

Taiko Palooza

Article by: Soo-Im Jansson, 2016-06-12

During the weekend 3rd-5th of June, members of *Taiko Shin Kai* participated in the great Taiko Palooza event in Ulm, Germany, arranged by Rannoch Purcell at the *Taiko Zentrum Deutschland*.



Evening taiko jam session at Taiko Palooza in Ulm, Germany

We flew from Sweden to Germany on Friday the 3rd of June and arrived in Ulm just in time for an evening meal with some of the participants of Taiko Palooza that came from Italy, Belgium, Scotland, and from various places in Germany. Having time to get the chance to chat with them and relax was great and it made it easier to loosen up and get into the mood when we partook in the jam session that was taking place that very same evening. With so much energy and joy in the room, it was impossible to sit still and we just had to grab a pair of drum sticks and join in on the fun.

The next day offered workshops and a concert night. We were gathered in the larger room that the Taiko Zentrum use.



At Taiko Zentrum Deutschland

I had a chance to interview Shonagh Walker from Scotland, who led the first workshop together with her partner Martin Doyle.

Soo-Im Jansson (SJ): How long have you been playing taiko?

Shonagh Walker (SW): I actually started playing taiko at school. I then played in the *Mugen Taiko Dojo* in Scotland for a number of years before I started playing taiko professionally. I became a teacher there as well. I played professionally for six years with *Mugenkyo Taiko Drummers*. And last year myself and my partner Martin Doyle started a new organization called *Tsuchigumo Daiko*, so it's been a great number of years.

SJ: Why do you play taiko?

SW: Because I love it. There's so many things about it. I love the energy. I love playing in a group with lots of people and connecting with them. I love the way it brings people together.

I met so many brilliant people who play taiko. I love the form. I love how it's music, it's dance, it's theater. It's many things to many people. There's so many styles. There's so much history. There's so many new things happening. It's a beautiful artform.

SJ: You're doing a workshop at the Taiko Palooza event today. So, what do you get out of that?

SW: Since I just love taiko, I love seeing other people loving taiko. I'm passing on some techniques and I'm passing on a piece and I love sort of seeing that shared connection and shared passion of taiko. I get energy back from the people I'm working with.

SJ: There's a joint group performance at the concert night tonight. What do you think about such an event?

SW: I think it is fantastic. It is really important to share what you are doing. Taiko is so many things to many people and I think it is great to bring taiko people together and share what they do, because there are so many things that are different and at the same time there are so many things that are the same. It's great for people to get together and be inspired by each other and learn from each other and also to see what else is happening with taiko. It's a really nice community feeling to it. It's going to be a great night.



Shonagh Walker

Shonagh Walker and Martin Doyle, both founding members of *Tsuchigumo Daiko*, led the first workshop and they taught us all a music piece called "Kuru-Kuru". The founder of *Taiko Zentrum Deutschland* in Ulm, Rannoch Purcell, led the second workshop and he taught us traditional festival (*matsuri*) music with their own version of it in a *naname* style. Both workshops entailed lots of coreographic arm movements that challenged our coordination skills.



Tsuchigumo taiko workshop



Naname basics workshop

The two-hour evening concert night, with over a hundred people in the audience, was spectacular with plenty of great performances, including collaboration performances with different groups as well as a final joint group performance of a *matsuri* taiko jam. It's something that cannot be described accurately in words, it simply has to be experienced.



Joint group performance at Taiko Palooza concert night

On the last day of Taiko Palooza, that offered two more workshops, I had the chance to talk to Rannoch Purcell who had organized this big event.



Rannoch Purcell

Soo-Im Jansson (SJ): Tell me a little about your taiko background.

Rannoch Purcell (RP): I started playing taiko in 2004 at California State University Northridge in Los Angeles. I did my music major there and I was studying classical voice and opera. I just needed a musical ensemble as part of my degree, so I found taiko and I thought it looked fun so I started a taiko course under Joel Mankey (formerly *Taiko Project*, *Prota Taiko*, and *Tetsu Project*). I played with *Jishin Taiko* there for a couple of years and then started my own dojo, *Celt Taiko*, as part of a College prep-school music program that I was running. I did that for four years. I then moved to Germany and have been teaching taiko here (privately and at the International School of Ulm) since then. In 2015 I went completely self-employed and started my own private dojo here!

SJ: So what got you started with taiko?

RP: I like the fact it was music and sport together and I was really into fitness at the time. When I found taiko, I just thought it fit perfectly to what I wanted to do. Something with music and also fitness and activity. So that's what got me into it.

I was able to study with some great people like Joel Mankey (my primary *sensei*), Masato Baba from *Taiko Project* [Taiko Project's Artistic Director]. And I had the chance to meet Kenny Endo and study with him on Hawaii several times. It's been really great being so early in the scene, since taiko is not really that old. The *kumi-daiko* movement that we are doing now and a lot of these great amazing players that started it are still accessible. You know, we can book a workshop with Kenny Endo and get to play with him or with Seiichi Tanaka [*founder of San Francisco Taiko Dojo*], so it's just really a great scene to get involved in that way. It is really easy to meet the top players, and there's such a closeness and familiarity in the community.

SJ: You started Taiko Palooza, what made you come up with that?

RP: I went to the ETC, the European Taiko Convention in February, and it was such a wonderful experience to meet taiko players from all over Europe and to find that connection. It was like making a whole bunch of new family. At the convention, I invited a bunch of people to come to my dojo and we ended up having Martin Doyle from Scotland [*Tshuchigumo Daiko*], Isabel Romeo from Spain [*Seiwa Taiko*], Steven Cools [*InnerDrum*] from Belgium, and Micah Wilhem from Switzerland [*Taiko Zürich*] and they all said "yeah, we'd like to come to your dojo". We had become friends there at the convention, and it just sort of happened that we got together here and had a great weekend playing taiko together. It was then that I said, "Yeah, I think I want to do this on a bigger scale and invite more people." And that is kind of what it was. I just wanted to do the same thing and invite people. My goal was to make it really low-key and relaxed, not a big official event, but something accessible and free about sharing taiko. And I think that is just what we have had, so I think that this has been a pretty big success so far.

SJ: So, now that the event is almost over, how do you feel now and what do you think about it?

RP: I think it was really, really great. For me it was a dream come true having all these taiko players here and being able to meet and share our experiences with each other, and to spend a really relaxed weekend together playing taiko, having fun, laughing, making new friends, and collaborating. It just builds that sense of community we all want, and that's what taiko is all about. That's what I wanted – the opportunity for people to get to know each other more and develop deeper relationships with each other and get more collaboration happening around Europe. I think that is what we have had, so I am very excited about it.

The third workshop was led by Remi Clemente and Sandra Miur (Wadaiko Switzerland). Here we learned how to play in low *naname* style. It was so much fun even though it was quite challenging for the legs.



Low *naname* workshop

We weren't able to partake in the fourth workshop with Steven Cools (*InnerDrum*, Belgium), unfortunately, since we had to catch our flight back to Sweden. We would have loved to learn more about decoding and understanding rhythm.

We came home a little bit wiser with lots of new things to digest. Taiko Palooza was definitely inspirational and an amazing experience. We got to meet and play with other taiko players in Europe. We hope there will be more events like these in Europe.

Taiko Palooza Workshops

Tsuchigumo Taiko Workshop – Martin Doyle & Shonagh Walker (*Tsuchigumo Taiko*, Scotland)

Naname Basics Workshop – Razz Purcell (USA)

Low Naname - "Ran" (repertoire) – Remi Clemente and Sandra Miur (Wadaiko Switzerland)

Decoding and Understanding Rhythm – Steven Cools (*InnerDrum*, Belgium)

Glossary

dojo (道場) – literally means “place of the way”

kumi-daiko (組太鼓) – ensemble-style playing

naname (斜め) – playing with a slanted drum

taiko (太鼓) – drum, big drum

Links

Taiko Zentrum Deutschland:

<http://www.taikozentrum.de/home>

Tsuchigumo-Daiko:

<https://www.facebook.com/Tsuchigumo-Daiko-444150339126516/>

Re Mi Taiko: <https://www.facebook.com/ReMiTaiko>

Taiko Zürich: <https://www.facebook.com/TaikoZH/>

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

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.

