Yamato - The Drummers of Japan
March 5-6, 2020

Applause Series Inquiry Guide
The Group

More than simply a “drumming group,” Yamato blends theater and musical arts into a performance of tightly synchronized taiko drum percussion and expressive solos. Yamato has drawn critical acclaim with performances that “have the power to put an audience on its feet, laughing, clapping and taking part” (London Times). The troupe has performed more than one thousand concerts around the world, including Europe, Brazil, China, Korea, Indonesia, Austria, England, Belgium, and Germany.

Yamato (Yah-MAH-toe) was founded by Masaki Ogawa in 1993 in Nara, the ancient capital of Japan and “the land of the Yamato.” The name “Yamato” has special significance for this group: in the eighth century, Japan was then known as Yamato, and Nara was the city where Japanese culture is believed to have started.

Yamato combines traditional Japanese musical formats with modern rhythms and themes. Traditional drumming groups were composed of only male performers. The inclusion of women in the group is one way that modern groups, like Yamato, break with Japanese tradition.
The Music

Yamato fuses the traditional art form of Japanese taiko with rhythms from around the world, creating an innovative sound and style.

Taiko, which is Japanese for "big drum", is a relatively modern revival of ancient Japanese drumming traditions. The word "taiko" refers not only to the art of Japanese drumming but also to the drums themselves. Taiko incorporates drums up to eight-foot in diameter, struck with wooden sticks using full-body enthusiasm and choreography influenced by Shinto and Buddhist ritual, the martial arts, and the delicate movement found in classic Japanese theater.

Yamato’s performance introduces the audience to Japanese culture through traditional Japanese instruments such as the Chappa and Atarigane, as well as many types of taiko drums, but also adds new rhythms and a modern sensibility to the ancient art. (See page i-iii for a Meet the Instruments sheet).

Yamato’s performance also shows the values of dedication and the cultivation of the collective spirit—values that are at the heart of Japanese philosophy. In order to perform such athletic movements and to be so in sync with other drummers takes a lifetime of dedication and lots of practice.

The art of taiko drumming is more than just being a skilled drummer or building stamina to perform. It is also the desire to bring people together. Yamato’s philosophy is meant to draw in any audience with its rhythms, connecting people despite any linguistic, cultural or personal differences.
5 facts about the Drums of Japan

01. There are many types of taiko drums in Japan but they can be broadly divided into two categories: taiko with a nailed head (Nagado-daiko) and taiko with the skins stretched over a hoop (Shime-daiko). The various Shime-daiko and Nagado-daiko are by far the most popular drums for performing taiko groups.

02. 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.

03. The term Shime-daiko (pronounced “she may”), from the Japanese verb “shimeru” which means to bind or tighten up, is often used to refer to the small drum that is bound with rope.

04. 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 used oak wine or whiskey barrels to make a drum body.

05. The drum heads of the taiko are made of leather, typically the rawhide of a cow. For some extremely large taiko, the skins of water buffalo may be used.

For more instrument information check out page i!
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.
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 Yamato 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.
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Explore
YAMATO – The Drummers of Japan
www.yamatodrummers.com

Yamato Study Guide

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

Watch
Yamato Preview
https://vimeo.com/119530300

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

Study Guide Sources
Flynn Center Yamato Study Guide

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 by a selection of translators. The ones marked with * are picture books.

• *The Boy Who Drew Cats by Margaret Hodges
• *Three Samurai Cats: a story of Japan by Eric Kimmel
• Mysterious Tales of Japan. by Rafe Martin
• *The Inch Boy. Viking Kestrel by Junko Morimoto
• *The Funny Little Woman by Arlene Mosel
• *Tanuki’s Gift: A Japanese Tale by Tim Myers
• Japanese Children’s Favorite Stories by Florence Sakade
• *Lily and the Wooden Bowl by Alan Schroeder

Guide Sources
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**Introductions of Taiko and instruments**

**Miya-daiko**

This is a barrel shaped drum with tacked heads that is 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 lace-headed drums of various sizes. Many pieces of wood are put together to make an Okedo-daiko. The biggest Okedo-daiko in Japan is 12 1/2 feet in diameter.

It is 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.
Shime-daiko

A small drum with laced heads, the Shime-daiko was brought to Japan from 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. The Shamisen became widely popular from about the 17th century. Today it can be heard accompanying Kabuki performances as well as traditional dances and folk songs.
Koto

The Koto was introduced to Japan in the Nara Era as one of the instruments used in Japanese court music and dance from China in the Tang Dynasty. The first Japanese Koto was the Chikushi Koto. The best sound quality for the Koto is acquired with a hollowed out Paulownia tree forty to fifty years old having a diameter of about 15 inches.

Shinobue

The Shinobue is a Japanese flute made from shino-bamboo. There are twelve types of Shinobue flutes, each having seven holes. The Shinobue acts as the melodic counterpart to the rhythm of the Taiko.
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.

Shinto Mythology

... One day Amaterasu discovered that her brother the storm god Susanowo, had been exceedingly unruly. He had broken down the boundaries of her rice paddies and killed the piebald colt (horse) of heaven - her favorite. The sun goddess, mortally offended, shut herself in a cave with a boulder. As the stone went into place, the world was plunged into darkness. The eight hundred residents of heaven despaired. To give them hope, Uzume, the goddess of mirth and dance, gathered everyone around the mouth of the cave. She overturned a wooden tub and began to dance a ludicrous dance on it and all the observers laughed uproariously. Amaterasu became curious. She opened the stone door a crack to peek outside, whereupon the people rolled away the boulder, and sunshine lit the world once more....
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 in Village Life
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.

Modern Taiko
Modern day taiko came about after World War II when Japan's borders were reopened to the West. Modern taiko techniques are largely attributed to a jazz drummer named Daihachi Oguchi who changed the rhythms of the traditional drum song and added taiko drums. He and his fellow players also contributed to the sense of speed, movement, and choreography found in the modern taiko techniques.
The Koto was introduced to Japan in the Nara Era as one of the instruments used in Japanese court music and dance from China in the Tang Dynasty. The first Japanese Koto was the Chikushi Koto. The unique composer Kenko Yamada used the Koto as his main instrument. Before that the Koto was only used as an accompaniment. Yamada continued improving the instrument in cooperation with Koto master Fusayoshi Shigemoto and together they created a new type of Koto of about 180cm wide. This increased the volume of sound dramatically. The sound also became much clearer. Yamato’s Koto is the original Yamada Koto and the production method and playing technique have been passed down until today. The best sound quality for the Yamada Koto is acquired with a hollowed out Paulownia tree forty to fifty years old having a diameter of about 40cm.

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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 |
| 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