

The European Taiko Conference 2016

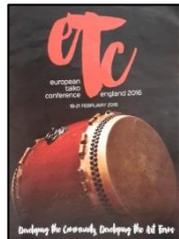
Article by: Soo-Im Jansson, 2016-02-23

The first European Taiko Conference was held in England on 18-21 February 2016. “The power of taiko is now worldwide. So, let's create a global taiko community together!” said Mr. Yoshihiko Miyamoto, President of *Miyamoto Unosuke Shoten*, in his opening talk about the spread of taiko around the world.

The first European Taiko Conference was held in England on 18-21 February with focus on “Developing the Community, Developing the Art Form”. There were workshops with international taiko players and discussion sessions as well as individual group performances and joint performances.

Mr. Jonathan Kirby, founder of *Kagemusha Taiko*, was the person who took the initiative to plan and organize the very first European Taiko Conference (ETC). The main theme of the conference was how to develop the taiko community in Europe.

Members of Taiko Shin Kai partook in this historic conference. Mr. Yoshihiko Miyamoto, president of *Miyamoto Unosuke Shoten* and sponsor for the ETC, mentions in the ETC conference programme booklet that “We must recognize that the creation of the European Taiko Conference is one of the greatest developments in the history of taiko. Aside from the North American Taiko Conference, there is no other event where taiko enthusiasts from all over the world can gather to share their time and experience.”



Mr. Yoshihiko Miyamoto talked about the spread of taiko around the world in his opening talk at the conference, beginning with a brief history of taiko. Taiko began as an art form with Daihachi Oguchi [1924-2008], who founded the *Osuwa Taiko* in 1953. Two other pioneering groups were *Sukeroku Taiko* (in the 1960s) and *Ondekoza/Kodo* (in the 1970s). With these pioneering groups there was a taiko boom in Japan from the 1980s to 1990s in which the number of groups increased very rapidly throughout Japan.

Taiko spread to the United States in North America and the pionering groups in the United States were *San Francisco Taiko Dojo*, (the oldest group in U.S.A. founded in 1968 by Grand Master Seiichi Tanaka), *Kinnara Taiko* (the very first Japanese-American group founded in 1969), and *San Jose Taiko* (founded in 1973). The first North American Taiko conference was held in 1997 and there have been 9 more conferences since then.

Brazil has the largest taiko population in South America. There are also taiko groups in Argentina and Paraguay. Taiwan has a really big taiko population too and since they are geographically close to Japan, they have frequent interactions with Japanese taiko groups. There are also taiko groups from Australia, New Zealand and Singapore.

Taiko has not only spread geographically, but has expanded artistically as well, from traditional festival drumming, to creating new styles of taiko and collaboration with other musical forms. Although taiko grew very rapidly it is based on traditional roots and Mr. Yoshihiko Miyamoto introduced us to some of them:

Gagaku – Gagaku is an imperial court music, which originated from the 7th century. Some of the basic ideas like the *tomoe* crest comes from gagaku.

Nohgaku – Nohgaku is a classical Japanese musical drama from the 14th century, when Japan went for minimalism like *zen* and tea ceremony. In taiko, the concept of *ma* is very important, and that kind of *ma* comes from Noh.

Kabuki – Kabuki is a classical Japanese dance drama from the 17th century.

Japanese festival drumming – Japan stretches from north to south with a different climate and different context, and therefore there are various forms of festival drumming such as *Edo Bayashi* from Tokyo, *Shishi Odori* from the northern part of Japan, and the famous *Chichibu Yatai Bayashi*.

“I think *diversity* is the key word,” Mr. Yoshihiko Miyamoto said as he spoke of the future of taiko. When developing taiko, that reflect the local culture just like the Japanese festival drumming from north to south, Mr. Yoshihiko Miyamoto asks us to develop our own unique taiko voice; to express who we are with taiko and draw inspiration from our own stories and rich cultural heritage.

Mr. Yoshihiko Miyamoto believes that the core of taiko has always been the center of Japanese festivals, because it gathers people together, lifts their spirits, and heals them. This gives a sense of community. Mr. Yoshihiko Miyamoto concluded his talk with, “The power of taiko is now world wide. So, let's create a global taiko community together!”

So what does it mean to be a taiko community? Mr. Shoji Kameda, a founding member of the group *On Ensemble*, elaborated on that question in his opening talk at the conference, “Being a community is much more than just having a share of interest in taiko. It is about having a share of a value system. It is about having shared values that we learn from being involved in this art form, that we learn from playing taiko.”

Some of these values of what taiko can teach us are:

- taiko has the ability to bring us to the moment and to see the world through almost child-like eyes in wonder and awe;
- taiko can teach us to step outside our comfort zone and try something different;

- taiko can teach us to be authentic to ourselves and that we all have an important story to tell;
- taiko can teach us to strive to be the kind of person that empowers other people.

Mr. Shoji Kameda also pointed out that, “It's not just for the leaders in the taiko community, it is for everybody. We could all be the kind of people that empower other people.”

The ETC ended with joint performances. The participants were able to take part in these joint performances. Members of Taiko Shin Kai were honored to have been able to take part in such a wonderful event of sharing and to be a part of this taiko community.

It's never the same looking at a video clip, than to actually experience it directly, but nevertheless, it is an event that can be shared so that when people see this it may be an inspiration to try out joint taiko performances like these:

- *Shimabayashi* – by Jonathan Kirby
- *Stepping Stones* – by Oliver Kirby
- *Ready, Set, kaDON!* – by Shoji Kameda
- *Matsuri* – by Franco Imperial

Links

European Taiko Conference Slideshow
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9j31bb92KU&feature=youtu.be>

The official link to the joint performances at ETC
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7VbvnV9OKA&feature=youtu.be>

Sharing of different warm-ups at ETC-2016
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONTSkS_OuZY&i-dex=11&list=PL8BtweoBdFKOjrfeeYjXpUiS4CsgX9Q4e

Taiko Shin Kai

Taiko Shin Kai is a non-profit organization, that wish to encourage and spread taiko, Japanese drumming, in Sweden. Taiko Shin Kai offers taiko courses and workshops in Stockholm and Uppsala for children and adults.

