



Benzaiten

MONDAY, JUNE 10 | 3 PM

Performed by **TAIKOPROJECT**

Prepare to be swept away by a captivating fusion of tradition and innovation. TAIKOPROJECT isn't your typical taiko group; they present a dynamic contemporary mix of taiko, music, storytelling, and choreography. Inspired by Benzaiten, the Japanese goddess of everything that flows, this performance seamlessly weaves percussive power and strength with graceful elements. Experience the thunderous resonance of authentic taiko drums alongside the delicate tones of bamboo flutes and the ethereal sounds of the koto. And of course, be prepared for their awe-inspiring centerpiece: a 350-pound mother drum that will quite literally make the earth tremble beneath your feet!

"This ain't your mama's taiko, but it may be your hip, younger cousin's." - *LA Weekly*

ARTISTIC TEAM

Bryan Yamami, Executive Director
 Masato Baba, Artistic Director
 Scott LeGrand, Lighting Designer
 Yumi Saito, Choreographer
 Sueko Oshimoto, Costume Designer
 Glenn Suravech, Sound Consultant

PERFORMERS

Masato Baba
 Jen Baik
 Courtney Deguchi
 Sarah Gilbert
 Keiko Harada
 Jenny Mimura
 Blaine O'Brien
 Doug Sakamoto
 Gaku Sasaki
 Cody Yoshida

PROGRAM

NEW BEGINNINGS (2017)

Composed by Bryan Yamami & Masato Baba
 Celebrating the joy of renewal and infinite horizons

EXPANDING (2003)

Composed by Masato Baba, Bryan Yamami, & Shoji Kameda
 Widening the vocabulary of taiko performance and possibility

MUTE (2020)

Composed by Blaine O'Brien
 The often unified sight and sound of a strike, divided to individual phenomenon

GROUNDED (2018)

Composed by Masato Baba
 Longing for stability, a home found

KIDOU "ORBIT" (2019)

Composed by Masato Baba
 Constantly moving, gravity pulling, discovering

SKY BOY (2020)

Composed by Masato Baba
 A song for our son, Ayden Sora

THE DROP (2022)

Composed by Bryan Yamami
 Inspired by Leonard Eto & Kodo's Zoku

HERE WE GO NOW!! (2006)

Composed by Bryan Yamami & Masato Baba
 Connection and synergy between performers and audience

Program and cast subject to change

BIOGRAPHIES

BRYAN YAMAMI (Executive Director) founded TAIKOPROJECT in 2000 with the idea simply to create a modern American expression of taiko with the best next-generation taiko players. He served as creative lead for the acclaimed 2005 Mitsubishi Eclipse commercial, for recording sessions for Nike and Target, and for the group's appearances on the 2009 Academy® Awards, the 2011 GRAMMY® Awards, *Conan*, *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*, *The Late Late Show*, NBC's *The Voice*, Nickelodeon, and the 2018 MTV Music & Movie Awards. He has performed with John Legend, DJ Tiesto, rock band 30 Seconds to Mars, Sean Paul, Reggie Watts, and the legendary Stevie Wonder.

MASATO BABA (Artistic Director) began playing and studying taiko at the age of 6 under his parents, jazz musician Russel Baba and taiko drummer Jeanne Mercer, who were among the first members of San Francisco Taiko Dojo, the first taiko group in the United States. He was also a member of the Kenny Endo Taiko Ensemble and served as instructor and director of the Youth Group at Endo's school, the Taiko Center of the Pacific. He is a founding member of TAIKOPROJECT (dating back to 2000) and is recognized as one of the leading next-generation taiko and shinobue performers and composers in the United States.

YUMI SAITO (Choreographer) began studying and performing Nihon Buyo (traditional Japanese dance) at the age of 3 under Mme. Hanayagi Rokumie. In 2002, under the training of Mme. Hanayagi Wakana, she earned her natori and was granted the professional stage name of Hanayagi Wakaseira from the Hanayagi School in Tokyo, Japan. After furthering her studies, she returned to Japan in 2006 and earned her shihan (teaching degree). She began playing taiko in 2002 with the collegiate group Jodaiko at UC Irvine and joined TAIKOPROJECT in 2007. She currently serves on the instructional staff of Kishin Daiko (community group) and TAIKOPROJECT's adult beginning and youth intermediate classes.

SUEKO OSHIMOTO (Costume Design) is known for her innovative costume design, her imaginative use of unconventional materials, and a keen eye for detail. Her work has been featured in Best Costume award-winning fashion film and television and in numerous international fashion magazines such as *Vogue Italia*, *Vogue Germany*, and *L'officiel India*. Her academic studies in Japanese culture, passion for architecture, flower arrangement, color consulting and background as a kimono master for over 30 years led her organically into the discipline of costume design. She is also a member of Costume Designers Guild Local 892 and the founder of Kimono SK, a Japanese kimono costume house.

COMPANY HISTORY

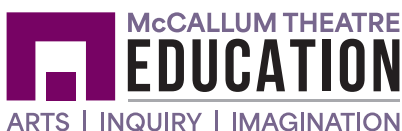
TAIKOPROJECT was founded in 2000 in Los Angeles, California by a group of young, emerging taiko drummers led by Bryan Yamami and Masato Baba. They were seeking to create a truly American style of taiko, blending traditional forms in which they were raised, with an innovative and fresh aesthetic approach to the Japanese drum. Over the past 24 years, they have garnered critical acclaim from all over the world and amassed an impressive resume.

TAIKOPROJECT first made waves when they became the first American taiko group to win the prestigious Tokyo International Taiko Contest in 2005, beating out all the Japanese taiko groups in attendance. That same year, they were cast in the Mitsubishi Eclipse commercial, the first and only national ad campaign to prominently feature taiko. They followed that up with performances in some of America's highest profile events, including the 2009 Academy Awards and the 2011 GRAMMY Awards.

In 2012, TAIKOPROJECT performed for the televised National Cherry Blossom Parade in Washington, DC, the Fall *X-Factor* semi-finals, Syfy's *Face/Off*, and was honored with the annual Visionary Award from East West Players. In 2013, TAIKOPROJECT was featured in rock band 30 Seconds to Mars' epic *Up in the Air* music video and appeared with the band on *Conan*, *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*, and the iHeartRadio Music Festival. They have also garnered national recognition by receiving major arts grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the MAPFund, the LA Arts Recovery Fund/America's Cultural Treasures Initiative, and the Japan Foundation.

TAIKOPROJECT has performed and recorded with some of the world's most well-known musical artists, including Stevie Wonder, Peter Gabriel, Alicia Keys, A.R. Rahman, John Legend, Kanye West, Sean Paul, producer Squeak E. Clean, as well as international stars such as Greek singer Antonis Remos, Persian singer Mansour, and DJ Tiesto. TAIKOPROJECT's recent activities include collaborations with Chieko Kojima and Ryutaro Kaneko of KODO, GRAMMY Award-winning Chicano rock band Quetzal, and Kabuki expert David Furumoto. TAIKOPROJECT members and students have recently appeared in trailers for Food Network's *Iron Chef Gauntlet*, Nickelodeon's "This is Me" campaign, the 2018 MTV Music and Movie Awards, and Playing for Change's 2020 release of *Biko*. In 2021, the ensemble recorded tracks for the Opening Ceremonies for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. Recently, the group has been featured in MTV and PBS Social promotional videos and guest performed with the band Atarashi Gakko at the 2024 Coachella Music Festival.

TAIKOPROJECT is sponsored by the Asano Taiko Co., Ltd. www.asano.jp
For more information, visit www.TAIKOPROJECT.org



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