle, his glance, his tone?" This is top drawer nonfiction filmmaking.

Ten years of total reform

A short version of a grander and much more nuanced account airing over PBS/OPB in the second week of July, goes as follows: Alberto Fujimori was elected

during a time of worthless Peruvian currency, runaway inflation, crushing rural poverty, unchallenged official corruption, and uncontrolled narcotic trafficking. Nearly half his nation was under the martial control of provisional rebel governments, including ultra-violent radical socialistic movements. Peru was a failed state. President Fujimori and his men managed to tame all that. His work was both brilliant and horrible. His ideas may have been big-hearted, but his administration's extraordinary efficiencies were due in no small part to taking terrible shortcuts. Way short of democratic values.

Says director Ellen Perry of making the film, "I often didn't know if I was making a film, or in one. In Lima, CIA operatives and the Peruvian secret police followed me. While interviewing an arms trafficker in San Jorge prison, I was knocked off my feet by a 7.2 earthquake."

President Fujimori's reign abruptly and scandalously unraveled in 2000. As shocking as his fall from popular power was, the President startled even his family when, on his way home from an international conference, his flight diverted to Japan, where he sought Tokyo's protection from his own government. There he stayed for five years, a fugitive accused of corruption, political torture, and murder, until November of last year, when he just as suddenly returned to run again for Peru's presidency. Mr. Fujimori's story is far from over.

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