

The European Taiko Conference 2017

Article by: Soo-Im Jansson, 2017-03-26



Photo: Courtesy of Pippa Kirby.

The second European Taiko Conference was held in England on 9-12 February 2017. The theme of the conference was “*Developing the Community, Developing the Art Form*” with focus on connection. The host country for the third European Taiko Conference was announced to be Germany. The third European Taiko Conference will be held on 15-18 February 2018.

The second European Taiko Conference was held in England on 9-12 February with the theme “Developing the Community, Developing the Art Form” focusing on connection. The conference included workshops with international taiko artists and discussion sessions as well as individual group performances and joint performances.

Jonathan Kirby, founder of *Kagemusha Taiko*, was the person who took the initiative to plan and organize the very first European Taiko Conference (ETC) that was held in England last year. The 2nd European Taiko Conference (ETC2) was also held in England this year.

Yoshihiko Miyamoto, president of *Miyamoto Unosuke Shoten* and sponsor for both the ETC and ETC2, mentions in the official ETC2 conference booklet [1] that “The creation of the European Taiko Conference has been one of the greatest developments in the history of taiko. [...] Let’s continue to build a greater global taiko community.”

Yoshihiko Miyamoto talked about the history of *kumi-daiko* and its Japanese cultural roots in his opening talk at ETC last year. This year he talked about “*Concepts Behind Taiko*”.



Photo: The official ETC2 conference booklet [1]

Opening Talks

During the opening talks, the workshop leaders introduced themselves and their workshops. The workshop leaders were:

- Eiichi Saito and Eri Uchida (*Kodo*)
- Karen Young (*The Genki Spark*)
- Tiffany Tamaribuchi (*Sacramento Taiko Dan* and *Jodaiko*)
- Shoji Kameda (*On Ensemble*)
- Mark H Rooney (*Mark H Taiko*)

Jonathan Kirby also introduced the purpose of the conference:

- created and organised by taiko players;
- with the participation of taiko players;
- for the benefit of taiko players.

In addition, Jonathan Kirby presented who was at the conference:

- 64 delegates
- 12 observers
- 10 workshop leaders and staff
- 16 volunteers
- ... from 15 countries, representing 49 different taiko groups and organisations.

In his opening talk, Yoshihiko Miyamoto presented some concepts behind taiko so that we may come to better understand the Japanese culture.

Yoshihiko Miyamoto believes that the concept of respect is the underlying and very important value of the Japanese culture. “We have respect to nature and that became *Shinto*. We have respect to others, respect to everything, and that became some of our courtesies like bowing, our gift wrapping, and even our *arigato*. The word *arigato* means ‘thank you’ and it literally means ‘rare to be.’ In Japanese, to say ‘thank you,’ is to say ‘thank you very much for making trouble to do this.’ So, it’s a show of respect to your counterpart. “

“Another concept is ‘hidden beauty’. A man named Zeami, who lived from 1363 to 1443, established the *Noh* as an art form of what we know today. He left behind a lot of influential words. Perhaps the most famous words are *Hisureba Hana*.” Yoshihiko Miyamoto mentioned that there are no good translations for it

in English; the meaning could be worded like this: “the hidden beauty is more attractive than the apparent one.” Yoshihiko Miyamoto continued to explain, “In many cases, the Japanese don’t want to reveal everything, we don’t say everything, we keep something unsaid and we leave some room for people to find out. So, this kind of value is also true of *kumi-daiko* and important to remember. “

“Third, there’s *shu, ha, ri*. words by Sen no Rikyū, who established the tea ceremony, and he lived from 1522 to 1591. *Shu* is to follow the rule, *ha* is to break the rule, and *ri* is to depart from the rule. So, this describes how Japanese people learn something in the classic arts.” Yoshihiko Miyamoto explained how this concept can be applied. “First, you do what your teacher tells you to do, you follow the basics and the form, following the rule. As you get better, you absorb enough of the rule, enough of the form, and then you start breaking the rule. Eventually, you get to the point where you depart from your teachers and become independent. So this idea puts the emphasis on basics, so you always go back to the basics and you have to be humble all the time. Even if you are supposedly the best in the world, you still have to be humble.”



Photo: Yoshihiko Miyamoto and Shoji Kameda

“The Japanese culture is as diverse as any other cultures, from the gentleman in England to the punk rock boy in England,” Yoshihiko Miyamoto said. “*Kumi-daiko* is a young art form and it’s in an evolutionary phase. You have to go and seek what fits for you.”

Joint Performances

The ETC2 ended with joint performances. The participants were able to take part in these joint taiko performances. Again it was such a wonderful way of playing together no matter what taiko group or country we belong to.

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
- *Ogi Matsuri Bayashi* – by Kodo



Photo: Joint performances: *Stepping Stones* – by Oliver Kirby, at ETC2

Links

Slideshow from the 1st European Taiko Conference, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9j31bb92KU&feature=youtu.be>

The official link to the joint taiko performances at the 1st European Taiko Conference <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7VbvnV9OKA&feature=youtu.be>

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The Next European Taiko Conference

The 3rd European Taiko Conference:

Date: 15-18th February, 2018

Location: the Sunderhof, Hamburg, Germany

Managed by: *Kagemusha Taiko*

Hosted by: *Kion Dojo, Tama Daiko, Tengu Daiko, Yo Bachi Daiko*

Sponsored by: *kaDON / Miyamoto Unosuke Shoten*

Interviews

Interviews with Jonathan Kirby and the workshop leaders concludes this article, letting the interviews speak for themselves. I wish to truly thank Jonathan Kirby and all of the workshop leaders for giving me this wonderful opportunity and for taking their time to share their thoughts and stories.

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Jonathan Kirby

Jonathan Kirby has been performing and teaching taiko professionally in the U.K. since 1998. He is the author of the world's first English-language guide to learning and teaching taiko "Teaching Taiko: Principles & Practice"

As founder and artistic director of *Kagemusha Taiko*, he has personally trained over 200 members of his own junior and adult groups, composing original repertoire and developing new training material on the way. The adult *Kagemusha Taiko* have performed in theatres and concert halls across the country and abroad. This includes a series of joint concerts with the late Grand Master Oguchi Daihachi, founder of the first modern taiko group, in what were the only U.K. performances of his long career. *Kagemusha Junior Taiko* have earned themselves a national reputation for performance excellence, appearing several times in the Music for Youth School Proms. In 2005, they were invited to perform in Tokyo by the Nippon Taiko Foundation.

He is also director of the annual U.K. Taiko Festival which he launched in 2005. The Festival attracts adult and youth groups from across the country and has a growing reputation nationally and internationally.

Source:
The Japan Society, U.K. [2]

Soo-Im Jansson (SJ): *Could you tell me a little about your taiko background and what got you started with taiko?*

Jonathan Kirby: I've always played drums, drum kits, since I was about 14. Played in all kinds of different bands. I discovered taiko almost by accident. A friend had given me a CD of *Kodo* and I listened to it. I had never seen taiko and I didn't really enjoy it, so I thought, "What's the point of this? It's just drums." And that's always been a little bit my frustration with CDs. But then I saw *Kodo* and I saw *San Jose Taiko* when I moved to California, and seeing it was completely different. So I signed up to join *San Jose Taiko*. It's a two year audition process, and that is where my training comes from.

SJ: *What is Kagemusha Taiko?*

Jonathan Kirby: *Kagemusha Taiko* was founded after I left San Jose and came back to this country [U.K.]. We were living in California, with my family, where I had a job. But I was liking taiko so much, that I thought, "This is more important than my job." So, I gave up the job, came back to the U.K. and wanted to help taiko get started in the U.K. And for the best way to do that is to go fully professional, so I do not get any distractions and to create an arts and education company as a framework for what my work would be and to take it from there. And that is what *Kagemusha* is. It was designed to help get taiko started in the U.K., to nurture and develop it. An English or European style of taiko, so focusing a lot on education, because I always thought, we're not gonna be able to train adults to be as good as Japanese players or American players, we need to start with kids. So education, kids groups, teacher training and then performance, because it doesn't do any good to make CDs as I discovered from my early days. The best way to get people excited about taiko is to perform.

SJ: *This is the 2nd European Taiko Conference, but how did the first one get started? It started with you?*

Jonathan Kirby: Yes, it started with me. In 2005, I produced the first U.K. Taiko Festival. I have always felt that taiko would grow if taiko players talk to each other and got together. There's a lot of different groups all over

the place doing their own thing but they need to connect to grow, learn and to get inspiration from each other, courage, realize they're not on their own, all these things. And the

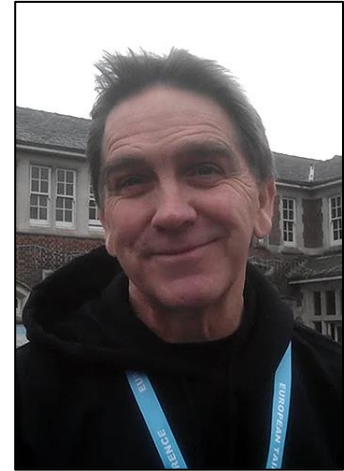


Photo:
Jonathan Kirby

first U.K. Taiko Festival were centered really on performance because I knew, in the early days, that people wanted to play and they didn't know that they needed to talk. And it took, I think, ten or eleven U.K. Taiko Festivals, and bit by bit we got to the point where people will now talk, they understand that they will learn from it. So the conference came at that point when I thought, "Okay, there are enough people now, I think we can go for it." So we booked the venue here [at Hannahs at Seale Hayne, Newton Abbot, England] and then I issued invitations to everyone I could find in Europe. And you [Soo-Im] are one of the people who responded. And people came. So, we facilitated it but of course it is not us really, it's the people who come who make it happen as much as anything else. And of course people who play taiko and care about taiko are great people. So if you bring them all together, great things will happen.

SJ: *At the end of this conference, there will be a joint performance and one of the pieces we are going to play is Shimabayashi which you have composed. I was wondering if you could tell me a little about that piece?*

Jonathan Kirby: That piece was the first one I got started with in the U.K. and it is named after a Japanese gentleman called Shimasaki, who was known as Shima for short. He kind of helped me get going. We had a bit of a falling out because of a school group, and he

thought that the school group should not perform for at least two years because he thought that they should be perfect before they played, and I thought they should perform after ten weeks because they were children, age eight to ten, and they should show their friends and their teachers what they do, and also, I wanted other people to see taiko so they get excited about it, but he said: "No, it's Japanese, I want it to be perfect." So we disagreed and separated. But he still helped me get started. So I named this first piece "Shimabayashi" after him. Two years later, we met again by chance, in London, at the *Hyde Park Matsuri* and there were about 200000 people there over two days. It was a huge event. My junior group had been invited to perform by the embassy. A massive coincidence, his theatre group from Tokyo was on the same stage just before my junior group. When we first saw each other, we looked at each other and he still wasn't talking to me, but then the junior group played. And the next time that he was on stage with his group he finished and then he said in Japanese to everybody: "And next you got this really great, amazing youth taiko group from England and I helped start them and they're amazing." And afterwards we shook hands. It's one of those things; you got different cultures and different approaches. But in the heart we got the same thing. I think it was a difficult process, but he was really honored I think that I had chosen his name for the song as well. So it all ended well. And it is a piece that we love, because it starts with the simplest of rhythms and then arms in the air, big shouts and people just seem to love it. So we love playing it. It's great fun. And taiko should be fun.

SJ: *What are your thoughts on the growing global taiko community?*

Jonathan Kirby: It's so, so exciting. I looked around the room at breakfast this morning and there are so many people I want to talk to, so many people I want to listen to, so many people I want to see playing, and I think it is going to be good for the art form. I think we will all help each other, because everybody is struggling. Taiko is hard to do. You got to find

the drums, the teachers, the repertoire, the space to play in. It's hard, but we can all help each other and encourage each other and that way I think taiko will grow and it needs to grow. Taiko is such a wonderful thing. More people need to be involved playing.

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Eri Uchida

Eri Uchida has studied in Canada for three years in high school, and has began a taiko group during her stay. Through the teachings of taiko in her group, she has realized of the charm of Japan and its rich culture, and felt the need to further study taiko at the Kodo Apprentice Centre. She became a Kodo apprentice in 2007. Uchida became an official performing member in 2010 after a strict selection process, and is now actively performing in different kind of stages in Japan and worldwide. She has directed the school workshop performances in 2014, and became the facilitator of *Kodo's* first school performance abroad in 2015.

Source:

The official ETC2 conference booklet [1]

Soo-Im Jansson (SJ): *Could you tell me a little about your taiko background and what got you started with taiko?*

Eri Uchida: I started taiko before I went to high school in Canada at a local community



Photo:
Eri Uchida

group in Japan where I was raised. I was 16 years old back then and connection that taiko

makes was so much fun and new to me. I was very much into it for a year, then I went to Canada for three years where I started a taiko group called “*Yamabiko*”. In there, we were playing pieces that I was doing in Japan. I was glad that about 10 to 15 people joined us and the group still exists today after 15 years. While I was in Canada, I saw *Kodo* performance in Vancouver and that’s why I’m here now.

SJ: *Could you tell me something about the workshop that you and Eiichi Saito is doing here at the conference?*

Eri Uchida: Today’s workshop is what Eiichi Saito has been doing for a long time, to share the idea of what he thinks is important when you play taiko. It’s about togetherness, to bring everyone’s heart as one and having fun rather than the timing of the sound. It’s very simple but very easy to forget at the same time, especially when you play better or longer. When you are always aware of each other to be one heart, audience could feel being together as well even though they are not playing. It’s a big and great thing about taiko.

SJ: *What are your thoughts on the growing global taiko community?*

Eri Uchida: I think it’s amazing. To see the European taiko community was the reason that I planned this workshop tour. Me and Eiichi Saito are going to do more workshops after this conference throughout Europe. I didn’t know it is growing so much and in such a different ways compared to Japan or North America.

People in Europe learn about Japanese culture and respect what is Japan, but at the same time, they know they are not Japanese and they are not trying to be one. They are looking for a way to be original and it is so inspiring. It was really interesting and very honoring to be able to be here at the second European Taiko Conference at the moment.

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Karen Young

Karen is the Founding Director of the Asian women’s arts and advocacy group *The Genki Spark* based in Boston, MA, USA. Deeply committed to inspiring others to use the art of taiko as a vehicle for empowerment and social change, Karen leads workshops related to community building and leadership development designed to build relationships and give people tools to lead others. She’s led workshops for the taiko community most recently at the East Coast Taiko Conference (Brown University, RI); European Taiko Conference (UK); UK Taiko Festival (UK); Regional Taiko Gathering (Vancouver, CN); TaikoBaka Leadership (San Diego, CA); the North American Taiko Conference (Las Vegas, CA). Karen got her start as a founding member of *Odaiko New England* and has been a member of the North American Taiko Community since 1997.

Source:

Courtesy of Karen Young

Soo-Im Jansson (SJ): *Could you tell me a little about your taiko background and what got you started with taiko?*

Karen Young: I’m from the United States and I currently live in Boston. I grew up in California and saw taiko for the first time when I was 21 year old college student. The University sponsored *Mt. Shasta Taiko* to perform for a multi-cultural event. It is the first time I saw taiko and it was the first time I saw



Photo:
Karen Young

Japanese-Americans who looked like me on stage being really lively and really full of a lot of emotion and expression. I’m Chinese and

Japanese, mixed heritage, raised in the United States, and I grew up being told I should be really quiet and think of other people first and not take up too much space. And so, to see Japanese-Americans be so lively, and hear them talk about their heritage and history, was so exciting for me. Also I saw younger people, kids like 13-14, and adults, parents, and that was very exciting, so I said: "I need to learn how to do that!" So a few years after college, I ended up in Boston, Massachusetts, for work I thought, "here's my time to learn" but there wasn't any taiko group. So I called every organization I could, Asian organization and Japanese organization, and there was one person who knew how to play, so I found this woman named Elaine Fong and I said: "I want to learn taiko and I can help you organize. That's how I got my start with *Odaiko New England*, I played with them for 15 years.

SJ: *Now you are a part of The Genki Spark, and you are the founder.*

Karen Young: Yes.

SJ: *Would you tell me a little about The Genki Spark?*

Karen Young: So I played with *Odaiko New England* for 15 years. Being part of the taiko community in the early 90's was really exciting. This was before the internet. The community grew solely by the sheer will and generosity of others. People shared their drum making skills, their compositions, their practices, and their intentions. One of the exciting things I heard was how some of the early 'pioneers' were Japanese and Asian Americans who were also involved in the fight for civil rights and were also anti-war. Some of them played taiko because it was a way to share their identity as Asian Americans. My relatives started the third taiko group in the United States called *San Jose Taiko*. They were raised in the sixties and the seventies, so they were listening to the music of Motown, and mixing in the cow-bell and tambourine with the taiko. They were figuring out what it meant to be Japanese and American. This purpose really appealed to me.

So when I spun off from *Odaiko New England* in 2010 to form *The Genki Spark*, I was really particularly interested in Asian women having a chance to share their story and their history and to use the taiko as a way to feel our power. *Genki* is a Japanese word that means happy, healthy, full of life, and energetic. We generally don't refer to ourselves as a taiko group. We talk about being an arts and advocacy organization. We use taiko drumming, personal narratives, and creativity to advocate a message of respect for all. We have 19 members and perform 40+ times annually for schools and community groups. We generally don't do many theater shows and don't really perform for 'cultural entertainment'. Our artistic repertoire includes spoken word pieces, monologues and skits, and at every event we share our personal stories with the audience and invite them to play with us. We often work with the immigrant communities or youth or LGBTQ communities, communities that understand how important it is to create safe spaces for people to be themselves, groups that understand that we need to stop bullying in schools, we need to stop prejudice and stereotypes, we need to build friendships and unite together. So that is the basic essence of what I wanted to do, I wanted to use the power of the taiko to help create a better world.

SJ: *You also have a new project going?*

Karen Young: Yes. 'We Play for Unity!' Elise Fujimoto, Tiffany Tamaribuchi, (both from

Photo:
"We Play for
Unity" shirts



California) and I wanted to go to the the Women's March in Washington. This march was formed after the US elections. January 21 is the inauguration day and the day after there were over 600 marches all over the world. *The Genki Spark* performed in Boston in front of 175,000 people. The DC march had something like 1.3 million people and it was incredible. Elise designed this shirt that says: "We play for unity" [on the front] and on the back it says "See US, here US, join US". The

Women's March in United States initially was really criticized of being mostly a white feminist march and we didn't see it that way. We felt that we wanted to show that we are part of this movement and this march as well. We created this shirt and we wanted to create opportunities for taiko players from all different kinds of groups to come together to be able to support efforts to basically build unity and fight discrimination and fight prejudice and fight oppression.

SJ: *Could you tell me something about the workshop that you are doing here at the conference?*

Karen Young: My workshop is focusing on building the taiko community. We will develop the community faster if we have relationships. My workshops focus on connection and purpose. Why are you here? What do you love most about this art form? What are your current challenges? How can we help each other? US politics are incredibly divisive and the taiko community has kept me sane. We know something as taiko players, to play you need to use your power and your voice, you need to be big, you need to know how to listen, you need to know when to stand back and let something entirely new emerge. We have a lot of power, these skills are what is needed to build a strong community. We need communities that can laugh and play and have hope. We can inspire and lift heavy hearts. We can unite people, but that all starts here with getting to know each other. It starts by saying Hello! So my workshop really focuses on us getting to know each other, and focuses on connection.

SJ: *What are your thoughts on the growing global taiko community?*

Karen Young: I love the taiko community here in Europe! You all have tremendous heart and creativity and diversity here. I know in other places there is more of a climate of competition but here, it seems like there is so much love and generosity and taiko is growing SO fast because of that. I love seeing events like *Taiko Spirit* in Zurich, and *Taikopalooza* in Ulm, and the big European taiko concert in

Dusseldorf! I also love folks like Silke in Germany host Taiko Sessions where she gets people together just to play. This community here in Europe is so broad, there are people who are playing to perform, there are people who are teaching to basically help special needs population or vulnerable children, there are folks who are here to just play for fun, there are some that are interested in developing compositions that we can all play together as a community, I think that is all wonderful.

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Tiffany Tamaribuchi

For over 25 years, Tiffany Tamaribuchi has toured internationally as a professional *wadaiko* artist with a number of renowned Japanese and North American groups, and as a solo performer, occasional composer, roguish instigator, and resourceful collaborator (having produced a number of tours, projects, and programs with some amazing artists). She has also gained notoriety as an engaging, enthusiastic, and highly skilled instructor, who draws from an eclectic background of intensive training and complementary studies.

Founder and Director of the international women's collective ensemble *Jodaiko* (1988), and the *Sacramento Taiko Dan* (1989), and regularly scheduled instructor for a number of groups throughout the U.S. and Canada. Tiffany is also a member of the *Kasuga Onigumi* and a former student and guest artist of the *San Fransisco Taiko Dojo*.

Source:

The official ETC2 conference booklet [1]

Soo-Im Jansson (SJ): *Could you tell me a little about your taiko background and what got you started with taiko?*

Tiffany Tamaribuchi: There is a Japanese *Min'yo* (folk music, dance, and song) group in Sacramento and they play a version of *Soma Bon Uta*, which is from Fukushima prefecture and they call it *Fukushima Ondo*, but in that piece they have a couple of *shimedaiko* and a *chudaiko* which they call an *odaiko*. My mom

says that from the time I could walk, I would just stand in front of the drum during that song (until I had learned the dance, and then I always started from a position in the circle that would keep me near the drum), so I grew up wanting to play taiko. And at the time, because I was a young girl, men who had been playing it, by then, over thirty years, and played for about sixty years in total, told me, and other people in the predominantly *Nikkei* group told me, "No, you can't do that, you're a girl. That's what the men play." So I was very frustrated, but always, always wanting to play. Then I started to see groups like *San Jose Taiko* and *San Francisco Taiko Dojo* because they are about 2 hours away from Sacramento by car, so they would come for various festivals. I got more and more excited!



Photo:
Tiffany Tamaribuchi

I was able to go to Japan as an exchange student and did a little taiko as an exchange student. But then I saw *Kodo* in 1984 and thought: "Aaaah, this... I want to play taiko." I tried to join *Kodo*, but because I couldn't speak Japanese, they wouldn't accept me at the time. I tried to join *San Jose Taiko* but they would not accept me because they weren't taking new members then, and I was so young. I finally approached *San Francisco Taiko Dojo* and asked if Tanaka Sensei, the leader and founder, would help me start a group and come to teach. He said, "No, but I will teach you and you can start a group." And so that's how I came into being a *wadaiko* player initially. Two years after, I started my own taiko dojo. I started my own group and started teaching students in Sacramento. 2-3 years later I

went to Japan for the first time to train seriously. A year after that, *Ondekoza* came through the United States on their marathon tour and I got invited to join that group. So, sort of a long story, but that's how I started playing *wadaiko*.

SJ: *As being a female playing taiko, how has that changed during the years? Is it easy to be a woman playing taiko today?*

Tiffany Tamaribuchi: I think, yes, it is easier now. And really the whole time I have been playing, there have been strong women players, but overall, the culture is still male dominated in a lot of ways, especially in Japan. Not so much in the U.S. and I don't really know about Europe, but when I first came to Europe, actually, I came to Düsseldorf and did some touring with *Tentekko-Taiko* a long time ago. Monika Baumgartl had a group of mostly women, so certainly I did not feel that here in Europe, but over time, I like to think that I helped to make a difference in helping people to see that women can play and can be strong. And I have less resistance, but for example I was at the 400th anniversary of *Asano Taiko* in 2009, and I was sitting next to two other American players Bryan Yamami and Masato Baba [of *Taiko Project*], and Bryan turned to me and he said: "What's it like to be the only woman sitting at this table?" and I said: "That's what it always is, Bryan, I've consistently been the only woman a lot of the time." Even though I know that there are many, many amazing women who perform in Japan and in the U.S.

With the North American Taiko Conference, even though many women have sort of held the community together and started groups and helped keep things going since Taiko came to North America, the majority of instructors have consistently been mostly men. And so, it's easier and it's better, but it's still not just even, it's not equal, even now. And it's something that I hope continues to shift towards everyone just being able to play. That it doesn't matter whether you are a man or a woman, you just play and you play with your spirit and that's all that matters. But I think

that there are systems historically, culturally in place that are still not easy to break through.

SJ: *Could you tell me something about the workshop that you are doing here at the conference?*

Tiffany Tamaribuchi: I was hoping to, sort of introduce my philosophy about playing, to really share an approach to basics that I found helped people play with less effort and less risk. And really, it is better, I think, to start with foundation, then we can all move towards more advanced things, and this way, people get an idea of who I am and how I think, and hopefully walk away having more ease being able to play. And I am very excited to be here. I saw that ETC was happening last year and I thought: "Oh, I really would like to go!" and so to be here and doing a workshop is quite thrilling.

SJ: *What are your thoughts on the growing global taiko community?*

Tiffany Tamaribuchi: I think it's fabulous. I think it's just really wonderful to see taiko spreading all over the world. When I first started, the Internet was just getting started, like you couldn't... information was very difficult to find, there were no English language books on taiko, there were no references about it, the only sort of vague reference was William P. Malm's Japanese instrument books, and that mostly talked about *Hogaku*, *Bugaku* and *Min'yo*, because *wadaiko* was not "traditional". The first time I did an Internet search, I got five hits and four of those were for a book called "Taiko" about the regent, the other use of the word, referring to the Emperor of Japan, so there was a book. And then there was one page that talked about the taiko that we know. And now, you can go to Google and you can search for taiko, and there are millions of pages (7,730,000 hits) and you go to YouTube and there's a half a million videos (now over 750,000), and to see taiko just everywhere understanding how beneficial it is to people in terms of bringing people together and giving them a sense of joy and giving them a sense of power, giving them an understanding of a little bit of Japanese culture even though you

don't have to be Japanese to play, but to have sort of a very approachable art form that they may then help people become more interested in other Japanese things other cultural things, or also begin to see Japanese people in a different way or Japanese culture in a different way. It's fabulous! To be watching from where I was and seeing *Tentekko* start and then seeing more and more groups, *Mugenkyo* starting and *Kagemusha* starting and now there are so many groups in Europe. And there are groups in South Africa and groups in South America, it's just incredible. The interesting thing is, because it's such a new art form to see sort of the growing pains that we're going through of "what is taiko?", "this is taiko", "this isn't taiko", "what are you doing with it?", you know. It is a fun and challenging time and really great to be a part of it.

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Shoji Kameda

Shoji Kameda is a Grammy nominated musician, composer and producer. He started playing taiko at the age of eight and has played continuously since. Collaborators with international artists have taken Shoji to Malaysia, Bali, French, Guiana, India, Indonesia, Japan, Mongolia, Thailand and the Philippines.

Shoji is a founding member of *On Ensemble* and the group's primary creative force. In 2013 *On Ensemble* was invited to perform at the National Theater of Japan for their prestigious "Nihon no Taiko" series. Recently Shoji has partnered with taiko master Kenny Endo, leading taiko and *fue* artist Kaoru Watanabe and instrument maker Miyamoto Unosuke Shoten to create kaDON a new online venture dedicated to providing high quality video instruction to taiko and fue.

*Source:
The official ETC2 conference booklet [1]*

Soo-Im Jansson (SJ): *Could you tell me a little about your taiko background and what got you started with taiko?*

Shoji Kameda: I started taiko when I was 8 years old, I started with the first childrens

taiko group in the the United States. So, I was eight and I played with them all the way through High School. After High School when I was in the University I performed and I taught one of the University taiko groups at my school, Stanford University. At the time, it was one of the three collegiate taiko groups in the United States. So, I continued learning and growing in taiko there. At some point in



Photo:
Shoji Kameda

my University years, I started to get very serious about the art form, so I took a year off and I went to study with a master by the name of Kenny Endo in Hawaii. That was a very transformative year. Kenny really showed me what it took to be a professional and giving me the confidence to know that, if I pursue this I could really do something with the art form. So, I went back to the University and finished that, moved to Japan for 2 and a half years to study more deeply. I studied not just taiko, but some of the classical art forms involving the taiko, *Edobayashi* which is a festival music from Tokyo and *Hogaku Hayashi* the classical music from *Kabuki* theatre.

After that, I moved to Los Angeles and started my own group called *On Ensemble* and in *On Ensemble* we do a lot of interesting work with taiko bringing in musical influences from all around the world. We started really making music that encompass all of who we are. So not just taiko but our interest in jazz and rock and other world music. So we're starting to bring it all together. And since moving to L.A., it's been really *On Ensemble*, and doing other sort of music for movies and television shows

and that kind of thing. And recently, I started an online venture for the taiko community called kaDON

SJ: *Could you tell me something about the workshop that you are doing here at the conference?*

Shoji Kameda: First of all, I first met Jonathan Kirby when I was a summer intern at *San Jose Taiko*. He came with his group *Press Gang*. So, that was my first meeting of him and we've just sort of stayed in touch over the years and the taiko world is wonderful I think. Meet all kinds of wonderful people, you stay in touch with and the world get really both bigger and smaller simultaneously. And, so Jonathan had invited me to a U.K. taiko festival and he had this idea of getting together all the European taiko community leaders and he brought me here [to the first European Taiko Conference] last year to help teach workshops here. I had a really amazingly wonderful and magical time, so it's been a real honor to be invited back. And my workshop here [at the 2nd European Taiko Conference] is a very basic workshop. I'm focusing on really trying to go into depth about just how you can stand at the drum and how you can think about how you hit, and how you can break everything down and really spend a lot of time in every single motion. Hopefully it will give people the framework and the tools that they can use to improve themselves through introspection and through taking a simple motion and really breaking it down and refining every part of the strike, and that's really what my workshop is about.

SJ: *What are your thoughts on the growing global taiko community?*

Shoji Kameda: Oh, it's a very, very exciting time. It's a wonderful time to be involved in the art form. The community both in Europe and all around keeps growing, so not just in Europe but in the United States and all parts of the world. It keeps growing and it becomes more connected, we are more connected to each other. There's more interest in taiko and this art form, so it is really fantastic.

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Mark H Rooney

Mark H Rooney – “the world’s most dangerous half-Japanese/half-Scottish solo improvisational taiko artist” – has been studying, performing, and teaching taiko for the past 19 years in the U.S., Japan and Europe. He was the Artistic Director of *Odaiko New England*, the founding instructor for Wesleyan University’s taiko program, and a touring member of *Taikoza*. Mark has collaborated with a wide variety of artists and groups including *Tiger Okoshi*, *Opera unMET*, *UpRooted Dance*, *ilyAIMY*, and *Arts on the Horizon*. As an instructor, Mark has taught taiko to thousands around the globe and continues his mission of “taiko for all people, at all levels” in the Washington DC area and beyond.

Source:

The official ETC2 conference booklet [1]

Soo-Im Jansson (SJ): *Could you tell me a little about your taiko background and what got you started with taiko?*

Mark H Rooney: I started almost 20 years ago when I saw a taiko group perform, *Odaiko New England*, and they performed at the *matsuri* festival in my home town in Massachusetts. It was just very exciting for me to



Photo:
Mark H Rooney

feel the drumming and to see something that was culturally a part of my own heritage, but also it was music, and I have been doing music since I was very young. I was, like: “This is really cool.” I took a workshop, then I took a class, then I became an apprentice, and then I started performing. Next you know,

I moved to Japan so I could study more. It hooked me. I have been doing this full time since 2004.

SJ: *Could you tell me something about the workshop that you are doing here at the conference?*

Mark H Rooney: My workshop is focusing on connection. For me, everything in taiko, I think about in terms of connection. To me, that is one of the most important thing we can do as human beings is to connect. Really, for me, taiko is actually kind of the tool that is used for connection. My ultimate goal in life is just connection, to connect with people, and I found I could do that a lot through taiko. I always think about connecting to the taiko itself. I think about the connection to my fellow taiko players, because this art form of modern version of *kumi-daiko*. And then I always think about connecting to the people who are witness to that, because that is also a very important part of the equation, I feel.

SJ: *In the ETC, we have several different workshops. What do you think about workshops and how these can be helpful?*

Mark H Rooney: I feel like, the kind of workshops that you find at a taiko conference, I have taken many workshops at conferences, I have taught many workshops, and I feel it is kind of a first step towards something. You can really change how you think about taiko in the course of a couple of hours. You are not gonna change how you play, right? No one is gonna come walking in and then walk out a master or something after two hours. But you could change so much how you think about something, even just one aspect or one little thing. I always want people who take my workshops, I am not trying to change everything about them, how they play or anything, I want them to find that one piece or that one little nugget of wisdom that they feel they can take and make a part of their own practice or their own playing, their own style or their own philosophy. If people can find at least one thing, I feel like it's a success. The other thing that is great about a workshop, even like

Karen Young was doing here [in her workshop], that it does further that bond of connection with the other taiko players. That is a very important part of the conference, the aspect of forming those relationships and those bonds. I don't know anyone who can do that quite like Karen.

SJ: What are your thoughts on the growing global taiko community?

Mark H Rooney: It's so exciting. It's taiko, and again the modern version of what we do is still quite young. So there's so much potential and possibility and we're sort of in the awkward teenage years of figuring out what this is, but we are doing so together. It's also a great time, because the community is still small enough that everyone of us is kind of two degrees of separation from each other.

Something I was telling my students before I came here, actually, was that concept. You know these people who study taiko in Washington D.C. you are connected to them in a much larger network of taiko drummers, The proof of that is the fact that I am here. I'm teaching alongside some people who were very influential teachers for me. I was invited here by Jonathan Kirby who I met almost 20 years ago, I guess about 17 years ago playing a performance in England, and that kind of lead to 17 years later to me being here and doing this [leading one of the workshops]. I mean, the interconnectedness of the taiko community is exciting and the continued growth of how taiko is sort of being used in various communities, how it's being used in various countries, and it has so much potential for becoming so much bigger. For a lot of people it might feel like in their own group or their own taiko that the growth is slow, but actually I feel like the growth is very rapid and that we're in a very exciting time for the global communities.

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A Word from the Author

This article is my way of contributing and thanking the taiko community. Thank you all very, very much.

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[2] The Japan Society. *Kirby, Jonathan*. London, U.K..

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Photo:
The ETC drum

Links

European Taiko Conference

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

Miyamoto Unosuke Shoten

<https://www.miyamoto-unosuke.co.jp/english/>

Kagemusha Taiko

<http://kagemusha.com/>

Kodo

http://www.kodo.or.jp/index_en.html

Tiffany Tamaribuchi

<http://ttaiko.com/tiffany.html>

The Genki Spark

<http://www.thegenkispark.org/index.html>

On Ensemble

<http://onensemble.org/>

Mark H Taiko

<https://www.markhrooney.com/>

Glossary

bugaku (舞楽)

Bugaku is a court dance and music.

chudaiko (中太鼓)

Chudaiko is a medium size taiko drum.

Edo Bayashi (江戸囃子)

A festival music style from old Tokyo (<http://taikosource.com/tag/edo-bayashi/>)

Fukushima Ondo (福知山音頭)

Fukushima Ondo is a piece of genre *min'yo* from the *Min'yo* School.

gagaku (邦楽)

Gagaku is an imperial court music, which originated from the 7th century. *Gagaku* is the court music that goes beside the *bugaku* court dance

hōgaku (邦楽)

Hōgaku is classical Japanese music.

hōgaku-hayashi (邦楽囃子)

Hōgaku-hayashi are *Hōgaku* ensembles, consisting of wind instruments, primarily flutes, and drums.

kabuki (歌舞伎)

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

kumi-daiko (組太鼓)

Kumi-daiko describes the ensemble-style playing.

min'yō (民謡)

Min'yō is a genre of traditional Japanese folk song. Many *min'yō* are connected to forms of work or to specific trades and were originally sung between work or for specific jobs. Other *min'yō* function simply as entertainment, as dance accompaniment, or as a components of religious rituals.

nohgaku (能楽)

Nohgaku or just *noh* is a classical Japanese musical drama from the 14th century.

ōdaiko (大太鼓)

Ōdaiko means “big drum” or “great drum”. The largest drum in any ensemble is called the *ōdaiko*, hence it can vary in size from small to very, very large.

shimedaiko (締太鼓)

Shimedaiko is a rope-tightened drum.

shinobue (篠笛)

Also called *takebue* (竹笛), is a Japanese transverse bamboo flute or *fue* (笛) that has a high-pitched sound and is commonly used in Japanese festival music.

Shinto (神道)

Shinto is a Japanese ethnic religion. Today it is a term that applies to the religion of public shrines devoted to the worship of a multitude of gods (*kami*).

Soma Bon Uta (神道)

Soma Bon Uta is a piece of genre *min'yo* from the *Min'yo* School.

taiko (太鼓)

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

wadaiko (太鼓)

Wadaiko means “Japanese drums”. Since any drum, e.g. tom-tom, bongos, djembe, conga, are called *taiko* in Japan, the word *wadaiko* is used to differentiate drums that are native to Japan.

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.

