



Dartmouth College

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## **Dazzling taiko drum troupe takes over the Hop stage**

HANOVER, NH—**Kodo**, one of the world’s leading taiko drumming ensembles, brings its new show *Evolution* to the Hop’s Spaulding Auditorium on Tuesday, March 4, 7 pm.

Based on Sado Island in northern Japan, Kodo has been dazzling audiences worldwide for over three decades, both preserving and reinterpreting traditional Japanese performance. *Evolution* showcases the group’s perpetual creative growth and the mesmerizing precision and endurance of the ancient drumming tradition, taiko. With synchronized power and grace, they play everything from small hand-held instruments to the five-foot-wide *ō-daiko* (called the “king of drums”). Kodo infuses the ancient form with fresh rhythms that move body and soul.

Formed in 1981, Kodo divides its time between training on the beautiful, tradition- and arts-focused island of Sado and touring the world with shows that combine traditional arts with extraordinary showmanship. “Superlatives don’t really exist to convey the primal power and bravura beauty of Kodo,” wrote the *Chicago Tribune*.“ Wrote *The New York Times*: “Traditional rituals recast as theater, and contemporary thoughts about ancient instruments both figure in Kodo’s performance, which includes ancient and modern compositions. Yet with tense, angular postures, with stylized, frozen gestures and, in one playful piece, with animal-like scampering and slithering, Kodo reminds its audience that, above all, its music is a matter of flesh and blood, wood and stretched skin. Kodo can raise the roof, but the group can also show extraordinary finesse.”

Exploring the limitless possibilities of the traditional Japanese drum, the taiko, Kodo is forging new directions for a vibrant living art-form. The ensemble was founded on the concept of “living, learning, and creating.” Kodo is dedicated to learning performing arts from all over Japan and around the world, as well as creating and sharing its own unique, innovative forms of artistic expression.

Kodo bases its performances on three components. One is the traditional arts, which the Kodo website describes as “rooted in the soil developed through an intimate relationship between the people and their art, and between art and nature. ... an irreplaceable treasure laden with hints for us denizens of a bewildering age. We would like as many people as possible to be challenged by the infinite possibilities they present.” A second is music composed by friends and mentors of Kodo, including orchestral and jazz musicians. Third are compositions by members of Kodo themselves. “Our performance begins with the blending of these three elements with our lives amidst the sights and sounds of Sado Island,” the website states. “It is then forged into shape on the anvil of rehearsal.”

Historians believe taiko came to Japan from Korea in the 6th century CE and were likely used for communication, in festivals, and in other rituals. After World War II, the first group was formed that brought taiko onto the performance stage by Daihachi Oguchi, in 1951. Trained as a jazz musician, he was given a piece of taiko notation. Unable to read it, he found someone to transcribe it then added his own rhythms and transformed the work to accommodate multiple taiko players on different-sized instruments. Several other groups emerged in Japan through the 1950s and 1960s, and taiko performance became more visible on the world stage during the 1964 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, when it was featured during the Festival of Arts event.

The ensemble Kodo traces its origins to the late 1960s when Den Tagayasu established a training center for taiko on Sado Island, where he had moved with his family. He called the group "Za Ondekoza", and implemented a rigorous set of exercises for its members including long-distance running. In 1975, Ondekoza was the first taiko group to tour in the United States. Their first performance occurred just after the group finished running the Boston Marathon while wearing their traditional uniforms. In 1981, some members of Ondekoza split and formed Kodo, also on Sado Island, and also involving rigorous training and communal living. Kodo went on to popularize taiko through frequent touring and collaborations with other musical performers and has for decades been one of the world's best-known taiko ensembles. At least 800 well established taiko groups are in Japan, and hundreds more exist throughout the world.

One of the biggest changes in Kodo's three decades has been the inclusion of female drummers. While women co-founded the group, they performed as singers and dancers at first, wearing graceful but movement-limiting kimonos. The drumming itself was viewed as masculine. Those who developed ensemble-style taiko in post-war Japan were men, and through the influence of Ondekoza, the ideal taiko player was epitomized in images of the masculine peasant class. The top players were the ultimate in buff male beauty, and women's bodies were perceived as being unequal to the art form's physical demands. An exception was San Francisco Taiko Dojo under the guidance of Grand master Seiichi Tanaka, who was the first to admit females to the art form. In the 1990s, female participation in other groups began to rise dramatically and now equals or exceeds male participation--although concerns still exist that women are limited as to the instrument they are permitted to play, and that the most impressive drums are the province of men. Still, in Japanese culture, where tradition stereotypes women as quiet, decorous and subservient, the sight of athletic young women pounding large drums in synchronized fury is a true game-changer.

## **MORE ABOUT...**

### **The Hopkins Center for the Arts**

Founded in 1962, "the Hop" is a multi-disciplinary academic, visual and performing arts center dedicated to uncovering insights, igniting passions, and nurturing talents to help Dartmouth and the surrounding Upper Valley community engage imaginatively and contribute creatively to our world. Each year the Hop presents more than 300 live events and films by visiting artists as well as Dartmouth students and the Dartmouth community, and reaches more than 22,000 Upper Valley residents and students with outreach and arts education programs. After a celebratory 50<sup>th</sup>-anniversary season in 2012-13, the Hop enters its second half-century with renewed passion for mentoring young artists, supporting the development of new work, and providing a laboratory for participation and experimentation in the arts.

## **CALENDAR LISTING**

### **Kodo: *Evolution***

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perpetual creative growth and the mesmerizing precision and endurance of the ancient drumming tradition, taiko. With synchronized power and grace, they play everything from small hand-held instruments to the five-foot-wide ō-daiko (called the “king of drums”). Kodo infuses the ancient form with fresh rhythms that move body and soul.

Tuesday, March 4, 7 pm

Spaulding Auditorium, Hopkins Center for the Arts at Dartmouth College, Hanover NH

\$60/50/30, 18 & under \$19, Dartmouth students \$10

Information: [hop.dartmouth.edu](http://hop.dartmouth.edu), 603.646.2422

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