**Title of Work:**
Japanese Festival Sounds: contemporary compositions for the Taiko drum

**Artists:**
Company: Japanese Festival Sounds
Johnny Mori

**Background Information:**
Curiosity led Johnny Mori to Taiko drumming. Each year he was fascinated by the Taiko drummer who accompanied the folk dancers at the annual Obon (Buddhist festival) held in Los Angeles. This curiosity later mixed with an interest in the music of his culture, and a growing respect for the physical and disciplinary demands of the art motivated Mori to begin learning Taiko drumming. He is now the music director of the Kinnara Taiko group of Los Angeles. This group has been featured on television and has played at numerous festivals, such as the “Olympic Arts Festival,” the “Third World Drum Festival” and the opening of the National Living Treasures of Japan, Los Angeles. Mr. Mori is also a member of the contemporary jazz group *Hiroshima*. He is currently serving as Artist-in-Residence at the Senshin Buddhist Temple in Los Angeles. Previously, he was Artist-in-Residence at the Japanese-American Cultural Center from 1982-1983. His experiences as a third-generation Japanese-American were incorporated into the play *Sansei* which premiered at the Mark Taper Forum.

**About The Artwork:**
Japanese Festival Sounds features Taiko drumming, a very ancient art form. The performers are Japanese-Americans. Their instruments are custom-made to accommodate this special kind of drumming. Japanese Festival Sounds blends the traditional art of Taiko drumming with a modern Japanese-American idiom. The intent is for the audience to experience the cultural fusion demonstrated in the performance of these contemporary compositions for the Taiko drum.

**Creative Process of the Artist or Culture:**
Taiko drumming is a blend of the old with the new. Originating in ancient India as part of religious and ceremonial events and celebrations, Taiko drumming eventually found its way to Korea, China and Japan. Originally, Taiko drums were included in ensembles with other instruments and were seldom featured as solo instruments. In some cultures the drums were also used to perform very functional roles, such as announcing the time or calling special gatherings. Modern compositions, however, have brought Taiko drumming into the featured performance level, with some ensembles composed solely of various sized drums. Taiko is not only an aural art, but a movement art, as well. The intense concentration of effort and thought result in an exciting multi-sensory experience.

**Photo:** Craig Schwartz

"As we express ourselves we create new traditions."  
Johnny Mori
**Discussion Questions:**
After the video has been viewed:

- What is the relationship between the movements of the drummers, the size of the drums and the dynamic level of the sound produced?
- How are Taiko drummers like athletes? Dancers?
- What significance does the drummer’s costume hold?
- What historical/geographical path did Taiko drumming follow?
- What are the materials used to make Taiko drums? Why are these particular materials used? Briefly describe how the drums are made.
- What is the evolution of Taiko drumming from its ancient heritage to the contemporary forms?
- How is Taiko drumming different than other drumming you have heard or seen?
- If you wanted to describe something special about Taiko drumming, what would you say?

**Compositions and Technique of Taiko Drumming:**
As with other instrumental music, some Taiko drum compositions tell a story, others may depict a scene, and others may convey a musical idea. The Taiko performers, in each instance, demonstrate great skill and control in movement and technique. Their performance skills are honed by many hours of concentrated, vigorous work which involves the mind, body and spirit. Techniques of learning drum patterns by vocalizing the sounds began in India and was transferred to many Asian cultures. This technique is an effective way to internalize the sequence of sounds. Five basic syllables incorporate placement of the sticks on the drum and the length of sound. They are:

**KA:** a quarter note struck on the drum rim
**KARA:** two eighth notes struck on the rim
**DON:** a quarter note struck on the drum head
**DOGO:** two eighth notes on the head
**SU:** indicates a rest

**Multidisciplinary Options:**
- In some instances drums have been carried from one culture to another. Trace some examples back to their ‘roots’ to discover the cultural and geographical journeys.
- Discover the scientific reasons for the relationship of sound to size.

**Audio-Visual Materials:**

**Additional References:**

**Sample Experiences:**

**LEVEL I**
- Describe how Taiko drums look. How are they alike or different from other drums you have seen?
- Imitate the different body movements made by the drummers. Compare these movements to similar ones in specific sports.
- Learn about and try the three basic techniques for playing percussion instruments: striking, shaking or scraping.

**LEVEL II**
- Discuss and explore different types of percussion instruments. Categorize them.
- Trace the geographical and historical route of the Taiko drums from India through Asia to the United States.
- Learn simple rhythm patterns to clap or play on a drum, with an ensemble of other drums. Experiment with basic Taiko drumming chants and patterns.

**LEVEL III**
- Study the syllables for Taiko drumming. Compose sets of rhythm patterns using these syllables. Select instruments to play and determine which patterns best work with each instrument in order to create unity.
- Work in groups to find short stories, illustrations or poetry on which you can base an original composition for percussion instruments.
- Listen to recordings of Taiko drumming which identify how the old and new have been combined or fused to create new musical ideas.

* Indicates sample lessons
INTRODUCTION:

Families of instruments are grouped by the way their sounds are produced. Percussion instruments include instruments whose sounds are produced when struck, scraped or shaken.

Percussion instruments have been created by people around the world. People have invented many different kinds of percussion with many different names. A wide variety of drums are usually among the percussion instruments used by cultures everywhere.

OBJECTIVES: (Student Outcomes)

Students will be able to:

• Demonstrate how percussion sounds are produced. (Artistic Perception)

• Discuss how people around the world have created percussion instruments from materials in their environment (Historical and Cultural Context)

• Create percussion instruments from the home/school environment. (Creative Expression)

• Describe, discuss, analyze and connect information and experiences based on this lesson. Refer to Assessment at the end of this lesson. (Aesthetic Valuing)

MATERIALS:

• Classroom percussion instruments, pictures, photographs and illustrations of percussion instruments from cultures around the world. “Found” sound sources. Recordings featuring percussion instruments.

PROGRESSION: (A series of lessons)

• Using a set of classroom percussion (rhythm) instruments, and other visual representations, discuss how the instruments are played. Name the instruments, then demonstrate and/or describe how each is played.

• Explain that there are three basic ways that percussion instruments are played (struck, scraped, shaken). With this information, categorize each instrument. (Some instruments, such as the tambourine, may fall into two categories.)
• Discuss why some percussion instruments, such as drums, are made in different sizes. Using two different-sized drums, demonstrate how size affects sound. Also, demonstrate how the way in which the drum is played affects the sounds it produces, e.g. playing with the hand on different parts of the drum (head-rim, center, off-center); playing with a wooden stick on different parts of the drum head; playing with a soft mallet; using a hard mallet; using finger tips lightly; sliding a wire brush across the drum head; tapping lightly with a wire brush.

• Take turns playing instruments in each of the three categories. Listen for the sounds made by each.

• Divide the class into three groups, one for each percussion category. (If there are not enough instruments for each student, ask that everyone within each group imitate the playing technique, i.e. striking, shaking or scraping.)

• Assign each group a simple rhythm pattern to learn, first by hearing and feeling the steady beat, then by chanting the pattern to the steady beat, then practicing the pattern to the steady beat. (See example.)

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• Chart other examples of patterns for continued use.

• Note that cultures around the world have created percussion instruments from materials found in their environments. Examine pictures, photographs or illustrations of ethnic percussion instruments. Note how they are shaped and decorated. Identify the materials from which they are made.

• Look for percussion sound sources in the home/school environment, indoors and outdoors. Decide which way the sound source should be played. Give it a name. Decide whether it will remain natural or be decorated.

**Note:** Shakers can be made from round cardboard containers with plastic tops. Fill with a tablespoon of rice, beans, rocks, or seeds to create a variety of sound textures then tape down the lid. Dowels or bamboo sticks can also be used to strike against each other. Put a hole in a metal pipe, tie a string through it and strike it with a nail. Drums can be made from plastic or cardboard containers or use metal wastebaskets.

• Choose a rhythm pattern (previously learned) for each instrument to play. Perform patterns in solo or in percussion ensemble.
EXTENSIONS:

• Select appropriate patterns and percussion instruments to accompany familiar songs.

• Learn songs from different countries and add appropriate percussion patterns.

VOCABULARY: percussion instruments, accompaniments, rhythm patterns, sound sources

ASSESSMENT: (Aesthetic Valuing)

DESCRIBE: Describe and demonstrate the three basic ways that percussion instruments are played.

DISCUSS: Discuss your understanding of rhythm patterns. Give an example.

ANALYZE: Discuss the difference between making noise and making music.

CONNECT: Identify the music you know or listen to that uses percussion instruments.

Japanese Festival Sounds at The Music Center
Photo: Craig Schwartz
INTRODUCTION:

Historically, humans have transformed musical instruments from a variety of materials found in their environment. They have designed numerous instruments which produce many different sounds. Through experimentation they have discovered many different ways to produce sounds. Over time, many instruments have evolved from very simple beginnings.

Some instruments produce sounds when they are either hit, shaken or scraped. They are called percussion instruments. Drums belong to this group and have been created by people worldwide. Like other musical instruments, drums are designed in many sizes and shapes, and produce a variety of sounds. This lesson will focus specifically on the Taiko drums from Japan and some of the rhythms played on these drums.

OBJECTIVES: (Student Outcomes)

Students will be able to:

• Discuss the fact that drums have been used by people worldwide to make music and to communicate. (Historical and Cultural Context)

• Play a variety of drum patterns separately and in various combinations. (Artistic Perception)

• Describe, discuss, analyze and connect information and experiences based on this lesson. Refer to Assessment at the end of this lesson. (Aesthetic Valuing)

MATERIALS:

• Recordings of drum solos, ensembles and performances which feature drum sounds. Select examples which are representative of different cultures and musical styles.

• Recording playback equipment.

• Photos and drawings of drums. Appropriate reference books, films or videos.

PROGRESSION: (a series of lessons)

• Discuss familiar kinds of drums. Describe how they look, sound and are played. Discuss, list and categorize the purposes for which they are used. Will it be used to play it? Will it have decorations, or not? Will it make one sound, or more? (These questions may be charted and remain on display during the exploration period of this project.)

• Divide into small performance ensembles. Learn simple rhythm patterns which will provide an interesting sound combination. For instance, use a sequence of six beats, and arrange single taps (for each beat) with intermittent rests. Vary each pattern of six.
• As confidence in playing is gained, make the sequence of beats longer and ensembles larger. These patterns are based on a sequence of eight beats for an ensemble of five instruments.

EXTENSIONS:

• Add other percussion instruments to the ensembles, thus providing additional color to the rhythm patterns.

• As playing proficiency increases, substitute Taiko drumming syllables for each beat. This will provide opportunities to add double taps to each beat, and to incorporate the “rim/head” technique into the performances.
As stated earlier, the five basic drum strokes (sounds of Taiko drumming) are:

- **KA**: a quarter note struck on the drum rim
- **KARA**: two eighth notes struck on the rim
- **DON**: a quarter note struck on the drum head
- **DOGO**: two eighth notes on the head
- **SU**: indicates a rest

By learning the drum meanings of these five sounds, the students can be taught a few very simple drumming patterns. If drums are not available, students can use two wooden pencils with erasers for the sticks and can strike the edges of their desks for the drum rim and the top of their desks to correspond to the drum head.

Here is a festival song called *Gion Matsuri*. First have students learn the chant, then play the rhythm as they chant.

1. (all rim)
   - **Ka**: Ka Ka Ka Ka Ka Ka Ka Ka Ka
   - **R**: L R L R L R L R

2. (rim) (rim) (head) (head)
   - **Ka**: Ka Dogo Don
   - **R**: L R-L R

3. (rim) (head) (head) (rest)
   - **Ka**: Dogo Don Su
   - **R**: R-L R

4. (head) (head) (rest)
   - **Dogo**: Ka Su
   - **R-L**: R

Repeat each chant several times.

- Create different combinations of the five basic Taiko drum strokes. Divide into groups of four or five. Assign each group the task of creating original sets of patterns, one for each group member. Individuals then select an instrument upon which to play an original pattern.

**VOCABULARY:** percussion instruments, rhythm patterns, texture, form, tempo, dynamics, coda

**ASSESSMENT:** (Aesthetic Valuing)

**DISCUSS:** Discuss the role of drumming in musical groups.

**ANALYZE:** Discuss the difference between doing patterns silently and with a rhythmic chant.

**CONNECT:** Discuss other aspects of life where patterns can be recognized.
INTRODUCTION:

A contemporary style has emerged in the last few years linking past musical ideas with new ideas and/or merging the music of two or more cultures to form a distinctive new musical style. This new combination of music is called “fusion.”

OBJECTIVES: (Student Outcomes)

Students will be able to:

• Discuss the different combinations of styles and eras that have been combined to form new sounds in music. (Historical and Cultural Context)

• Discuss how musical pioneers (composers) are challenged by the unknown and motivated by technological advances to create new musical sounds. (Historical and Cultural Context)

• Describe, discuss, analyze and connect information and experiences based on this lesson. Refer to Assessment at the end of this lesson. (Aesthetic Valuing)

MATERIALS:

• The Artsource® video of Taiko - A Japanese-American Buddhist Perspective.

• Recorded examples of authentic music from Japan, India, Africa, South America, the Caribbean and the United States (jazz and gospel).

• Recorded examples of contemporary music which demonstrate a fusion of cultures and/or musical styles.

• Appropriate recording playback equipment.

PROGRESSION: (a series of lessons)

• View the Artsource® video to listen and observe authentic Japanese instruments being played. Identify the sounds of the instruments, such as the shakuhachi, the koto and taiko drums. Use the ‘Discussion Questions’ on page 2 of the unit to get students more deeply involved.

• Listen to a recording by a group, such as Hiroshima. Identify the manner in which the traditional and modern instruments have been combined or fused to create new musical ideas. Identify the rhythm patterns, the tempo, the vocal timbre and styling and the interplay between the instruments.

• Research to find different contemporary fusions. Use the previous activity as a guide for listening. In addition, answer the following:
Can you identify the styles or eras represented?
What are the historical/cultural roots of each style?
What is the instrumentation that was traditionally used in each individual style?
What is the instrumentation in this composition?
If vocals are used, where did the styling originate?
Can you name the musical sounds that have created the fusion?

Historically, music has undergone significant changes as creators find new ideas and meet technological challenges. What are some of the changes that have taken place in contemporary music over the last twenty years?

EXTENSIONS:

Look for the fusion of musical styles within the style known as rock, such as jazz-rock, electronic-rock, or soul-rock. Add to this list. Describe each category. What makes each of these combinations unique?

Rap music is a popular musical style. Are there different kinds of rap music? If so, can you name them? What makes them unique?

Research to discover whether there are different kinds of jazz. If found, identify and describe them.

VOCABULARY: koto, shakuhachi, taiko drums, fusion, musical style, jazz, rock, rap, soul

ASSESSMENT: (Aesthetic Valuing)

DESCRIBE: Describe what most fascinated or interested you about the music you researched.

DISCUSS: Discuss the differences you found between the more traditional music of each culture and the modern music that built on traditional sources.

ANALYZE: Discuss why you think modern musicians would draw from traditional sources or combine modern technology with traditional instruments in their new music.

CONNECT: Discuss what you think makes a pioneer different from other people in any field of endeavor.
BIBLIOGRAPHY
JOHN MORI


  The music of Japan is one of the topics featured in this book. Lesson plans, resource lists, bibliographies and photographs accompany this segment.


  A comprehensive collection of music resources.

AUDIO-VISUAL REFERENCES:

• Kodo: *Heartbeat Drummers of Japan*. Rhapsody Films.

  This film features Kodo, a contemporary taiko drum ensemble, in rehearsal and performance.

• *Soh Daiko: Taiko Drum Ensemble*. Lyricord LLCT 7410, recording.

  The recording presents various instruments of a taiko drum ensemble.

Members of Japanese Festival Sounds
Photo: Craig Schwartz
Artsource®

The Music Center’s Study Guide
to the Performing Arts

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Introduction

Artsource®, The Music Center’s Study Guide to the Performing Arts

Artsource® highlights works of art and artists of stature from diverse cultures. It represents early to contemporary art forms in the disciplines of dance, music and theatre and complements the programs and performances of the Music Center’s resident companies and artist roster.

The arts are ancient, enduring and universal forms of communication. Artists present their perceptions, reflections, and points of view which influence, and are influenced by, the culture and period of time in which they exist.
**Artsource® Contributors**

**Project Director**
Melinda Williams

**Project Coordinator**
Susan Cambigue-Tracey

**Writers:**

Dance
Susan Cambigue-Tracey
Diana Cummins, Carole Valleskey, Madeleine Dahm, Deborah Greenfield, Barbara Leonard, Melinda Williams

Music
Rosemarie Cook-Glover
Ed Barguiarena, Susan Cambigue-Tracey, Barbara Leonard, Connie Hood, Annette Simons, Marilyn Wulliger, Diana Zaslove, John Zeretzke

Theatre
Barbara Leonard
Kathryn Johnson

**Technical Production** donated by
Paul Tracey

**Layout and Logo* Design**
Maureen Erbe Design
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**Additional Artwork & Artsource® Logo Graphic**
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Mark Slavkin
Vice President for Education

Melinda Williams
Director of Education