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## Buoyed by beats

**Veteran taiko drummer Kenny Endo's art has taken him on a global and musical journey**

By Gary C.W. Chun

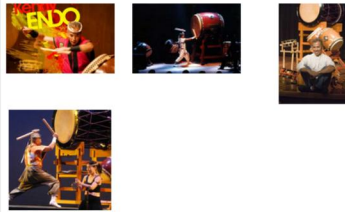
POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jun 11, 2010

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The dramatic and resonating sounds created by veteran taiko drummer Kenny Endo would be the perfect soundtrack for the whirlwind of activity surrounding him at this time in his life.

First off, there is tonight's 35th anniversary concert at the Hawaii Theatre—a cornucopia of Japanese, jazz and Hawaiian influences as filtered through the artistic sensibility of Endo. The Japanese will be emphasized in performances by Endo's own taiko ensemble and a pre-show offering from his Taiko Center of the Pacific youth group; jazz with the help of local jazz lights Noel Okimoto and Dean Taba and their Rhythm Summit trio, and guest trumpeter DeShannon Higa; and Hawaiian with slack-key guitarist Keola Beamer and hula dancer Moana Beamer.

At the concert, fans will have the opportunity to buy two new CDs, both recently completed: "Rhythm Summit," a world-fusion jazz album Endo made with Okimoto and Taba, and "Honua," an intimate, acoustic duet with former island resident Derek Nakamoto, who's now a Los Angeles producer and pianist.

Endo will lead taiko-intensive classes all next week at the Taiko Center, which he runs with wife Chizuko. In the fall, he'll be on tour with a select group of musicians from Japan and the U.S.

In early March, Endo celebrated his island

anniversary. Born and raised in L.A., he first came to Hawaii to do a couple of collaborative concerts, and decided in 1990 to make this his home base.

He was at a Bay Area tour stop when he spoke by phone about the preparation behind tonight's concert, produced by Chizuko Endo.

"Every five years, ever since the 25th anniversary, I do a special concert as a way to bring people together to collaborate. This one is a big one in the sense that it features both my group in Hawaii and Rhythm Summit," he said. "Ten years ago, I did this cool thing with Keola Beamer, so I asked him and his wife Moana to be my guests in the show."

"My other guests, San Jose Taiko, just happen to be touring Hawaii at the same time as my concert, so I asked them to be on the bill as well. I worked with the group last December."

ENDO remembers taking to the drums at a young age, although he didn't concentrate on taiko until he was 21 and in college at the University of California at Santa Barbara.

He was admittedly the idealistic sort, taking part in civil rights and anti-war campus movements. He walked the walk as well, living and working on a mostly Mojave reservation in Arizona for a year as part of his field studies in social work.

"Coincidentally enough, it was also an area where 25,000 Japanese were interred during the war, which made it the third largest 'city' in Arizona at the time," he said. After his experience there, Endo wanted to reconnect with "his own culture and roots, and taiko put everything together for me."

"There was a point then when I was thinking of either going to Japan and getting into taiko, or New York and doing jazz. I guess my music now has come full circle, because when I'm not doing traditional taiko, I set up my drums like a standard Western drum set found in a jazz combo."

Endo got his initial training in San Francisco, then traveled to Japan in 1980, "where I intended to stay for a year, and it ended up being 10 years," he said.

He and Chizuko became the parents of two boys, and then came to Hawaii, where Endo started his "residency," so to speak.

OVER HIS lengthy career, Endo has taken the taiko drums out of their traditional role as accompanying instruments to festivals or kabuki plays, and instead showcased their unique, percussive tones.

"We'll be premiering some new compositions of mine and also introducing some new members in my taiko ensemble," he said. "In fact, we'll be doing a new piece, 'Rites of Thundering,' that will feature an ojime-daiko that's the largest in Hawaii—8 feet long and 16 feet in diameter."

The Tokyo style of kumi-daiko (group drumming) is something that Endo has been known for since he introduced it here in 1990 as part of his teachings.

After the concert, maybe somewhere down the line, Nakamoto will return to his island home to help Endo showcase the more intimate sounds of smaller taiko drums.

"It's a whole 'nother side to the drum," Endo said. "We close-mike it, and the sounds are amazing. Derek has always appreciated that aesthetic."

But in the meantime, Endo said, "I appreciate all the support from the community for taiko in general. I'm humbled by it."

### 'MITSUDOMOE (MIND, BODY, SPIRIT)'

Kenny Endo's 35th anniversary celebration concert

**Where:** Hawaii Theatre, 1130 Bethel St.

**When:** 7 p.m. today

**Cost:** \$17 to \$40 (discounts available for military, seniors, groups of 10 or more and JCCH/HTC members)

**Info:** 528-0506 or [www.hawaiitheatre.com](http://www.hawaiitheatre.com)

### Kenny Endo - Taiko Artist

[www.kennyendo.com](http://www.kennyendo.com)