



INTRODUCTION TO JAPANESE TAIKO DRUMMING

Basic Techniques and Rhythms

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March 2020

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TAIKO & RENSHU

Playing Taiko

Taiko, like many traditional music traditions, uses an oral nomenclature to teach and preserve songs. Each hit has a particular sound (phonic or syllable) to represent it. Memorizing these sounds and learning to “sing” the song is the first step in learning to play the patterns. An ancient taiko proverb, loosely translated, states “If you can say it, you can play it.” (Same in African and Middle Eastern!)

DON	hard hit on drumhead; multiple hits written as <i>dogo, doro</i> or <i>doko</i>
tsu	soft hit on drumhead; multiple hits written as <i>tsuku</i>
ka	sharp rap on the rim; wood sound; multiple hits written as <i>kara</i> or <i>kaka</i>
su	rest or space; “empty hit” (some patterns use (<i>tsuku</i>) etc. for timing)

Tanaka Sensei of the SF Taiko Dojo wrote a short piece called ***Renshu*** (literally means *practice* or *training*) which incorporates these basic hits and is used to teach beginners. You might give it a try at home. (translates neatly to Djun-Djun)

RENSHU

composed by Seiichi Tanaka, SF Taiko Dojo

	ichi (one)	ni (two)	san (three)	shi (four)
1a.	DON	DON	DON	DON
1b.	Don – Don	don – don	DORO – tsuku	DON – DON
2.	DORO – tsuku	DORO – tsuku	DORO – tsuku	DON – DON
3.	DON – kara	DON – kara	DON – kara	kara – kara
4.	DON – tsuku	DON – tsuku	DON – tsuku	DON – DON
5.	su – DON	su – DON	su – DON	DON – su

Play each line twice. Note that the first line (1a-b) is eight counts long. Generally, hands alternate Right-Left. Exceptions are lines 3 and 4 where the *DON—ka-ra* and the *DON—tsu-ku* are played **R—R-L**.

Different instruments also have their own vocabulary, so you might hear:

shime	TE -‘n – TE-RA – tsu-ku – tsu-ku – TE-‘n – tsu-TA – TE-‘n – i – ya
atarigane	chi – chan – cha-cha – chi-ki – chi-cha – chan – cha-cha – chi-ki
odaiko	su-do – don – don – su-do – don – don – do-don – su

Please see the very helpful ***Taiko Primer*** from Seattle Kokon Taiko
<https://seattlekokontaiko.org/about/taiko-primer/>

NI YON MATSURI DAIKO

FESTIVAL DRUMS & 2/4

I learned the basics of *Matsuri Daiko* from Soh Daiko in NYC many years ago. I recently realized that the baseline was almost identical to that of our basic 2-4. This lends itself to some fun cross cultural world percussion playing around.

See “*Ni-Yon Matsuri Daiko*” experiment on the Shangö Percussion website.

tone.

Ju-ichi / Baseline

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
DON	Tsuku	Don	Don	DON	Tsuku	Don	Don

(2-4)

B	t t	B	T	B	t t	B t	S
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Matsuri Main

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
DON		DON		DON	<i>kara</i>	<i>ka</i>	<i>ka</i>
R	-	L	-	R	r l	r	r
Don	Don	(su)	Ko	DON	<i>kara</i>	<i>ka</i>	<i>ka</i>
R	R	-	L	R	r l	r	r
(su)	DON	(su)	Ko	DON	<i>kara</i>	<i>ka</i>	<i>ka</i>
-	R	-	L	R	r l	r	r
Ko Don		<i>kara</i>	Don	DON	<i>kara</i>	<i>ka</i>	<i>ka</i>
R L		r l	L	R	r l	r	r
<i>ka</i>	Don	<i>ka</i>	Don	DON	<i>kara</i>	<i>ka</i>	<i>ka</i>
R	R	-	L	R	r l	r	r
DoRo	<i>kara</i>	Don	Don	DON	<i>kara</i>	<i>ka</i>	<i>ka</i>
R L	R L	R	L	R	r l	r	r

The *Matsuri* main patterns and solos are played over the *juichi* / 2-4.

A typical, *but not the only*, arrangement might be to lead in with a roll, then the baseline. Then while some drums (typical higher pitched *shime-daiko*) would continue the *juichi* with a bell or *atarigame* - the lead drums would play the *matsuri* sequence (2-4x), then a set of solos alternating among the drums, then return to the sequence at a faster tempo (2-6x), then an ending roll and end beat. There are lots of ways to play *Matsuri*!

For Changö’s, set-piece version, we could alternate the solos with the *Diimbés*, *Doumbéks*, *Taiko* and *Djun Djun* and other percussion instruments.

MIYAKE TAIKO KUCHISHOGA

Ji-uchi

do don - do don - do don - do don - (3-on-4 played continuously under pattern)
L R L R L R L R

Pattern

don (tsuku) don (tsuku) don don (tsuku)
L R L R

don (tsuku) don (tsuku) don don [no rest!]
L R L R

do-donko don don
L R L R R

tsuteteko don don (tsuku)
L RRL R R

Five Solo Patterns

1. don don don don don don don don

2. DON tsu tsu DON tsu tsu DON DON
R L L R L L R L

3. don don (su) DON don don (su) DON
R L L R L L

4. do don (i-ya) do don (i-ya) do don (i-ya) do don (i-ya)
R L R L R L R L
or R L L R R L L R

5. don (su) don, don (su) don, don don
R L R L R L

Solo Ending

dodon dodon dodon dodon
R L R L R L R L

DON don don don don Don DON
R L R L R L R

do do (su) do (su) ko don do don (su) DON
R L L R R L R

SELECTED TAIKO GLOSSARY

Taiko – The Japanese word for drum. Can mean both the drum itself and the style of playing the drum. In Japan, **wadaiko** is used to differentiate the larger, barrel-sized drum that we refer to as simply *taiko*. (note **-daiko** is used in combination) Modern ensemble drumming is **kumidaiko**.

Atarigane – hand held brass gong; comes in various sizes, struck with a bobe and bamboo stick called a *shimoku*

BACHI – drumstick; various sizes, a common one being 15" to 16" long and 7/8" to 1" diameter; lighter bachi made of bass wood, heavier ones of *keyaki* (Zelkova wood – related to elms)

Beta-uchi – Upright playing style, drums played vertically

Chappa – hand cymbals; comes in various sizes

CHU-DAIKO (AKA *jozuke*) – or mid-sized drums; most often used for playing main parts and solos on songs; like the *odaiko*, the heads of these drums are stretched over the body and nailed down, so cannot be tuned; often played on slant stands (called *Sukeroku-dai* or *Naname-dai*)

Do – the body of the drum

Dojo – practice hall

FUCHI – the head and rim or face of the drum

Fue – flute; played to the side; usually made of bamboo (take-bue)

Hachimaki – headband; strip of cloth tied around the head

Happi – a short work coat; our uniform “tops”

HARA: In Eastern philosophy, the center of being. Generally located two finger-lengths below the navel, halfway towards the spine. Generation of *ki* comes from the *hara*. Also, the center of the head of the drum, which produces the deepest most resonant sound. Yes, a relationship here.

JI /JIUCHI – a basic line or pattern in a song, played to anchor and set time for a *taiko* song

Kata – form; basic body alignment and movement when striking the drum

Kiai – release of energy (*ki*); a shout/yell/vocalization (*ai*) emanating from the body's center; used to release own energy or to encourage others.

Kiyari – a type of festival chanting or song

Mimi – “ears”; the flaps over the side of the *odaiko* or *jozuke* used when pulling on the skin to tighten the head prior to nailing

Naname-uchi – Diagonal / slant playing style, with the drum on a slant stand (*naname -dai*)

Obi – a belt, sash, girdle; used to hold happi or kimono closed

ODAIKO – big drum; the largest drum in any ensemble is called the *odaiko*, but people often think of the very large drums (4-5 feet in diameter) played by San Francisco Taiko Dojo, Kodo or Ondekoza; usually played on a tower stand

Okedo – “barrel drum”; made of staves with straight sides; heads are constructed similar to the *shime*, but larger; heads also roped like a *shime*; heads can be 15" to over 3 feet in diameter; often played with flattened bamboo slats which give a “slapping” sound

SHIME-DAIKO – “tightened” drum; smaller, flat drums whose heads are pulled together by rope or metal bolts; highest toned drum, often used to maintain the base rhythm on songs.

Tabi – socks with a slit between the first and second toes to allow wearing of *zori* (sandals), Also refers to split toe *tabi* boots, often worn by Taiko players.

Uchiwa daiko – “fan drum”; single head stretched over an iron frame and stitched down, attached to a handle; also called “*sumo daiko*” because used to start sumo wrestling matches

Yuko-uchi – Side striking style, with both ends played, includes *Miyake*, *Odaiko* and *Hachijo* style.

Terms from: seattlekokontaiko.org, taikosource.com, and truetalltaikotales.blogspot.com.

RHYTHM EXERCISES IN 4/4

Exercises for learning to play Whole, Half, Quarter, Eighths, and Sixteenth notes, in African and Taiko nomenclature.

	1	-	2	-	3	-	4	-	1	-	2	-	3	-	4	-
1. WHOLE	B								B							
	Gun								Gun							
	Don								Don							
2. HALF	B				B				B				B			
	Gun				Gun				Gun				Gun			
	Don				Don				Don				Don			
3. QUARTER	B		B		B		B		B		B		B		B	
	Gun		Gun		Gun		Gun		Gun		Gun		Gun		Gun	
	Don		Kon		Don		Kon		Don		Kon		Don		Kon	
4. EIGHTS	B	T	T	T	B	T	T	T	B	T	T	T	B	T	T	T
	Gun	Go	Gun	Go	Gun	Go	Gun	Go	Gun	Go	Gun	Go	Gun	Go	Gun	Go
	Don	Kon	Don	Kon	Don	Kon	Don	Kon	Don	Kon	Don	Kon	Don	Kon	Don	Kon
5. SIXTEENTHS	B	T	T	T	T	B	T	T	T	T	B	T	T	T	T	T
	GunGo	GoDo	GoDo	GoDo	GoDo	GunGo	GoDo	GoDo	GoDo	GoDo	GunGo	GoDo	GoDo	GoDo	GoDo	GoDo
	DoKo	DoKo	DoKo	DoKo	DoKo	DoKo	DoKo	DoKo	DoKo	DoKo	DoKo	DoKo	DoKo	DoKo	DoKo	DoKo
	1	-	2	-	3	-	4	-	1	-	2	-	3	-	4	-

The choices of Bases and Tones, etc. are largely arbitrary. But it can be helpful to help keep the count, **B T T T B T T T ..** etc. But you can drop in patterns or rhythm phrases **B T T S**, **B T B S**, **BT TT SS TT**, experiment, have fun, sharpen your chops. Try playing sets of four and eight measures of each exercise. Make it interesting, try odd numbered or mixed sequences.