

Hakata Kinjishi Taiko and Hakata Koma

Tuesday, May 6, 2008
11 a.m. - 12 p.m. ET
Grades 4-6



Background Information

Hakata Kinjishi Taiko and Hakata Koma

Hakata Kinjishi (meaning “golden lion”) Taiko performs a style of drumming derived from music used for the Lion Dance. Performances include Koma, which is a traditional Hakata top-spinning act, and the Lion Dance, which is said to bring good luck. The drumming became independent from the two acts and the Golden Lion Taiko Group was established to present this style of taiko drumming. Hakata Kinjishi Taiko is led by brother and sister Jyuraku and Syouraku Chikushi. These drummers use a wide range of stick percussion instruments to integrate multiple genres, such as jazz and rock, into a unique sound experience. Their mother, Shuraku Chikushi, performs Hakata Koma; she is the only female traditional top-spinning artist in all of Japan.

Taiko

Taiko drums are ancient instruments that are now played in new ways in modern music, often blending jazz, rock, and other genres. Japanese taiko reflects the influence of Chinese and Korean instruments, demonstrating the cultural influence China and Korea had on Japan from 300-900 AD. Taiko literally means “fat drum,” but taiko drums appear in many shapes and sizes. They are mostly stick percussion instruments with heads on both sides of the drum body and a sealed cavity. The drums are played with bachi, which are wooden sticks.

Historically, taiko drumming has appeared in many contexts. In ancient times, Japanese armies used

taiko drums to intimidate the enemy, to give commands, and to coordinate marching and movements. Religious ceremonies and rites inside Buddhist and Shinto shrines and temples have used taiko drums, which are often associated with the gods. Taiko drums have appeared in Japanese classical music, imperial court music, folk music and at festivals. In Japanese villages, taiko drumming may communicate messages, to warn villagers of danger or to signal the start of a new harvest.

In the 1950s, jazz drummer Daihachi Oguchi established modern taiko and the first contemporary taiko ensembles. Over the past twenty-five years, taiko soloist Eitetsu Hayashi has further developed modern taiko through new and innovative techniques. For example, it was Hayashi who first introduced the now popular method of playing taiko with the drummer’s back to the audience. This technique amplifies the richness and dynamic range of the drums’ sound, and it allows the player more versatility and precision.

Koma

Koma is a type of performance art where tops are used in a series of tricks. Children play with tops in countries all over the world, but top spinning was first introduced to Japan from China more than 1300 years ago. Over the last 400 years, Hakata Koma has perfected this performance art as a form of entertainment.

The tops used by Hakata Koma are made from wood and metal. Inserting a metal pin into the center of a wooden top will create a top that spins



magnificently, without shaking. As the top spins, a performer can take it into his or her hand and move it around. In performance, Hakata Koma uses tops in a series of tricks that involve bamboo, poles, swords, Japanese fans, and strings.

Lion Dance

The shishi-mai, or Lion Dance, is often performed at Japanese shrine festivals and at New Year's. Dancers wear a shishi-gashira, which is a headdress shaped like a lion's head, or a mask, which may look like a dog, a deer, or a lion.

The Chinese most likely introduced the Lion Dance to Japan by or before the 8th century, during which time the Japanese made frequent missions to China. After that, Lion Dances spread across Japan as a form of festival entertainment, as a means to ward off evil spirits, and as a way to pray for peace, bountiful harvests, and good health. Currently, there are 9,000 different Lion Dance forms being performed throughout Japan.

About the Program

This high-energy program, presented as part of the Kennedy Center's Japan Festival, features taiko drums played in new ways that blend ancient and modern techniques, and top-spinning, a 470-year-old performance art using tops in a series of tricks involving bamboo, poles, strings, and swords. This family of performers also talks about the making of the drums and tops for this traditional and unique art form.



Instructional Activities

Because everyone's hands are a different shape and size, top spinning performers must make their own tops to ensure they will be able to give their best performance. Master top spinners craft their tops from wood they have selected themselves.

You can make your own top out of cardboard and a short, pointed pencil. Cut a circle out of the cardboard and push the pencil through the exact center of the disc. To start your top, hold the top of the pencil lightly, spin the top, and then let go.

When a top master lacquers a top, he or she integrates three significant colors. The color gold represents heaven. Green represents the earth, and the color red represents human beings. As you make your own top, choose colors that represent something significant to you!

Resources

Internet

For more information, connect to:

Hakata Kinjishi Taiko:
kinjishi-taiko.jp/index_e.html

Hakata Koma:
hakata-koma.jp/english/eng.html

Rolling Thunder - The Total Taiko Resource:
taiko.com

Recordings

NEGAI. Jyuraku Chikushi, 1999.

KABUKIMONO. Jyuraku Chikushi, 2002