

✕ TAIKOPROJECT



CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Art Form: Music

Style: Taiko

Culture: Japanese

MEET THE ARTIST

TAIKOPROJECT was founded in 2000 in Los Angeles, California by a group of young, emerging taiko drummers led by Bryan Yamami and Masato Baba. The group continues to define a modern American style of taiko, blending traditional forms with an innovative and fresh aesthetic. They first made waves when they became the first American taiko group to win the prestigious Tokyo International Taiko Contest in 2005. Currently consisting of 18 members, TAIKOPROJECT has gone on to perform on the Academy Awards, the Grammy Awards, NBC's The Voice, Syfy's Face/Off, The X-Factor, Conan, Jimmy Kimmel Live, The Late Late Show with James Corden, Food Network's Iron Chef Gauntlet, the iHeartRadio Music Festival, and have performed with numerous artists such as 30 Seconds to Mars, Stevie Wonder, Usher, Alicia Keys, John Legend, and Peter Gabriel.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

TAIKOPROJECT presents an interactive and dynamic introduction to the music, history, and art of taiko. The program features songs interspersed with detailed history on how taiko has made its way from ancient Japan to modern day America, information on drum construction and craftsmanship, and insight into the contemporary approach used to create and play taiko music today.

PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE

Originating from Japan, taiko was first used by farmers to pray to the gods for a good harvest of their crops. The deep rumble of the drum when struck resembled the sound of thunder, so farmers would strike the drum in hopes that the thunderous sound would bring rain for their crops to grow. Taiko was also used as part of ceremonial and religious events and later on used in traditional Japanese theatre and music.



The style of group taiko drumming known as “kumi-daiko” that is often seen today has existed for around 70 years, which is considerably new, looking at the long history and evolution of taiko. In the 1950s, Daihachi Oguchi, a Japanese jazz drummer trained in western music, visited a temple in Japan and found ancient Japanese sheet music. Instead of playing the music by himself, he decided he wanted to split up the parts and play them on taiko with a group of musicians. Thus, the new style of playing taiko with an ensemble, “kumi-daiko,” was born.

Taiko first made its way to America in 1968 by a Japanese man named Seiichi Tanaka. He founded the first taiko group in America, San Francisco Taiko Dojo, that is still an active taiko group. Around the same time in Los Angeles, a group of third-generation Japanese Americans were looking for a way to express their cultural heritage, and started playing a taiko they found at their local temple. They started a group called Kinnara Taiko. From these first two groups, taiko started spreading all over the United States, and today, there are over 200 taiko groups across the country.



The members of TAIKOPROJECT did not grow up in Japan, but in the United States, listening to American music. These experiences and influences have been integrated into their work and play a large role in their music. Just like any other art form, taiko continues to grow and evolve everyday.

ABOUT THE SONGS

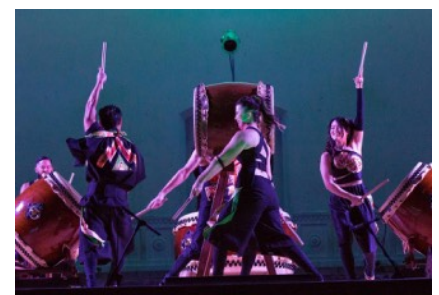
TAIKOPROJECT’s songs are a combination of traditional songs and styles that the group grew up playing, with original compositions written by members of the group.

Expanding (2003) Composed by Bryan Yamami and Masato Baba

This song embodies one of our main goals; to expand the boundaries of taiko performance as well as the vocabulary of taiko drumming. As taiko players might tell you, most taiko songs are taught through *kuchi shoga*, vocalizing the rhythms and then playing them on the drum. Blending hip hop rhythms and movements with taiko, it has become one of our signature compositions.

Many Sides (2004) Arranged by Masato Baba

Sukeroku Taiko was founded in Tokyo in the late 1950s and they dynamic style of taiko came to the U.S. with Seiichi Tanaka in the late 1960s. This song is our own interpretation of this exciting style, inspired by Sukeroku Taiko’s “Yodan Uchi” and Shasta Taiko’s “Tsumujikaze.”



Here We Go Now!! (2006)

Composed by Bryan Yamami & Masato Baba

This spirited composition combines traditional Japanese sling *okedo* taiko drums along with American drumline-style drums and choreography. It is an embodiment of our group—Japanese traditions reinterpreted with an American spirit and attitude.

Kodama (2011) Composed by Masato Baba

This song was inspired by filmmaker Hayao Miyazaki's dedication to nature. *Kodama* are the mysterious forest creatures from his film *Princess Mononoke*.



Omiyage (2003)

Composed by Shoji Kameda, arranged by TAIKOPROJECT

Omiyage refers to the traditional Japanese custom of gift-giving. During workshops and residency activities, we teach “Omiyage” and offer it to communities as our “omiyage” in thanks for bringing us out to share our show.

ABOUT THE INSTRUMENTS

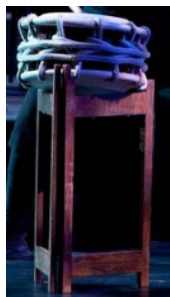
Taiko performances typically feature a variety of types of taiko drums and instruments. Most of our taiko drums are made by the Asano Taiko Company of Ishikawa, Japan. They were founded in 1609 and have over 400 years of taiko-making experience.



Chu-Daiko (Nagado-daiko)

These are “middle-sized drums.” This term usually refers to the standard drums in an ensemble. They are primarily played in “betta” (down) or “naname” slant styles. The type of construction is called “Nagado-daiko,” referring to a solid-body barrel drum with a cowskin drumhead attached with metal tacks.

**Fun fact - The cost of one of TAIKOPROJECT's Chu-Daiko is about \$12,000 US dollars.*



Shime-Taiko

These are the drums in a taiko family that have the highest pitch. Their drumheads are made of cowhide wrapped and sewed onto a metal ring. Then the two drumheads are placed on either side of a shallow wooden drum body and a metal ring and bolts or rope is used to tension the drumheads over the body.

**Fun fact - In major concerts, TAIKOPROJECT uses 4 shime-taiko, and their pitches are tested and utilized for different musical purposes.*



Okedo-Taiko

These drums come in a variety of sizes and has cowhide heads similar to shime-taiko, but usually thinner heads and metal rings. The drum bodies are much lighter and longer, allowing them to be played in a multiple drum set, or slung over the shoulder and played while moving, called “katsugi-okedo.”

**Fun fact - TAIKOPROJECT has developed original choreography and movements in “katsugi-okedo” style influenced by hip hop dance, drum line, and other American choreographers.*



Odaiko

Odaiko usually refers to a group’s largest and most-revered drum. In this performance, biggest and deepest drum is about 4’ in diameter and 3 1/2’ deep. It is an okedo-style drum, tensioned with thick purple ropes.

**Fun fact - The design on the drumhead is called a “Mitsudomoe.” It is a common family crest, and for us, the three swirls represent the elements that comprise taiko drums; animal (cowhide skin of the drumhead), tree/plant (the wooden body of the drum), and earth (the metal tacks used to attach the drumhead to the drum body).*



Bachi

Drumsticks used to play taiko. Usually these come in pairs and are made out of various types of wood, from lightweight, soft woods such as hou (magnolia) and cypress (hinoki) to dense hardwoods such as kaede (maple) or kashi (white oak). Bachi can even be made out of bamboo or other natural materials.

**Fun fact - A more modern bachi trend is the “baseball bat” bachi, used to play the largest drums in an ensemble.*



Shinobue

The shinobue is the Japanese bamboo side/transverse flute. They come in various sizes from #1 to #12, with the most commonly-used ones being #6, #7, and #8. There are seven finger holes that are played open or closed to change the notes and one embouchure hole that is blown across.

**Fun fact - The shinobue was the first melodic instrument used in TAIKOPROJECT. We have since added vocals, koto (13-stringed zither), and marimba*



Other Instruments (High-hat, Cymbals, Woodblocks, Udu, Marimba) TAIKOPROJECT performances incorporate non-traditional musical instruments that provide color and texture to our various songs. In this performance, you can see Western instruments such as high-hat and cymbals, percussive components you might normally see with a standard drum set, as well as wood-blocks, a common Western



percussion instrument. In “Kodama,” you can also see and hear the udu, a clay pot drum of African origin, and a custom-made wooden marimba of Zimbabwean design.

**Fun fact - Our marimba was custom-made to fit in with the design of our taiko instruments and was made in Portland, Oregon by marimba-maker Carl Dean.*

ABOUT THE COSTUMES

TAIKOPROJECT’s costumes were custom-designed and constructed by accredited kimono master and stylist Sueko Oshimoto, utilizing high-quality, finely-crafted kimono materials. The costumes are based in traditional Japanese designs, but with a modern, innovative aesthetic.



Haragake

This top part of our costume is based on the traditional Japanese apron typically used for festivals.

Happi Coat

These coats are based on festival coats, but using heavier, more visually stunning fabrics and sections of embroidery. In order to play more freely, we use tasuki, a long piece of fabric, to tie back the sleeves of our happi coats.

Tekkou (and other arm accessories)

Tekkou are traditional wristbands, used to keep our wrists warm and to keep sweat from getting onto our hands. We have expanded these arm accessories with a modern edge, creating decorative gauntlets, arm sleeves, and bicep bands for variety and individual preference.

Hakama (Pants)

Our pants are based on traditional “hakama” formal pants, but allow for movement, stances, and active choreography. Normally “hakama” pants are baggy all the way to the floor. If we wore them for our performances, we would trip on them in our more active songs.

Tabi

Tabi are traditional Japanese footwear that are flexible like socks, but have rubber soles like shoes. They are used by Japanese roofworkers and fisherman due to their ability to provide a strong grip on slippery surfaces.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The sound of taiko is often used to recreate sounds heard in nature such as thunder and rain. What are some other instruments that you can think of that are often used to recreate or imitate other sounds?

What are some differences you see between taiko and a drum you might see and hear in Western music?

What were the different types of taiko that were demonstrated? Which one was your favorite and why?

What was your favorite part of the performance? What about this part that stood out to you?

FRAMEWORK FOCUS: SCIENCE

Have students learn about natural materials similar to taiko construction materials. To learn about various types of wood, students will need to bring in one wooden item from home and tap them to hear the different sounds they make based on the hardness or thickness of the wooden item. A rawhide chew or toy can be used to demonstrate how taiko drumheads are stretched. When taiko drumheads are stretched over the drum body, the cowhide heads are soaked in water overnight in order to make them soft and pliable. Then once they are stretched, they are tacked and left to dry. Once dry, they are hard again. This process shows the science of biological materials and effects of water on them.

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE

Taiko is an important aspect of Japanese culture that has been passed down from ancient times. Can you think of something in your culture’s history that has been passed down from your ancestors? Make a list, then share and discuss with your fellow classmates.

Taiko come in all shapes and sizes, and each can be played in various ways. Do you remember all of the different types of taiko that the performers introduced? Draw a picture of the different drums you saw during the performance.

Compose a simple 4-beat drum pattern using a combination of Don, Do-Ko, dokodoko, Tsu, Tsu-Ku, Ka, and Ka-Ra (the words used for the basic sounds that can be played on a taiko). Say the pattern out loud and have your fellow classmates imitate you by clapping the pattern. Loud claps should be used for a 'Don' or 'DoKo'. Soft claps should be used for a 'TsuKu'. Snap your fingers (or stomp your feet if you can't snap your fingers) for a "Ka" or 'KaRa'. Try to play the pattern to a constant tempo (if you have access to a metronome, this would be the best tool to keep a steady tempo).

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

"The Way of Taiko" by Heidi Varian

"Taiko Boom" by Shawn Bender

"Jasmine Toguchi, Drummer Girl" by Debbi Michiko Florence (fiction)

TAIKOPROJECT

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CULTURE: Japanese

MEET THE ARTIST:

TAIKOPROJECT was founded in 2000 in Los Angeles, California by a group of young, emerging taiko drummers led by Bryan Yamami and Masato Baba. The group continues to refine their unique style of taiko performance, blending traditional forms with an innovative and fresh aesthetic. The members of the ensemble were born and raised in the United States, and grew up listening to American popular music which has been a major influence on their work. They first made waves when they became the first American taiko group to win the prestigious Tokyo International Taiko Contest in 2005. The full group currently consists of 18 members and has performed on the Academy Awards, the Grammy Awards, NBC's *The Voice*, Syfy's *Face/Off*, *The X-Factor*, *Conan*, *Jimmy Kimmel Live*, *The Late Late Show with James Corden*, *Food Network's Iron Chef Gauntlet*, and the *iHeartRadio Music Festival*, along with supporting numerous artists such as 30 Seconds to Mars, Stevie Wonder, Usher, Alicia Keys, A.R. Rahman, John Legend, and Kanye West.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

TAIKOPROJECT presents an interactive and dynamic introduction to the music, history, and art of taiko. The program features songs interspersed with specific aspects of how taiko has made its way from Japan to modern day America. The audience is also given a view into how the drums are constructed and the craftsmanship involved. The group gives insight into the contemporary approach used to create and play taiko music today. Beside the main taiko drums, there are also metal percussion instruments played, including the *atarigane*, a small circular brass gong, and small brass cymbals, called *chappa*. In addition, there are two wind instruments—the *shinobue*, or bamboo flute, and the *horagai*, a giant seashell with a mouthpiece. The audience is also given an opportunity to learn a taiko pattern, called an *oroshi* and learn the verbal sounds that match the rhythmic pattern. This begins with a short vocal "call and response" pattern called *kiai*. Toward the end of the program, students and teachers have the opportunity to come up to the stage and play the taiko drums. The performance concludes with a dynamic song called "Many Sides." It demonstrates a modern style of taiko from Tokyo, Japan, and includes choreography and improvisation.



PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

Originating from Japan, taiko was first used by farmers who would strike the drum in hopes that the sound would bring rain for their crops to grow. The deep rumble of the drum, when struck, resembled the sound of thunder. Many villages even determined their boundaries by the distance the sound of the drum could carry. Taiko was also used as part of ceremonial and religious events and later was used in traditional Japanese theatre and music.

Taiko drums are handmade and a single, medium-sized drum can take as long as 40 hours to make. It is believed that the spirit of the trees from which the wood came, as well as the drum makers and performers, come to embody each drum. Movement is an integral part of taiko, requiring each musician to use his/her body in connection with the drum and its sound to communicate.

The style of group taiko drumming known as "kumi-daiko," often seen today, has existed for over a half century and is considerably new when compared to the long history and evolution of taiko. In the 1950s Daihachi Oguchi, a Japanese jazz drummer trained in western music, visited a temple in Japan and found ancient Japanese sheet music. Instead of playing the music by himself, he decided he wanted to split up the parts and play them the various taiko drums with a group of musicians. Thus, a new style of playing taiko with an ensemble, "kumi-daiko," was born.

This style first made its way to America in 1968 by a Japanese man named Seiichi Tanaka. He founded the first taiko group in America, called San Francisco Taiko Dojo, still a very active taiko group. Around the same time in Los Angeles, a group of third-generation Japanese Americans were looking for a way to express their cultural heritage, and started playing a form of taiko they found at their local temple. They started a group called Kinnara Taiko. From these first two groups, taiko started spreading all over the United States and today there are over 200 taiko groups across the country. Just like any other art form, taiko continues to grow and evolve.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How do the movements of TAIKOPROJECT performers relate to the music they make? Does the size of the drum affect the movements they use? If so, how?
- What is unique about playing taiko? How does it differ from playing other types of drums you have seen?
- The sound of taiko is often used to recreate sounds heard in nature such as thunder and rain. What are some other instruments that are often used to recreate, or imitate other natural sounds?
- What were the different types of taiko that were demonstrated? Which one was your favorite and why?
- What was your favorite part of the performance? What was it about this part that stood out to you?
- What other aspects of Japanese culture are you familiar with?

FRAMEWORK FOCUS—SCIENCE:

Have students learn about natural materials similar to taiko construction materials. It is interesting to note that early cultures used the materials most available to them. To learn about various types of wood, students will need to bring in one wooden item from home and tap them to hear the different sounds they make based on the hardness or thickness of the wooden item. Perhaps do some research to discover what type of wood is used to build different types of instruments. If you are interested, make a chart with pictures of instruments and then list the type of wood used to make them.

A rawhide chew or toy can be used to demonstrate how taiko drumheads are stretched. When taiko drumheads are stretched over the drum body, the cowhide heads are soaked in water overnight in order to make them soft and pliable. Once they are stretched, they are tacked down and left to dry. Once dry, they are hard again, and have also been reduced in length and width. This process shows the science of biological materials and effects of water on them. Think about other materials that could be used as a "skin" if cowhide wasn't available (rubber, stretch cloth, etc.).

LEGEND

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS CONTENT STANDARD STRANDS

- ★ Artistic perception
- Creative expression
- Historical & cultural context
- ◆ Aesthetic valuing
- ◆ Connections, Relations, Applications

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

■ Taiko is an important aspect of Japanese culture that has been passed down from ancient times. Can you think of something in your family history that has been passed down from your ancestors? Make a list, then share and discuss with your fellow classmates.

◆ Taiko drums come in all shapes and sizes, and each can be played in various ways. Do you remember some of the different types of taiko that the performers introduced? Draw a picture of the different drums you saw during the performance.

◆ Compose a simple 4-beat drum pattern using a combination of the following sounds: *Don*, *Do-Ko*, *dokodoko*, *Tsu*, *Tsu-Ku*, *Ka*, and *Ka-Ra* (the words used for the basic sounds played on a taiko). Say the pattern out loud and have your fellow classmates imitate you by clapping the pattern. Loud claps should be used for a 'Don' or 'DoKo'. Soft claps should be used for a 'TsuKu'. Snap your fingers (or stomp your feet if you can't snap your fingers) for a 'Ka' or 'KaRa'. Try to play the pattern to a constant tempo using a metronome, (a device that keeps a steady tempo; various apps are available if you don't have one). Experiment with different combinations of the sounds.

★ Using several of the following adjectives, write a paragraph describing your impressions of TAIKOPROJECT sounds:

timid	exciting	vibrant	bright
listless	expressionless	expressive	intense
strong	concentrated	energetic	assertive

Take two to five of these words and write one to three sentences that describe taiko music from your perspective.

● Create a poem or story with a taiko drummer as the main character. Include directions on how to read specific lines or sections so that the traits of taiko drumming are emphasized. For example:

Softly like rain (read like rain falling)

Strong and steady (say line three times)

With rhythm (add finger snaps or claps)

Broken by silence (shhhhhhhhhh)

SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

Varian, Heidi, *The Way of Taiko*. Stone Bridge Press, 2005.

Bender, Shawn, *Taiko Boom: Japanese Drumming in Place and Motion*. University of California Press, 2012

"Japanese Festival Sounds." The Music Center, The Music Center, www.musiccenter.org/education/Teacher-Resources/Artsource-Curriculum/Available-ArtSource-Units/Japanese-Festival-Sounds/.