



## Assembly Cue Sheet

In this performance, Portland Taiko brings Asian American music to new heights with the thundering sound of the taiko (Japanese drums). Through a blend of traditional and modern music, you can experience the power of the drum, the sweetness of the Japanese bamboo flute, the beauty of choreography and the laughter of Asian folktales.

Portland Taiko shares the richness of Asian American music and cultures, while teaching about cultural awareness and important life skills. The group combines American history (with information about the Japanese American Internment), personal experiences, exuberant performance and audience participation together into a lively celebration of Asian American cultures and our own diverse communities.

Portland Taiko's hope is to create and share taiko performance of the highest artistic quality, to touch our common heartbeat and to provide a strong and beautiful voice for Asian America.

### About Taiko:

- Taiko is the Japanese word for drum and the name of the art form.
- For thousands of years the taiko has been used in religious ceremonies, community festivals and theater.
- Drums were used to scare pests from the rice fields and enemies during battle.
- The boundaries of villages were defined by the distance from which the community odaiko (large drum) could be heard.
- Japanese taiko are made by hollowing out a single tree trunk; American taiko are made from oak wine barrels. Some odaiko in Japan are more than 4 feet in diameter across the head, weigh over 2000 lbs, and cost as much as \$150,000!
- Portland Taiko performs kumidaiko or ensemble drumming. This relatively new form of drumming started in Japan in the late 1940's and in America in the early 1970s. With American influences like jazz, soul and rhythm and blues, taiko truly is Asian American!
- There are over 5,000 taiko groups in Japan and nearly 200 groups in North America.



# Taiko Terms



In general, Japanese vowels are pronounced similarly to those in Spanish: "a" as in father; "i" as "ee"; "u" as in "glue"; "e" as in bed; and "o" as in no.

**TAIKO** - literally, "drum" in Japanese. Also refers to the art form overall. Changes to "daiko" when it follows another word describing a specific type of drum.

**ODAIKO** - "O" means big; largest drum in an ensemble of drums.

**CHUDAIKO** - "chu" means medium. This is the most commonly used taiko.

**OKEDODAIKO** - "oke" means barrel and refers to the lighter wood staves used to make the body of these drums.

**SHIMEDAIKO** - "shimeru" means to tighten. These small drums have the highest pitch because the ropes are pulled tight before we play.

**UCHIWADAIKO** - "uchiwa" means Fan. This drum is so light it can be carried while we drum!

**KUMIDAIKO** - "kumi" means group or ensemble. So Portland Taiko plays ensemble drumming!

**FUE** - a Japanese bamboo flute, played horizontally.

**KIAI** - a loud shout used to gather the performers energy and to add to the music. Ki means "energy" and is the same as chi in Chinese.

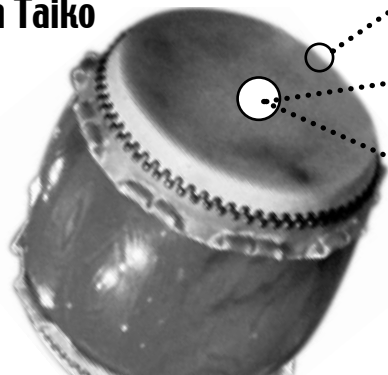
**HARA** - literally, "center"; "middle". Where the kiai comes from, and is the source of physical energy and balance when playing taiko.

**KUCHI SHOGA** - How taiko songs are taught. Each sound on the drum corresponds with a spoken word. This is also called an "oral tradition".

**OROSHII** - or Drum roll. We practice perseverance and build endurance with Oroshii.

**BACHI** - drumstick. The wooden sticks we use to strike the taiko with all of our spirit.

## Kuchi Shoga: The way we learn Taiko



"Ka, Kara" ..... sound created when we strike the rim.

"tsu, tsuku" ..... sound created when we hit the center softly.

"DON, DOKO" .... sound created when we strike the center loudly

"Su" ..... the rest or the "ma" when we don't strike at all!



## Taiko in America

People from Japan started coming to the U.S. in the late 1890's. At first, they weren't allowed to become citizens or own land. People were afraid of them because they looked different, spoke another language and had their own customs.

Most of the Japanese who came here were very hard working. They helped build America's railroads and were farmers. The Japanese word for those who came to the U.S. is *issei*, or first generation. Their children, the *nissei*, were American citizens because they were born here, becoming Japanese Americans.

After Japan bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941, the U.S. sent 110,000 Japanese and Japanese American citizens to relocation camps. They lived in these camps behind barbed wire fences guarded by soldiers. The U.S. government did this because they were afraid that the Japanese and Japanese Americans would be disloyal, but no case of disloyalty or sabotage was ever found.

The people who went to these camps had two weeks to get ready and could only take two suitcases with them. In the camps, they lived in barracks with many other families, eating in a mess hall and using communal outdoor toilets. After the war, most of the Japanese could not get back what they had left behind. They had to start life all over.

Much later, the children who were sent to the camps and their children began to ask questions. They became part of the "redress movement" which asked the U.S. government to apologize and give back some of the money lost when they were sent away. Taiko drumming is part of that movement because when young Japanese Americans came together they became interested in learning more about their heritage. Taiko arrived in the U.S. about this time and it became a powerful symbol of voice and pride during this struggle.

Over time, the drums have become symbols of unity and celebration. Taiko today is not just drumming but also part dance, and something resembling martial arts with a similar "kata" or stance. Taiko drummers train so that they can strike the drum using their whole bodies. That is how even someone who looks small can get a big sound out of the drum.

## Taiko word jumble

Unscramble the taiko-related words. When you are done, write down the capitalized letters and unscramble the word that answers the question:

### "How do we learn Taiko?"

Scrambled Words		Unscrambled Words	
<i>(Words are in random order)</i>			
eoOdk	eeCrtps	Chudaiko	Okedo
hmiSe	stuuk	Don	Odaiko
Aark	kUhcoida	Taiko	Bachi
tGiraaO	iotKa	Tsuku	Kara
Okolad	cbaHi	Shime	Hara
raHa	ond	Respect	Arigato



### What do you think?

1. How is taiko an example of culture? What did you learn about other cultures?
2. How is taiko similar to other drumming you have heard or seen? How is it different?
3. Could you see an American influence in Portland Taiko's performance?
4. Why do you think it is important to know about and be proud of your culture?

## 5 principles that help us learn taiko

Communication • Cooperation • Perseverance • Pride • Respect

## To find out more...

Learn more by listening to recordings and by checking out web sites such as Kenne Thomas' "Taiko Drums From A Small Planet", [www.mninter.net/~thomasjp/taiko.html](http://www.mninter.net/~thomasjp/taiko.html)

**Suggested Reading** about Asian American culture and history:

*Thanksgiving at Obaachan's*, by Janet Mitsui Brown  
*Japanese American Journey*, by Takako Endo  
*Peace Crane*, by Sheila Hamanaka  
*Chopsticks from America*, by Elaine Kasakawa  
*In The Park*, by Huy Voun Lee  
*Baseball Saved Us*, by Ken Mochizuki  
*Dumpling Soup*, by Jama Kim Rattigan  
*Sachiko Means Happiness*, by Kimiko Sakai  
*The Gift: The Hmong New Year*, by Ia Xiong  
*Farewell to Manzanar*, by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston

### About drums in Asia:

*The Drums of Noto Hanto*, by J. Alison James  
*The Junior Thunder Lord*, by Laurence Yep

## Other Resources:

Asian American Research and Curriculum Project  
[www.wce.wvu.edu/Resources/AACR/](http://www.wce.wvu.edu/Resources/AACR/)

National Asian American Telecommunications Association (NAATA)  
[www.naatnet.org](http://www.naatnet.org)

Japanese American National Museum  
[www.janm.org](http://www.janm.org)

Oregon Nikkei Legacy Center  
[www.oregonnikkei.org](http://www.oregonnikkei.org)

[www.densho.org](http://www.densho.org)

[www.questia.com](http://www.questia.com)

[www.asian-nation.org](http://www.asian-nation.org)



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Through artistic excellence and innovation in taiko, Portland Taiko inspires audiences, affirms Asian American pride, builds community, and educates about our culture and heritage.