

## LEAD STORY

# LET'S TALK NATTŌ

### The Fermented Soybean Has a Fan Club in Hawai'i!

Jackie Kojima

Special to The Hawai'i Herald

Eien Hunter-Ishikawa begins each morning with a cup of hot home-roasted coffee, two pieces of homemade toast drizzled with extra virgin olive oil and a most unlikely topping: a heaping scoop of freshly made *nattō* — yes, those pungent fermented soybeans!

Eien is a musician, composer and educator based in Portland, Ore. He performs drumset, *taiko*, percussion and *shinobue* (Japanese side-blown flute). While working on his master's degree in music with an emphasis on percussion performance at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa in 2003, he performed with the Kenny Endo Taiko Ensemble and taught classes at the Taiko Center of the Pacific. Eien now performs with the contemporary taiko quartet, *On Ensemble*, and studies traditional forms of Japanese music with master musician and dancer Kyosuke Suzuki. He also leads workshops around the country on a variety of topics.

In addition to his work as a musician, Eien is a passionate home cook and a fermentationist who is especially interested in beer, bread and *nattō*. He was born and raised in Japan's Saitama Prefecture, where he developed his love for *nattō* as a child. He started experimenting with making his own *nattō* in 2010 after trying to find fresh varieties on the U.S. mainland. With *nattō* garnering worldwide attention for its growing list of health benefits and signature slimy texture, Eien's *nattō* demonstrations have grown in popularity in recent years.

I joined a packed crowd of 60 fellow *nattō* enthusiasts at da Shop: books + curiosities in Kaimukī on a warm Sunday evening in June to take in Eien's first *nattō* demonstration in Hawai'i. The audience ranged in age from



Eien Hunter-Ishikawa shared a batch of *nattō* he had prepared 10 days earlier with his Hawai'i *nattō* lecture audience. (Photos by Jackie Kojima)

millennials to retirees. An exciting buzz filled the air with talk of *nattō* and the opportunity we would have later in the evening to sample Eien's homemade batch.

Eien started the session by asking how many of us had tried *nattō* and whether we ate it because we liked the taste. Except for three people, everyone said they ate *nattō* just because they like it.

"This is very different from my Mainland talks," Eien chuckled.

He explained that on the Mainland, and even in Japan, there are people who don't particularly love *nattō*. They consume it solely for its health properties.

Among its many health benefits, *nattō* is rich in Vitamin K2 and fiber, which helps to regulate blood sugar and lower LDL cholesterol. Additionally, Vitamin K2 helps deliver calcium to the bones and is commonly found in animal flesh, which makes *nattō* a beneficial option for vegans. *Nattō* is also packed with a protein enzyme called *nattokinase*, which is a by-product of *nattō* fermentation. According to Eien, the enzyme acts as a blood thinner, supports brain function and stress reduction and boosts the immune system.

Eien clarified several common misconceptions about *nattō*. First, he said, the agent that turns

soybeans into *nattō* is not mold; rather it is a spore-forming bacteria called *Bacillus subtilis*. The typical styrofoam container of *nattō* that you buy at the supermarket contains 40 to 45 grams of beans. One gram of *nattō* — that's one to two beans — has 10 million bacteria. What makes *nattō* slimy, or "*neba neba ni suru*," results from the bacteria's mechanism, called the biofilm, to protect itself under harsh conditions, such as freezing and heat. *B. subtilis* spores can survive in frozen *nattō* and in our stomach and intestinal system while regular bacteria cannot survive, thus improving intestinal and digestive health.

The second misconception people tend to have about *nattō* is that it is acidic, since it is a product of fermentation. While other fermented foods such as *kimchi* exhibit this reaction, *nattō*'s pH actually rises during the initial fermentation process, making it

more basic. As *nattō* is left to ferment, however, the acidity rises, the beans shrink and turn more liquidy, and it loses its nutty flavor.

However, small beans do not always indicate that the *nattō* is old. There are various bean sizes, such as Ibaraki Prefecture's small bean Mito *natto*, *hikiwari* style, in which the *nattō* is pulverized before fermentation, and big bean varieties, such as Hokkaidō *nattō*. Generally, though, bigger beans tend to take longer to ferment and have a milder taste. Eien said he prefers bigger beans due to their texture.

It was finally time to taste Eien's *nattō*, which he had made 10 days earlier. He challenged us to see if we could taste two distinct flavors: diacetyl, the fake butter flavor found in movie theater popcorn, and nuttiness, tasted in roasted nuts, chocolate, toast and coffee. I could definitely detect the nutty flavor, and I was impressed at the freshness and heartiness of the beans.

Eien was asked about foods that pair well with *nattō*. He encouraged us to think beyond just green onions and rice, and to instead consider foods that pair well with butter and chocolate, since those are the desired flavors in *nattō*. Eien said he has enjoyed *nattō* in Japanese curry, chili, pizza and even on top of a waffle. The recipe possibilities are endless for a versatile ingredient like *nattō*.

All *nattō* lovers have their own preference for the level of sliminess of their *nattō*. Eien cited an NHK study that determined that stirring *nattō* 424 times, or constantly for about two minutes, produced the best *umami* flavor and optimal aeration. If stirred any longer, the *nattō* tends to lose its stringiness. According to the study, sauces such as *shoyu* should be added on the 350<sup>th</sup> stir.



Eien is also a percussionist and drummer with the innovative taiko performance group, *On Ensemble*, which performed in the Islands earlier this year. The group members are (from left) Eien Hunter-Ishikawa, Masato Baba, Shoji Kameda and Abe Lagrimas Jr. (Courtesy: onensemble.org)



LEAD STORY/ Continued from Page 1

# THE HAWAII HERALD

Hawaii's Japanese American Journal

(USPS 738-330)

The Hawaii Herald is published semi-monthly on the first and third Friday of each month. Subscriptions are \$54 yearly, \$92 domestic airmail yearly, or \$3.25 per copy by Hawaii Houchi, Ltd., 917 Kōkea Street, Honolulu, Hawaii 96817-4528. Phone (808) 845-2255. Fax (808) 847-7215. E-mail: heraldinfo@thehawaiihouchi.com. Web site: www.thehawaiiherald.com. Periodical postage paid at Honolulu, Hawaii. Postmaster: send address changes to: The Hawaii Herald, P.O. Box 17430, Honolulu, Hawaii 96817-0430.

Opinions expressed by columnists are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of The Hawaii Herald. Reproduction of material appearing in *The Hawaii Herald* is forbidden without written permission.

© 2019 by The Hawaii Herald

President and Publisher ..... Taro Yoshida  
 Editor ..... Karleen C. Chinen  
 Staff Writer ..... Jodie Chiemi Ching  
 Advertising Manager ..... Grant Murata  
 Advertising Production ..... Izumi Okino  
 Layout and Design ..... Asami Arai

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Lead Story: Let's Talk Natto.....	1
Community Focus /Herald Salutes.....	3
Culture4Kids!.....	5
Movie Review: "The Farewell".....	6
Nanako's Gift.....	7
In Our Community: Haleiwa Toro Nagashi... 8	
"The Wonderland".....	10
Dear Frances.....	12
Ryan's Table.....	13
Your Social Security/Medicare 411.....	14
Generation Gap/8•0•8.....	15
Shūshin/Today's Thought.....	15

## ON THE COVER

It was a perfect summer evening for a bon dance in the country. Hundreds of people turned out at the Haleiwa Jodo Mission on July 20 to dance the night away at the foot of the *yagura* tower, where musicians with their *taiko* drums, flutes and percussive instruments set the pace for the dancing. As the evening came to a close, the people flocked to the shoreline to bid departed loved ones farewell until next year with pastel-colored paper lanterns illuminated with candles that were set afloat on the calm ocean. *Hawaii Herald* contributing photographer Wayne Shinbara captured our cover shot just as evening was beginning to fall on the old country temple, which was founded in 1913. Wayne captured many more photos (see Pages 8 and 9) as the late afternoon turned in a beautiful night on the North Shore of O'ahu.

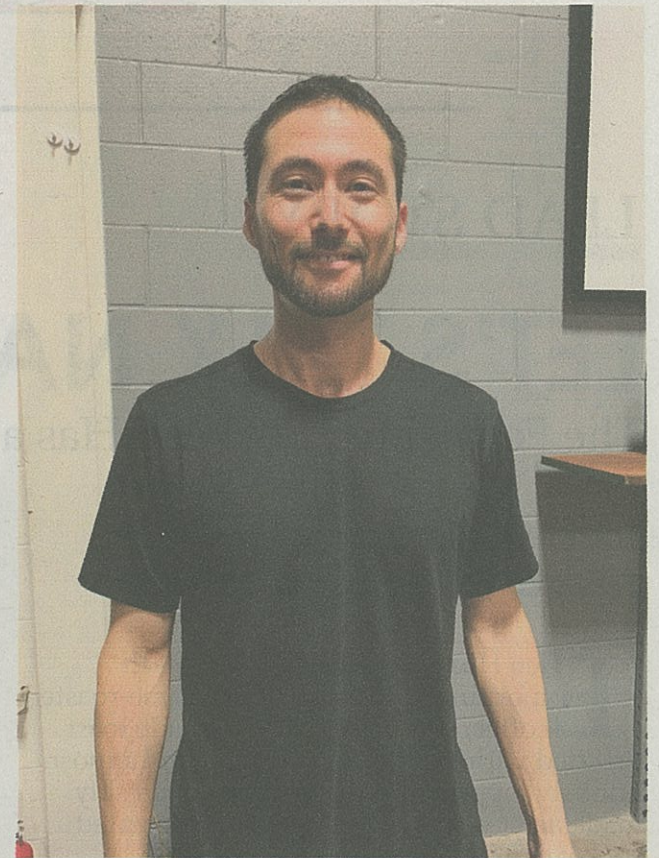
Eien's *nattō*-making process begins with washing and soaking organically grown soybeans from Nebraska in lots of water overnight for about 15 to 20 hours. Fresh beans work best, as older beans will not soak up the water as well. He then puts the beans in a pressure cooker with a half-inch of water at 15 pounds per square inch for 45 minutes. The steamed beans are very soft at this stage and are innoculated with *B. subtilis* spores. Although frozen *nattō* can be used as a starter, Eien uses Mitoku traditional *nattō* spores, which he purchases online at Cultures for Health (\$12.99 per bottle). Only a miniscule amount is needed, which he mixes with water and adds to the beans. Eien then ferments the beans for approximately 18 hours at 104 degrees Fahrenheit in a homemade temperature regulating contraption. Once the *nattō* has cooled to room temperature, it is packaged, put in the fridge and is ready to eat.

"If you like *nattō*, you can learn how to do it," Eien said.

Several audience members shared challenges they experienced while making *nattō* at home and asked for his advice on what they were doing wrong. Eien assured them that it took him many tries to develop a process that worked and that even today, not all of his batches turn out perfectly uniform.

*Nattō* can also be made from black beans, *edamame*, chickpeas and even *azuki* (red mung) beans. Fermentation takes a lot of experimentation, which is not for the faint of heart.

I left the demonstration feeling inspired to try some of the new recipes I learned and vowed to make my own *nattō* one day. In the meantime, Eien opened my eyes to the importance of seeking out fresh, locally made *nattō*, such as Aloha Tofu's fresh *nattō* (check out the Natto



Musician and fermentationist Eien Hunter-Ishikawa developed his love for *nattō* while growing up in Saitama, Japan.

Spaghetti recipe on its website, aloha-tofu.com), even though the frozen varieties boast the same health benefits. Whether you have been a *nattō* fan your whole life or haven't yet mustered up the courage to try the iconic, pungent bean, it's always a great day to eat *nattō*. ☘

To learn more about Eien Hunter-Ishikawa, visit his website at [eienhunterishikawa.com](http://eienhunterishikawa.com). You can also check out his *natto* blog, *Natto Time*, under the "Groups" tab.

Jackie Kojima works as an assistant teacher in the After School Japanese Immersion program at Punahou School and is a freelance writer. A gosei, she developed a passion for studying Japanese in her middle school years. She earned her bachelor's degree in international business and marketing with a minor in Japanese from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa last year. In her free time, she enjoys singing, listening to podcasts and eating Korean food with her sister Jenny.

見る力。魅せる力。  
**東京メガネ**

Gassho. With palms pressed together and heads bowed, we (Karen and Arlene) wish to say thank you with our deepest gratitude, with reverence, and in apology. Tokyo Optical, Japan has informed us that our Honolulu store will close on 8/15/2019.

We were so blessed and honored for the opportunity to have helped you for many years. You have touched our lives, becoming more than a customer. You have been our friend and our family. We will miss you.

Gassho and Aloha,  
 Arlene Gonzalez and Karen Matsumoto

Understanding how difficult it may be to find another optical shop, we visited two shops in the area who said they would be happy to assist you with your eye care needs. Visit them personally to see if they fit your needs.

Dream Vision Eye Care  
 1221 Kapiolani Bldg, Suite 120  
 Honolulu, Hawaii 96814  
 Dr. Leslie Poon, (808) 596-4445

Paris Miki  
 1450 Ala Moana Blvd, #1247  
 Honolulu, Hawaii 96814  
 Mr. Y. Jotoku (808) 943-6454

If you have problems with you frames, Mr. Yasutaka Yasui (Tokyo Optical Overseas Director) promised to help you. He can be reached at: [spd@tokyomegane.co.jp](mailto:spd@tokyomegane.co.jp), or [tomya2@tokyomegane.co.jp](mailto:tomya2@tokyomegane.co.jp), or +81-3-3411-6308.

Should you have any problems with your HOYA lenses, Dream Vision has been kind enough to help. They use HOYA (lens company) as well, and will be able to access our HOYA lens files. HOYA lens warranties will be honored.

**HOSOI GARDEN MORTUARY INC.**  
 30 N. KUKUI ST. HONOLULU, HI  
 PH. 538-3877