

## Workshops

Article by: Soo-Im Jansson and Ralf Jansson, 2017-02-15

There are many taiko workshops offered around the world. Taiko workshops are often intensive sessions that last for 2 hours or longer. Some workshops stretch over a couple of days, such as during a whole weekend or a whole week. There are advantages with workshops; such as playing together with others, instruction is received directly on site and the feedback is immediate. Attending taiko workshops can also be immensely inspirational.

*If there aren't any experienced taiko teachers in the neighborhood, it is possible to seek out taiko workshops to attend. There are many advantages with workshops; such as playing together with others, instruction is received directly on site and the feedback is immediate. Attending workshops can also be immensely inspirational. There are many taiko workshops offered around the world.*

There are two ways we could go about it, to attend a taiko workshop. Either we could travel to a workshop that is offered somewhere in the world, or we could invite an experienced taiko instructor to hold a workshop in our local area.

To travel to a workshop has its benefits, since we don't need to think about all the logistics that are related to hosting a workshop. However, travelling may not always be affordable and in these days, we also need to think about the concerns of our global environment. So, inviting instructors to workshops that we could perhaps arrange ourselves have benefits in this way, but there are also some drawbacks that must be overcome.

There is the question of cost of course, and if we are a small group this could very well be a big obstacle. It doesn't necessarily have to be an obstacle though. There is another possible way of doing this and the keyword is *sharing*. By sharing, as in giving and taking on equal terms, several small groups could come together, on neutral ground, and share instructors in workshops for all groups to participate in. The launch of the European Taiko Conference (ETC), last year, has helped facilitate this possible opportunity for it to happen!

The ETC has been about getting together, share and grow together. It has laid the foundation for groups not to compete, but to share and play taiko together, which in turn could make it easier for groups to collaborate and to arrange workshops together.

However, for a workshop to be really good, it has to be led by not only an experienced taiko player, it has to be led by a taiko player that can teach. Being a good player is not necessarily the same thing as being a good teacher.

So finding good taiko instructors is vital for an excellent workshop, and here is another example of how the ETC can be helpful too. By attending the ETC we are able to get in touch and get to know good instructors. Here we have a chance to meet the taiko instructors that lead the ETC workshops as well as the leaders of taiko groups throughout Europe and other parts of the world.

Some attributes we have found from attending these great workshops with Shoji Kameda, Tiffany Tamaribuchi, Karen Young, Mark H Rooney, Franco Imperial, Eiichi Saito and Eri Uchida, Oliver Kirby, to name a few, are the following:

- They are using the 'tools of taiko', for instance, the *kuchishouga*
- They are prepared
- They create a relaxing atmosphere which promotes learning
- After we had attended their workshops we were filled with new energy, felt enriched, happy and truly motivated to improve our taiko skills

So, just getting together and playing together, is not really a workshop in this article's sense, rather more what we would call 'jamming together', which of course is equally enriching and immensely fun to do too.

At the Taiko Palooza, in Ulm in Germany, at the beginning of June last year, there were jamming sessions included in the event as well as four different workshops. Jamming allows for free expression and creativity, and workshops offer us structured learning.

Even if we do come to a point where we could host our own workshops, it could still be of great value to travel to other parts of the world to meet kindred spirits, to share and exchange ideas, and to learn what is going on in the taiko world at large.

So, workshops can be so much more than just attending or hosting a workshop in order to learn a specific taiko skill. It can be such a great opportunity to get new ideas, to connect with new people and to be a part of a greater taiko community.

In 2016, we attended many workshops in order to expand our horizon and to learn more about taiko outside of Sweden. We attended workshops at the European Taiko Conference in England, as well as workshops in other parts of Europe. We found that all of these workshops were very inspirational and we got to meet, make friends, and play with other taiko players from other countries.

Among the taiko workshops that one of us attended, was "Kondo Sensei's Skills and Drills", which was led by Oliver Reichelt at *Tama Daiko* in Germany. It was a two-day workshop over a weekend in early August last year. The workshop focused on specific drills that we practiced during the whole workshop. The drills focused on how to become more sensitive with the use of our *bach*i and how we can develop freedom of movement

During our visit, we had the chance to interview the workshop instructor Oliver Reichelt.

**Soo-Im Jansson (SJ):** *How did you get started with taiko and why?*

**Oliver Reichelt (OR):** I started taiko because I wanted to train my rhythmic and metric ability: keeping count and space in music. It was during the first month of my Japanology studies. A tutor had just come back from Osaka where she had started taiko and then wrote on our blackboard: *next Wednesday, Taiko, 18:00 h, Museum of Ethnology lobby*. I could not participate right away but soon saw the new group perform for New Years and in the coming spring I joined, in May 2002.

**SJ:** *Could you tell me a little about your teacher Kondo Katsuji Sensei?*

**OR:** Kondo Katsuji started taiko over 40 years ago, soon forming *Ondekoza*, and later *Kodo*. He has trained on Sado island and (co)arranged many pieces, among them *Yatai Bayashi*. He has come to value a healthy approach to movement, after injuring himself so severely, that he almost had to stop taiko. He became very good at yoga and Japanese massages. He studied other systems of percussion and has arrived on a very sufficient snap technique similar to the "German Roll". He has developed special *Katsugi Okedo Bachi* and written many pieces involving ensembles all over Japan. He teaches *Ôdaiko*, *Okedo*, *Tateuchi* and *Yokouchi* on a 2-shaku drum centered about one meter above ground.

Oliver Reichelt at  
*Tama Daiko dojo*

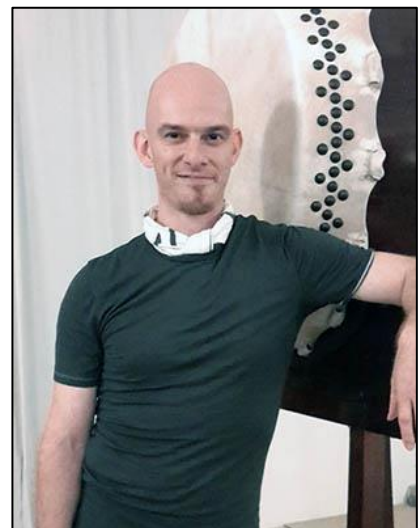


Photo by:  
Soo-Im Jansson

**SJ:** *How often are you able to meet your teacher in your taiko practice? And how do you work with a teacher that doesn't live nearby?*

**OR:** I try to meet him twice a year. He comes to Germany every year and I try to go and visit him once a year in Nagano, Japan. We also look at the videos taken during Workshops to repeat lessons and we get "Home-work".

**SJ:** *How long have you been teaching taiko and what do you teach?*

**OR:** Soon after I started, others wanted to learn taiko, and I helped them informally in our first group. Then we organized a beginners Workshop which I taught in concert with Ingmar Kikat. So after 2 years of taiko, I had to teach the beginners class, and that taught me a lot about taiko, as well as structure and music in general.

Now I teach techniques such as *Katsugi Okedo*, Taiko-Set with two or three drums, *Tateuchi*, *Shime*, *Ôdaiko*, *Yatai* and *Yokouchi* (high and low). I also teach pieces. Besides the ones I got from Kondo Sensei, I also still teach pieces from the Ôsaka Area, one from Australia, and some pieces common in German Taiko.

**SJ:** *You are holding a 2-day workshop with "Kondo Sensei's Technique and Drills", could you tell me something about that?*

**OR:** The special way Kondo Sensei has developed, enables a great variety of feeling. The *bachi* tip can touch the [drum] skin very smoothly and precisely, but also fast. The *bachi* becomes a part of your hand to the point where you can feel the "dimples on the hide" through the wood, but still makes it possible to erupt into sudden powerful strokes. The snap of the wrist is the key to balance precision with strength. Keeping the movement of hand and *bachi* clean is a very important part of that.

The actual drills were developed by Kondo Sensei to develop musical ability, speed and feeling at the same time. Many can not only be used on the standing drum, but on *Okedo*, *Odaiko* and *Shime* as well. When teaching, Kondo Sensei stresses that the single patterns should be played ten to twenty minutes before going on to the next phase of that same pattern. The ear will find all the different ways to listen to that same pattern and the eye will see the hands move without attachment: a certain freedom can be achieved and music may start to flow from that place of consciousness.

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## Links

### *Tama Daiko*

<http://taiko-hamburg.de/>

<https://www.facebook.com/taikohamburg/>

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The "Kondo Sensei's Technique and Drills" workshop, like others we have attended, had a very relaxed atmosphere, even though the drill practice could be very intensive. This is what we really enjoy about workshops; taiko can still be a lot of fun, even if it means hard work.



Photo by: Oliver Reichelt

## Glossary

*bachi* (桴 or 枹)

*Bachi* is taiko drumsticks and they come in various sizes.

*kuchishōga* (口唱歌)

*Kuchishōga* means song-writing and it is used for learning and memorizing a taiko piece. Oral transmission of the taiko knowledge has been a tradition and *kuchishōga* is still used today. In taiko, there is a saying: "If you can sing it, you can play it."

*katsugi-okedō-daiko* (かつぎ桶胴太鼓)

*Katsugi-okedō-daiko* means "carried barrel-body drum". The drum is made of staves with straight sides and the drum heads are tightened with rope. When playing the drum, it is slung over the neck/shoulder.

*ō-daiko* (大太鼓)

*Ō-daiko* means "big drum" or "great drum". The largest drum in any ensemble is called the *ō-daiko*, hence it can vary in size from small to very, very large.

*okedō-daiko* (桶胴太鼓)

*Okedō-daiko* means "barrel-body drum". The drum is made of staves with straight sides and the drum heads are tightened with rope.

*shaku* (尺)

*Shaku* is a measurement unit that is still used to define the size of a taiko drum. 1 *shaku* = 11.9 inches (= 30.3 cm).

*Shimedaiko* (締太鼓)

*Shimedaiko* or *shime* is a rope-tightened drum and it's often very high pitched.

*taiko* (太鼓)

The word *taiko* means "big drum" or "drum" and it also describes the Japanese musical instrument.

*tateuchi* (縦打ち)

*Tate* means vertical; and *uchi* means strike. The word *tateuchi* relates to striking the drum vertically.

*Yatai* (屋台)

A float pulled/drawn as part of a sacred procession during a festival.

*Yatai-bayashi* (屋台囃子)

A traditional taiko piece inspired by an annual festival in Chichibu, Japan.

<https://estoestaiko.com/2015/12/07/chichibu-yatai-bayashi/>

*yokouchi* (横ウチ)

*Yoko* means side, sideways; and *utsu* (打つ) means to hit. The word *yokouchi* relates to hitting a drum sideways.

## 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.

