



Asian American  
Drum Performance

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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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*For immediate release*

**Photos available**

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**What:** "The Gathering": *Crossing Bridges* and *From Many Rivers*

**Who:** Portland Taiko, Asian American Drum Performance, with Masato Baba, composer, and guest artists Uzume Taiko, One World Taiko, Kenny Endo, Russel Baba and Jeanne Mercer, and taiko and youth taiko groups from around the Northwest and Western Canada.

**When:** *Crossing Bridges* Saturday, June 17, 2006, 8pm; *From Many Rivers* Sunday, June 18, 2pm

**Where:** St. Mary's Academy Auditorium, 1615 SW 5th Avenue, Portland

**Tickets:** *Crossing Bridges* \$17-\$20, *From Many Rivers* \$9-15. Advance tickets available now through Brown Paper Tickets at 1-800-838-3006 or online at www.portlandtaiko.org. Also available at the door.

**For further information:** Call (503) 288-2456 or visit www.portlandtaiko.org for further information, group or season tickets.

**Sponsors:** The James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation, The Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, The Autzen Foundation, and The Mark Spencer Hotel.

### ***"THE GATHERING" BRINGS GUEST TAIKO ARTISTS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY FOR TWO CONCERTS***

Portland Taiko, an Asian American drum performance group, presents "The Gathering," two taiko concerts featuring exciting guest artists from the regional and national taiko scene. *Crossing Bridges*, Saturday, June 17 at 8pm, features guest artists Kenny Endo, Russel Baba, Jeanne Mercer and a new composition for the three northwest professional taiko groups Portland Taiko, One World Taiko of Seattle, and Uzume Taiko from Vancouver, B.C.

*From Many Rivers*, Sunday June 18 at 2pm, showcases the region's strength. Five or six ensembles from the Northwest and Western Canada representing a diversity of artistic style and ages will perform, including Portland Taiko's youth ensemble, Tanuki Taiko, and several Seattle groups, who will perform *Sansa Odori (Three Willows)*, a traditional Japanese folk dance. This concert is a family event, suitable for a Father's Day outing for the entire family.

Both concerts are at St. Mary's Academy Auditorium, 1615 SW 5th Avenue, Portland. Tickets are \$17-\$20 for *Crossing Bridges*, and \$9-\$15 for *From Many Rivers*. Advance tickets are available now through Brown Paper Tickets at 1-800-838-3006 or online at [www.portlandtaiko.org](http://www.portlandtaiko.org). They can be bought at the door on the day of the concert subject to availability. Call (503) 288-2456 or visit [www.portlandtaiko.org](http://www.portlandtaiko.org) for further information, group or season tickets.

A new work by Masato Baba, currently titled *Changing Landscapes*, will be the climax of *Crossing Bridges*. With a generous gift from Mabel Shoji Boggs, Portland Taiko was able to create the George T. Shoji Commission for Baba, an emerging artist on the national taiko scene, to compose a new work for members of Uzume Taiko of Vancouver, BC, One World Taiko from Seattle, and Portland Taiko.

Baba recently returned from a 2 year journey studying kumi-daiko (ensemble drumming) and shinobue (Japanese bamboo flute) in Japan, and his composition is influenced by that experience. *Changing Landscapes* has five sections depicting different landscapes.

According to Baba, "This song was inspired from a tour I did on the Big Island of Hawaii with Kenny Endo and Shoji Kameda. The Big Island has a vast array of landscapes due to being the youngest island in the Hawaiian island chain. Parts of it is still being formed. The song expresses the feelings I had when I passed through each of these environments starting with the volcanoes, jungle, mountains, grasslands, and ending with the ocean."

Masato Baba started playing taiko at age 6 under the tutelage of his parents and founding members of Shasta Taiko, Russel Baba and Jeanne Mercer, who also appear as guest artists in *Crossing Bridges*. In 1996 he moved to Hawaii to study and perform with the Kenny Endo Taiko Ensemble. He taught at Endo's school, the Taiko Center of the Pacific, and directed the center's youth group. In Tokyo, he studied taiko with the Nihon Taiko Dojo and bamboo flutes with Kyosuke Suzuki of the Wakayama school. Baba has become one of the most respected taiko players in North America. Currently living in Los Angeles, he maintains an active performance schedule with On Ensemble and as a performing member of TAIKOPROJECT: (re)generation.

Each of the Shoji Commission artists will be featured in the concert. All three respective groups will perform one additional piece from their repertoire. Kenny Endo will perform solo. Russel Baba and Jeanne Mercer will be joined by their son Masato to perform transitions and a featured work. Portland Taiko will also be featured and Masato Baba will join Portland Taiko in one piece.

Kenny Endo returns to Portland Taiko, where he was composer in residence as part of the Continental Harmony program of the NEA in 1999-2000. Endo is a performer/composer and pioneer in contemporary taiko. Utilizing the traditional Japanese drum in innovative collaborations, his music blends taiko with rhythms influenced from around the world in original melodies and improvisation. Recently, Endo performed as a taiko soloist with the Honolulu Symphony, the Hong Kong

Philharmonic, percussionist Kiyohiko Semba, Hawaii Opera Theater, and with singer, Bobby McFerrin. His ensemble recently performed on tour in Germany and Belgium. Endo maintains an active schedule performing, collaborating, composing, and teaching while also serving as Artistic Director of Taiko Center of the Pacific, a school of traditional Japanese drumming in Honolulu.

Russel Hisashi Baba & Jeanne Aiko Mercer, guest performer, co-founders of Shasta Taiko, both began playing *taiko* over 33 years ago. Baba, a gifted musician with a distinctive sound on the saxophones and flutes, has performed with artists such as Eddie Moore, Michael White, Andrew Hill, and *butoh* dancer Min Tanaka. He has recorded and produced three CD's including *Spirit Drum: Taiko Stories From America*. His work has received accolades in DownBeat, Musician Magazine, Option, Jazz Times, CODA, and Cadence. Mercer is a highly respected American *taiko* artist and pioneer. Her *taiko* training began with Seiichi Tanaka and San Francisco Taiko Dojo. She has carried her *taiko* expertise to the modern drum set, performing on traps and taiko at various jazz venues and with artists such as Art Blakely.

Both concerts are part of the Regional Taiko Gathering, a biennial conference of taiko groups and players from the Northwest and Western Canada being held in Portland for the first time June 16-18. Besides the two public concerts, several workshops and demonstrations are open to the public. For more information on "The Gathering," go to [www.portlandtaiko.org](http://www.portlandtaiko.org) or call Portland Taiko at (503) 288-2456.

For further information and to purchase season tickets, call Portland Taiko directly at (503) 288-2456 for further information or visit [www.portlandtaiko.org](http://www.portlandtaiko.org).

"The Gathering," both concerts, and the George T. Shoji Commission are partly supported by grants from The James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation, The Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, The Autzen Foundation, and major support from The Mark Spencer Hotel.

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