

Japan: Ondekoza

About the Artists

Ondekoza was formed in 1969 under the direction of its founder, Den Tagayasu. The group was originally created on the Japanese island of Sado, where a group of young men and women gathered to follow the ideals of Den Tagayasu. Since then Ondekoza has expanded across Japan and the rest of the world, popularizing taiko along the way. They are widely recognized as one of groups to have set the groundwork for taiko as a performance art.

At the foundation of Ondekoza's activity is the principle of "Sogakuron"- that "running and drumming are one, and a reflection of the drama and energy of life".

Living in the city of Fuji in Shizuoka, Japan, Ondekoza members live together at the base of Mt. Fuji. Members run twice a day as a means of physical and mental training. Since the group began, Ondekoza members have competed in various marathons in Japan and the United States. In their debut visit to America in 1975, the group performed a full set after completing the Boston Marathon!

Members

Naoto Kinoshita	Taiko drums
Yoshimitsu Matsuda	Shakuhachi
Masashi Matsui	Taiko drums
Takahiro Yoshida	Taiko drums
Catherine Tsai Kuo	Taiko drums

Taiko Drumming

Taiko has existed for over a thousand years in a variety of forms, as the word *taiko* translates to "fat drum." In traditional Japanese folk music, the taiko drum has been used to accompany various styles of music throughout history, such as Gagaku, Noh, Kabuki, and Minyo. These styles feature wind and stringed instruments, including the *shakuhachi*, a traditional bamboo flute.

In modern times, taiko has found its most popular role as the lead instrument in the *kumi-daiko*, the taiko ensemble. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, westernization caused the decline of many traditional Japanese folk arts and customs. After World War II, Japan revived a sense of national identity by reawakening traditional values, and *kumi-daiko* performance art was born. While *kumi-daiko* performances center on athletic drumming, ensembles often feature additional Japanese folk instruments, such as the *shakuhachi*.

Video

Check out a video of Ondekoza on YouTube:

<https://youtu.be/2yVISO58AxU>



Photo of Ondekoza



Photo of Ondekoza



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Did you know?
-*daiko* is a suffix used to indicate a type of drum, a taiko group, or a style of taiko playing!



Photo by [Taiko-Kaiser-Drums](#) (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Hirado
The *hirado-daiko* is a shallow drum carved from a single log. Thick, durable hides are tuned and nailed to both ends of the drum, allowing it to be played from either side with considerable force. The tone of the drum is deep and reverberant with a short decay.

Shime
The *shime-daiko* is the smallest drum of the taiko ensemble and is often considered the time keeper. The word *shime* comes from the Japanese verb *shimeru*, which means to bind or tighten up. This small drum uses two thin hides stretched over steel rings, sewn tightly to itself and tightened with rope. Unlike the *hirado* and *negado* drums, the *shime* and *odeko* drums are tuned using this rope system.

Ask the musicians!
What's the furthest you've ever ran?



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Ask the musicians!
What's your favorite drum to play?

Nagado
The *nagado-daiko* is similar to the *hirado*, but has a much deeper tone due to its long body. The thunderous bass tone of this drum will shake the ground, making you feel the rhythms throughout your entire body!



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Shakuhachi
Shakuhachi is a traditional Japanese bamboo flute that requires a technique similar to blowing into an empty glass bottle. There are five tuning holes tuned to a minor pentatonic scale, and the sound can be adjusted by varying embouchure, blow angle, and partially covering finger holes.



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Okedo
The rope-tuned *okedo-daiko* has a body constructed with wood staves (like a wine barrel). The size of the *okedo* can vary, from a sling drum that the performer can carry to an instrument with heads more than 10 feet high!



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