

Yakudo Delivers a Concert “Full of Energy and Life”



Yakudo Traditional Drummers' concert “En” was held at the Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts on October 3, 2010.
Photo courtesy of Yakudo

By EVAN MACKAY

RICHMOND HILL—The Japanese drumming group Yakudo's show at the Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts in October proved that there is more to *taiko* than big drums. Bursting with variety, every aspect of the performance was kept fresh throughout, making the two hours of entertainment fly by—a sense compounded by the efficiency with which the show unfolded.

The show started with no introduction, no reminder to turn off cell-phones, no time for fidgeting. The curtain came up on a stage filled with drums, from the size of a steering wheel to the size of a Smart Car, and nine performers began to play. The first sound was of soft, slow, deep thumps on the *odaiko*, the biggest drum, positioned at head height with two men playing it, one at each end. On the rims of drums the

girth of an oil barrel, serious-faced women added a restrained tapping. Centre stage, a man and a woman played *kodaiko*, small high-pitched drums. Two other women played sets of three drums, small, medium and large, angled so the players moved like they were breaking boards in a karate demonstration. In fact, *kiai* were yelled out by one or another of the eight drummers as the energy and volume mounted to an exhilarating pitch, and eventually wound down like a dissipating storm.

Only after the first number was the non-professional group introduced. Ontario's Trillium Foundation presented Yakudo with a \$10,000 grant to support their continued development, and after a word of congratulations from Minister of Tourism and Culture, Michael Chan, it was back to the music.

The inventive group played their

taiko with more than just with the traditional *bachi* sticks. They played one piece with long thin sticks decorated with red and white pompoms, giving a different look and a lighter sound; in another, they used padded mallets which drew muted tones from the resonant *taiko*.

The concert, titled En, was a tribute to many friends who have contributed to Yakudo's development, including the dancers of Sakura Kai who joined them. With such big drums weighing down the stage, it was a change of pace to watch a masked man with a gourd shaker perform a Bouffon-like dance, moving around the stage shadowed by a man playing a marcher's drum. Masked women in *yukata* joined the simple folk dancing.

Although it was a *taiko* concert, Yakudo went beyond the standard assortment of drums, not only fleshing out the ensemble with gongs, cymbals, clacking woodblocks and rattling gourds, but also balancing the percussion by incorporating flutes, earthy tones blown through conches, and a good amount of singing. From one number to the next, there could be two performers or a dozen. In one number the troupe was joined by a pair of small children each striking a disc-shaped drum with a stick as they strutted to the beat. Costumes alternated from white headbands and a dark *hakama* to bright red gowns and billowy, patterned tops, accented with shoulder ties crossing between the shoulder blades.

Yakudo made each number flow smoothly and dynamically into the next, with silent and kaleidoscopic rearrangements of the hefty *taiko*, and drummers sometimes beginning the next piece while others around them unobtrusively completed the new set up. At first, drums were arranged like a percussive Zen rock garden, later the *odaiko* was brought to the front of an otherwise empty stage where it was given a tandem thrashing. For one number, a battery of fat *taiko* were gathered front and centre in a tight semicircle, with the *odaiko* pounding behind them, making the audience feel like spectators at a besieged fortress defended by flailing drummers instead of archers.

As their website explains, Yakudo means “full of life and energy.” They certainly are, and that's how they make the audience feel. To learn more about their upcoming performances, workshops or courses, visit www.yakudo.com, or call 416-410-9169.



From left, Richard Kenno, his mother Cathy Kumamoto, and president of Shodo Canada, Noriko Maeda. Left of Maeda-sensei is Kenno's entry which won a Bronze Prize. Photo: Jane Toyota

New Award Categories Added to Annual Calligraphy Competition

By PETER WAKAYAMA and STAFF WRITER

TORONTO—The November 14th opening of the exhibition that displayed all 140 entries of the 3rd Annual Japanese Calligraphy Competition in Canada at the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre in Toronto (JCCC) was celebrated by an overflow crowd of over 220 people.

Congratulatory greetings and award presentations were given by Tetsuo Yamashita, counsul general of Japan in Toronto, Masayuki Suzuki, director of Japan Foundation Toronto, Gary Kawaguchi, president of JCCC, James Heron, executive director of JCCC, Noriko Maeda, president of Shodo Canada, and Marie Ikeda, vice president Shodo Canada.

The competition was judged by five renown calligraphers in Japan who selected two Grand Prizes, one Judges Prize, five Gold, six Silver, seven Bronze and 28 Honourable Mentions awards. The variety and diversity of the calligraphy was highlighted by the beautiful mounting of everyone's work on silk scrolls.

The Judges Prize and Grand Prize categories were newly introduced this year and were awarded to those whose work exceeded that of a Gold Prize.

Another new addition to the exhibition were the English translations included with each entry on display. This allowed non-Japanese

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primarily seniors from the community who hold events throughout the year in support of the Museum and Heritage Centre. Founded in 2000, this dedicated group hosts a series of popular events each year, including the Farmer's Market and Food Fair, Breakfast with Santa, and the year-end Mochitsuki. They also support the annual NNMHC Craft Fair and many other special events. This year, the NNMHC Open House was partnered with the Farmer's Market for a record attendance, where the public was able to view a sample of the variety of programming offered at the Centre, see the Museum, and partake of tasty traditional Japanese treats.

On October 29, the Ellipse lobby of the NNMHC was transformed into a performance hall, with an evening of the beautiful music of Leslie Uyeda performed by Kathryn Cernauskas (flute/bamboo flute), Rachel Kiyo Iwaasa (piano), Heather Pawsey (soprano), and Sue Round (cello) in the magnificent space designed by architect Raymond Moriyama.

Composer Leslie Uyeda was the musical host for the evening, which included her haiku songs; songs for soprano and flute with poetry by Joy Kogawa; the world premiere of a new song cycle with poetry by Lorna Crozier; plus music by Poulenc and Ravel.

This concert was dedicated to the memory of Leslie's Japanese Canadian family—her father Yutaka Uyeda, her aunts Mariko and Lily, and her grandparents Bunjiro and Kimi Uyeda who, in the 1930's, donated a thousand cherry trees to the City of Vancouver.

To further mark the anniversary, a small commemorative publication was produced to share some of our interesting history. Copies are available for free at the Centre or can be viewed online at www.nikkeiplace.org.



Visual artist, clothing designer, and costume maker, Natalie Purschwitz, was among the Nikkei artists brought together for the Kizuna exhibit at the JCNM from Sept. to Nov. 2010.



Children Enjoy Christmas at Kamloops JC Centre

KAMLOOPS, B.C.—The annual Children's Christmas Party at the Kamloops Japanese Canadian Association (KJCA) Cultural Centre took place on December 5, 2010, with many crafting tables, and a yummy kid-friendly lunch. A favourite craft is the gingerbread houses (graham wafers) and the table is jammed with decorators sticking the candies to their custom creation. The informal event provides the opportunity for young families to meet and be introduced to the Centre.

Pictured are, Santa Claus (Fred Sawada) with, from left, Bryan Yamada, his grandma Kathy Yamada, and Kianna Yamada. This year Kathy Yamada donated especially for this event that was sponsored by the KJCA and organized by Brenda Sawada and a small team of parents.
Photo and report by Brenda Sawada