JAPANESE DRUMMING

ART FORM FOCUS: Music, rhythmic movement

KEY MESSAGE: Drum with passion and power: discover your body’s beats and rhythms

ABOUT THE SHOW:
Learn how to play the awe-inspiring taiko drum with members of Australia’s TaikOz. Enjoy this unique experience that will allow you to feel the awesome power of the taiko, the vitality of the rhythm and the fun of making music in a group. Learn basic technique and a short piece of music and unleash your creativity in this unique drumming workshop.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITY
The workshop provides children with opportunity to experience the vitality of rhythm and beat. Children will learn how to produce a vibrant drumming sound. They will explore diverse rhythms and sound patterns culminating in a joint performance with other participants. Children will experience the discipline and thrill of ensemble participation.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Starting with the body:
- Listen to the beats of your body and the music that it makes (heart-beat, pulse, breath)
- Put the beat in your feet and step a steady pulse
- Listen to the rhythmic patterns of the world (clocks, pedestrian lights, trees moving in the breeze)
- Reproduce those patterns by speaking, clapping, or patsching (patting the left, right or both thighs)
- Vary the tempo (speed) of your pulse and patterns – can you play these faster? Slower?
- Listen to the sounds around you – what are the patterns of the conversations you hear?

Moving into other sound worlds:
- Take a favourite song and tap the rhythm of the words onto a hard surface (table-top)
- Try keeping the beat in your feet and tapping the rhythm at the same time. Can you swap these over?
- Explore your home to find objects that can be used as mallets and drums (chopsticks, pots n’ pans, ice-cream containers, tins, jars, buckets – you will find lots to make music with!)
- What sounds do different objects make when they become your drum?

Making music with others:
- Play your favourite song and drum along – can you follow the pulse?
- Make a band! Join in with your friends and family to make your own drumming band
- Can you drum loudly? Can you drum quietly? Can you drum together?
- Create your own drum circle!
**RESEARCH**

The activities in this guide have been informed by research findings from the Music Early Learning and Development (MELD) and Pedagogy of Creativity projects of the Creative Collaboratorium at the School of Music, The University of Queensland.

**For further reading:**

Barrett, Margaret S. (2012). Belonging, being and becoming musical: An introduction to children’s musical worlds. In Susan Wright (Ed.), *Children, meaning-making and the arts* 2nd ed. (pp. 57–81) Frenchs Forest, NSW, Australia: Pearson Australia.


**Relevant MELD projects:**


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More information about Taiko drumming from TaikOz

An Introduction

TaikOz is an Australian, Sydney-based performance group that specializes in the art of taiko – the Japanese drums. Our schools concerts and workshops introduce the students not only to the instruments and music, but give historical and cultural background, including the place of taiko in a contemporary, Australian context. The program is drawn from TaikOz’s large repertoire, which includes traditional Japanese music and drumming styles, compositions written by contemporary Japanese composers, as well as original works by members of the ensemble.

Taiko is an extremely visceral form of making music that can be appreciated on another level through the physical experience of playing. It is no surprise that hands-on participation by members of the audience is a feature of TaikOz’s concert performances and workshops. Not only does the experience of playing upon the big drum give each participating student a chance to ‘feel’ the taiko, its rhythm and accompanying movements, but it also opens up possibilities for new forms of musical expression. All other students have the opportunity to join in through the chanting of ‘kakegoe’ – or voice cues – as well as asking and responding to questions.

Taiko and Wadaiko

Taiko is the Japanese word for ‘drum’. When rendered in kanji (Japanese written characters based on Chinese script), taiko appears thus: 太鼓. The first character, 太 – tai – means ‘fat’ or ‘big around’ and the second, 鼓 – ko – is ‘drum’, hence ‘big, fat around drum’.

A second commonly used word is ‘wadaiko’. It is a combination of two words: ‘wa’ and ‘taiko’ (the ‘t’ in ‘taiko’ changes to ‘d’ when following a prefix). In kanji, ‘wa’ can be read as an alternative name for Japan. Wadaiko therefore means ‘Japanese drums’, which gives a broader sense of the concept of taiko rather than just ‘taiko’ or ‘drums’. An interpretation of the two words could plausibly be ‘taiko’: the instrument and ‘wadaiko’: the art of Japanese drumming.

Taiko In Context

Traditionally, taiko are used in a variety of contexts, including Shinto and Buddhist religious ceremonies, theatre music ensembles, such as in the kabuki and noh theatres, and as part of social activities within local communities such as singing and dancing to celebrate local events, customs and stories, and especially annual matsuri, or festivals.

Nearly every region in Japan has a matsuri that is unique to its area. In these (mostly) annual festivals, singing and dancing, as well as playing the taiko and shinobue (bamboo flute) is employed in celebrating local deities and customs.

Matsuri are vibrant and colourful events that involved the whole community. The larger, more famous festivals draw huge crows of out-of-towners. For foreign visitors, attending a matsuri, large or small, can be an exciting experience and an excellent introduction to traditional Japanese culture.

Popular winter-spring festivals include Chichibu Yo-matsuri (Saitama Prefecture), Todaiji Shunie (Nara Prefecture), Sapporo Snow Festival (Hokkaido), Sanja Matsuri (Tokyo) and Kanda Matsuri (Tokyo). Some of the most famous summer festivals are Aomori Nebuta Matsuri (Aomori Prefecture), Fukagawa Matsuri (Tokyo), Tenjin Matsuri (Osaka), Gion Matsuri (Kyoto Prefecture) and Kawagoe Matsuri (Saitama Prefecture).
Modern Taiko Performance

As mentioned, taiko is rooted in Japanese culture where its traditional use is essentially confined to shrines, temples and the theatres. It is also used as accompaniment to song and dance, particularly in the festival (matsuri) context. However, the now very popular style of taiko that sees large ensembles made up of multiple taiko players playing a wide variety of taiko instruments on concert hall stages is a relatively modern development. This form of taiko is commonly referred to as ‘kumidaiko’.

Scholars date the rise of the kumidaiko ensemble to the 1950s when two prominent players, Daihachi Oguchi (Osuwa Daiko) and Seido Kobayashi (O-Edo Sukeroku Daiko) developed a new musical form that makes use of multiple lines of complex rhythms playing on a wide range of taiko. They, and other players since, extended the expressive possibilities through dramatic and flamboyant body movements.

The taiko ensemble concept developed even more (and gained international exposure in the process) through the work of such groups as Sado no Kuni Ondekoza (Demon Drummers of Japan) in the 1980s and since then, the famed Kodo ensemble. Eitetsu Hayashi, the pioneering taiko soloist, has also influenced countless modern taiko players through his unique solo style. These players brought, and continue to bring, a unique dynamism, intense energy and refined sensibility to the concert halls of the world through programs of new taiko music that is based on the traditions of old.

As for Australian taiko – what is its inspiration and where does it come from? For musicians of the 1970s and ‘80s new possibilities were created by the musical explorations of great Australian composers like Peter Sculthorpe, Richard Meale and Ross Edwards, who in the 1960s chose to engage with and learn the cultures of Australia’s nearest neighbors in favour of ‘returning home’ to England and Europe. Their partial rejection of European musical systems and thought, combined with an engagement with cultures close to Australia’s shores, made it the norm for succeeding generations of musicians to travel and explore the musical traditions of Central, South east, and East Asian countries.

Two Sydney-based musicians, Ian Cleworth and Riley Lee, formed TaikOz in 1997. The ensemble was born out of a desire to make music through the medium of the taiko and shakuhachi (end-blown bamboo flute). Both musicians had taiko training and performance experience with many fine Japanese teachers and players during the 1970s and ‘80s and the inspiration for making an Australian taiko group was to explore musical ideas drawing on their combined backgrounds in traditional Japanese music, specifically shakuhachi, shinobue and taiko, and western contemporary/classical music.

Since then, TaikOz has developed its own sound by drawing upon the input of all its members – past and present – whose musical backgrounds range from years of study and performance not only in Japanese traditional music and Western symphonic/contemporary music, but also jazz and pop. Esteemed Colleagues and teachers in Japan such as Eitetsu Hayashi, Fuun no Kai, past members of Sado no Kuni Ondekoza, senior members of Kodo, and composers, choreographers and artists, Meryl Tankard, Regis Lansac, Gerard Brophy, John Bell, Michael Askill, Timothy Constable, Andrea Molino among several others, have all informed, inspired and contributed to the development of TaikOz. Several members’ experience in dance, singing and various forms of martial arts also strongly informs TaikOz’s performance practice.

TaikOz’s aim is not to simply transplant one culture’s music into another’s, but to allow a new form of music to grow upon a sure foundation of understanding and application of wadaiko technique and spirit. Within this tripartite framework, TaikOz seeks to build an original form of taiko.

The current membership of TaikOz is Ian Celworth (Artistic Director), Riley Less, Graham Hilgendorf, Mase Ikegawa, Kerryn Joyce, Kevin Mas, Anton Lock and Tom Royce-Hampton.
Featured Instruments

**Shimedaiko**

This name comes from two words: ‘shimeru’, the verb ‘to tie’ or ‘fasten’, and ‘taiko’. It is tuned to a very high pitch by means of rope, although bolts are now often used. This style of shimedaiko is most commonly used in matsuri (festival) music and is a mainstay of most mixed-taiko ensembles.

**Chudaiko (aka Miyadaiko)**

The generic name of this particular taiko is miyadaiko or ‘shrine drum’ (‘miya’ means ‘shrine’). As the size of this taiko sits between the smaller shimedaiko and the large odaiko (big drum), the word chudaiko – which means ‘medium (sized) drum’ – is a modern way of referring to this instruments. The shell is carved from a single trunk of wood, the finest of which is keyaki, a hard, dense and very heavy wood that results in a sound with great carrying power. There are many styles in which this taiko can be played.
Okedo

The name stems from two words: ‘oke’, meaning ‘buckets’ or ‘tub’ and ‘do’, meaning ‘body’ (or more correctly, ‘torso’). The shell is made from staves of lightweight hinoki or sawara wood that are held together by glue and a ring made of bamboo. Generally speaking, the okedo has a medium to low pitch depending on its diameter and depth. Small, high-pitched okedo are sometimes slung around the shoulder of the player and can be played in a highly virtuosic manner. When played in this style, the instrument is called ‘katsugi okedo’ (literally, ‘shouldering drum’)

Atarigane (aka Kane)

‘Atarigane’ is often shortened to ‘kane’, simply meaning ‘metal’. This hand-held metal dish is also colloquially called ‘chanchiki’ as it can produce three distinct sounds: ‘chan’ – struck in the middle by the deer-horn shumoku stick – ‘chi’, is produced on one rim, and ‘ki’ on the other.

Chappa

Small metal cymbals, the chappa, are often used in combination with the taiko, contributing a wide variety of colours. Some contemporary players specialize in the chappa and are capable of producing an astonishing range of techniques, sounds and rhythms. These cymbals were traditionally used in temples.
Terminology use in TaikOz Performance and Workshops

**Bachi**

‘Drum stick’: bachi are made from a variety of woods and vary in length, thickness and weight according to the size and type of taiko to be played.

**Ichinini...san...shi (yon)...roku...shichi (nana)... hachi...ku...ju**

The numbers from one to 10 in Japanese.

**Kakegoe**

Calls and shouts used in performance to add expression, lend encouragement to other players and to give cues. The word derives from ‘kakeru’, meaning ‘to paly against’ and ‘spur on’, and ‘koe, or ‘voice’.

**Matsuri**

‘Festival’: the taiko is closely associated with festivals in Japan. Many towns and regions conduct seasonal matsuri and their uniqueness in expressed in a extremely diverse range of taiko playing styles.

**Oroshi**

A rhythmic figure heard in many musical contexts in Japanese music. Oroshi begins as a slow beat that gradually increases in speed and intensity.

**Fue, Takebue, Shinobue**

Fue means ‘flute’. Another name is takebue (the ‘fu’ in ‘fue’ changes to ‘bu’ when following a prefix), meaning ‘bamboo flute’, whereas the more common ‘shinobue’ refers to a specific type of bamboo called ‘shino’ this is often used in making fue. There is a wide range of bamboo, side-blown flutes used in combination with taiko: the shinobue is the most common.

**Tabi**

Japanese split-toed ‘socks’ made of cotton. Jika-tabi have rubber soles that are often used by taiko players because of their light-weight comfort and excellent grip.

**Taiko**

‘Drum’: literally, ‘big, fat around drum’.

**Tamaire**

Tamaire is a section in the structure of a piece of music that involves solo playing usually on the high pitched shimedaiko. It typically features fast and complex rhythmic interplay between two solo shimedaiko.

**Wadaiko**

When rendered in kanji, (the Japanese written characters that are based on Chinese script), ‘Wa’ is read as an ancient word for Japan. ‘Wadaiko’ therefore means ‘Japanese drums’.

**Yatai**

Means ‘cart’ and refers to the large floats used in matsuri (festivals). The music played at Chichibu’s annual Yo-matsuri is called Yataibayashi, which literally means ‘cart accompaniment’.