

# 2024 Canada 🇨🇦 Tour News

Written by Yukari Ichise

The sky over Kelowna, Canada, where we visited for the first time in five years, was as blue and wide as ever, and a fresh breeze welcomed us. Following last fall's European tour, Art Lee, the leader of TOKARA, and Yukari Ichise, the first officer, embarked on our Canada tour. From the day of our arrival, our schedule was packed with school performances, workshops, and full concerts. We were blessed that fans and friends were awaiting our return.



## Leopard watching the show?

This is a scene from a school performance. Actually, this is a junior high school gymnasium. Here (photo on the right) ➡ is a full view of the wall painting. There were three school performances. The children we met this time were very excited to see our performance. I was impressed by the girl who danced along with “Hatou no Hibiki”.



After a 24 hour flight, including transfer, to Vancouver airport, we arrived and were picked up by our good friends for the final trip...a five hour drive to Kelowna.

Although we arrived at close to 4:00a.m., we were scheduled to perform at the first junior high school six hours later at 10:00am. We were very happy to make be fully awake and ready for this performance as school performances are very much our favorite.

On the day of each performance, we always think that even though the program and songs may be the same, no two performances are ever the same. We can only share the time we have with the people we meet on that day at that venue, and when we think of that, even if this is the last time we perform on stage, we want to be able to say in all honesty that we have pushed and squeezed out every milligram of strength without any regrets. It may sound like a tough fight, but for us, this time is also a very happy time.

## Dr. Tatsuko?!

One person we especially want to thank on this tour is Ken Fix, a founding member of the Yamabiko Taiko drumming team from Kelowna. We first met him 20 years ago when Art was touring North America and was passing through the city. Ken asked Art if he would like to join a rehearsal with the early group of members. Art, who happened to be in the city by chance, was delighted and said, “Let’s rehearse together.”



Since then, Ken Fix (center), has supported TOKARA's Canadian tour in various ways, including theater performances, school performances, workshops, and collaborations with the Okanagan Symphony Orchestra. One particular story I would like to share with you is the story of his large flat-bodied Odaiko, called “HiraOdaiko”.

The HiraOdaiko that belongs to Ken and was used for the performance has a thick body and hard skin. It is difficult to make a “good” sound, but Art is able to make it possible with his unique playing style (including with a single stroke of a finger). When I described this HiraOdaiko as “stubborn,” Art said, “If you know when and how to treat this drum, you can communicate in detail with him. This drum is not just one where you can go and start hitting hard right away and think that it will just follow. This drum needs to get to know you, and you need to take the proper time to get to know the drum... have a deep conversation with him...learn about who he is by his own voice. Only then can you build a beautiful collaborative performance together on stage...between one drum and one person.”

Art says, “When I play the big taiko drum, I feel as if I am facing an opponent that I cannot compete with half-heartedly. The taiko is a mirror of yourself, an opponent you cannot lie to. I feel that properly

playing the big taiko drum is a special realm that I can enter only when I have trained and honed myself, both physically and mentally.

Art Lee's solo o-daiko performances, which I watch from the side of the stage, are never the same. Especially in the past few years, I feel that each of his performances is special.

A few minutes into this performance, as we approached the climax of the show, the big drum "Kobushi" began. I could see Art's shoulders relax for a moment. It was like a boxer shaking his shoulders up and down to relax before entering the ring. It was as if some other switch had been turned on. From there, a very long and deep story really began. ( I'm sorry I can't show it to you here and now...)

Taiko players often give names to their drums. Perhaps it is because each has its own personality and feels like a person.

After the performance, I took the opportunity to talk with Ken and asked him, "Does this drum already have a name?" By coincidence, he told me that he had been thinking of a name for the taiko since watching Art's Odaiko performance. The name that came to mind was Tatsuko. "Tatsu" means 'dragon' and "ko" means 'child'. I asked Art the same question. He replied, "I think it's more like Dr. than Mr. or Mrs. This HiraOdaiko may be called "Dr. Tatsuko" next time we visit Canada.



中央が平大太鼓Dr.たつ子



雷電太鼓のみなさんと

### Workshops

We had the opportunity teach a workshop with Vernon Taiko, about an hour away from Kelowna, and Raiden Taiko in Kamloops who are based another hour and a half away. On the last leg of the tour, we drove 8 hours inland to Edmonton for the first time in 13 years, where we held a Taiko Stairmaster workshop with the members of Kita no Taiko.

Both cities have Japanese community centers with Japanese gardens, temples, and splendid facilities with large kitchens, halls, and judo halls. Just in time for Children's Day, carp streamers were swimming in the air.

北の太鼓のみなさんと



The Vernon Taiko team that we visited this time had just started around one year before. They were practicing with a large bucket covered with tape on one side of the drum. It was an honor to meet them at the beginning of their new history. We look forward to seeing this team grow and hope to see them again.



We have already begun plans for touring Canada next year. This time, we are set to tour the Northwest Territories. We are looking forward to it and will post updates on our website as they become set.

### What's Next?

1. We continue our 20th Anniversary Tour with the full six-member group at the Matsumoto Performing Arts Theater on June 29th. If you are in Japan, [COME SEE US!](#)

2. The [Saiwai Fringe Festival](#) is set for July 13th in Iida City. We are still accepting applications for groups who wish to perform in this casual taiko festival.

3. Registration is now open for the Spice Rack Project in November. The dates are not yet fully decided, but will be soon.

[Details for this unique project can be seen here.](#)

