



(LYRCD 7410)

SOH DAIKO

Taiko - - the Japanese drum. Stories of its musical origin are hinted at in legends about the beginning of Japanese culture written in the 7th C. The taiko acquired a multitude of symbolisms and powers in Japan's native Shinto religion including the ability to communicate with and entertain the gods, to mobilize and inspire warring armies, to chase away insects and to bring rain. Buddhism also gave it an important position, referring to its sound as the "voice of Buddha."

In the 1950's, a taiko Renaissance began in Japan, reaching the United States in 1968 with the fought of the San Francisco Taiko Dojo by master drummer Seiichi Tanaka. Having studied both the Sukeroku taiko style in Tokyo and with Daihachi Oguchi at the Ssuwa Grand Shrine, Tanaka-sensei became a tremendous influence in the U.S., offering instruction to groups across the country. Other groups started soon afterwards, notably the Los Angeles Kinnara taiko group, which began as a Buddhist study group. Their movement and music, based on Buddhist philosophy, became what Rev. Masao Kidani called "Japanese American Buddhist Taiko."

In 1979, members of the New York Buddhist Church formed and officially chartered a taiko group. Asking Rev. Hozen Seki for a name that would be a symbol of the group's values, the group received "Soh" which in pre-Buddhist times meant "peace, harmony and working together". The name reflects the spirit of dedication and cooperation which enabled the group to flourish from its beginnings with no teacher, virtually no experience, and with garbage cans, discarded tires and wine barrels serving as practice instruments.

Operating collectively, the group attracted members from New York City's Asian-American community. The group's current membership ranges from 10 to 15, with diverse backgrounds and professions. Early instruction came from various taiko players, Rev. Ron Miyamura of Chicago, Rev. Masao Kodani of Los Angeles, Russel Baba and Jeanne Mercer of Mount Shasta. Intensive workshops over a two-year period with Seiichi Tanaka dramatically changed their style and repertoire. Contact with members of the Kodo taiko group from Sado Island, Japan, also proved inspirational. Kodo's friendship resulted in a unique joint concert, "Lodo/Doh Daiko: A Taiko Celebration" at the Japan Society of New York in 1987. Shortly afterwards, Soh Daiko took its first trip to Japan, highlighted by a stay on Sado Island with hosts, Kodo.

In addition to drums, the group incorporates accessories such as bamboo flute, brass bells, conch shells, gongs, Tahitian pahu, African movement and choreography, requiring physical strength, endurance and energy, essential elements of what makes taiko more than mere percussion.

Soh Daiko has been featured on National Public Radio and the PBS children's program Reading Rainbow. In the New York area, they have performed at Carnegie Hall, the American Museum of Natural History, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn Botanic Garden and Lincoln Center as well as throughout the Asian-American community. They have also performed at the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival in Massachusetts, the Walker Art Center, Minnesota; the Morikami Museum, Florida; the USA-JAPAN Taiko Festival in San Francisco, California; and in Puerto Rico and London.

TRACKS:

1. Miyake Daiko. (5:40)

Adapted by Sanford Ikeda from an original arrangement by the Kodo drum group of Sado Island, Japan, this piece combines the unique festival drumming style and stance of the people of Miyake Island with the compelling rhythms of Hachijo Island.

2. Hiryu Sandan Gaeshi. (5:07)

Drummers call upon the dragon god to help mankind three times to change bad fortune into good and to bring peace and long life to us all. This is Soh Daiko's version of music originated by Daigachi Oguchi, taiko master of the Osuwa Grand Shrine, who took an excerpt from one of the shrine's norito, or ancient prayer. It also incorporates an adaptation of another Osuwa "song" pattern called Enjoys.

3. Yuudachi. (10:22)

Sanford Ikeda creates the sounds of an evening storm, incorporating a modified version of the traditional drum pattern Yatai Bayashi of the Chichibu region.

4. Hachidan Uchi Daiko. (8:47)

This arrangement by Jennifer Wada and Peter Wong is based on the dynamic movements and double drumming style originated by Tokyo's Oed Sukeroku Taiko group. Soh Daiko

learned the element of this piece from Seiichi Tanaka, master drummer and teacher of the San Francisco Taiko Dojo, who studied with the Sukeroku Taiko School.

5. Nimba/Jatsuri Daiko. (7:23)

Two festive pieces combining drums and dance. Nimba is traditional folk dance music that Soh Daiko frequently uses as an accompaniment to their version of Shishimai (lion dance). Matsuri Daiko, an original Soh Daiko arrangement that sets six drums in a circle, features improvisational solos to a traditional basic beat; the piece also incorporates festival music patterns learned from Seiichi Tanaka.

THE SOH DAIKO ENSEMBLE

Soh Daiko: Eba Aoki, Kenny Chin, Theresa Day, Elaine Fong, Toshi Kawanishi, Lori Kitazono, Choonyong Lee, Cynthia Mauro, Alan Okada, Merle Okada, Wendy Takahisa, Jennifer Wada, Legan Wong, Peter Wong, Theodora Yoshikami.

CREDITS

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