

Japanese Taiko

Drum is one of the most ancient musical instruments used throughout the world. As one finds drum in the relics of many ancient cultures, Taiko (Japanese drum) is also found amongst the relics of the Japanese ancient period. The sound of Taiko travels far, and for that reason, it was originally used as a tool of communication.

Because the vibrating sound of Taiko touches the human heart, Taiko has traditionally played an important role in religious rituals and festivals.

During the Warrior period (15-17 centuries), Taiko was used to boost the morale of fighting warriors in battles. Taiko started to become a part of Japanese folk culture since the Edo Period (17-19 centuries).

Taiko population is increasing rapidly in recent years. There are great number of Taiko groups scattered throughout Japan, each having its own unique rhythm indigenous to the region. Recently, there are active movements to form new groups and to revitalize the traditional Taiko music. Today, Taiko has established itself as a unique music genre and has been receiving enthusiastic attention even from the international communities.

There are several different types of Taiko. The traditional style Naga-do Taiko is made with one piece of hollowed tree trunk, whereas Oke-do Taiko and Shime-Taiko are made by assembling a number of vertical wood pieces together to form the frame of Taiko.

The top quality Taiko are all hand-made by artisans, and Keyaki tree, Zelkova, is used for the frame of Taiko for excellent sound quality. Over the years, Japan has exhausted the giant size Keyaki tree resources and now has to resort to similar trees from Africa. The first preparation required for Taiko making is to dry the Keyaki wood. Traditionally, it took over 10 years to dry naturally. In today's modern age, the wood could be dried by machine in one year. Then the dried Keyaki trunk is hollowed and inner surface of the hollowed frame is grooved using a chisel to maximize the resonance.

Sometimes the inner surface is also varnished with Japanese lacquer, Urushi, or pasted with gold leaves for the special sound effects. Lastly, both openings are covered by stretched raw cowhide of black Japanese cows. The largest Taiko in existence today with diameter of 267cm, which was made in 1996, took 5 years in making.

NIPPON TAIKO FOUNDATION

Chairman : Tadashi Tsuda

Total Membership : 800 groups (23,000 players)

Nippon Taiko Foundation was established in November 1997 with the purpose to further promote Japanese traditional Taiko culture both domestically and internationally. Taiko performance during the closing ceremony of the Nagano Winter Olympics 1998 indicates the popularity and wide recognition of Taiko in Japan as its traditional culture. Taiko is also highly appreciated internationally. Taiko performances abroad have been acting as successful tools to introduce the spirit of Japan. The formation of large number of Taiko teams by foreign nationals is the proof of worldwide interests in Taiko.

Taiko is known to enhance good rhythm in everyday living and is also noted for its role as an important educational instrument. It is actively participated by all people from pre-kindergartners to senior citizens as well as mentally and/or physically challenged people. Nippon Taiko Foundation intends to further promote the Japanese Taiko culture throughout the world.

Officers of Nippon Taiko Foundation accompanying on this tour:

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The closing ceremony of the Nagano Winter Olympics 1998

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