

# URBANGATEWAYS

## HEARTBEAT OF JAPAN TSUKASA TAIKO



### ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

The rich history of Japan comes alive through dynamic music and dance examples, embodying the centuries-old culture of this beautiful country. Audiences will be introduced to the thunderous roar of Taiko drums, the grace of classical dance, and the stories behind these traditional art forms.

### MEET THE ARTISTS

Tsukasa Taiko, one of the leading taiko (Japanese drumming) ensembles in the Midwestern United States, has as its mission to preserve and to protect, and most importantly, to pass on the traditional concepts of taiko as a cultural legacy through direct lineage.

While utilizing these concepts to expand and evolve the taiko form in collaborative efforts with prominent music artists, Tsukasa Taiko remains aesthetically the most traditional taiko group in the Midwest. The long-established art form from Japanese culture is artistically woven into the group's contemporary performances for an enriched representation of taiko today. The ensembles are rooted in the community but are enhanced by professional artists lending their talent and expertise for dynamic performances.

Over the last decade, Tsukasa Taiko has expanded the scope of what the community taiko group can do and has served as a pioneer in community professionalism, preservation, and development. It is an aesthetic journey that can be provided only by the direct lineage that Tsukasa Taiko possesses.

## CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

Literally meaning "drum," taiko is known for its thunderous sound and stunning, stylized choreography. With a 2,000 year-old history, taiko has its roots in Japanese court, theater, religious/ceremonial and festival music, where the taiko was just one instrument of many that comprised the ensembles that performed this music. In the 1950s, the kumi-daiko style evolved, which features an ensembles made up solely of drums. Since then, kumi-daiko has become popular across the globe and has become a celebrated symbol of heritage and culture for the Japanese American community. There are several different types of taiko drums that vary in size, material, and sound or tone produced. It can take several years to create a taiko drum, if hand-made in the traditional process, but these drums can last for decades if not centuries.

In addition to taiko, traditional Japanese music uses many other instruments such as the shamisen (three-stringed lute), shinobue (flute), and more. While these instruments do not have the international popularity of the commanding roar of the taiko drums, they are very important in Japanese folk and classical music.

In ancient Japan, like many cultures, in its earliest form, dance was used as a way to convey stories and highlighted with musical accompaniment. Gagaku is one of the oldest known style of music and dance and was developed by fusing Japanese songs with Chinese and Korean Buddhist traditions. Performed at the Imperial Palace for the elite class, Gagaku reached its peak in popularity during the 10th century. While the dances were very simple, the music was very advanced for its time and serves as the foundation for most modern Japanese music and dance.

The other main styles of traditional Japanese dance are mai and odori. Mai, developed in the 13th century, features elegant and simple movements such as small shuffles or slight turns performed in a repeating pattern. Mai dancers wore vibrant costumes and intricate masks and were accompanied by flutes and small percussion instruments to heighten the storytelling. Odori is a festival dance that comes from the Kabuki drama and features more exaggerated and energized movements.

## RESOURCES

Improv 4 Kids: games and educational material: <https://goo.gl/16rNQX>

The Second City Website: history of improvisation in Chicago and how the iconic improv club got its start: <https://goo.gl/ta9qJk>

For older audiences, watch clips of Whose Line is it Anyways (episodes available on YouTube)

## Chicago Guide for Teaching and Learning in Arts: Scope and Sequence

### Music Interpretation & Evaluation:

#### **Listen and Describe**

(IL 25A, 26A, 27A; Nat'l 6)

- Analyze the uses of elements of music in musical selections representing diverse genres and cultures.
- Analyze the tempo and dynamics in songs that represent diverse cultures and styles.

### Music Making Connections

#### **Cultural**

(IL 26B, 27A; Nat'l 9)

- Distinguish styles of music in various cultures and periods and identify unique features.
- Identify and describe in simple terms music from other cultures of the world, using the elements of music.

### Dance Literacy:

#### **History and Culture**

(IL 27B; Nat'l 5)

- Discuss and explore the role of dance in celebrations or events.
- Investigate aspects of dance in various cultures or historical periods.

## VOCABULARY

### BIWA

A lute like instrument but with a short neck and frets, usually used for narrative storytelling.

### KABUKI

A stylized form of traditional dance and drama that is used to tell stories about Japanese history, lifestyle, and society. Unlike Noh, which features simplistic movement and masks, this style is rich with showmanship including elaborate costumes and makeup and exaggerated movement.

### KUMI

DAIKO A performance that features an ensemble of taiko drummers playing different styles of drums that was developed in the 1950s by Daihachi Oguchi and helped increase the popularity of Taiko globally.

### MAI

A style of dance that features very simple but elegant movements, generally accompanied by lutes and small hand drums. Associated with Noh drama.

### NOH

A theatrical performance that includes drama, music and dance (mai) elements, it is often compared to opera. Performers, who are considered more like storytellers rather than actors, wear masks and use simple movements to share a stories.

### ODORI

A lute, or violin like instrument, that has four strings and is used in Gagaku music.

### SHAMISEN

A violin like musical instrument with three strings and a long neck that is used in traditional music.

### SHINOBU

A flute traditionally made from bamboo that has a high pitched sound that is often used in festival music.

### TAIKO

In Japanese it means drum; the term has come to refer to a certain style of traditional Japanese drumming that features a thunderous sound and highly physical style of playing drums.

## PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

1. Have a discussion about the role and importance of music and dance in society. Nearly every culture has its own music and dance traditions. Why do they think this is? What types of dance and music do students see within their family or community?
2. Many traditional Japanese dancers wore masks with neutral expressions and had to use dance to convey different emotions. Have students make masks with a neutral or blank expression using paper plates and string. Afterwards, ask students pick a certain emotion (joy, tired, mad) and have them demonstrate using just their body as their face will be behind the mask. The student who guesses correctly then has to take a turn performing an emotion.

## POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

1. Free-write: What is one thing you learned from today's show? Have students share their answers with a partner.
2. Create a collage! Ask students to think about what images, colors, patterns came to mind during the show. Use newspaper, magazine, scrap paper, etc. to create a collage based on how the show made students feel.
3. Practice Japanese dance! Have students create a short dance that tells a story, using what they saw and learned in the performance (video demonstrations also listed in Resources). Remind students of the graceful and simple nature to the movements, while still conveying a message or story.