

Music of the Whole World

- presentation # 6: August 9, 2006

Scottish Highland Bagpipes and Japanese Taiko Drums

- study materials

by Moshe Denburg

with bibliography and discography
compiled by Michael O'Neill

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General Note

The following study materials are being made available to participants in the educational series, **Music of the Whole World**, presented by the Vancouver Inter-Cultural Orchestra (VICO) at the Vancouver Public Library. The presentation, **Scottish Highland Bagpipes and Japanese Taiko Drums**, took place on August 9, 2006.

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Intercultural Orchestration Materials

These materials form part of a larger work in progress (as of 2006) entitled ***Orchestrating the World - a Manual of Intercultural Music Making*** by Moshe Denburg. Portions of this work are available for downloading on the VICO website. To download this study guide, go to:

www.vi-co.org

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Scottish Highland Bagpipes and Japanese Taiko Drums – Scope and Considerations

The intercultural marriage of Japanese Taiko drums and Scottish Highland Bagpipes is quite unprecedented since there is no previous historical connection between their traditions. It is true that drums have for quite some time been associated with the bagpipe tradition, but as far as this writer is aware, the taiko tradition, and Japanese musical traditions generally, have had no historical contact with bagpipes.

What makes this marriage so natural is simply the dynamic balance between the instruments being brought together. Not only this, but there is a similar music making esthetic in both traditions, an esthetic which rarely shies away from that which is *strongly and loudly expressed*.

The presentation, **Scottish Highland Bagpipes and Japanese Taiko Drums**, takes as its reference point a composition created by the collaboration between several bagpipers, several taiko drummers, and a shakuhachi player. Initiated by composer Michael O'Neill, the work includes major elements composed by: Bonnie Soon, Boyd Seiichi Grealy, and Jason Overy (Taiko); Michael O'Neill and Stuart MacNeill (Scottish Highland Bagpipes); and Alvin Ramos (Shakuhachi). Here is what Michael O'Neill writes about the collaborative aspect of the work.

“The piece *Luffness* is a collaborative work. *Luffness* was composed by Bonnie, Boyd, Jason, Stuart MacNeil, Alvin, and me. It began with a section for pipes by me. Boyd wrote the taiko part for the section. This is also the way a pipe band works. No piper writes the drum part, but unfortunately, the drummer/composer never seems to get any credit. But Boyd wrote a superb taiko part which interacts, supports, and shines through by turns throughout this section. A subsequent section was added in the same way. I wrote the pipe part first. Boyd added the taiko part.

Alvin wrote his shakuhachi intro, knowing where and how it needed to connect with the next section, which Stuart MacNeil wrote. Jason added a cymbal part to Stuart's section....Bonnie wrote the concluding section, both the pipe melody and the taiko part.

I knitted the piece together lengthening Stuart's and Bonnie's sections. I think the fact that it is such a thoroughly collaborative work is where its real strength and interest lies...”

In this connection it is worthwhile noting that collaboration, in one way or another, is often an integral part of intercultural composition. It relies not only upon a composer, in the western sense, working on his score alone, but rather composers and performers working together to create a piece of music that works. This collaborative approach is especially germane to traditions of drumming, and other traditions which utilize the improvisational skills of performers to make music. Certainly composers may be trained, with careful study, to write every note and beat themselves; but drumming and improvisational traditions rely upon performers to supply much of the musical material, so one may do very well to work collaboratively.

This does not mean that we must abide by the Rudyard Kipling's line: “East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet”. Composers can still commit notes to paper, and performers who traditionally improvise can learn a piece from the page. It is all a matter of creating a language which takes into consideration the abilities and interests of the composers and performers involved.

What follows are descriptions and some discussion dealing with of the instruments and traditions involved: Scottish Highland Bagpipes and Japanese Taiko drums.

Scottish Highland Bagpipes and Japanese Taiko Drums - study materials

- **Scottish Highland Bagpipes**



Scottish Highland Bagpipes (aka. Great Highland Bagpipes, or GHB for short) belong to a very large family of instruments found in varying forms the world over. The basic mechanism involved is an airfilled bag which provides a constant flow of air to a double reeded conical chanter in order to play the melodies, and to 3 single reeded drones to constantly sound the basic tone of the scale. Of all bagpipes, the Highland Bagpipes are arguably the loudest. Apart from providing music for entertainment and as art, they are utilized in a large variety of social functions, including parades, weddings, and funeral processions. Importantly, the Highland Bagpipes have been associated with and utilized on the battlefield. Their sheer power allows them to be heard far away, and they can sound different calls of order to the troops.

Origins

Bagpipes go back a very long way and their origins are difficult to nail down. Bagpipes are visually represented on coins from the time of Nero for instance - perhaps he didn't fiddle while Rome burned, he piped! All European countries have bagpipes: Spain, Ukraine, Rumania, Bulgaria, Northumbria (England), Ireland, and many more.

The Scottish Highland Bagpipes are a development of earlier bagpipes, and it is not clear whether the instrument evolved in Scotland itself or was brought to Scotland, in some form, from the outside. It would hardly matter, since the instrument is by now firmly a part of Scottish musical culture, and its musical tradition is unique in the world.

The Scottish Highland Bagpipe band tradition is only 250 years old, and the instrument's association with the military is not much older than that.

Fuller Description and Method of play

The chanter is double reeded and has a conical bore while the drones are single reeded and have cylindrical bores. There is a standard highland pipes - instruments may vary in how they are ornamented on the outside, but the internal structure remains the same. Generally speaking, the size of the pipes remain the same from instrument to instrument, but the size of the bag may vary. One can call these bag sizes: small, medium, and large.

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The pipes are carried around usually in a case, after the component parts are all taken apart. The bag is deflated, the pipes are disconnected, and all these parts fit neatly into a carrying case.

The bagpipes comprise 3 drones (1 bass and 2 tenors), a chanter, and a blow pipe. There are 5 holes in the bag where these various pipes are inserted. The blow pipe has a valve in it, so that when you take a breath the valve closes, thus keeping the bag inflated and pumping air to the chanter and drones.

Bags may traditionally be made from elk hide or other animal skins. In order to use such hide bags, one has to season the hide to close the pores. Nowadays there are synthetic bags being utilized which do not require such vigilance. However, with synthetic bags there may be a buildup of moisture, which can be harmful to the reeds, so a tube is attached to the stock of the blowpipe to help eliminate the moisture. This tube acts as a water trap, and after playing the performer can dump out whatever moisture has built up there.

The 3 drone pipes are connected to each other by a tassel, which makes it easier to hold up the pipes - all the piper has to do is rest the bass drone on his shoulder, and the 2 tenors will hold up as well.

Method of Play

The piper blows through the blow pipe to keep the bag inflated. The chanter, which is attached to the bag, is activated when the piper pushes against the bag with his arm in order to create air pressure. Once the double reed in the chanter is activated, the piper can finger the chanter to create the melodies.

Scottish Highland Bagpipe: Styles and Traditions

Two main categories of musical traditions have evolved:

Heavy Music – known by the name of **piobaireachd** (pronounced: **pee-brok**, and often spelled *pibroch*), is the great music of the highland bagpipe; this is the ‘heavy’ or ‘classical’ music. In Gaelic it is called **ceòl mór** (pronounced: *kyawl more*), and means “big music”.

Light Music, called **ceòl beag** (pronounced: *kyawl buck*) in Gaelic, includes all non-pibroch music, music for all kinds of occasions. Light music can be broken down into two subcategories:

1. Music for dancing and marching, such as: marches, retreats, strathspeys, reels, jigs, and hornpipes.
2. Music of individual expression and pathos, such as: laments, lullabies, and old folk songs.

In light music all ornaments are written in small notes, without indicators such as ‘tr’ and so on. In *pibroch* however, the abbreviations for the embellishments are utilized.

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Related Instruments

Here are just a few of the many bagpipes from around the world:

Scottish Small Pipes



A bellows blown bagpipe with three drones and a cylindrical bore chanter. It can be found in 4 keys: A, Bb, C, and D. The scale of the chanter, like the Highland Bagpipe, is mixolydian. It is a very flexible instrument of medium dynamic, and can be played with other instruments readily.

Uilleann Pipes (Ireland)



The Uilleann (elbow) pipes of the Irish tradition are bellows blown, with a melody chanter, and as many as 3 drones. There are regulator stocks fitted with keys that can provide chordal accompaniment. Its range is two octaves, and its construction allows for the stoppage of tone, since the chanter is a closed pipe, opened only when a finger is lifted. With the addition of a few keys, the chanter can be played chromatically. The instrument comes in several tonic keys: D, C#, C, B, and Bb.

Zampogna (Italy)



The zampogna, a bagpipe from Italy, has many variations in construction – typically it has more than one chanter plus one or more drones. All the pipes are fitted together into a single stock and the stock is inserted into the bag. In a double chanter zampogna, the player fingers each chanter with a different hand, and can thus create harmonized melodies.

Scottish Highland Bagpipes and Japanese Taiko Drums - study materials

- **Taiko**



Basic Description

Taiko is a Japanese word that means ‘big drum’ or ‘big drums’ (in Japanese the form of singular and plural is the same). Today’s taiko ensemble is comprised of several kinds of drums, rendering a large range of pitches, plus metal percussion instruments which serve as time keepers and add colour to the ensemble. Taiko (drums) are associated with many other Japanese traditions especially the theatre (*Noh* and *Kabuki*), and classical court music and dance (*Gagaku* and *Bugaku*). **Kumi daiko** is the art of ensemble playing, and it exists today in many forms in Japan, as well as outside of Japan and throughout the Western world.

Description, History, and Background

In a taiko ensemble each drum has a different role, and also requires a different way of being played. This depends upon where the drum is played in Japan, i.e. - different regions of Japan have different drumming traditions.

What makes taiko drumming different from other styles of drumming is that, by and large, elements of the martial arts are combined with the drumming techniques. Thus drumming and the movements that accompany the drumming, are fused into one art form.

Japanese and North American practitioners have recently been discussing how taiko have come to North America, and it would seem that nowadays the tradition is bi-partite: there is a Japanese tradition and an ‘outside Japan’ tradition.

Taiko, as an ensemble instrument and as an art form unto itself, has come to the fore only over the past 50 years or so. Traditionally, it was always used to accompany rituals, village life and ceremonies, and traditional theatre.

Martial arts are utilized as a discipline and a way to approach the learning of the instrument. There are 2 ways of learning the taiko – the Japanese way and the North American way. Of course the Japanese way is an intensive course of learning from the sensei (the teacher, the master), by living in his house, being his disciple, and so on, and gradually imbibing the tradition. This is generally the Eastern way. Not so the North American, or Western way. The Western way is a knowledge based approach – the student is given the materials and is challenged to make them his own. The materials are given liberally, and as quickly as the student can take them in. The Eastern way dwells on one thing at a time, a small amount of information, drilled very hard, until the lesson is incorporated with great certainty and acumen.

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There are some practitioners who are trying to strike a balance between East and West. Not too much material at once, but not too little either. Too much drill may overemphasize technique, which should be a means to an end, not the end itself. So interestingly, the Eastern way may sometimes leads to great technical proficiency without deeper feeling. And too much material too soon, as in the Western way, may lead to a superficial understanding of the art.

Ki-ai, martial arts vocal shouts utilized in taiko performance, come from the gut and are meant to exhort oneself and one's colleagues to exert greater energy . Taiko is about communicating your spirit as well as the music. A challenging aspect of traditional taiko is that it is 70-80% visual and only 20-30% music. So listeners sometimes will complain that the beat is monotonous and unchanging, and unless you are watching it, it's boring to listen to. Thus in the North American tradition, music is given a greater emphasis, and new compositions are created with specific musical interest.

Taiko ensembles can be small (e.g. – Uzume Taiko, based in Vancouver, Canada is a quartet), but often quite large, 12-20 performer is common.

To summarize, there are two camps – one more traditional, following a sensei and a tradition, and the other freer, more self-directed, and experimental. In Vancouver we have not had a sensei like in many places in the USA; so there has been a marked experimentalism in taiko drumming here. There are 14 taiko groups Canada-wide, and 7 of them are Vancouver based. There is a freedom here to create one's own music, one's own movement style, and one's own context (political or musical). This may be very healthy for the future growth of taiko, as it keeps the art from stagnating. In the USA there are round 130 taiko groups, mostly based in major urban areas.

Taiko is very much a team effort - the drums are heavy, it takes effort to care for them, and take them from place to place, and ensemble playing takes a lot of sensitivity to your fellow performers – practicing is not usually done alone, but within the group. Most taiko groups are consensual by nature, though there may be leader. Taiko practice requires both physical and musical training.

The Taiko Ensemble

One can generally classify the taiko into three groups:

bigger drums – low pitched

okedo – middle pitched

shime – high pitched

The smaller and higher pitched the drum, the quicker the decay rate. The more articulate rhythms and quicker pulsed patterns can be obtained from the smaller/higher drums, the bigger and longer decaying tones from the big/low drums.

Taiko – types, sizes, and materials

Taiko are made from hardwoods and skins. The skins utilized are usually cowhide and horsehide. The wood utilized varies. In Japan, hardwoods are used and the shell is hollowed out. Wood staves are not utilized for most of the drums except the **okedo**. The okedo are lighter drums covered with horsehide, but the **shime** drums and the barrel drums are hollowed out.

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In North America drums are often made of recycled old barrels, which of course have wood staves. A more recent development is the creation of new staves and an attempt to get into great detail and conform to the specifications of the traditional taiko drum, both in thickness and in the scalloping on the inside of the drum. This is an attempt to obtain the acoustic properties of the traditional drum. Certain processes have been simply copied from Japan, like the use of cowhide and the fastening of the skins with Japanese style tacks.

The Japanese have been making taiko for 400-500 years, with families passing the tradition of taiko making down through the generations. The process of skinning is a trade secret, which the Japanese are reluctant to share – the type of cow they use, how they feed it, when they kill it – knowledge of these matters contribute significantly to making the best drums. Not surprisingly, a Japanese taiko is much more expensive (up to 8 times) to obtain than a North America one.

Here are the main types of taiko:

1. **Chu-daiko** (aka. “josuke”) – a term denoting any medium sized drum;
2. **Okedo-daiko** – drums made of wood-staves, with heads stretched over steel rings and laced to the body with rope; the body is normally long relative to the head. Among these are the drums of mid range pitch.
3. **Shime-daiko** – these are the highest pitched drums. They have their drumheads pulled taut over hoops by tensioning cords. Strictly speaking the drum most commonly utilized in taiko ensembles is the *tsukeshime-daiko*, the term **shime** representing a large class of drums, but taiko drummers simply call the *tsukeshime-daiko* ‘shime’ for short.
4. **Nagado-daiko** – a very common form of taiko, they are made of a single, hollowed out log, and are two-headed and barrel shaped.
5. **Hira-daiko** – drums which are wider than they are long; *hira-daiko* literally means “flat drum”; they are carved from a single block and have heads which are nailed down with tacks.
6. **Odaiko** – meaning literally a ‘very big’ drum, these are the largest drums in the taiko ensemble; they can be any of the styles of drums, but usually are of the ‘nagado’ variety. They can render very low pitches.

The drums that use tacks to secure their skins cannot be tuned, but the tension strands on the **okedo** and **shime** allow for some tuning.

Narimono - small, handheld percussion instruments

There are also metal instruments which are an important part of the taiko instrumentarium. These metal instruments are crucial for keeping time, and for other effects as well.

atarigane – this is a high pitched instrument, used for the metronome of the ensemble. It looks like a brass ashtray. It functions much the same as a clave does in Latin music – since it is high pitched and piercing, the entire ensemble can hear it, even when they are playing the taiko very loudly.

There are also cymbals, called **chapa**, used for ornamentation. There are Chinese chapa and Japanese chapa – the Chinese kind have a thicker metal and they are held with little handles and are struck together to render different rhythms.

Another Japanese instrument is the **hyoshigi**, a kind of wooden claves which render a very high, thin, and piercing sound, also helpful for keeping time.

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Modern taiko groups may utilize different instruments for time keeping and percussive effects. For example, Uzume Taiko utilizes Chinese temple blocks; however, the Japanese tradition is the original.

There is another Japanese instrument, a long, notched stick that is rubbed with a smaller stick. It is snake-like in appearance and makes a raspy sound like a guiro. It is called **bo-sasara**.

Other instruments

Uchiwa is a fan drum, in which a skin is stretched onto a hoop. It has a gentler sound (akin to the native North American drums sonically). To play it one holds it with one hand and beats it with a beater held in the other. With a variety of these, one can create ‘melodies’, as they have a nice round tone. However, dynamically the uchiwa cannot compete with the larger taiko.

Fue (transverse bamboo flute) is also part of the taiko tradition in Japan.

Selected nomenclature

Atarigane – a hand gong utilized in the taiko ensemble to keep time.

Bachi – this is the generic term for drum sticks.

Bo-sasara - a long, notched stick that is rubbed with a smaller stick. It is snake-like in appearance and makes a raspy sound like a guiro.

Chappa – small hand cymbals.

Chu-daiko - a term denoting any medium sized drum;

Fue – a term meaning broadly any wind blown instrument but mostly associated with the transverse bamboo flutes of Japan.

Hira-daiko - drums which are not as deep as they are wide, they are carved from a single block and have heads which are nailed down with tacks.

Hyoshigi - a kind of wooden claves which render a very high, thin, and piercing sound, very helpful for keeping time.

Kuchi showa – Aka. kuchi shoga, kuchi shoka, these are the sound words utilized to transmit Japanese music and taiko drumming patterns. Each syllable corresponds to one sound/beat.

Nagado-daiko - drums made of a single, hollowed out log, two-headed and barrel shaped.

Narimono – this is the generic term for small handheld percussion instruments.

Odaiko - meaning literally a very big drum, these are the largest drums in the taiko ensemble; they can be any of the styles of drums, but usually are of the ‘nagado’ variety.

Okedo-daiko - drums made of wood-staves, with heads stretched over steel rings and laced to the body with rope; the body is normally long relative to the head.

Shime-daiko - drums which have their drumheads pulled taut over hoops by tensioning cords;

Shumoku – a mallet utilized for playing the Atarigane.

Tsukeshime-daiko - A type of shime-daiko used much in taiko ensembles, referred to by taiko performers simply as *shime*.

Uchiwa-daiko – a taiko without a resonator, a hoop-fan with a skin stretched across, held in one hand and played with a beater in the other.

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Selected Bibliography and Discography

compiled by Michael O'Neill

Scottish Highland Bagpipe

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Discography

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- On Home Ground: Volume 1 and Volume 2*, Simon Fraser University Pipe Band, Greentrax Recordings Ltd., CDTRAX293, 2005-2006.
- Thunderstruck*, Gordan Duncan, Greentrax Recordings Ltd., CDTRAX241, 2004.
- The World's Greatest Pipers Volume 9, Pipe Major Bill Livingstone*, Lismor Recordings, LCOM 9095, 1991.
- Bothy Culture*, Martyn Bennett, Rykodisc, RCD 10381, 1997.
- Expression*, Andrew Douglas, Cnatural Music, 2005.
- Dream Tigers*, Matthew Welch, Tzadik, 8015, 2005.
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Japanese Taiko

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Undula, Uzume Taiko Ensemble, OO ZOO MAY Records, Zoom 003, 2006

The Drums of Tokyo, Oedo Sukeroku, Playasound, 1997. CD

Prism Rhythm, Kodo, SICL10003, 2006

Kyouten Douchi, Ondekoza, JVC Musical Industries, 1997.

Tsunami, San Francisco Taiko Dojo, self produced, 1997.

Quiet No More, Seattle Kokon Taiko, 1997.

Hibiki, Kenny Endo Ensemble, Bindu Records, CD #9801-2, 1998. (Studied and performed with Sukeroku).

LOUD, Loud, self-produced, Vancouver, BC, 1999, Distributed in Canada by Festival Distribution.

Ocean, Leonard Eto, NGCA, 2006. (L. Eto, formerly of Kodo).

Big Bang, Portland Taiko, 2003.

Haru, Eitetsu Hayashi, (E. Hayashi formerly of Ondekoza) with shamisen and Chinese erhu.

Important Taiko Groups in Japan and North America [compiled by Uzume Taiko, of Vancouver, BC, Canada]

U.S. Taiko Ensembles:

San Francisco Taiko Dojo (1968)

Kinnara Taiko (1969)

San Jose Taiko (1973)

Soh Daiko (1979)

Seattle Kokon Taiko (1980)

Shasta Taiko (1985)

Kenny Endo Ensemble www.taikoarts.com

On Ensemble www.onensemble.org

Tiffany Tamarabuchi www.sactaiko.org

Canadian Taiko Ensembles:

Katari Taiko (1981)

Hinode Taiko (1982)

Arashi Daiko (1983)

Uzume Taiko (1988)

Sawagi Taiko (1990)

Chibi Taiko (1993)

Fubuki Taiko (1995)

LOUD (1996)

Kiyoshi Nagata Ensemble (1998)

Japanese Ensembles:

KODO

Oedo Sukeroku

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Intercultural Scores by Michael O'Neill

Scores available from the composer.

Luffness (2000/2004), Scottish highland bagpipe trio and Japanese Taiko trio (collaborative work).

Dogfish Transformations (2002), prepared piano, Scottish smallpipes, percussion.

Being and Doing (1995, 2001), four bagpipes, tabla, and cymbals.

Lessons of the Garden: Metaforest and Field (2000), gamelan Degung and Scottish highland bagpipe.

Jedaya (1998), Scottish highland pipe band.

Every Part of the Animal (1996), taiko ensemble and bagpipe (collaborative work).

Stabimobilism (1995-96), bass clarinet and bagpipe.

Inish Beag (1991), bagpipes, synthesizer, l.e.d. sign machine.

Equus Alias Colore (Horse of a Different Colour) (1990.), four bagpipes, snare drum, bass drum.

Ur Og and Aji (1990), four bagpipes, bass clarinet, tabla.

Wind River (1989), bass clarinet, soprano sax, accordion, bagpipe.

Druid Jazz (1989), bagpipe, soprano sax, bass, drums.

Solar Tutorial (1987), two bagpipes, two soprano sax, percussion.

Lament for the Making of Sand (1986), two bagpipes.

Hieroglyphs: Where do Elks Accumulate? (1984), bagpipe, soprano sax, tabla.

Internet Resources and Electronic Media

Uzume Taiko, www.uzume.com

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Kenny Endo Ensemble, www.taikoarts.com

The Taiko. Parcwave, 1996. CD-ROM (mac/win).

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