

DAICHI (BIG EARTH) (2004) GRAHAM HILGENDORF

Daichi is a musical reflection of our country: vast plains and undulating hills, a place where changes are subtle and gradual, extreme and harsh.

Daichi, which loosely translates as 'Big Earth', is composed of a five bar taiko rhythm and a solo shinobue flute melody twice the length of the taiko theme; the two elements represent the land and sea.

All of the musical material is developed from these ideas: the rhythms expand, the melody builds, each taiko, flute and bell working its way through the piece giving form to the suggestion of exploration, growth and beauty.

The opening introduction has the feeling of a slow but determined walk... and so the journey begins. We hear the sound of distant chappa cymbals and katsugi-okedo, which are small, light taiko slung over the shoulder. Derived from traditional Japanese 'field music' known as dengaku, the katsugi-okedo is ideal for making music on a long walk-about!

As the ensemble grows to include the meandering bamboo flute melody and deeper-voiced taiko, the colour changes much like an outback landscape. The power of the entrance of the odaiko (large drum), with accompanying narimono (cymbals and bells), defines a sudden, spontaneous change. The booming voice of this grandest of taiko conjures rolling monsoonal clouds, the crashing of waves.

The return of a single solo taiko that accompanies the brilliantly embellished shinobue melody represents a quiet moment: perhaps a stark plain, the endless desert sky? The entrance of the full ensemble – big, wide and open – evokes the grandeur of our landscape.

BLESSINGS OF THE EARTH

Welcome to our performance! It is a real pleasure and honour to be back 'on the road' touring throughout our beautiful country and having the chance to perform for you tonight.

Through the sound of our taiko, shakuhachi and shinobue, the expression of our movement and dance, and the meaning of our songs, TaikOz celebrates the blessings of the earth we all share: and indeed life itself. Drumming, dancing and singing are intended as the outward manifestation of our credo:

*'to beat with every muscle, bone and sinew in our bodies,
with an open and joyous spirit'*

One thing is for sure – we will play, sing and dance our hearts out for you tonight! We hope you enjoy *Blessings Of The Earth*.

THE MUSIC

HOUSE MUSIC (2010) IAN CLEWORTH

House Music was inspired by my son Charles' interest in 'house' techno music. Hearing the low bass tones and incessant beat resonating around our home was the genesis of the piece, and while the tempo and basic feel is derived from techno, *House Music* is conceived as a true taiko piece employing a range of instruments, stylistic techniques and flamboyant movement.

The piece is in four parts: Parts 1 and 4 feature three players wielding single large drumsticks in movements reminiscent of the sword play in Onikenbai (Demon Sword Dance) while Parts 2 and 3 concentrate on a song and the sound of four taiko sets playing intricate rhythms in combinations of 7 beats.

The words of the song are taken from a poem written by Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902).

*Atsukurushi
Midare-gokoro ya
Rai o kiku*

*Oppressive heat –
My whirling mind
Listens to the peals of thunder*

PASSING THROUGH TEARS OF NECTAR (2010) RILEY LEE Arranged by Riley Lee and Ian Cleworth

This piece is based literally, and figuratively, on the chanting by Zen monks at Eiheiji Temple in the mountains of Japan, of the sutra called Kanromon. The literal translation of the three characters in the word, kan-ro-mon is "sweet-tears-gate", though the title is often translated as "Sweet Nectar Gate".

Both the rhythms and the melodic lines in the piece are based directly on the chanting of the Eiheiji monks. The sutra or scripture addresses the universal ideals of 'practice' and 'service'. One benefits oneself, the individual, while the other benefits the community.

The sutra also alludes to the paradox of joy that can come out of suffering: a heart is whole only after it is broken.

Hok-kai no gan-jiki ne-ga-wa-ku wa ko-no ho ni jo-ji-te, to-ku jo Bus-suru ko-to en

May all sentient beings of the dharma realms, conveyed by this rite, swiftly attain Buddhahood

SOLO from KAIDAN: A GHOST STORY
CHOREOGRAPHY BY MERYL TANKARD
MUSIC BY IAN CLEWORTH AND
KERRY JOYCE
ANTON LOCK, SOLO DANCE

This solo dance was derived from a much longer 75-minute dance-music-theatre work entitled *Kaidan: A Ghost Story* that was directed and choreographed by the highly acclaimed Meryl Tankard with music composed and performed live by Ian Cleworth, Riley Lee, Timothy Constable and the full TaikOz ensemble.

The dance performed tonight by Anton Lock, who danced in the original Sydney Opera House production, does not tell a literal story, as such. Rather, Meryl's gestural language originates from a part of the original *Kaidan* production – based on an ancient Japanese ghost story – that conveys complex and intense emotions emanating from a woman's shame at her selfish actions. The dance and music is in three parts.

MONOCHROME (1974)
MAKI ISHII

This piece is at the core of TaikOz's repertoire for it represents the nexus between so-called East and West. Maki Ishii was a composer in the European classical tradition, but who intently studied the music of his own culture. Using structures and techniques familiar to Western contemporary music, Ishii has constructed a piece that bridges cultural gaps in a unique and intensely musical way.

“Juxtaposing constant and irregular patterns and blending symmetric and asymmetric rhythms, *Monochrome's* construction develops spirally to an exciting climax. The sounds visualise primordial birth, the evolution of life, and the changes of seasons – monochromatic, but with myriad gradations of grey.”

From Heartbeat Drummers of Japan (Sheffield Lab CD: KODO)

Ishii builds his piece around the sound of the high-pitched shimedaiko rope drum, largely ignoring its traditional role as a timekeeper and solo voice, and in its stead, exploring many new sounds and dynamic possibilities. By using a large ensemble of seven shimedaiko, Ishii creates unique tonal textures through the subtle interplay of each drummer. Though radical in its conception, Ishii does not spurn tradition. Indeed by the end of *Monochrome* the shimedaiko reverts to a traditional rhythmic base-rhythm which accompanies three lower-voiced nagado playing the rhythms of *Chichibu Yataibayashi* in 3-part canon; in this subtle way Ishii is acknowledging the past while looking towards the future.

TaikOz member Riley Lee gave the first performances of *Monochrome*, and its companion piece *Mono-Prism*, during his time with the now legendary Ondekoza. This revolutionary ensemble lived communally on the island of Sado and Ishii was invited to study their unique approach to music making. *Monochrome* was the result.

ONIKENBAI

TRADITIONAL Arranged by Yoshikazu Fujimoto (Kodo)

Onikenbai, or 'demon sword dance', is a traditional dance form that hails from Iwate Prefecture, Japan. There are many regional variations and our version is derived from the Iwasaki area, in Kitakami City. TaikOz was inspired to learn this dance because we believe the beautiful, spectacular movements, dramatic music and intrinsic message of peace and goodwill can be universally enjoyed and appreciated.

Our 'Onikenbai journey' began in 2006 when TaikOz member Anton Lock began learning under Kodo's Yoshikazu Fujimoto, who himself has been studying Iwasaki Onikenbai since his Ondekoza days with Riley Lee, and who received a performer's license from the Iwasaki Onikenbai Grand Master in 1998 after many years of cultural exchange. Under Yoshikazu's mentorship, the full group travelled to Iwasaki in August 2010 to deepen our understanding and technique of the art form. TaikOz is the first group from outside Japan to study Onikenbai in Iwate.

The origins of Onikenbai date from around 700AD when it is believed to have been performed by the priest who founded the Shugendou sect of Buddhism. This solemn dance, which is accompanied by shinobue (flute), dengaku okedo (drum) and te-bira (cymbals), involves a heroic demon whose dramatic stomping movements symbolise good spirits driving away the bad.