



Use this info sheet to prepare your students for the performance they are about to experience while you're on the bus! We know your classroom time is at a premium, so we hope you'll take advantage of the transit time to and from UCLA. If you have more time, or want to know more about the performers, the attached packet offers more in-depth information.

### What to Know Before the Show: On Ensemble

- On Ensemble is a taiko quartet based in Los Angeles, taking the ancient instruments of Japanese ensemble drumming into new realms with a distinctly modern expression for the art form.
- In Japanese, the word *taiko* simply means drum, and it can refer to any drum, from any type of music. Outside Japan, taiko usually refers to percussive music played by a group or ensemble using traditional Japanese drums.
- On Ensemble's music is distinguished by wide-ranging musical influences, from Tuvan throat singing to turntable scratching. In addition to the traditional Japanese drums, the group employs percussion instruments from around the world.
- The group's four members were all born in the US and have trained extensively with teachers both here and in Japan. Unlike many taiko groups that seek similar form and style in all their players, On Ensemble's members bring their individual styles to the group.
- On Ensemble is supported by Miyamoto Unosuke Shoten, instrument maker to the Emperor of Japan, giving them access to authentic, rare Japanese instruments.

#### PRE-PERFORMANCE DISCUSSION

Are you familiar with taiko drumming? What do you expect today's performance to sound like?

On Ensemble uses mostly percussion instruments. Can you think of other groups or musical styles that primarily use percussion?

Which do you think is harder, or more technically challenging: solo performance or drumming in an ensemble? Why?

On Ensemble's music puts a modern spin on an existing musical form. Can you think of any styles you would like to update or reinterpret?

#### POST-PERFORMANCE DISCUSSION

Did anything about the performance surprise you?

What was your favorite piece of music from the performance today? How would you describe it to a friend who hasn't heard it?

Did you hear any instruments that are new to you?

If you could play any of the instruments you saw today, which would it be?

On Ensemble combines Japanese drumming with musical styles from around the world. Do you think it is successful? Why or why not?

## About On Ensemble

On Ensemble is a professional taiko (Japanese ensemble drumming) quartet based in Los Angeles. Its music is distinguished by the extensive use of non-Japanese instruments and wide-ranging musical influences, from Tuvan throat singing to turntable scratching, and an array of percussion instruments from around the globe.

The group's four members were all born in the US and have trained extensively with teachers both here and in Japan. Unlike many taiko groups that seek similar form and style in all their players, On Ensemble's members bring individual skills and styles to the group. The group's unique sound has been praised as "completely original and brilliantly conceived." *Modern Drummer* magazine calls On Ensemble "an exciting taiko ensemble looking at new ways to apply traditional Japanese drums."

On Ensemble combines their study and deep appreciation of Japanese traditional music with their equally influential experience as DJs, electronic music producers, Jazz drummers, and rock bassists to create some of the most compelling music in the taiko world.

Their fearless musical innovations have taken the ancient instruments of taiko into new realms and have established a distinctly modern expression for the art form. For all of their avant-garde musical explorations, On Ensemble is supported by one of Japan's most important traditional-culture bearers, Miyamoto Unosuke Shoten, instrument maker to the emperor of Japan. This support empowers On Ensemble to utilize authentic, rare Japanese instruments in its exploration of taiko.

## What Is Percussion?

The word **percussion** has evolved from the Latin word *percussio*, which translates as "to beat or strike". A percussion instrument is any musical instrument that is played by hitting, beating, scraping or rubbing, using your hands, a stick or mallet, or even another percussion instrument. The most common example is the drum, of course, but rattles, shakers, xylophones, and bells all fall into the percussion category.

Percussion is commonly referred to as "the backbone" or "the heartbeat" of a band or ensemble, keeping the rhythm of the music. But, they can also play the melody or tune. Many percussion instruments play definite notes. These are called **pitched** or tuned instruments. The xylophone, marimba, chimes and hand bells are pitched instruments. **Untuned** or non-pitched instruments, like the bass drum, cymbals, castanets or shakers, do not play an actual note, but they do make a recognizable sound.

There are dozens of familiar instruments you might see in the percussion section of an orchestra or band, but you might also discover some unusual things. Have you ever heard someone drum on a bucket or barrel? That's an example of a **found instrument**—an item used to make musical sounds that was not originally designed or built to be an instrument. Percussionists have discovered that brooms, bicycle spokes, pipes, pans, flower pots, even rocks can make interesting sounds when hit or scraped.

At the performance, look at the variety of instruments on stage. Can you guess which ones are percussion instruments and which are not?

## Draw That Drum!

You can learn more about percussion instruments played by On Ensemble on page 3. Watch for them during the show.

After the performance, draw a picture of the one you remember the most. You can send it to us if you'd like—we'd love to see your work!



## THE BIGGER PICTURE: Taiko Drumming



*Illustration of a woman playing a taiko drum  
Japan, circa 1825*



*Taiko practice at a community center in the US*



*Modern taiko ensemble, Japan*

In Japanese, the word *taiko* simply means drum, and it can refer to any drum, from any type of music. Outside Japan, the word taiko usually refers to the genre of percussive music played by a group or ensemble using Japanese drums (known more specifically as *kumidaiko* in Japan).

The type of drum commonly played by taiko ensembles had existed for centuries, and were frequently used in other performing arts traditions like Kabuki Theater, but it wasn't until well after World War II that the drums became the focus of the performance. The taiko genre started in the 1950's, when Japanese musicians began creating a new style with the traditional Japanese drums as the focus. Technically, taiko is newer than rock and roll!

Groups like Osuwa Daiko and Sukeroku Daiko in Japan established the form as we know it today, and international touring companies like Kodo and Ondekoza helped to spread the style around the world.

Here in the United States, San Francisco's Taiko Dojo is generally credited as the first American taiko group. It was founded in the late 60's and was followed soon after by groups across California like San Jose Taiko, and Kinnara Taiko in Los Angeles. The genre was quickly adopted by third-generation Japanese-Americans looking to reclaim their heritage and cultural roots after their parents and grandparents moved away from Japanese traditions during WWII.

There are now over 100 taiko groups in the United States, and hundreds more throughout the world. There are several professionally-performing groups based in major US cities, and a wide network of community-based groups. Although the art form has its roots in Japanese and Japanese-American culture, people of all races and ethnicities play taiko.



*Kyodo, UCLA's student taiko ensemble*

## THE INSTRUMENTS

On Ensemble uses the traditional taiko drums, but also includes other instruments from around world to create their own unique sound. Here are some of the instruments and musical techniques you might see at the performance:



**1. Koto**, the Japanese Zither, plucked or played with small sticks. **2. Tantan**, a Brazilian drum. **3. Kane**, a metal ‘dish’ played with mallet made of carved antler to create a bell sound. **4. Puili**, split bamboo sticks from Hawaii make a dry, rattling sound. **5. Fue**, a Japanese bamboo flute. **6. Throat singing**, an ancient style from Southern Russia and Mongolia that includes low drones made with the throat, rather than the mouth. **7. Shaker**, a container filled with beans or seeds to make a rattle. **8. Uchiwa Daiko**, This handheld “fan drum” makes a soft or thin sound. It was originally designed to help chanting monks keep a rhythm. **9. Kiai** (“kee eye”), vocal shouts used to give cues and encourage players. **10. Chappa**, Japanese hand cymbals. **11. Shime**, played with sticks, this short drum makes a high sound. **12. Cymbals**, made of thin metal for a ringing metallic sound. **13. Nagado Diako** (rim), the wooden rim of this drum makes a sharp, hard sound. **14. Turntable** for background tracks and ‘scratching’. **15. Tambourine**. **16. Nagado Daiko**, the traditional, quintessential drum used in taiko. Each is carved from a single piece of wood, making a deep, warm sound.

## About the Performers

### **Shoji Kameda**

Shoji is a Grammy nominated musician, composer and producer. He started playing taiko at the age of 8 and has played continuously since. He was selected through a highly competitive process as an Asian Pacific Performance Exchange fellow, collaborating with master artists from the Philippines, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and the USA. As the group's primary creative force he has produced On Ensemble's critically acclaimed CDs *Dust and Sand*, *Ume in the Middle* and *Bizarre Heroes*. He also composed an original score for *Abduction: The Megumi Yokota Story*, Audience Award winner for Best Documentary at the Slamdance Film Festival. He was featured in the music of the hit NBC TV show "Heroes" performed with Stevie Wonder at the 2008 Democratic National Convention and received a Grammy nomination with jazz fusion band Hiroshima for his work on their album *Legacy*. His track "Yamasong" was the inspiration for Sam Koji Hale's short film of the same name which won *Best Animated Film* and *Best Fantasy Short* at the Dragon Con Film Festival. He has collaborated with musicians from around the world including projects and tours to Malaysia, Java, Bali, Mongolia and French Guiana. He continues to be involved in a number of projects as a composer, musician and producer including a trip-hop duo with Grammy Award winning composer Christopher Tin called Stereo Alchemy.

### **Masato (Maz) Baba**

Born into a musical family, Maz started playing taiko at age 6 under the tutelage of his parents and professional taiko players, Russel Baba and Jeanne Mercer. In his twenty-eight years of studying, performing, and teaching, Maz has become one of the most respected taiko players in North America. He has toured the United States, Japan, Macau, and Germany and has recorded with many of North America's leading taiko artists. He was featured in the David Mamet film "Redbelt", performed at the Academy Awards and performed with Alicia Keys on the TV show "X-Factor". He also lends his talents as Musical Director to TAIKOPROJECT and serves as lead instructor and workshop leader to several Los Angeles-based taiko groups.

### **Kristofer Bergstrom**

Kris began his taiko career as a member, composer, and leader of the university group, Stanford Taiko. He then spent 3 years in Japan where he studied and performed traditional dance within the Wakayagi school, kumidaiko with Nihon Taiko Dojo, and nagauta shamisen with Kineya Katsuyukie, one of the world's most respected shamisen players. An artist of many talents, Kris maintains an active teaching schedule of taiko technique, turntable scratching, and shamisen, and currently serves as mentor to a small group of dedicated apprentices. In 2008 Kris received his natori (professional stage name) for nagauta shamisen from the Kineya School where he is known as Kineya Katsukoujyu. He is one of only a handful of musicians in the United States who have achieved this status.

# DESIGN FOR SHARING

K-12 ARTS EDUCATION

## PREPARE FOR YOUR VISIT TO UCLA

- Please bring the attached Directions for Bus Drivers with you in case your driver does not have proper directions.
- Design for Sharing volunteers will meet your bus and direct you to the theater; please be ready to leave the bus when directed to do so.
- Count your students and teachers before you arrive; the ushers will need to know how many people you have before they can seat you.
- Adequate adult supervision is important to the success of these events. Chaperones may need to supervise students in restrooms and be alert when students are entering or leaving the auditorium. Adults are expected to sit with students and help maintain appropriate standards of behavior.
- The hall is opened for seating one-half hour before the performance is scheduled to begin. We make every effort to begin on time, but occasionally the opening is delayed five to ten minutes due to late arrivals from other schools or technical problems.
- Restrooms are located to your left as you enter the theater. Have your students use the restrooms before the performance begins.
- **Flash photography is not allowed in the theater**, as it can be dangerous for the performers - the flash may temporarily blind them causing an accident. Use of any flash camera, laser pointer or recording device whatsoever may be cause for ejection from the hall.
- Remind your students that chewing gum, loud talking and running are inappropriate in the theater, even before and after the actual performance.
- Please do not allow students to bring lunches or snacks to their seats. Lunches can be stored in the lobby during the performance.
- Please remain seated when the performance is over. Schools will be dismissed a few at a time.
- Self-guided tour information and campus maps are available in the lobby. We hope you'll make the most of your visit to UCLA and explore the campus. If you don't have time to cover it all, take a stroll through the sculpture garden or pop into Powell Library's historic rotunda.

