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On June 23, 2011, MCA Chicago celebrated the achievements of MCA Stage with the remixed/reimagined Performance Benefit. This innovative evening was cochaired by MCA Trustee Sara Albrecht and MCA Performance Committee member Jay Franke. Our sincere thanks to all who contributed to the event and to all who continue to support MCA Stage in its 15th season.

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Taiko Legacy 8: Origins of Now 2011

Some of you may recall my work Origins of Now from 2001. Commissioned by the Jazz Institute of Chicago and premiered at the Chicago Jazz Festival, Origins of Now was one of the first taiko drumming ensemble fusion ventures with Chicago avant-garde jazz. The young founder of Tsukasa Taiko, Hide Yoshihashi, was part of the taiko section of that massive Asian American big band orchestra. I created Origins of Now as a reminder of the importance to pass on the tradition of our cultural legacy while moving forward with the present age. The guiding concept of my work back then was my belief that tradition is not alive unless we live it. I thought taiko drumming was a perfect example of the tradition in motion.

Thirteen years later, I work centered on the same principle: we live the tradition. Social content, historical context, community environment … for us, taiko drumming is always spiritually traditional and authentically historical. For our 2011 Taiko Legacy 8 concert, I revisit this intention for Origins of Now. Our world is discovering new and faster ways of transmitting information, developing strategies to conduct business and marketing on the Internet, changing the ways we communicate with each other through YouTube, and a whole array of other social networking. This is transforming the ways we experience the arts via a computer screen. It is happening rapidly, and we indeed benefit from the advancement of technology. At the same time, for humanity, we must continue to seek and develop the essential beauty in life, to uncover the fundamental meaning of our being. This can be done through our body and the art and practice of performing in physical time.

We also want to remind ourselves how wonderful it is to own tradition, to live tradition, and to evolve through tradition. For this edition of Taiko Legacy, I am proud to collaborate with many key individuals who carry tradition and live its evolution.

Tatsu Aoki
Executive Producer and Artistic Director

From the Artistic Director

Artists Up Close

Taiko Legacy 8: Origins of Now 2011

The MCA has organized these intimate opportunities for audience members to engage with the artists.

MCA Family Day
On the afternoon of Saturday, December 10, three generations of Tsukasa Taiko drummers ranging in ages from 4 to 24 performed from their repertoire and led a hands-on demonstration for museum visitors young and old.

Saturday Speakeasy
Audience members are invited to mingle with the artists in the lobby following the performance, with a cash bar and snacks available.

Artists Up Close

General ensemble performers
Jenna Lee
Megan Lee
Nicholas Low
Wesley Hitomo Yee

Stage direction
Fujima Yoshinojo (Fujima Ryu of Chicago)
Kay Kawaguchi (JASC)

Crew and staff
Yuko Aoki
Sharon Harada
Jeffrey Hidaka
Sharon Hidaka
Gail Tokazou
Rudy Loo
Jane Mulholl
Naomi Negi
Diane Nitahara
Jackie Nitahara
Ken Nitahara
Steve Nitahara
Rika Sato-James
Joanne Tohei
Lynne Oshita-Wong

Tsukasa Taiko, Gintenkai unit performers
Eigen Aoki
Kioke Aoki
Miyoumi Aoki
Warren Hidaka
Justin Mark
Kiyami Negi
Koji Negi
Christine Nitahara
Michelle Nitahara
Jun Takanarita

Tsukasa Taiko, Asunaro unit performers
Neil Ducklow
Koki James
Morgan Mican
Kenji Mulholl
Colin Wong

Tsukasa Taiko at JASC

Taiko Legacy 8: Origins of Now 2011

Featuring
Amy Homma (Tsukasa Taiko/ Gintenkai Project)
Grand Master Fujima Shunoojo (Fujima Ryu of Chicago)
Melody Takata (Gen Ryu Arts/Gen Ensemble of San Francisco)
Yoko Reikano Kimura, koto, shamisen, vocals
Yasushi Shimazaki, chindonya drums and percussion
Edward Wilkinson Jr., tenor saxophone
Coco Elysses, percussion
Tatsu Aoki, bass shamisen, taiko

Tsukasa Taiko, Gintenkai unit performers
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Kioke Aoki
Miyoumi Aoki
Warren Hidaka
Justin Mark
Kiyami Negi
Koji Negi
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Tsukasa Taiko at JASC

4427 N. Clark St.
Chicago, IL 60640
773.275.0097
www.taikolegacy.com

Tsukasa Taiko at JASC is supported in part by the Illinois Arts Council, the MacArthur Fund for Arts and Culture at the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation, the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation, the Alphawood Foundation, and The Joyce Foundation.

Jeff Chan, Associate Producer and Director of Development
Joanne Kiyoko Tohei, Director of Outreach and Education
Amy Homma, Manager of Logistics
Kazu Yamamoto, IT Marketing Consultant

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Tatsu Aoki, Executive Producer and Artistic Director

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Mawashi–Hachiban
We begin the performance with the concept of origin. Voice and drum are two of the oldest instruments of human history. *Kuchi shoga* is a method in the Japanese phonetic system for “pronouncing” the sounds of instruments. This concept has been applied to many of our traditional arts such as shamisen, flute, dance, and especially taiko drumming. Since all of the compositions and choreography must be memorized in our oral teaching method, *Kuchi shoga* becomes the essential “Step One” for learning taiko. *Hachiban*, meaning “number eight,” is one of a series of exercises created for understanding the basic concepts of drumming. The word *Mawashi* is also a traditional term for the cyclical routine used in shamisen and taiko training. This newest edition represents the evolution of traditional vocalization to a musical composition.

Ken Mai (Sword Dance)
Grandmaster Fujima Shunojo in a dance interpretation to contemporary ensemble music. The combination of taiko and dance is a most classical and significant relationship that is often disregarded in today’s mainstream taiko culture. Because our cultural training and education should emphasize nurturing the application of taiko more broadly to music and theater, we are glad to have re-created this relationship. In the late 1970s, *Ken Mai* was originally conceived as a creative dance pairing with experimental musicians, a ritualistic portrayal of Samurai was taken into an unknown space.

Yatai Bayashi
Many taiko groups include this *Kumi-daiko* piece in their repertoire as it is known for its unique layout of drumming. It is said to be more than 1,400 years old and one of the oldest forms of festival taiko music. Drumming while on a moving float has been a distinctive style for centuries in both the Kyoto and Tokyo regions. To illustrate our national collaboration project, we combine the choreography of both the Tsukasa Taiko and GenRyu ensembles to create this special version.

Suukeroku Matsuri
Gen Ensemble led by Melody Takata is featured in this segment that incorporates *O-hayashi* (Kabuki theater drumming style of music) with *Kumi-daiko*. Just as in Gintenkai’s “Yanagimachi,” this work represents a recognizable concept of the taiko movement origins from the late 1960s. The original choreography was passed on from Oedo Suukeroku Taiko in Tokyo, Japan to Melody Takata. This has become a standard in the repertoire of Gen Ensemble.

Ku-ru-ri
*Ku-ru-ri* is an onomatopoeic phrase meaning “spin.” It also represents a particular playing method or routine for small taiko in chamber (ozashiki) music. This was originally part of a shamisen composition, but we have made a few alterations and modernized the formula to create a more hyper-dynamic presentation. Synchronicity is the main attraction of this work.

Yo-in-rou
Yoko Reikano Kimura is featured on *koto* and vocal, as we try to connect the spirit of taiko with another original Japanese sound of the *koto*.
Koto is often heard together with the shakuhachi (bamboo flute), but rarely with the large taiko. In some traditional settings, the koto would be paired with a small taiko, but not a large one. This composition is based on a poem about a cherry blossom tree.

Yanagimachi
This signature piece by the Gintenkai cultural troupe from the late 1970s is being presented by popular demand. This number is based on the belief that the taiko is used as a tool of sound and body movement, while at the same time that an orchestral concept is represented. Like “Sukeroku Matsuri,” this piece is inspired by Kabuki dance and has become an established part of Tokyo drumming since the beginning of the Kumi-daiko era. The Taiko Legacy 8 version features a crossover with creative percussion by Coco Elyssess.

Odoriba Suite
These original Gintenkai compositions are from a theater play that premiered in Tokyo in 1976. The taiko parts were used as pit music for several scenes during the play and were performed with only seven drummers. In our rendition, we have expanded the scale to connect three parts together to create an epochal ensemble suite. One of the objectives of Tsukasa Taiko is to remind us of the notion that drumming rituals must be connected to narrative. We, therefore, value the concept of storytelling in our drumming practices. The Introduction, Scene 3, and Scene 2 are presented in this dynamic theatrical version.

What is taiko?
Literally meaning “drum,” taiko is known for its thunderous sound and stunning, stylized choreography. Taiko’s 2,000-year-old history is rooted in Japanese court, theater, religious/ceremonial, and festival music, where it was one of many instruments comprising a variety of musical ensembles. The mid-twentieth century witnessed a large step in the evolution of taiko, with the birth of ensembles made up solely of drums, a style known as kumi-daiko. Since then, kumi-daiko has enjoyed tremendous popularity, and in the United States has become a celebrated symbol of cultural heritage for the Japanese American community.

Tsukasa Taiko at JASC began as Tsukasa Daiko
and was founded in 1996 by Hide Yoshihashi in conjunction with Wakayagi Shiyu, a grand master of classical Japanese dance. Yoshihashi expanded the organization by working with Asian Improv aRts Midwest and in 2004 established the group as a resident arts program of the Japanese American Service Committee (JASC). In 2005 it created the branch Toyaoaki Shamisen to revive the traditional musical relationship between the shamisen (3-stringed lute) and taiko, taking an innovative step toward a more comprehensive taiko music experience. It is now the leading community taiko ensemble in the Midwest.

Its repertoire is unique
in that it reaches beyond kumi-daiko to other forms of Japanese folk and classical music, employing other instruments, such as the shamisen and shinobue, which are central to the tradition. The shamisen’s drum-like skin-covered body produces a sound akin to the American banjo, with a lower register reminiscent of the buzzing of the Indian sitar. The shinobue (transverse bamboo flute), distinguished by its high-pitched, haunting sound, holds a prominent role in noh and kabuki theater music as well as matsu performance.

With these instruments, Tsukasa Taiko at JASC performs a broad range of musical styles, including ozashiki (chamber music), minyo (folk music) and ohayashi (classical/folk/theater music) styles, representing many Japanese musical traditions that are now rarely heard.

Tsukasa Taiko at JASC is proud to have a role in the preservation, development, and presentation of these cultural arts.

The mission of Tsukasa Taiko at JASC
is to preserve, develop, and pass on the traditional concepts of taiko as a cultural legacy and to utilize these concepts in expanding and evolving the taiko form. Dedicated to strengthening the Chicago Japanese American/Asian American communities and being a leader in the taiko drumming culture of the Midwest, Tsukasa Taiko at JASC maintains an international profile by performing yearlong around the world, while remaining an active, positive presence in the metropolitan Chicago area. Tsukasa Taiko at JASC presents quarterly taiko class sessions as well as workshops, lectures, and demonstrations in taiko and shamisen throughout the year to students of all experience levels.

Tsukasa Taiko has appeared at the Bunka Shutter Hall in Tokyo; the Malta International Theatre Festival in Poznan, Poland; the Smithsonian in Washington D.C.; Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco; many Asian American Jazz Festivals in Chicago, as well as at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago Cultural Center, Jay Pritzker Pavilion at Millennium Park, Symphony Center, and Harris Theatre.
Tatsu Aoki

is a leading advocate of the Asian American community, prolific composer and performer of traditional and experimental music forms, filmmaker, and educator. He was born in Tokyo in 1957 to an artisan family called Toyoaki Moto and proficient in Okiya, the traditional line meaning a booking and training agent for Geisha ladies in downtown Tokyo’s designated area. Starting at the age of 4 he was part of his family performance crew and received the essence of traditional Tokyo Geisha cultural training and studies, which combines history and flexible creativity. In the late 1960s, upon Tokyo’s economic and social decline, which forced many traditional artisan family businesses to close down, and his grandmother’s passing, he shifted his music training to American pop and experimental music. By the early 1970s Aoki was active in Tokyo's underground arts movement as a member of Gintenkai, an experimental ensemble which combined traditional music and new western forms. In the same period he started his work in small gauge films and experimental film production, influenced by his biological father who was a movie producer at Toho Studio.

In 1977 Aoki left Tokyo to study experimental filmmaking at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He was named one of 2001’s “Chicagoans of the year” by the Chicago Tribune for his music and has performed with masters such as Roscoe Mitchell, Don Moye, Pipa virtuoso Wu Man, and the late Chicago legend Fred Anderson. Aoki’s four-suite ROOTED: Origins of Now, a four-movement suite for big band, premiered in 2001 at Ping Tom Memorial Park, the Chicago Jazz Festival, and at MCA Stage as part of Chicago Asian American Jazz Festival. His other notable recordings include BassLive (1999) and BassLive II (2005), both recorded live at the MCA, and artistic achievements in jazz and taiko innovation The MIYUMI Project (2000), Symphony of Two Cities (2002), and Posture of Reality with pipa virtuoso Wu Man (2003). For Aoki’s contributions to Chicago area arts, Asian American Institute awarded him the Milestone Award in 2007. In 2010 he received the Cultural Achievement Award by Japan America Society of Chicago and a coveted 3Arts Artist Award.

Coco Elysses

hails from Robbins, Illinois. She is a member of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians and works in theater, for voice-overs and film, and is a screenwriter and poet. She recently completed her MFA in Creative writing from National University. She originated the voice score for the Adler Planetarium permanent installation Skywatchers of Africa. Her voice can also be heard on spots for BET, BlackVoices.com, McDonald’s, Nike, IN and OUT Burger, Saints Row video game and EverQuest II. Her acting credits include Organic Theatre’s The Old Settler, for which she received a Black Theatre Alliance Award nomination for Best Featured actress in a drama. She performed in the Chicago Theatre Company, Black Theatre Alliance Award-winning, and Jeff Nominated production of Shakin the Mess Outta Misery. She has appeared in the independent film, Severed Ties, available at Blockbuster Video.

Amy Homma

is a leader among her generation of Chicago Japanese American artists dedicated to working in the traditional Japanese cultural arts. A second-generation Japanese American, she joined the Wakoayagi Daiko group in 1990 to explore her Japanese musical heritage. In 2005 she became full-time performer and instructor with Tsukasa Taiko under direction of Hidenori Yoshihashi, taking over the leadership in 2008 as head taiko instructor/performer and core shamen/performer. Her studies of Toyoaki Ozashiki shamen under the instruction of Tatsu Aoki led to her Japan tour in 2009 with a traditional musical ensemble. She also studies Japanese classical dance with Fujima Ryu of Chicago. Homma performs with Tatsu Aoki’s MIYUMI Project and Yoko Noge’s Japanese in venues such as the Chicago Cultural Center, Millennium Park, Steppenwolf Theater, and Chicago Jazz Festival, and made her European debut at the Malta International Theatre Festival in 2007 with Tsukasa Taiko. She has collaborated with artists such as Dohee Lee of San Francisco for European engagements and in 2010 was featured in World Music Festival Chicago. Earlier this year she performed in the
Yoko Reikano Kimura
performs classical Japanese music in the
Yamada School style as well as more
contemporary music on the koto and shamisen.
She has lived in the United States since 2010 and
has given numerous recitals in New York as well as
Chicago. A graduate from the Tokyo
University of the Arts and Music, she continued
her studies at the Institute of Contemporary Music for Traditional
Japanese Instruments, an affiliate of Senzoku
Gakuen Music University in Japan. For more
information about the artist please visit www.
reikano.yamadaryu.com

Yasushi Shimazaki
is a native of Tokyo and has been an active
figure in preserving and re-creating the
traditional Japanese street performance called
chindonya, a stylized marching band by
colorfully costumed street musicians used for
advertising businesses. Originating in the 19th-
century Osaka and Tokyo regions, chindonya
flourished between 1900 and the 1960s. In 1993,
Shimazaki established a theatrical troupe,
U-Stage, to revitalize the virtues of this tradition.
With his collaborators he has created
experimental theater based on chindonya since
the 1960s, involving chindon troubadour music,
Japanese taiko drumming, and a growing
diversity of street entertainment. Especially
popular is the group’s chindonya performance
as Japan’s Seven Lucky Gods. U-Stage has
toured throughout the United States and the
United Kingdom, Australia, Japan and Southeast
Asia, earning a festival award for overall
excellence in 2002 and an award for best
musical performance in 2004.

Fujima Shunojo
earned his professional name at an early age
and opened his own school of classical dance in
Tokyo where he taught for several years before
coming to the United States. He is founder and
artistic director of Fujima Ryu of Chicago, which
is observing its thirty-fifth anniversary. He
appears internationally and throughout the
Midwest, performing in major venues, college and
university campuses, such as Tokyo’s
National Theater, the Chicago Cultural Center,
Symphony Center, and the Art Institute of
Chicago. In 2005, Fujima Shunojo became a
resident artist at the Japanese American Service
Committee of Chicago, helping to establish the
JASC as a leading center for Japanese and
Japanese American cultural arts. He has been a
collaborator, mentor, and advisor with Tsukasa
Taiko since Taiko Legacy 4.

Melody Takata
is the founder and artistic director of GenRyu Arts
(formerly Gen Taiko) and has been performing
for more than 25 years. Growing up in Los
Angeles, she learned odori (Japanese dance) at
age eight at the Nishi Hongwanji as part of the
obon festival ritual (festival honoring ancestors). From age twelve to twenty she formally studied
Nihon Buyo (Japanese classical dance) at the
Fujima school under Madame Fujima Kansuma.
During those years she studied shamisen with
the Kineya school, and by age fifteen she began
studying and performing with Los Angeles
Matsuri. She traveled at the age of twenty to
Japan to study and perform as a member of
Tokyo’s O Edo Sukeroku Taiko, one of Japan’s
most highly renowned taiko ensembles.
Completing in 2002–03 the ACTA master apprentice program on shamisen with Hideko Nakajima sensei, and in celebration of Gen Taiko’s tenth anniversary Takata re-established study with 90-year-old Madame Fujima Kansuma in Los Angeles and recently completed the ACTA master apprentice program with her. As one of the longest-standing collaborators of Tsukasa Taiko, Takata has toured in Europe and Japan as a part of MIYUMI Project led by Tatsu Aoki and other traditional ensembles.

Edward Wilkerson Jr
is an internationally recognized jazz composer, arranger, tenor saxophone and reed musician, and educator based in Chicago. He is founder and director of the octet 8 Bold Souls and the twenty-five-member performance ensemble Shadow Vignettes, which have toured to festivals and concert halls throughout the United States, Europe, Japan, and the Middle East. A longtime member of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), he teaches composition at the organization’s music school and served for a time as President. Wilkerson performs with Ethnic Heritage Ensemble, the AACM Great Black Music Ensemble, Roscoe Mitchell, Douglas E Ewart, the Temptations, Chico Freeman, Geri Allen, the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Muhal Richard Abrams, Aretha Franklin, and George Lewis. He is a frequent collaborator in Chicago’s Asian American music scene, including Tatsu Aoki’s MIYUMI Project and Jeff Chan’s Chicago Clarinet Conglomerate.

Asian Improv aRts Midwest (AIRMW) strives to build a vital, self-empowered Asian American community in the Chicago area by advancing the understanding and profile of Asian and Asian American cultures through the traditional and contemporary cultural arts. AIRMW is dedicated to creating productive relationships with artists, community and institutions in order to produce high quality arts programs that accurately reflect the multicultural, multi-ethnic reality of Chicago and the nation. Visit www.airmw.org for more information.

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Program notes compiled by Yolanda Cesta Cursach