

Taiko Shudan Amanojaku



the ultimate presence
rhythm in evolution

embracing tradition and creation
pursuing that only sound
focusing both the spirit and the senses
then that single beat becomes a cry
deep from within our soul

Amanojaku's Vision

Taiko is the soul beat of Japan. For every Japanese, taiko means the village shrine festival, the celebration of a good harvest or fishing catch, the primordial rhythm of folk songs.

Amanojaku takes that proud legacy and lands it right on the concert stage of modern art. Amanojaku breathes the funk of Tokyo's cityscape, the multi-layered vibrations of the present and faraway sounds like swing and samba – all integrated with the Japaneseness of taiko. Amanojaku is also about physical and spiritual discipline. Choreography that accentuates the tune's narrative is a key driving force for the unfolding musical tales.

As one of the world's most respected taiko ensembles, Amanojaku has toured more than 40 nations, including Thailand ('06), the United States ('05) and Brazil ('04). Amanojaku has performed at the prestigious Japanese National Theatre four times.

Founder and leader Yoichi Watanabe's compositions often use phrasings inspired by Kabuki-based mood-evoking sound effects that call to mind a cicada's song, dashing waves, or a voice echoing in a valley, and blends them with other forms of indigenous music. By changing the context, touch and interpretation, Mr. Watanabe takes rhythms such as a Latin bell pattern and makes them sound naturally Japanese.

Mr. Watanabe is Special Advisor for Cultural Exchange, appointed by the Japanese government, as well as a First-Class Taiko Instructor certified by the Nippon Taiko Foundation. Mr. Watanabe has taught thousands of students, not only in Japan but also the United States, Brazil and Great Britain.



武人 BUJIN



怒涛 DOTOU

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What is Amanojaku?

In folklore, Amanojaku is a mischievous fairylike imp. Over the years, Amanojaku has come to mean a person who goes against the grain of society.

Amanojaku's music is about looking beyond trends and superficiality in order to find an artistic truth.

The concept behind Amanojaku underlines the need of an artist to have the courage to speak the truth.

As a Hogaku pioneer, Amanojaku has collaborated with artists playing both Japanese and Western instruments including the three-stringed shamisen, yokobue flute, synthesizer and Latin percussion, for 20 years.



海人 UMIBITO



怒涛 DOTOU



三人囃子 SANNINBAYASHI



若武者 WAKAMUSHA



神楽 KAGURA



打ち出し UCHIDASHI



早獅子 HAYAJISHI

Compositions



国立劇場 第64回

波のうねり Nami no Uneri

うち寄せ引いてゆく波韻の流れ 高まりゆく鼓動

The beating rhythm of the dashing, departing waves
The intensifying pulse of the drum

相生 Aioi

蓄積された二人の時は”呼吸”をとらえ
”間”を相生い共す

Time over time, the two breathe to coexist with a
timeless moment

神楽 Kagura

空間を切り裂く音 心は次第に郷愁を覚える

Sound pierces space
The heart remembers a forgotten past

武人 Bujin

かつてこんな太鼓を見たことがあるだろうか
今、全身に走る衝撃の戦慄

No one has ever witnessed such drumming
Now, the body fills with an awesome trepidation

怒濤 Dotou

解き放たれた濤声 荒波の如く

A thunderous voice set free by the waves

海人 Umibito

和太鼓生まれいずるこの地より
海を漂い辿り着きし国々

Japanese taiko-born of this land, wandering across
seas, touching faraway nations

鼓心 Koshin

響きの中に身をゆだね 鼓へと昇華してゆく

Follow the vibrations
Reach the ultimate in rhythm

魂の響き Tamashii no Hibiki

生命の気焔 轟く魂の響

The spiritual fire of life
The echoing beat of your soul



国立劇場 第86回



魂の響 公演



国立劇場 第68回



手練 公演



Relax'95 公演



天邪鬼 初演



原点を求めて 公演



Relax'95 ビデオジャケット



手練 ビデオジャケット

Player Profiles

Yoichi Watanabe

- Special Advisor for Cultural Exchange (Agency of Cultural Affairs)
- First-Class Certified Taiko Instructor (Nippon Taiko Foundation)

Founder and leader of Amanojaku, Yoichi Watanabe, is one of taiko's premier players and instructors. Mr. Watanabe's influence on taiko is most recognizable through his compositions, which feature a distinctive modernity combined with traditional techniques.



Twenty years ago, Mr. Watanabe composed "The Unknown World" becoming one of the first taiko drummers to experiment with ensembles featuring both taiko and Western instrumentation. He continues to innovate on taiko by collaborating with musicians around the world.

As an instructor, Mr. Watanabe has more than 500 students not only in Japan but also abroad including the United States, Brazil, Australia, and the United Kingdom. Over a six-year period, Mr. Watanabe's students won an unprecedented 10 National Championships at various taiko contests held throughout Japan.

Hiromi Ogawa

- Certified Taiko Instructor (Nippon Taiko Foundation)

Hiromi Ogawa began her professional career as one of the co-founders of Amanojaku. Her playing style features an elegance and dynamism that make her one of the world's finest drummers.



Her compositions "Aioi" and "Koshin," written with Mayumi Kawana, are trademark Amanojaku pieces. The complex syncopation of the pieces and the breathtaking rendition by the two women make for a stunning performance.

Mayumi Kawana

- Certified Taiko Instructor (Nippon Taiko Foundation)



Mayumi Kawana, along with Yoichi Watanabe and Hiromi Ogawa, is one of the central players and co-founders of Amanojaku. Like Hiromi Ogawa, she is one of the most prominent female taiko drummers today.

She composed "Aioi" and "Koshin," has perfected a superb drumming style, and plays a critical role in instructing Amanojaku students.

Player Profiles (continued)

Harumi Wakui

- 2003 “Minyo Nihon no Matsuri” National Champion



Harumi Wakui, an extremely versatile Hogaku musician, plays various styles of taiko, the three-stringed shamisen and is a master Minyo-style singer.

In 2003, Ms. Wakui overcame tremendous odds to become a Minyo National Champion. She is one of the central players of Amanojaku, and one of the Hogaku world’s bright young stars.

Makoto Baba

- 1998 “All-Japan OTAIKO Contest” National Champion

Makoto Baba began studying under Yoichi Watanabe in elementary school at his hometown in Fukushima Prefecture.

Mr. Baba’s spectacular performance at the 1998 “All-Japan OTAIKO Contest” was awarded an Odaiko National Championship.

Together with Wakui Harumi and Isaku Kageyama, Makoto Baba is one of the instructors of Amanojaku’s student group, the Amanojaku Hozonkai.



Isaku Kageyama

- 2000 “Mt. Fuji Taiko Festival” National Champion
- 2003 “Hokkaido Taiko Championship” National Champion

Isaku Kageyama is one of the bright young stars of premiere drum ensemble Amanojaku. Mr. Kageyama is a two-time National Odaiko Champion, winning highest honors at both the Mt. Fuji Taiko Festival in 2000, and the Hokkaido Taiko Championship in 2003.



Like the master drummers of Amanojaku, his sound is a blend of tradition and innovation that speaks to the hearts of all in the universal language of music.

Isaku Kageyama is a fluent English speaker and interprets for the group’s workshops.

Press Coverage

Fest (Edinburgh, Scotland)

August 17, 2002

At the first hit of the giant drum the small performance space seems as though it can't hold the sound, and it appears unlikely that the audience will come out with eardrums intact. Fears about loud drumming in the morning being a bad idea suddenly seem justified. How wrong this worry is. Soon the power and spectacle take over and the room is engrossed.

It is easy to be cynical about Taiko Drumming. A show played entirely on percussion instruments could be a dull talentless affair. This cynicism is harder to maintain once in the theatre. The drumming is extremely skilled and truly exciting. When the performers shout in unison it is impossible not to feel invigorated. They are an amazing example of power with skill, and an energizing way to start the day.

Three Weeks (Edinburgh, Scotland)

August 15, 2002

Amanojaku – Taiko Drums

Everyone who comes to the Fringe should see some Taiko drumming: it is the best aural catharsis you could wish for, leaving your sinuses unblocked and your senses tingling. This particular Taiko performance is somewhat pared-down, but that only heightens the exhilaration and evisceration that one gains from it. The female drummers are particularly powerful, and grin with joy as they elaborate the initially basic rhythms that they pound from the drums.

The movement of all the drummers is gorgeous: crisp, dynamic and graceful. Coming out of the show, you may feel quite drained and sleepy (and slightly deaf!), but it is a powerful and refreshing experience that should not be missed by those with an ear for the beat.



- ◇ “a parade of brilliantly choreographed movement and energetic, highly-disciplined percussion”
- ◇ “like sitting in the eye of a hurricane”
- ◇ “unbelievable precision and stylized movements”
- ◇ “made the hair on the back of my neck stand on end”