

TAIKOz

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The 'Kaidan' Cast and Crew

Its been a fulsome beginning to the year for TaikOz. We kicked off with the World Premiere of *Kaidan* for the Sydney Festival and continued with Term 1 classes, workshops, schools concerts, the odd gig here and there and preparations for our upcoming capital city tour for Musica Viva (details below).

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Producers' Unit of the Sydney Opera House and the Sydney Festival for their significant support in the production and presentation of *Kaidan*. The championship of new Australian work is always a difficult and challenging proposition – particularly when it involves large, multi-disciplined forces – and the only way such projects can reach a high standard of conception, development and execution is when large, well resourced organizations are willing to take a lead in offering material support to artists. This project was a hugely complex one and its creation and subsequent performance would not have been possible without the Opera House and Sydney Festival's help.

However, a performance is not a performance without an audience and so to all of you who came and saw *Kaidan*: thankyou!

“THE GATHERING” ON TOUR

In mid-April through to early May, TaikOz is heading off on a capital city tour as part of Musica Viva’s 2007 subscription series. Musica Viva are presenting TaikOz in a program entitled *The Gathering* in Sydney, Adelaide, Perth and Melbourne, which features Riley on shakuhachi, Timothy Constable on marimba and percussion and of course the full TaikOz ensemble.

We are presenting some very exciting new music in these concerts, including two World Premieres – Graham Hilgendorf’s *Circle Dance* and Riley Lee and Timothy Constable’s *Mushin* – as well as a dynamic number entitled *Marimba Spiritual* by renowned Japanese composer, Minoru Miki that features Timothy playing his 5-octave marimba with taiko accompaniment.

Marimba virtuosos often include *Marimba Spiritual* in their repertoire because it uses the instrument in very colourful and vibrant ways. However, what makes our interpretation unique is the use of taiko over the usual practice of Western percussion and drums. Timothy’s playing of this piece is brilliant in the extreme and we’re sure you will enjoy our collaboration.

We have also been working on Graham’s *Circle Dance* for a few weeks now and it is really shaping up to be an incredibly dynamic piece with distinctly fun overtones! I have included the program note below in order to give you an insight into the inspiration and thinking behind Graham’s new work. In the meantime this presents me with an opportunity to share a few thoughts about the processes that TaikOz undergoes when creating brand new music.

After gaining that first flash of inspiration (in Graham’s case it was after experiencing the New Year’s custom of ‘mochitsuki’ when living in Japan a couple of years ago) a composer will work through several conceptual processes like developing musical themes using various compositional techniques, choosing instruments and cultivating stylistic ideas etc. The ideas are brought to our regular training sessions and communicated firstly through a process of renshū (practice exercises) and improvisation, followed by work on the themes or sometimes just fragments of themes and musical ideas. At this stage, most of the work is done aurally, with perhaps the odd look at a written score.

Using these musical fragments and forms the group collectively works on ensemble, dynamics, phrasing, sound and style and once we begin to get the feel of the music in our bodies and minds, we then begin the process of working on the full piece. One of the beauties of our ensemble is that because we work together on a daily basis and know each other’s playing really well, developing new pieces of music can be done over an extended period of time, which allows the composer to carefully consider every aspect of their piece of music. The composer is able to hear things played in a myriad of ways and make changes as they go, before settling on the final composition. By this stage we often use the printed page as an extra tool in the learning process and this will eventually make its way into a full score that can be referred to in the future. It’s not uncommon for us to make changes after a piece is given its first performance and so the process of development and refinement continues, sometimes for years!

As far as *Circle Dance* is concerned, this extended period of ‘work-shopping’ will continue for a few more weeks yet, but come early April we will be ready – we hope! – for its ‘unveiling’ in Sydney, Adelaide, Perth and Melbourne. We’d love to see you there for an exciting, dramatic, theatrical and totally musical experience. Come and say hello afterwards!

TOUR DATES

“THE GATHERING” in SYDNEY, ADELAIDE, PERTH & MELBOURNE

TaikOz, featuring Riley Lee (shakuhachi) & Timothy Constable (marimba & percussion)

1. SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE CONCERT HALL
April 14 (Sat)
8PM
Bookings: 02 9250 7777
2. ADELAIDE FESTIVAL CENTRE
April 19 (Thurs)
8PM
Bookings: BASS 131 246
3. PERTH CONCERT HALL
April 24 (Tues)
7:30PM
Bookings: BOCS 08 9481 1133
4. HAMER HALL, THE ARTS CENTRE, MELBOURNE
May 1 (Tues)
8:15PM
Bookings: Ticketmaster 1300 136 166

PROGRAM NOTE FOR GRAHAM HILGENDORF’S CIRCLE DANCE

Circle Dance was conceived after Graham had experienced the Japanese New Year’s custom of ‘mochitsuki’: a celebration that involves pounding thick, glutinous rice with a heavy wooden mallet to produce sticky rice called ‘mochi’.

Graham says, “We were travelling down a street in Maragame and came across a group of people milling outside in a car park, chatting and imbibing of the odd cup of sake – it was absolutely freezing cold, too! The thing that grabbed my attention was an old woman who ran out of a kitchen with a handful of steaming rice and put it on a stone mortar. A guy then picked up a really heavy looking mallet and started pounding the rice – like really pounding! The women kept running out with more handfuls of sticky rice and the guys – young and old – kept pounding away, always in a strictly rhythmic way; it had to be rhythmic because the person flicking the rice on the mortar would lose their fingers under the blow of the hammer, otherwise! I also remember a guy using the hammer in a grinding fashion before he began to swing away. This inspired the opening section of the piece – the grinding sounds on the taiko...it really was a great day out!”

With such vivid images in mind, Graham has rendered the sight, sounds and smells of mochitsuki into a piece of music: pots, pans and utensils of the kitchen have inspired the movements and rhythms of the ‘shinjiro’ taiko sets (a style associated particularly with the Owaridaiko group of Nagoya where a low-voiced okedo is placed on the side in combination with the high-pitched

shimedaiko) and a large hiradō-daiko is the 'mortar' upon which the rice is moulded into the delicious mochi rice-balls...enjoy!

“KAIDAN”: IT’S A WRAP!

Kaidan: A Ghost Story was in gestation for nearly two years and it was both a relief and a joy to finally see it make it to the stage. Meryl Tankard is one of Australia’s cultural treasures and in the two months of workshopping and rehearsing together, every moment was stimulating.

The process of creating the music along with the dance and overall stage conception was a fascinating one. Meryl has wonderfully imaginative ideas and it was ceaselessly stimulating and challenging to come up with music that matched her vision of the piece. Meryl and I spent over two years developing the story and laying the foundations of the structure. We had many brainstorming sessions that produced quite a few wild and wacky ideas, some of which made it into the final production...and many of which didn't!

A large group of people, including the costume designer, lighting designer, set designer, rigger (for the stunningly athletic 'flying' elements of the show) and a myriad collection of other technical support people, came together with the musicians and dancers some eight weeks before opening night. Although this seems like a long period in which to rehearse a performance, we used every minute of an eight-hour day – Monday to Saturday – in order to try out new ideas, develop existing ones, learn and memorise over sixty-five minutes of musical material, refine ensemble playing, practice movements and reach the final point of creation. This all came together for the enjoyment of an expectant and appreciative audience on January 17, 2007. Hard work – but lots of fun!

Right from the beginning, the intention was for TaikOz to appear on stage with the dancers and not be confined to the pit as a 'support band'. This presented Meryl with the challenge of having to meaningfully integrate our performance aesthetic and strong movement into the overall fabric of the production. Without ever resorting to cliché or simple imitation, Meryl triumphed in her ability to meld TaikOz with the six dancers, Riley’s powerful presence and Régis Lansac’s stunning illuminations. All of the elements successfully coalesced into a single entity that was, in equal measure, visually and aurally powerful.

Meryl really understands TaikOz’s music and was incredibly intuitive in using and developing our unique movement and sound language – without compromising the integrity of the Wadaiko art form.

All of the members of TaikOz had moments when they became part of the action: sometimes a player would carry the story line through independent action, or be asked to convey a particular emotion or character trait in their playing. This was a real challenge for us, but one that everyone relished. For example, in an early scene entitled 'Reflections of Childhood', Graham and Masae replaced their katsugi-okedo for Japanese paper fans that miraculously became fluttering butterflies, which then transmuted into Kevin accompanying a flying insect on his taiko set. TaikOz’s youngest member, Anton Lock, actually auditioned for Meryl as a dancer and ended up dancing more than drumming!

Overall, *Kaidan: A Ghost Story* was a true gift for TaikOz: working with Meryl, Régis, the dancers and all of the creative team was not only enormously challenging, but incredibly inspiring, exciting and in the end, very moving. We hope it will tour Australia and indeed the world, in the year’s to come!



Two "baldies": Ian and Kevin in 'Kaidan'

TAIKOZ WELCOMES ITS NEWEST MEMBER

TaikOz is pleased to announce Tom Royce Hampton to the group. Tom arrived in Sydney from Melbourne in 2005 to begin study of the taiko and subsequently went on to join the group for major performances as an Associate Member in 2006. Previously Tom studied music at the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) where he completed a Bachelor of Music Degree majoring in percussion and drum set. Tom will continue performing and teaching as a member of TaikOz and we wish him all the very best.

TAIKO NO WA

As Term 1 draws to a close, it seems a good time to give you a progress report on Taiko No Wa and at the same time, let you know a little more of our thinking about the group and our hopes for its future.

In 2005 a group of TaikOz students began to give public performances at school fetes, cultural festivals and so on. New members joined from time to time and everyone who did came to know both the exhilaration that group practice and performance bring and the strong bond that can grow among people who share a common passion. There were many rehearsals and performances got better and better. By 2006, the TaikOz students' performing group was sufficiently well known and in demand that it was time to give it its own name and identity; and so, Taiko No Wa (Circle of Taiko) was born.

TaikOz believes that every student in the TaikOz School should have the opportunity to participate in Taiko No Wa. From now on, the dojo at Ultimo will be available to Taiko No Wa from 4 to 6PM every Sunday afternoon throughout the year and everyone who is currently enrolled in one of the TaikOz classes is also welcome to join Taiko No Wa.

Out of the weekly practice sessions, groups of performers will be drawn when public performances are arranged, but you don't have to be willing to perform in public in order to join. We now think of Taiko No Wa as a meeting place for all students in the TaikOz School to come together to play the repertoire they have previously learned or are learning in their regular classes. Playing music with others is a delight in itself, and one that we want all our students to be able to share in.

We don't expect that every member will come every week. So far, there are about twenty-five members in Taiko No Wa and all of them drop in and out depending on other commitments, but we think that if you ask any of them, they will say that it's a wonderful way of spending two hours on any Sunday afternoon when they have two hours to spare.

Taiko No Wa is wholly student-managed, under the general guidance of TaikOz. Each week one member leads a group renshû and then there is a rehearsal of one of the pieces from the repertoire (such as Kazan, Yataibayashi, Tabidachi, Miyake.) Those who have not yet learned these in class have the opportunity to learn them collaboratively, by observing, listening to and playing along with those who already know the music. The members say that this is a very pleasurable way of getting to know the repertoire.

We have set the fee at \$66 for the year (or part of a year) to encourage as large a membership as possible.

After a lot of thought and discussion, the Taiko No Wa members willing to take executive positions

have devised a new structure that we think will work. There will now be a 6 person Music and Performance Directorate that will operate as a collective to:

- give guidance and structure to the weekly sessions;
- plan and guide rehearsals for public performances;
- give artistic direction with guidance from TaikOz; and
- manage gigs.

The Directorate members are Marcus Perozzi, Martin Lee, Steve Moore, Sam Newton, Terry Ashman and Wendy Tsui. We thank them and wish them well.

Before long, public performances will begin again. If you are interested in public performance, then please join Taiko No Wa, but remember, you are welcome to join whether or not you have the time or inclination to play music in public: all you need is the inclination to play music with your fellow students.

One of Taiko no Wa's newest members is Marcus Perrozzi. Marcus moved from Perth to Sydney this year in order to take up serious study of taiko. He recently completed a degree in percussion performance and was looking for a new challenge. Back in 2003 Marcus attended an intensive live-in workshop that TaikOz presented on behalf of the Australian Youth Orchestra. This experience whet his appetite for more and he consequently decided to make the big move to Sydney. Marcus is with us until the middle of the year and we wish him well. Here is Marcus's story...

MY EXCELLENT SYDNEY ADVENTURE

By Marcus Perrozzi

Hi everyone! My name is Marcus Perrozzi and I am currently a student with TaikOz. Here is an insight into my experience so far...

In January I moved here from Perth to study with TaikOz for six months. This was made possible thanks to a scholarship provided by the W.A. Youth Music Association and ArtsWA. I am very grateful for this opportunity, as it has allowed me to take six classes per week. Ian kindly selected a program of classes that covers a wide range of styles and taiko works, including *Umi*, *Yataibayashi*, *Tabidachi*, *Miyake*, *Hachijyô* and even shinobue. I've also recently begun learning katsugi-okedo style with Masae in my private lessons.

It has been a most enjoyable experience so far as I near the halfway point of my study period. I have had the privilege to learn from most of the TaikOz members (except Riley at present) and have found them to be welcoming and humble people, who are all very passionate and articulate in class. They are always supportive and understanding, and encourage us to push ourselves to achieve...even when we think we can't push ourselves any further! I have also enjoyed meeting the other students in the classes. They too have been welcoming and are great people to have fun with, especially in Taiko no Wa!

The dojo itself fascinates me. It has a real sense of beauty and peacefulness about it... rather contradictory when you consider how loud we are when we all play the taiko together!! But when you combine the wonderful people with the beautiful instruments it houses, it really is an amazing place!

I am most excited that I have had the chance to experience Taiko no Wa. For readers who don't know, Taiko no Wa is a student-run ensemble which comprises students who take weekly classes

with TaikOz. The ensemble has access to the dojo once a week in order to run their own workshops and rehearsals, thanks to the incredible generosity and support of TaikOz. Currently, as we are not in 'concert rehearsal mode', these workshops generally consist of renshū and the learning of thematic material related to arrangements of works that Taiko no Wa perform. Most recently this has included learning two full arrangements of Taiko no Wa's established repertoire – a very exciting and gratifying experience! It is made up of an incredible group of people who are all very keen to practice and develop their skills, share knowledge as well as perform when the opportunities arise. So if you've ever wondered what it's like to play in a taiko ensemble, then Taiko no Wa is certainly the place to do it! I would encourage anyone and everyone, who is a current student at TaikOz, to come and experience it first-hand! You won't regret it!!

My first experience of taiko drumming was with TaikOz in 2003. I was one of twelve very lucky percussionists (including Tom Royce-Hampton, now a member of TaikOz) to be selected by the Australian Youth Orchestra to attend a weeklong master-course camp in Ballarat, Victoria. The location was a most appropriate setting for this insight into the world of taiko: a wooded village surrounded by lush forest and a serene and tranquil lake. I remember going for a walk into the forest with my fellow participants one afternoon... we were about one or two kilometers from the campsite and we could still hear the thundering sound of TaikOz practicing, resounding through the trees and dense scrub. It really blew us all away! Certainly an experience I'll never forget!

Since then, it has been dream - three and a half years in the making - to come to Sydney and further my studies with TaikOz. I'm thoroughly enjoying every second of the classes and Taiko no Wa! I don't know of anywhere in Australia where you'll find a group of such dedicated and knowledgeable musicians, in any field, that offer such an amazing schedule and variety of community classes as TaikOz does. In my opinion, I believe TaikOz is a national treasure. Sydney locals are incredibly lucky to have this group of such caliber in their own backyard! I'd like to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved in making my stay such an enjoyable experience – from the members of TaikOz, to the administration and fellow students. Keep on drumming!

TAIKO AND BUDO

Sunday group member, Dean Whittle, is a keen practitioner of the Japanese martial art known as Ninjutsu, having studied it since 1986. He has travelled internationally to train and teach and runs a small dojo in Darlinghurst (for more info you can contact Dean at ninjutsusydney@bigpond.com).

Dean tells me that "Ninjutsu, the art of the ninja, is stereotypically associated with espionage and assassination from Japan's feudal past, but the art's main emphasis today is on it's armed and unarmed fighting principles, along with the personal/spiritual development available through studying a warrior tradition".

Dean is keen to share his thoughts about the connections between taiko and budo (The Way of the Warrior).....

TAIKO AND BUDO
Japanese Drumming and Martial Arts
By Dean Whittle

I started studying Wadaiko at TaikOz at the beginning of term 3 2005. My interest in Japanese drumming began a number of years ago when I saw a performance by the ensemble Honno Daiko, a group of three female drummers who brought the audience to their feet after a dynamic and powerful performance at the Seymour Centre in Sydney.

My interest in Japanese culture began many years before that when I started studying the martial art of Ninjutsu.

Over the last twelve months I have found numerous similarities between Taiko and Ninjutsu practice that have made my training somewhat easier. What I've also found interesting is that these similarities extend beyond Ninjutsu to most Japanese martial arts, for example, jujutsu, aikido, judo, and kenjutsu (fencing).

ETIQUETTE

My first hint at the similarities was the direction to hold the bachi in my right hand when they're not being used. This is also the correct way of holding a sword or bokken (a wooden practice sword) when you're not using it. Since the majority of sword work is right-handed, carrying a sheathed sword in that hand indicates a non-threatening attitude.

Also the proper way of placing the bachi on the ground – from a standing position, placing the right knee on the ground, keeping the back straight, head up and quietly putting the bachi on the ground, then gracefully moving into the seiza seated position – is almost identical to the method used by many Japanese martial arts to place a sword on the ground (although generally the left knee goes down onto the floor first). In partnered practise, this is generally done at the beginning and the end of a combat pattern. The two practitioners, from a safe distance, place their weapons on the ground, and offer a kneeling bow to each other as a sign of respect, always maintaining a balanced posture just in case their opponent tries something untoward.

The proper 'soft' grip on the bachi, with tension only used on impact, is quite similar to the grip and striking used with sword and other weapons in Ninjutsu. Although I don't remember getting quite so many blisters when learning sword...HA HA!

PHYSICAL FORM

This brings me to the physical 'form' that is stressed in both taiko and martial arts. Whilst the actual 'form' varies between the practices, and the outcome is different, the emphasis on there being a correct way of executing a strike (or movement) is the same. In martial arts the physical form is about the tactical movement of the body in a way that ensures the defeat of an opponent, in taiko it's about giving the audience a visual performance as well as the auditory one.

Our basic drumming stance, with the feet well spread and 'earthy' feeling is very similar to the fighting stances used in many traditional martial arts. The emphasis on maintaining a low centre of gravity is stressed in all Japanese martial arts, particularly those that focus on grappling (wrestling) where keeping a low centre of gravity is intrinsic to avoiding defeat.

As we know, taiko can be physically demanding, and I've always heard the teachers emphasize being relaxed and releasing any unnecessary tension to ensure that we can play for the full duration

of the class, whilst maintaining the appropriate form and using that effortless power that they demonstrate so well.

Relaxed, tension-free movement is emphasized in many Japanese martial arts, particularly the older ones like Ninjutsu, Jujutsu and Aikido. In Ninjutsu this is promoted through the two physical principles of 'ken tai ichi jo' (the body and strike are one) and 'shizen gyo un ryu sui' (the natural power of fluid movement). Senior practitioners are also prompted to work on refining their movement for grace and naturalness in all actions.

MENTAL FORM

After adopting our drumming stance, but before we start playing, there is usually a small pause where we are meant to focus on the drum and mentally prepare to start the piece. During martial arts training this pause is an opportunity to adopt a state of mind called 'mushin' (literal translation - 'no-mind'). Mushin is a mind-set that is free of emotion (fear, anger, aggression, anxiety), which allows the fighter to see/feel the reality of the situation, rather than over-reacting because of anger or aggression, or under-reacting because of fear.

At the conclusion of playing we hold our final position while the sound resonates, maintaining a focus on the drum, before slowing bringing our arms together, coming out of the stance (right foot, left foot), and placing the bachi together (without sound) in our right hand; all which is meant to be done in time with our fellow players, without looking at them.

At the end of practicing a fighting technique, practitioners are expected to maintain their focus on the opponent, this is called retaining 'zanshin' (literal translation – remaining spirit), a state of readiness in case the confrontation needs to continue. It is a mind-set very similar to mushin, in that it is a non-emotional state, no anger, aggression, fear or anxiety, just a calm centeredness, prepared to continue if necessary.

These non-emotional states, mushin and zanshin, also allow practitioners to be intuitively associated with their opponent and their surroundings. This in-turn enables the practitioner to respond in harmony with the opponent's attacks, almost before they are launched. This intuitive skill is expanded in advanced training to 'link-in' with one's surroundings, enabling students to detect attacks that are unseen, to pick up on negative intent even before a punch is thrown, and respond appropriately.

I think that this intuitive association is part of what allows the TaikOz performers to finish in harmony with each other without any visual or auditory cues. You may have experienced this intuitive awareness in your everyday life with a long-term partner or friend, knowing what they're about to say or do before it happens. It's a common and natural skill that can easily be developed.

CONCLUSION

I should highlight that even with these commonalities between taiko and Ninjutsu I have still found the classes to be very challenging, mainly from the musical side because I haven't played any musical instruments since junior high school .

I hope this short article has provided you with some insight into the similarities between taiko and Budo. In fact many of these similarities also cross over into other Japanese cultural activities such as calligraphy (shodo), flower arranging (ikebana) and tea ceremony (chado), which shows how valuable Japanese society found these physical and mental characteristics.

UPCOMING EVENTS

CAFÉ CARNIVALE in SYDNEY

TaikOz & Timothy Constable (marimba & percussion)

Presented by Musica Viva Australia

April 13 (Fri) 8.15PM

EASTSIDE MUSIC CAFÉ, 395 Oxford Street, Paddington

Bookings: 1800 688 482 / www.musicaviva.com.au

“THE GATHERING” in SYDNEY

TaikOz, featuring Riley Lee (shakuhachi) & Timothy Constable (marimba & percussion)

Presented by Musica Viva Australia

April 14 (Sat) 8PM

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE CONCERT HALL

Bookings: 02 9250 7777 / www.musicaviva.com.au

“THE GATHERING” in ADELAIDE

TaikOz, featuring Riley Lee (shakuhachi) & Timothy Constable (marimba & percussion)

Presented by Musica Viva Australia

April 19 (Thurs) 8PM

ADELAIDE FESTIVAL CENTRE

Bookings: BASS 131 246 / www.musicaviva.com.au

“THE GATHERING” in PERTH

TaikOz, featuring Riley Lee (shakuhachi) & Timothy Constable (marimba & percussion)

Presented by Musica Viva Australia

April 24 (Tues) 7:30PM

PERTH CONCERT HALL

Bookings: BOCS 08 9481 1133 / www.musicaviva.com.au

“TAIKO FOR EVERYONE!”: INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOP

Led by members of TaikOz

April 28 (Sat) 2-4PM

TaikOz DOJO, ULTIMO, SYDNEY

(02) 9572 8595 / [www.admin@taikoz.com](mailto:admin@taikoz.com)

“THE GATHERING” in MELBOURNE

TaikOz, featuring Riley Lee (shakuhachi) & Timothy Constable (marimba & percussion)

Presented by Musica Viva Australia

May 1 (Tues) 8:15PM

HAMER HALL, THE ARTS CENTRE, MELBOURNE

Bookings: Ticketmaster 1300 136 166 / www.musicaviva.com.au

“THE GATHERING” in SALE

TaikOz, featuring Kevin Man (shakuhachi) & Timothy Constable (marimba & percussion)

Presented by Musica Viva Australia

May 3 (Thurs)

ESSO BHP BILLITON WELLINGTON ENTERTAINMENT CENTRE

Box Office: (03) 5143 3200 / boxoffice@wellington.vic.gov.au

“CIRCLE DANCE” in BLACKTOWN CITY FESTIVAL

TaikOz, featuring Riley Lee (shakuhachi)

Presented by Blacktown City Council

June 1 (Fri) 8PM

BOWMAN HALL, BLACKTOWN

Enquiries: Blacktown City Council 9839 6000 (between 8:30AM-4:30PM)

“CIRCLE DANCE” in SYDNEY

TaikOz, featuring Riley Lee (shakuhachi)

Presented by Musica Viva Australia and Trinity Grammar School

June 7 (Thurs) 7PM

TRINITY GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Enquiries: 02 9581 6000

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