

**WELCOME TO**



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## HISTORY OF YAMABIKO TAIKO

Yamabiko Taiko was founded in the spring of 2003 in Kelowna, BC, Canada, by Eri Uchida with the assistance of Lindsay Favell, Ken Fix and Jerry Takeda. The group was begun with very humble and simple desires: to enjoy and play Japanese Taiko-style drumming and be lost in its power and grace. With only a few members, practices began that summer using duct-taped tires and sawn-up broomstick handles. By autumn, a connection was made with the Kelowna Buddhist Temple to use their hall as a practice space. The relationship with the Temple and Japanese community has since flourished.



*Eri Uchida*

As Yamabiko gathered members and experience we were able to acquire our very first crude but effective drums. They were homemade with ordinary packing tape and, believe it or not, 18-inch cut-to-size sewer pipes (unused of course!) donated by the City of Kelowna. Since then, the group has purchased professionally-made performance drums, and has evolved into a regularly performing group.

Eri Uchida, upon founding Yamabiko Taiko, was its first dedicated, gifted leader. She has since moved back to Japan where she has become a member of the internationally acclaimed taiko group “Kodo”. Yamabiko owes her much gratitude and credit, as much of our repertoire comprises songs the group learned from her. We wish her the best of luck with her taiko endeavours. Yamabiko also acknowledges those who have helped our group both during our formative years and up to the present. Particular acknowledgement of support goes to former Yamabiko members Ken Fix, Lindsay Favell, and Jerry Takeda; Doug Masuhara from the Tetsu Taiko of Richmond, BC; Art Lee from Wadaiko Tokara in Iida City, Japan; and the Kelowna Buddhist Temple.

Today, Yamabiko’s main purpose is to share the beauty and spirit of taiko, and to promote cultural awareness within our community. Through practising and performing taiko, our members find self-fulfillment and develop team skills. Practices are held in the basement of Kelowna Buddhist Temple twice weekly, and performances are listed at [www.yamabikotaiko.ca](http://www.yamabikotaiko.ca).

The name “Yamabiko” means “mountain echo”. Kelowna is situated in the Okanagan Valley, surrounded by mountains. The sound of taiko resonates not just literally throughout the mountains of the Valley, but also figuratively as the “echo” reaches around the world, and pays homage to Japan. The “echo” represents communication that transcends linguistic and cultural boundaries, ultimately sharing the rhythm of our hearts.

## BECOMING A MEMBER OF YAMABIKO TAIKO

Yamabiko practices are held every Monday and Thursday from 7 – 9 p.m. in the basement of the Kelowna Buddhist Temple, 1089 Borden Avenue in Kelowna. Entry to the building is through the lower back door via the parking lot. (Note: Yamabiko Taiko is not affiliated with the Kelowna Buddhist Temple.) Members who can arrive early are encouraged to do so to help with drum set-up and repair, floor cleaning, shimedaiko tightening, etc. This ensures that the practice can begin exactly at 7 p.m.

Monday practices are designated as ‘advanced’ level while Thursdays are designated as ‘intermediate’ level. ‘Beginner’ practices are held several times per year. Those interested in observing are encouraged to attend and watch any practice. (Occasionally a practice will be cancelled due to other Temple events; check [www.yamabikotaiko.ca](http://www.yamabikotaiko.ca) for schedule updates.)

Those wishing to join should attend a ‘beginner’ practice by contacting Yamabiko to find out when it will be held (the drop-in fee of \$10 applies). After that, you can decide to join the group, and begin attending practices regularly. New members are encouraged to attend ALL practices, regardless of level, to get a broad exposure to many songs and exercises, and to ensure steady progress and skill development.



*A typical taiko practice*

## REQUIREMENTS OF MEMBERS

### GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

1. Members must:
  - a) pay a membership fee of \$25 per month. The membership fee is set at this amount regardless of how many practices you attend each month. Those who attend irregularly may opt to pay a drop-in fee of \$10 per practice;
  - b) purchase a pair of bachi (drum sticks) which are available for \$10; and,
  - c) volunteer twice a year to help with Temple activities such as preparation of food for fundraising events and a yearly Temple clean-up which will take approximately one hour on a practice night. Yamabiko's agreement with the Kelowna Buddhist Temple stipulates that our members will assist whenever possible.
2. Should a member decide to leave the group, all dues must be paid in full. Please give the executive at least one month's notice. Discussion with an executive member as to the reason for quitting is encouraged.
3. Members who decide to take a leave of absence must give notice. If no notice is given, a normal monthly membership fee must be paid. Members on a leave of absence will still be kept updated with Yamabiko news, events, progress, etc., via e-mail.
4. Members are required to sign applicable waiver forms.
5. Members must be 18 years of age or older. Those who are 14-17 years of age may join after discussion with the executive and must have parental consent.

*If you cannot fulfill these requirements, or have concerns about them, please speak to a Yamabiko executive member.*

### PERFORMANCE REQUIREMENTS

Yamabiko performs year round at various venues and for various functions. The intentions in performing are to share the beauty and spirit of taiko with others. It is important to interact with an audience and convey the feeling, purpose and meanings



of the songs. Yamabiko also performs to promote cultural awareness and to raise funds for the group (for drums, stands, uniforms, t-shirts, etc.).

Before being invited to perform in public, members must:

- Be able to play a song(s) with confidence and enthusiasm, and without visual cues from the experienced members.
- Be able to express the mood and meaning of the song and communicate with other players (e.g., smile, make eye contact while playing).
- Be current with their membership fees.
- Be willing to pay for some personal items such as t-shirts, uniforms, footwear, and bachi, as needed. (See price list on p.20).



*Confidence and enthusiasm are important for an effective performance. (Photo: Linda Quon)*

Members who have committed to take part in a performance must:

- Attend practices before a performance (extra practices maybe be held in the weeks leading up to the performance date).
- Help with equipment transport between the Temple and the performance venue.
- Arrive on time. Members who will be late must notify the group ahead of time.
- Ensure personal transportation to the performance venue (usually we carpool from the Temple).
- Wear their uniforms: black pants, Yamabiko or black shirt, clean and ironed happi, tekkou, hachimaki, and tabi (optional).
- Interact with an audience, i.e., express the mood and meaning of the song, smile when you're having fun, make eye contact, etc.
- If not performing a given song, provide logistical support to those who are playing (e.g., announcing, moving equipment on/off stage) and encouragement (shout kakegoe during the song!).
- Help with public relations: answer audience questions after the show, hand out brochures, take photos and video, help with t-shirt sales, etc.



*Yamabiko members performing in uniform: black shirt and pants, happi, tekkou and hachimaki (Photo: Linda Quon)*

## PERFORMANCE REQUESTS FROM THE PUBLIC

When someone requests a Yamabiko performance, either

1 a) Give a Yamabiko business card to whoever is inquiring and ask them to contact us via the email address on the card. Also encourage them to visit the web site: [www.yamabikotaiko.ca](http://www.yamabikotaiko.ca),

or,

1 b) Get as much information as possible about the proposed performance (date, time, duration, location, purpose). Obtain the person's contact information as well.

**Do not confirm a performance or fee without consultation with the group.**

2. Bring the information to the executive who will consider the performance request and determine the appropriate fee.

3. The executive will discuss the performance with the group. A decision will be made.



*Since 2003, Yamabiko has practised in the basement of Kelowna Buddhist Temple (Photo: Linda Quon)*

## EXPECTATIONS OF MEMBERS

1. Demonstrate enthusiasm, energy and interest in our main purpose (see p.1). Enjoy being part of a team and working with others. Be willing to assist any other member.
2. Be respectful, considerate, patient and encouraging towards all group members.
3. Be mindful that you are a representative of Yamabiko Taiko. Therefore, be aware that your behaviour and actions reflect on the group as a whole. This is especially true at performances, e.g., wear your uniform neatly, avoid chewing gum, etc.
4. Be willing to learn the practical, theoretical, cultural and historical aspects of taiko, as well as some basic Japanese terminology relating to taiko (see the Taiko Terminology on p.15).
5. Be willing to participate in all aspects of stretching and warm-up drills with the group.



*Strength and stretching exercises are an important part of taiko training. (Photos: Linda Quon)*

6. Participate in group discussions. Your input and ideas are important to us and are always welcome.
7. Be open and able to accept constructive criticism, direction and instruction from Yamabiko members and visiting instructors.
8. Be responsible to learn at your own pace, and seek help and information when needed.



## TAIKO ETIQUETTE

### RESPECT THE DRUMS

- Make sure the taiko are secure in their cases during storage and transport.
- Do not place anything on top of the taiko hides, e.g., stands, books, clothes, food, etc.
- Do not sit, lean or put your feet on the taiko drums or practice drums.
- If you need to push a drum, use your hands, not your feet.
- Refrain from drumming while someone is giving instruction.
- Have two people carry the large taiko drums when transporting them long distances.
- Be mindful of the sacrifices made to create the taiko (it once was a living animal and living tree).
- A member who damages equipment through negligence will be asked to pay for repairs.



*Taiko drums are made of wood covered with stretched cowhide affixed with metal tacks. They are expensive to replace, and therefore should be treated with care. (Photo: Barry Freeman)*

### RESPECT THE BACHI

- Take care of your bachi.
- Keep them in a bag, towel, or safe place.
- Sand your bachi regularly to remove splinters, paint, etc.
- Do not use damaged bachi on a performance taiko (i.e., bachi must have no splits in the wood, or paint on the tips).
- Check your bachi before all performances and whenever using any performance drums.
- Put your name, initials, or identifying mark on the ends of your bachi.
- Do not leave bachi on top of the taiko as they will likely fall off, or lying on the open floor where they will be a tripping hazard. Place them on the floor tucked in by the base of the drum.



*Pairs of bachi in a carrying case*

## RESPECT THE PRACTICE HALL

- Keep the storage room tidy at all times.
- Refrain from using cell phones during practice time except for taiko-related purposes.
- If you arrive at a practice early, help sweep and mop the floor, tidy, set up drums and tighten the shimedaikos.
- Move the incense burners on the upstairs altar to the floor
- Make sure the door is closed when playing taiko so as not to disturb neighbours.
- Everybody helps with setup and takedown of the drums at practices and performances.

... above all, respect your fellow taiko drummers, and remember to have fun!



*Ultimately, the purpose of playing taiko is to have fun!!! (Photo: Linda Quon)*

## YAMABIKO EXECUTIVE

The executive finalizes decisions based on the interest and betterment of the group. The executive must adhere to the following requirements:

1. The executive must consist of a minimum of 2 persons, to a maximum of 4.
2. A member of the executive must have been a member of Yamabiko Taiko for a minimum of one year, and must currently be a member.
3. Executive meetings should be held periodically throughout the year.
4. The executive must hold an Annual General Meeting (AGM) with Yamabiko members. This is usually done in late January. A second general meeting is encouraged in the middle of the year.

The executive consists of the following three positions (if the executive consists of only two members, one of them will hold two positions):

President: Is Yamabiko's representative: signs any grant applications, documents, etc.; receives all performance requests; discusses requests with the group; negotiates performance fees; and replies to requests for performances. The president shall be a signing authority for Yamabiko's bank account, along with the treasurer.

Treasurer: Is responsible for taking care of Yamabiko's funds: collects payments to Yamabiko including membership fees and performance fees; deposits money in the bank; reimburses members for expenses incurred on behalf of Yamabiko; issues a semi-annual financial report showing expenses, revenues and current balance.

The treasurer shall be one of at least two signing authorities for Yamabiko's bank account. The other signing authority shall be the president. More Yamabiko members may be added as signing authorities if required.

Secretary: Is responsible for Yamabiko administration: collects members' waiver forms, contact information, etc., and maintains a list of current members; circulates an agenda before a general meeting; takes minutes during executive and general meetings (date, time duration, attendance, topics discussed, and decisions made); updates the Yamabiko Handbook as required.



All members of the executive are equal. Positions do not determine or imply a hierarchy.

Election of executive members takes place at the AGM, or whenever it is necessary (e.g., an executive member resigns, or an executive member is not discharging their duties, etc.)

Members or non-members who have concerns or inquiries pertaining to Yamabiko can discuss them with the executive. Contact information can be found on the web site: [www.yamabikotaiko.ca](http://www.yamabikotaiko.ca).



*The AGM is followed by a potluck dinner! (Photo: Mia Lee)*

## BASIC TAIKO FORM

### STANCE

#### Lower Body

- hips square to the drum
- feet firmly planted on the floor, knees bent, wide and low stance
- with your arms straightened, the tips of the bachi should extend to the centre of the taiko

#### Upper Body

- when your arms are raised, try to raise them straight up with arms close to your ears and elbows straight
- your bachi are an extension of your arms, keep them straight, and try not to ‘spill’ the energy by allowing them to tip too far behind or in front of you
- arm movement drops from shoulder, elbow, forearm, then wrist
- allow your bachi to bounce naturally from the taiko after contact; do not leave your bachi tips resting on the drum after a hit as it will deaden the sound
- when bringing your arms up, extend them out as far as possible without moving your body forward. It can help to think of a string being pulled tightly from the very tip of your bachi outwards all the way from the taiko up to the sky

#### Holding Bachi

- do not grasp the bachi too tightly when striking the drum
- most of the grip is done with the thumb, index, and middle finger
- the other two fingers help to ‘snap’ the bachi in your hands
- the snapping motion is how you will get a more powerful sound



*A typical taiko stance  
(Photo: Mike Biden)*



*Keep bachi pointed vertically  
when your arms are raised  
(Photo: Lyndsay Coletti)*



*A light grip on the bachi enhances  
technique and reduces fatigue  
(Photo: Darryl Malcaba)*



## GENERAL ELEMENTS OF GOOD FORM

When playing taiko, try to use as much space around you as possible. For example, when holding your bachi upwards toward the sky, reach up as high as you comfortably can. When you point your bachi outward, reach really far out. It will look much more dramatic.

Use your whole body to accentuate the sounds. If you play a big loud sound, look big by reaching higher and standing straighter; sometimes you may even stand on your toes. When you are playing softly, look smaller: bend your knees more, and crouch lower toward the taiko.

Remember to keep breathing! Yelling *kakegoe* is a good way to give and receive more energy; it will also help you with your breathing if you notice that you're holding your breath at times.



*Using as much space around you as possible makes for an expressive, dramatic performance. Shouting kakegoe encourages the group and excites the audience. (Photo: Linda Quon)*

If you are firmly grounded and have good form, you will have more energy. Think of energy coming from the earth, travelling from your feet up through your body to your raised bachi, and then suddenly being imparted down to the taiko, which then transfers it back to the earth.

## TAIKO TERMINOLOGY

### TAIKO PHONETICS

<u>Phonetic Word</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Don	a single loud beat to the centre of the drum played with the right hand
Kon	a single loud beat to the centre of the drum played with the left hand
DoKo (DoRo)	two fast beats of equal sound and power. “Do” refers to the right hand; “Ko” refers to the left hand
TsuKu	two fast beats played very softly. “Tsu” refers to the right hand; “Ku” refers to the left hand.
Ka	a beat played on the fuchi (edge of the drum)
KaRa	two fast beats played on the fuchi (edge of drum). “Ka” refers to the right hand; “Ra” refers to the left hand
Su	a rest (silent beat or portion of a beat)

### JAPANESE NUMBERS

1 = Ichi	4 = Shi (or yon)	7 = Shichi (or nana)	10 = Ju
2 = Ni	5 = Go	8 = Hachi	
3 = San	6 = Roku	9 = Ku (or kyu)	

### INSTRUMENTS

Bachi:	drum sticks
Shime daiko:	small, heavy, high-pitched drum, usually used to play the backbeat (jiuchi)
Chu-daiko:	medium-sized drum
O-daiko:	large drum



*A shime daiko on a low stand  
(Photo: Linda Quon)*

Okedo-daiko: a drum constructed of staves, and tensioned with rope.  
May be carried and played at the hip

Fue/Shinobue: a Japanese flute, made from bamboo (shinobue) or plastic

Atarigane or kane: a hand-held brass clanging bell

Chappa: hand-held cymbals



*Playing a shinobue  
(Photo: Linda Quon)*



*Chappa*



*Kane with striker*

## JAPANESE TERMS

Kiwotsuke! = Attention!

Kiite kudasai = listen please

Rei = bow

Hajime! = Let's begin!

Oyasumi naysay = good night    Gomer nashi = I'm sorry

Arigato gozaimashita = thank you (polite form)

Otsukaresama deshita = thank you for all your hard work

Kiwotsuketene = be mindful of your journey/have a safe trip

## KAKEGOE

Kakegoe are shouts to encourage fellow players, accent the music, and cue rhythm changes. Use your diaphragm and energy when shouting kakegoe to make a loud sharp sound. Commonly used kakegoe are: SORE!, HUP!, SUP!, SA!, SEIYA!, YOISA!, SEI!, and DOKOI!. These are not actually translatable words; they are interjections like “hoorah!”, “hey!”, etc.

# THE ORIGINS AND HISTORY OF TAIKO

## The Birth of Taiko

The taiko was used in ancient Japan over 2,000 years ago. According to some archeological and anthropological researchers, ancient people in the Jyomon era already used drums as a communication tool or as an instrument for religious rituals. However, the percussion they used is thought to be quite different than the taiko we see today.

Taiko were also used in the battlefield to intimidate the enemy, to issue commands and to use as an S.O.S signal.

When the Taiho Ritsuryo, the oldest constitution of Japan, was enacted in AD 702, a department of imperial court music was established in the Imperial Palace. The taiko used for ‘Gagaku’ (court music) are some of the most elegant and beautifully decorated of all Japanese instruments.

Many original art forms were born under feudal Japan, unleashed from Chinese and Korean cultural influence. These art forms include ‘Kabuki’ and ‘Noh’ plays. Taiko had an important role in these art forms as an accompaniment, and were gradually diversified into different sizes and shapes.

Since ancient times in Japan, taiko has always been regarded as sacred. The rumbling power of the taiko has long been associated with the gods, and has been appropriated by the religions of Japan. Taiko has continued to find a place in religious ceremonies, both Buddhist and Shinto.

Village festivals were and still are celebrated with the sound of drumming. These festivals developed a rich body of traditional taiko rhythms which are a never-ending source of inspiration to modern players.

## Modern Taiko:

“Kumi-daiko” literally means a taiko ensemble that consists of many taiko drums. Daihachi Oguchi invented this style in 1951. Originally, he was a jazz drummer. One day he was asked to interpret an old sheet of taiko music for the Osuwa shrine. The sheet music was written in an old Japanese notation, and he couldn’t understand it. Fortunately, he found an old man who performed the piece, and who was able to interpret it. However, as a jazz musician, he found the rhythm patterns too simple to play. He wondered why no one played taiko together. Inspired by the western drum

set, he formed a group in which each player beats a different taiko; in short, he gave the group the function of a drum set. A high-pitched shime-daiko established the basic rhythm like a snare drum, and a rumbling Nagado-daiko added accents like a bass drum. Oguchi went on to lead the influential group named Osuwa Daiko, and spread his exciting style throughout Japan, and then throughout the world.

Following Osuwa Daiko, Sukeroku Daiko was formed in 1959. Their taiko music was based on traditional Edo-bayashi rhythms. The group was characterized by powerful playing, speed, and unique choreography with flashy solos and movement. Later, the group split into two: Yushima Tenjin sukeroku Daiko, and Oedo Sukeroku Daiko.

In 1969, Tagayasu Den founded the group Za Ondekoza on Sado Island located in the western part of the Sea of Japan. This group was totally different from any other ensemble. Members came from all over Japan, many of whom were youths disaffected with modern big city life. They lived as a commune, cultivated fields, and ran long distances to build stamina. This rigorous training and communal living forged powerful taiko performances. Za Ondekoza is credited with bringing taiko to audiences worldwide. The original members went on to form the group 'Kodo' in 1981. Today, Kodo and Za Ondekoza are the world's most famous taiko groups.

The period from the 1970s to the 1990s in Japan seemed to be the Renaissance of taiko music. The activities of Osuwa Daiko and other early kumi-daiko groups in 1960s, and the taiko performance at the Tokyo Olympics in 1964, ignited the phenomenal taiko boom for decades that followed. People began to pay attention to their local cultural heritage which had begun to vanish. Many municipal organizations took action to preserve cultural practices, and consequently a lot of hozonkai (municipal preservation organizations) were created in Japan. In addition, the government promoted these activities with vast subsidies in 1980s. The result is that approximately 4000 taiko groups have been formed in Japan since then. An important revision in education was also enacted recently. In modern times, music education in Japan had focused on the western classical music while disregarding traditional Japanese music. An educational revision in 2002 required schools to use Japanese traditional instruments including taiko as teaching materials. The new generation will surely reactivate taiko music in the 21st century.

### **Taiko in North America:**

In 1968, Grandmaster Seiichi Tanaka founded the first taiko group in the United States, San Francisco Taiko Dojo. He eventually went on to form the "Tanaka Style" which is a synthesis of Oedo Sukeroku Daiko, Osuwa Daiko, and Gojinjyo Daiko. Kinnara Taiko of Los Angeles was founded in 1969, creating a uniquely American



Japanese Buddhist hybrid style of taiko. San Jose Taiko followed in 1973, focusing on making taiko a Japanese American art form.

Taiko first came to the Pacific Northwest when early Japanese immigrants brought over their religious and cultural practices in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Organized, performing taiko groups, however, have only existed here for about 30 years, largely centered in the two cities of Vancouver, BC, and Seattle, WA. Although taiko rapidly spread through the 1990s and 2000s, the majority of taiko groups in the Pacific Northwest still hail from either Seattle or Vancouver.

Katari Taiko, the first taiko group in Canada as well as the region, started in 1979. Early training came from Seiichi Tanaka. Most founding members were involved as volunteers or staff for the Powell Street Festival, started in 1977 as a means of pulling the dispersed Japanese-Canadian community back together. From the beginning, Katari operated as a collective with a clear goal of empowering both the individuals in the group as well as the community they represented. Early Katari members, most of them women, were quite politically conscious and saw Katari Taiko as a means of fighting stereotypes of both Japanese Canadians and Asian women.

Seattle Taiko Group formed in April 1980 following an awe-inspiring performance by Ondekoza at the Seattle Center. Started by a group of young activists in the local Japanese-American and Asian-American community, Seattle Taiko Group relied on community donations of space, materials and money to get started.

### **Taiko in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:**

Inspired by the successful world touring of Za Ondekoza and Kodo, vast numbers of taiko groups have been established in Japan as well as around the world, especially in North America, during the last few decades. It is estimated that there are approximately 1000 taiko groups in the United States and Canada. The taiko boom has spread throughout Europe, Australia, and South America as well. It is becoming a worldwide phenomenon and will continue into the 21st century. Taiko is also becoming a universal musical language making peoples of the world closer to each other. The instrument has unlimited potential, as the fact that the kumi-daiko style was invented and developed in a relatively short time shows. Traditional but new: that is what taiko is. Taiko music continues to evolve through the beginning of 21st century; and maybe it will be you, who creates a new generation of taiko music.

Sources: [http://www.taiko.com/taiko\\_resource/history/](http://www.taiko.com/taiko_resource/history/)  
<http://kyodo.wordpress.com/history/>  
<http://www.taiko-center.co.jp/english/whatstaiko.html>



Web: [www.yamabikotaiko.ca](http://www.yamabikotaiko.ca)  
Email: [info@yamabikotaiko.ca](mailto:info@yamabikotaiko.ca)

### Equipment Prices

Bachi: \$10

Fue (plastic): \$15

Fue (bamboo): \$40

Yamabiko Taiko Stickers: \$2