

San Jose Taiko

March 31 - April 1, 2022



Applause Series

Presented by the Lauridsen Family Foundation

Inquiry Guide

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Dear Teachers,

Welcome back to another season of the Applause Series with Des Moines Performing Arts! We are excited to invite you back to the theater and are eager to share the magic of taiko with you and your students!

San Jose Taiko joins us all the way from California - but the traditional drumming practice of taiko comes from much further away. . . Japan! The drummers that join us on stage in Des Moines are musicians as well as ambassadors of their musical legacy and innovators to the traditional taiko style.

This guide provides additional teacher materials to help provide contextual information about the performance, as well as some discussion questions to dig deeper into the themes of the performance to help connect the theater to the classroom.

Thank you for your commitment both to your students and to providing them opportunities to experience the arts. We are SO happy you are coming to visit us.

See you at the theater,
Des Moines Performing Arts

Thank you to our donors

SUPPORT FOR DES MOINES PERFORMING ARTS EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND THE APPLAUSE SERIES IS PROVIDED BY THE LAURIDSEN FAMILY ENDOWMENT AND MANY DONORS INCLUDING

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The Group

“Creating innovative performances, empowering diverse voices, and educating across cultures to foster a more accepting and engaged world.”



Since 1973, San Jose Taiko has been delighting audiences with their powerful performances inspired by traditional Japanese drumming. Performers express themselves through taiko, striving to connect people through cultural understanding, creative expression, and rhythm.

San Jose Taiko was founded by young Asian Americans searching for a way to convey their experiences as third-generation Japanese Americans, or Sansei. Looking to Japan for inspiration, they were drawn to the sounds of taiko - the Japanese drum - an instrument that embodies the spiritual essence and heartbeat of Japan.

Since then, San Jose Taiko has become a world-class ensemble, performing extensively both nationally and internationally, reaching more than 75,000 audience members each year and being honored in their home state of California, and around the world.



Material Adapted from San Jose Taiko

The Music



[Click here for a preview](#)

San Jose Taiko is acknowledged as one of the best taiko ensembles in the world, whose artistry and philosophy have influenced many artists in the U.S. and in Japan. By studying with masters of other traditions and cultures, San Jose Taiko has updated this historical art form into a hybrid performance style that blends the traditional rhythms of Japanese drumming with the beat of world rhythms, including African, Brazilian, Filipino, Latin and Jazz and is often described as “dancing with drums.” Known for fun choreography, eclectic musicality, and a joyful spirit, San Jose Taiko’s music is appreciated by those brand new to the world of taiko and experts in the music.

San Jose Taiko performers use the power and beauty of taiko to move beyond cultural barriers and create a greater understanding of Japanese American culture. One of San Jose Taiko’s strengths lies in the accessibility of its music and art. Not tied to any one demographic or style, San Jose Taiko appeals to everyone! Through taiko, they encourage multicultural musical appreciation as a pathway to better communication, open-mindedness, and connection.

5 facts about the Drums of Japan

01.

Taiko is the Japanese word for drum. In North America, this term is used to describe both the Japanese drum itself and the art form of kumidaiko (ensemble drumming with Japanese drums).

02.

The kumidaiko art form began in Japan in the late 1950s and came to the US in the late 1960s.

03.

San Jose Taiko was founded in 1973, and was only the third group to form outside of Japan. Since then, they have helped to create a network of drumming that now supports more than 500 groups throughout North America.

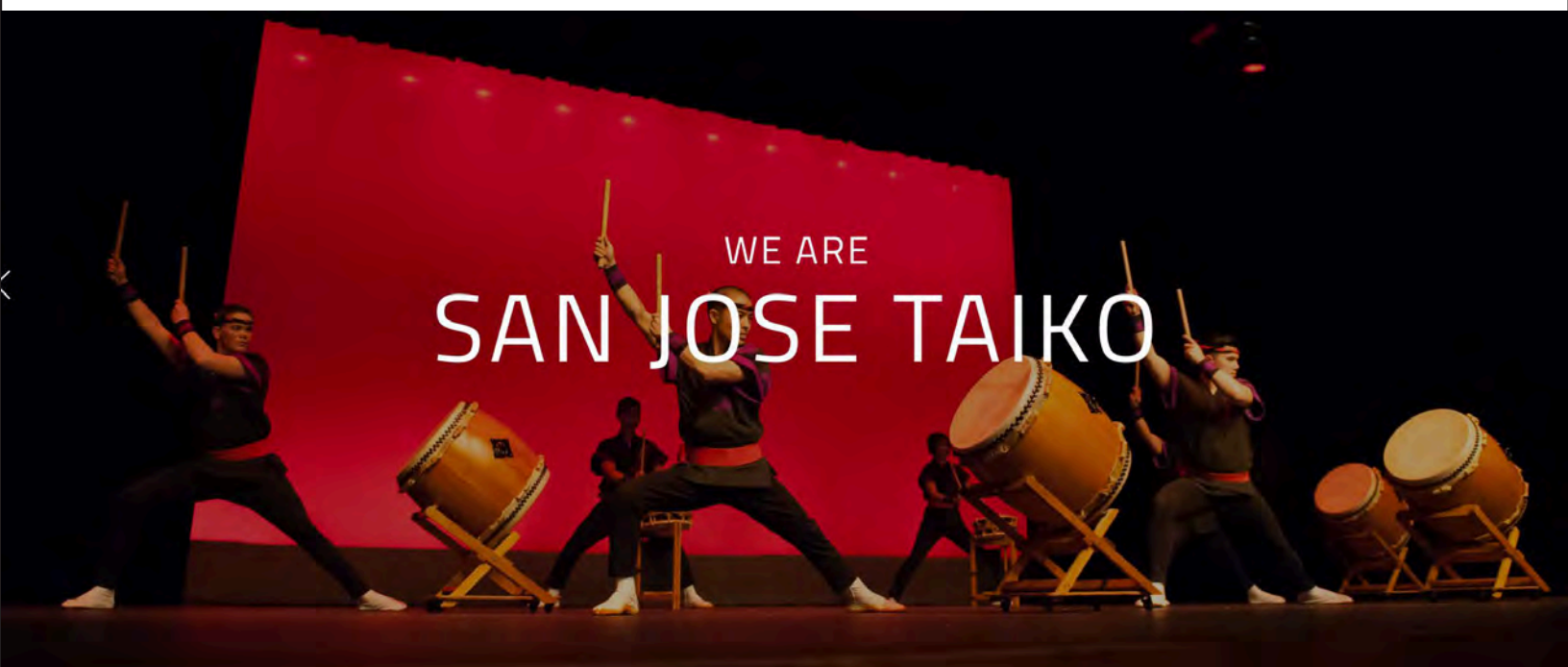
04.

Ko means drum or drumbeat. In olden days taiko was written with the kanji (Chinese characters) symbols of both dai (big) and tai (fat, thick, or broad). So both daiko and taiko imply a big, thick drum.

05.

In Japan the bodies of the taiko are usually carved from a single log, some over 400 years old. This means that the making of a large taiko takes a large tree. The increasing scarcity of old growth forests makes it difficult to obtain large enough logs. To compensate, some taiko makers now use oak wine or whiskey barrels to make a drum body.

For more instrument information
check out page i-iii!



The Principles

There are four principles that are critical elements of San Jose Taiko's style. No element is more important than another.

The four principles are:

Attitude

For San Jose Taiko, Attitude is the mental aspect of the taiko art form. The group believes that respect includes respect for one's self, other players, the instruments and other equipment, practice space, history, audiences, etc. They see the discipline of body and mind as critical foundations for being a good artist.

Kata

Kata refers to the way players use their bodies when playing, such as choreography, physicality, or the visual aspect of the art form. San Jose Taiko Kata includes elements that always apply (like stance) and elements that change based on style and song. Players think of Kata as a way of "making the sound visual." San Jose Taiko was amongst the first taiko ensembles to embrace the potential of the human body as part of their approach to their playing.

Musical Technique

Linked to Kata, Musical Technique integrates movement and sound into the sound aspect of San Jose Taiko's style. For San Jose Taiko, this principle includes how to hold the bachi (drumsticks), how to strike the drum, and how to coordinate movements to produce consistent sound and tone. It also encompasses musicality and expression.

Ki

San Jose Taiko defines Ki as "the life force energy that connects all things." It can be loosely translated as "energy" and is often understood better in the U.S. through the Chinese word "chi." San Jose Taiko believes that this intangible energy can be heard in their playing and seen in their Kata. Often described as the emotional and spiritual aspect of the San Jose Taiko philosophy, Ki is a way players achieve oneness with the drum, other performers, and even their audience.

Learn more about the development of the principles here:

<https://taikopeace.love/community-garden-posts/7idm0tt6pfouv42mchwcfm44o2xh1>

"We believe that taiko is...the connection between the drum and the player. So at a certain point if we concentrate too much on technicality and we lose that feeling or that spirit behind the playing, then it becomes just the drum. They become separated. The player is just using the drum rather than creating a relationship with it."

Wisa Uemura,
San Jose Taiko Executive Director.



Enduring Understandings

Overarching (aka, “big”) ideas that are central to the core of the music discipline and may be transferred to new learning beyond the music.

Artists use their personal/political/cultural/historical perspectives and experiences to shape their musical compositions and performances.

When we understand elements, structures and context of music we can “read” the music to understand the intent of the performance and ask deeper questions about purpose.

Understanding a musician’s expressive intent is important for appreciating the work before we can engage in meaning making.

Compelling Questions

Compelling Questions deal with curiosities about how things work; interpretations and applications of disciplinary concepts; and unresolved issues that require students to construct arguments in response.

Use the inquiry prompts on the following pages to spark student curiosity and, in turn, support their discovery of enduring understandings.



Inquiry 01

Goal:

Research taiko drumming to add to the experience of the performance

Strategies:

Activating Prior Knowledge

Supporting an Opinion with Evidence

Temperature Read Question:

Music is a good way to learn about culture. Agree or Disagree?

Students may respond in a poll, a sticky-note on the board or even create a spectrum of support by using their standing bodies across the classroom.

Research:

What do we know about the history and context of the type of music being performed?

How does this performance add to what you knew/thought about drumming? Does it replicate a tradition or do something new?

Read the article on pages iv-v to learn about the history of taiko drumming. Divide students into small groups and have them jigsaw the sections or ask students to use the research sheet (page vi) to note their learning.

Consider:

How does learning more about the history of a musical tradition impact your experience of seeing San Jose Taiko perform?



Inquiry 02

Goal:

Use musical terms to discuss specific “readings” of the performance.

Strategies:

Observing to make inferences

Considering theme and purpose of a performance/composition

Observe:

What musical clues can you use to discern expressive intent?

Consider: volume, tempo, facial expression and posture of performer(s)?

What can you “read” about the performance?

Use the glossary of musical terms to select a few terms to report on after the performance.

(page vii)

Extension Discussion:

Who is in charge of the “meaning” of a piece of music? The listener, the performer, the composer, the tradition?



Inquiry 03

Goal:

Consider the human connection to music as a listener and as a performer.

Strategies:

Connecting to self and text across medium and genre

Connect:

What music do you respond to/like to listen to? What about that music connects you to it?

If you perform music, what influences your decisions as a performer?

How can others “read” your expressive intent (what you are feeling or meaning in the performance) when you are creating music?

Ask students to write a paragraph or more on a musician or genre and provide reasons they connect to it. Sharing a sample of the song and a short response to others (in large or small group) can provide an impetus for discussion.



Guide Sources

Explore

SAN JOSE TAIKO
www.taiko.org

More about Taiko Drumming
<http://tamashii.nz/about/taiko>

A guide to traditional Japanese instruments
www.japan-experience.com/to-know/understandingjapan/traditional-instruments

Japanese Online: beginner Japanese lessons
www.japanese-online.com

Taiko Drums
<http://www.miyoshidaiko.com>

Japanese American Citizens League
<https://jacl.org/asian-american-history/>

Asian Nation
<http://www.asian-nation.org/japanese.shtml> and <http://www.asian-nation.org/assimilation.shtml>

Watch

Preview and Youtube Channel
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCIhwXBNhWwX7G9JoATIJLqQ>

Example of Taiko drummers
www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7HL5wYqAbU

Study Guide Sources

Flynn Center Yamato Study Guide

<https://www.flynncenter.org/assets/files/education/student-matinees/YamatoStudyGuideFlynn.pdf>

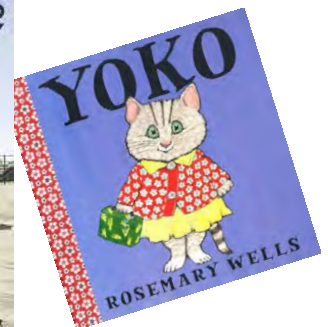
Ordway Center for the Performing Arts' Study Guides
<http://www.ordway.org/education/studyguides>

San Jose Taiko- School Outreach Curriculum Guide
<http://www.taiko.org>

Lyrical Works: Taiko Legend of Amaterasu
<http://www.lyricalworks.com/stories/amaterasu.html>

Reading

To get a deeper sense of the culture, read a few traditional folk tales or more modern stories about Japan and experience of immigration and internment in Japanese American history.



Meet the Instruments (REFER TO PAGE 4)

Introductions of Taiko and instruments

Miya-daiko

This is a beer-barrel shaped drum with tacked heads made of one big piece of wood (Japanese cypress, zelkova, oak). It was brought to Japan from China through Korea around the 15th century. The Miya-daiko is used mainly for Japanese traditional festivals.



Hira-daiko

These Taiko drums are made in the same way as Miya-daiko. Their diameter is longer than a man's height.



Okedo-daiko

These are laceheaded drums of various sizes. Many pieces of wood are put together to make an Okedo-daiko. The biggest Okedo-daiko in Japan is 380cm in diameter. It is made light so that it can be played while being carried. Musicians frequently play this type of Taiko drums at the Shishimai (Japanese dance-like play) or Kabuki.



Meet the Instruments (con't) (REFER TO PAGE 4)

Shime-daiko

A small drum with laced heads, the Shime-daiko was brought to Japan from Kudara(Korea) around the 6th century. Its body is made of zelkova or pine tree which is hollowed out inside. Cow skin is put over each end and fastened with hemp. This Taiko drum has a high pitched sound and is often used to play fast rhythm.



Chappa

A small bronze cymbal, the Chappa was used widely in the ancient Near East. Passing along the Silk Road, it was first brought to China, and then to Japan around the Nara Era. It is often used at religious services.



Shamisen

One of the best-known Japanese instruments, the Shamisen is used to provide accompaniment to different styles of vocal music and theatrical performances. The Shamisen came to Japan from China via the Ryukyu Island and was fashioned into its current shape during the 16th century. It has a long thin neck and a box which resonates when its three strings are plucked with a big plectrum called Bachi. The Shamisen became widely popular from about the 17th century. Today it can be heard accompanying Kabuki, Bunraku and Joruri performances as well as traditional dances and folk songs.



Meet the Instruments(con't) (REFER TO PAGE 4)

Shekere

This unique looking Afro Cuban instrument is called shekere. Made with a dried gourd and a net of seed beads anyone can play this by holding in one hand and twisting with the other to make a percussive shaking sound.



Agogo

Used in African and Samba drumming, a classic metal Agogo sound like a cow bell and has two differently sized metal bells. When struck with the wooden beater these produce notes slightly different tones.



Tamborim

A tamborim is a small, round Brazilian frame drum of Portuguese and African origin and often used in Samba. Made of metal, plastic, or wood with a tightly tuned drum head it is meant to have a short tone with a minimum of sustain. The drum doesn't have any snares or jingles - different than the tambourine! They can be played with a small drum stick, a beater, or with the hand.



Repinique

Also from Brazil and used in Samba music. The Repinique is a larger metal drum and has a higher tone that can be heard more easily and is often used as the "tune" or to signal other drummers.



Article on Taiko Drumming (REFER TO PAGE 7)



The Origin of Taiko Drumming

It is difficult to know when taiko began exactly, but scholars believe that taiko drums evolved from Chinese and Korean instruments introduced to Japan during the 4th to 9th centuries. The specific types of drums used by taiko were present in ancient India and are thought to have migrated with Buddhism across China to Japan. Archeological findings in Japan indicate that taiko style drums were present in 500 AD.

Mythology of the Taiko Drums: Shinto Mythology

The origins of taiko are linked to the earliest history of Japan - mythology of Shinto, the indigenous or folk religion of Japan. Much like the ancient Greeks and Romans, the Japanese had a pantheon of gods and goddesses. The Japanese deities, or Kam, were descended from Izanagi and his wife, Izanami. According to Shinto legends, the people of Japan are descended from their daughter, Amaterasu - the Sun Goddess.



Religious History: The Shinto Goddess Uzume

When Buddhism was also introduced to Japan, taiko became associated with Buddhism and was used in temples and shrines for religious ceremonies. Priests used taiko to chase evil spirits and to protect rice fields from insects. Taiko was meant to be the voice of Buddha with the ability to spread wisdom, compassion, truth and beauty through its rhythms.

Taiko has been associated with all major aspects of life in Japan, including the changing of the seasons and the cycles of nature. Japanese people of all kinds used taiko in their daily lives for practical as well as spiritual purposes.

One of the earliest uses of the taiko was to determine the boundaries of a village. A village was considered to be as large as the booming sound of the drum would carry. The taiko was also used in battle to give courage to samurai warriors and to intimidate the enemy. There is some evidence that armies used taiko to communicate to each other across the battlefield. Farmers might play the taiko believing that its thunder-like sound would bring rain for their crops. At festivals, the drum was played to ward off sickness and give thanks for prosperity.

Article on Taiko Drumming (con't)

(REFER TO PAGE 7)

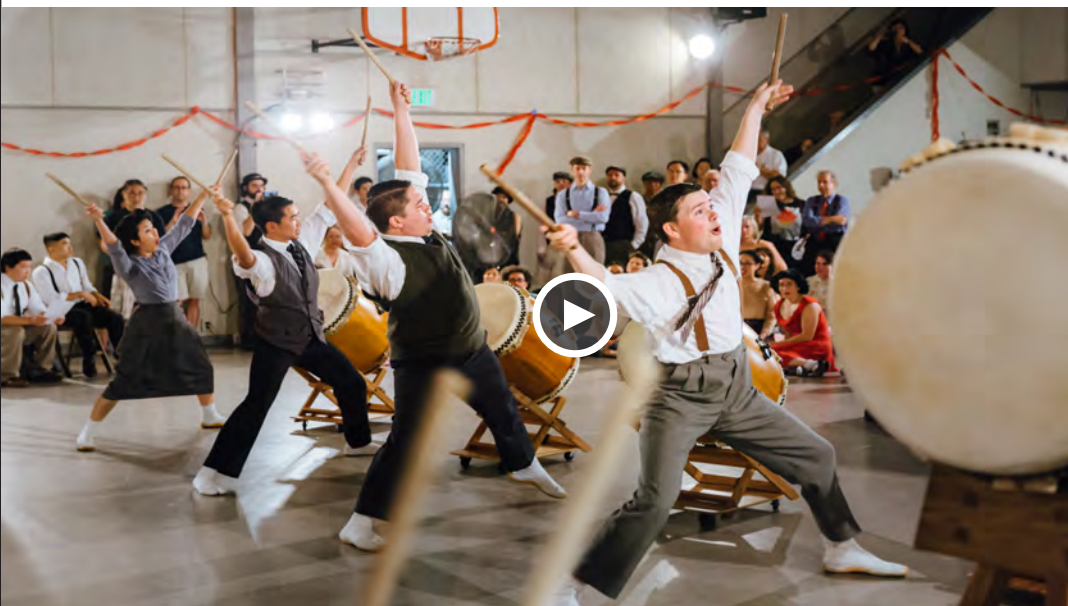


Modern Taiko

Connecting Past and Present

San Jose Taiko teaches, performs and expands the Taiko art form through their work with the community and in teaching Taiko to a new generation of drummers. They also have re-invented and re-mixed the traditional forms by incorporating other cultural drumming traditions (like Afro-Caribbean and Latin American drums) to create new sounds that are entirely their own. The evolution of San Jose Taiko includes collaborating in new techniques and traditions in addition to keeping their connection to Japanese culture and ancestry alive.

For example, San Jose Taiko created *Swingposium* as a way to educate audiences about the past and to introduce them to contemporary Taiko. *Swingposium* combines taiko, jazz, swing dance, and immersive theatre to tell a hidden history of one way Japanese Americans maintained morale in WWII Internment Camps - through swing dances with live big band music. *Swingposium* uses the power of performance to teach about Internment and foster dialogue around civil rights, honoring the resilience of those who lived through Internment.



Research Sheet (REFER TO PAGE 7)

what do you THINK	what did you LEARN	what do you still WONDER

Glossary of Terms (REFER TO PAGE 8)

Choose among the list below a few terms to focus on during the Yamato performance. Invite reflection about how the chosen terms were demonstrated in the music/performance.

ARTICULATION:

Characteristic way in which musical tones are connected, separated, or accented; types of articulation include legato (smooth, connected tones) and staccato (short, detached tones)

BEAT:

Underlying steady pulse present in most music

BODY PERCUSSION:

Use of the human body as an instrument to create percussive/rhythmic sounds such as stomping, patsching (patting thighs), clapping, clicking, snapping

COMPOSER:

One who creates music compositions

CONNECTION:

Relationship among artistic ideas, personal meaning, and/or external context

CONTEXT:

Environment that surrounds music, influences understanding, provides meaning, and connects to an event or occurrence

CULTURAL CONTEXT:

Values, beliefs, and traditions of a group of people that influence musical meaning and inform culturally authentic musical practice

CULTURALLY AUTHENTIC

performance: Presentation that reflects practices and interpretation representative of the style and traditions of a culture

CULTURE:

Values and beliefs of a particular group of people, from a specific place or time, expressed through characteristics such as tradition, social structure, religion, art, and food

ELEMENTS OF MUSIC:

Basic characteristics of sound (pitch, rhythm, harmony, dynamics, timbre, texture, form, and style/articulation) that are manipulated to create music

ENSEMBLE:

Group of individuals organized to perform artistic work, includes traditional, large groups such as bands, orchestras, and choirs as well as chamber or smaller groups, such as duets, trios, and quartets

EXPRESSIVE INTENT:

The emotions, thoughts, and ideas that a performer or composer seeks to convey by manipulating the elements of music

FUSION:

Type of music created by combining contrasting styles into a new style

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

Conditions of the time and place in which music was created or performed and that provide meaning and influence the musical experience

LYRICS:

Words of a song

PERSONAL CONTEXT:

Unique experiences and relationships that surround a single person and are influenced by personal life, family, habits, interest, and preferences

RHYTHM:

Duration or length of sounds and silences that occur in music; organization of sounds and silences in time

SOCIAL CONTEXT:

Environment surrounding something or someone's creation or intended audience that reflects and influences how people use and interpret the musical experience

STAGE PRESENCE:

Performer's ability to convey music content to a live audience through traits such as personal knowledge of the repertoire, exhibited confidence, decorum, eye contact and facial expression

STYLISTIC**EXPRESSION:**

Interpretation of expressive qualities in a manner that is authentic and appropriate to the genre, historical period, and cultural context of origin

TEMPO:

Rate or speed of the beat in a musical work or performance

TIMBRE:

Tone color or tone quality that distinguishes one sound source, instrument, or voice from another

Excerpt From the National Core Arts Standards on Music

Excerpt From the National Core Arts Standards on Music