University of Florida Performing Arts

presents

Yamato The Drummers of Japan

Sunday, November 18, 2007, 7:30 p.m.

Sponsored by

Dharma Endowment Foundation
PROGRAM

SHIN-ON: HEARTBEAT

My heartbeat was forged in ancient times
From one beat to the next, slowly it links together
(A thought set within each sound)
Carrying forth lives

I feel

This energy which flows from past to future

And today
I beat
With all my might

A beat connecting past with future

One beat, one sound.

PROGRAM NOTES

Since the day we formed Yamato, we have been thinking about the importance of “one beat, one sound.” As taiko (Japanese drum) players, we put our energy and thought into getting a resonating sound each time we beat the drum. The link between each of these beats is very important as well. It is as if our lives were made up of each of these moments every day. History, too, can be viewed as composed of links between each person, numerous links between people existing on the Earth. When we see ourselves as simple members of this Earth, we are surprised and moved to discover that, in fact, we have inherited our heartbeat from the past and will give it to the future. With this in mind, we beat the drums to meditate on the significance of “one beat, one sound,” “one piece of music, one performance,” and “one chance in our lives” to perform with Yamato.

For 15 years, the rigorous training of the 10 men and women of this troupe has allowed us to give all our energy to every beat of music that we play. Each beat of the drum is meant to synchronize with your heartbeats, and through this, all of our thoughts will be united. Today is the one chance for this we will have in our lives.

One beat, one sound.

We play, hoping that the heartbeat we make will become energy for tomorrow.

The first piece is called Yakara. In the Kansai Area, from which the group originates, Yakara means “youngsters full of vigor” (and also includes the notion of “violent”). We’d like to express the high spirit and energy of young people who are all the more vigorous for their ignorance of the world and their unconsciousness of the feelings of others.

The second piece is Hayate, which means “a wind which swiftly blows through.” According to the Beaufort Wind Scale, Hayate is ranked as “Wind Force 5.” Here, we play the syamisen, a kind of Japanese stringed instrument that invokes the moment this invigorating blast shakes the trees and ripples the water.
The third piece is Rekka or “fierce fire.” In our last two tours, two men performed this piece, but this time, a man and a woman will play it. As quick as lightning, and with thorough care, the two will compete with each other through the beat of the taiko.

Kizashi (or Sign) is the fourth piece. Originally composed in 1995, the hallmark of this piece is its speed and synchronicity. The sticks move like choreographed lightning. To perform this piece to perfection, we practice working together with beauty and harmony, even in our daily lives. We hope you will see the uniformity we’ve attained by living together in this way.

The fifth piece is Lion, which means “thunder.” In Japanese, its pronunciation is similar to the English word “lion.” In this piece we express the strong image of these two words, “thunder” and “lion,” through a typical Japanese drumming style called Kumi-taiko. In Kumi-taiko, players combine to beat many kinds of taikos. This form of taiko playing developed soon after the Second World War, and is now the most popular style of taiko performance. For us, playing in the Kumi-taiko style is the most enjoyable!

The sixth piece is Rakuda. Also a well-known musical style, this piece is one of our most important works, and playing it never fails to make us happy. Rakuda is a coined word whose Chinese characters literally mean “merrily” and “to beat.” The Japanese word rakuda also means “camel” in English. So, let’s conjure up the image of a happy-go-lucky camel and enjoy ourselves!

The seventh piece is Garakuta. This was performed for the first time on our previous tour. In this piece, we put down our drums in favor of the chappa, small cymbal-like instruments. The highlight of this piece is a comical scene in which big, burly men perform with these small instruments in their hands. In Japan we have a word, Oto-dama (or “the soul of sound”). Since ancient times, we have thought of sound as having a soul. For this piece, we have created a little performance where Oto-dama, or sound balls (another meaning of Oto-dama), fly back and forth. If one of these balls reaches you, we’d be very happy.

The final piece is called Shin-on. The sound of the Japanese drums is shin-on (or “heartbeat”) itself. It’s full of strength and vitality. For this piece, we bring Yamato’s big taiko to the front of the stage. With everyone present, we feel the heavy, low sound of the big drum shaking the Earth in the center of the stage. The sound of this drum becomes the sound of the heartbeats of the players, jumping around the stage. Your heartbeat too will synchronize with the sound. Gradually, all our heartbeats will overlap, and we will be united at last.

HISTORY

Yamato The Drummers of Japan (1993-2007)

Yamato was founded in 1993 in Nara, “the land of Yamato,” which is said to be the birthplace of Japanese culture. Based in Asuka Village in the Nara Prefecture, we travel all over the world with our traditional Japanese taiko drums. Since its formation 14 years ago, Yamato has played to more than one million people, over 1,000 performances in more than 20 different countries, and yet our enthusiasm remains undiminished. We continue to travel with several dozen drums of various sizes, displaying the instruments’ versatility and appeal, whether at impromptu street performances or in concert halls seating several thousand people.
In the years to come, we hope to meet more people through the taiko. These encounters are the greatest source of energy for our drumming.

**YAMATO’S STAGE**

Based in the thousand-year-old Asuka village and with the musical instrument Wadaiko as its core, Yamato looks for new expressions in drumming. We aren’t trying to inherit or pass on the traditional music of ancient times, but seek the creation of new Japanese stage performances based on Wadaiko.

Drums have existed since time immemorial, and the sound never fails to stir people, whatever their age, language, or origin. When we, the taiko drummers of Yamato, play our drums, we pour our hearts into them so that their sound will echo our beating pulse, which is the resounding essence of all living things. When we perform in front of an audience, we feel the power and warmth of life’s rhythm, which is found in every corner of the earth, giving courage and strength to those who accept life as it is.

Yamato’s drummers must first find the “heart tone” of the sound. We try to expose the very heart of life which is beating inside our bodies and is the origin of performance energy. It is the heartbeat of a lonely runner, beating hard in his smooth flesh and the embodiment of the soul that strongly supports it. You can’t see it with your eyes or touch it with your hands, but it exists beyond a doubt. Our intensive training helps us make this heartbeat reverberate the world over, sometimes with gentleness, sometimes with overpowering force. For the drummers of Yamato, it is a celebration of the sound inherited by humanity at the beginning of time.

Yamato’s drums sound in places where people gather. When the drummers’ beating resonates with the audiences’ heartbeats, ripples from their hearts gently overlap each other. In this moment of performance, when an “encounter” happens in space and time, great forward energy is generated, giving us the strength to continue on the journey of creation and expression. This feeling is what we wish to share with our audiences.

**CURRENT WORLD TOUR**

“Encounter” is the root of Yamato’s energy, and this world tour is a journey to exchange this energy. Departing Asuka Village, the land of Yamato, we run through the world beating our drums, looking for these encounters.

In order to keep this energy coming to us for the arduous training and concert tours, we started the world tour with the motto, “If you call us, we will go.” In 2007, we toured Europe for seven months from February through September, and will tour North America from October through December. Through 200 performances in 10 countries, we look forward to many new encounters.

From the land of Yamato and into the world, Our path leads us back to the place we began. So the journey continues...

**MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS**

**Nagado-daiko (miya-daiko)**

The “long-bodied drum” has a rounded, barrel-shaped appearance. (The cowhide heads are nailed onto the body of the drum with tacks). This is the prototypical taiko drum, most often associated with taiko drumming.
**Hirado-daiko**
The “flat drum” is the general term for a drum that is wider than it is deep.

**Odaiko**
Translated as “big, fat drum,” the Odaiko is made from a huge tree more than 400 years old, and it refers to a drum of any type that is larger than 84 centimeters in diameter.

**Okedo-daiko**
A drum constructed from staves, like a barrel, it is often placed horizontally on a tall stand and can be played by two drummers at the same time.

**Shime-daiko**
A rope-tensioned drum, especially the small, rope-tuned drum often used in Noh and Kabuki.

**Uchiwa-daiko**
A hand-held taiko drum, the skin of which is stretched by stitching over a hoop and attaching a handle.

**Atarigane**
A hand gong often used to keep time. It is held in the hand or suspended by a cord and struck with a deer-horn mallet called a Shumoku.

**Dora**
A gong shaped like a shallow plate, made from a mainly copper alloy. It is often used in Japan for Buddhist memorial services, as a stage prop for timing or in the climax scenes of Kabuki plays.

**Shinobue**
A bamboo transverse flute, also known as Fue, Hayashi-Bue, Takebue or Yokobue.

**Shamisen**
A banjo-like instrument with three strings, often claimed to be the best instrument for expressing Japanese sensitivity and feelings.

**Koto**
A Japanese zither that usually has 13 strings, although bass and custom-built versions with more strings are also found.

**Chappa**
Small hand cymbals, also called Tebyoushi.

**BIOGRAPHIES**

**What does shin-on mean to you?**

**Masa Ogawa**
When I run around the hills and fields, struggling against the wind, I can feel my heartbeat racing in my body. I stop and listen carefully. I hear each shin-on or heartbeat throbbing inside me. Life is pulsing in me. I look up at the sky, then down at my feet. I stand on the Earth. Each pulse measures out a day, and each day measures out a life. I exist within the ceaseless flow of time on the Earth. In each moment something is born and something dies. Ah, the moment! When I strike the drum once with all my strength, this is another
form of the moment. It is proof that I exist here and now. The sound of the taiko is the soul of sound. The energy of life exists within it – life that takes the past to the future. This is the meaning of shin-on. Let’s absorb a bit of this energy today. As each shin-on links life together, so each stroke I make with all my body and soul will create this performance of Yamato.

Takeru Matsushita
The first thing the word shin-on (“heartbeat”) reminds me of is my heart. Since the day I was born, my heart has been beating quietly and strongly without fail. This comforting sound is the incarnation of my vital power. It is the evidence of my life. Shin-on also makes me think of a voice or cry that emanates from the heart; in short, a feeling. My heart has feelings that change from day to day. Without a word, the voice in my heart expresses happiness, anger, sorrow, and joy throughout my body. So, shin-on for me is a voice in my heart that gives me the energy to take action. It is without form or substance, but its emotion is as indispensable to me as my heartbeat. And it is this shin-on that brings the sound from my taiko, my drum.

Akiko Ogawa
Shin-on is the sound I seldom notice: it is the sound of my heartbeat. Rarely are we conscious of its work, but it is repeated day-in and day-out without rest. Quietly and steadily it continues. “How many times have I heard my own heartbeat?” I asked myself. I remember that as a child, I was sometimes frightened: “My heart will be broken some day!” I used to think.

My heartbeat strikes me, so I strike the taiko. Everyone’s heartbeat strikes the taiko. Again and again it beats. Then all of our heartbeats overlap and become one. And people send this sound to each other all over the world. My shin-on leads me to this thought. I’d like to make the taiko resonate with the heartbeats of many people. To me, it means I’m living, and driven by shin-on, I am at the mercy of my feeling.

Mika Miyazaki
They say that we hear our mothers’ heartbeat in the womb from five months before we are born and that the memory of this travels on in our subconscious, never to be forgotten. That’s why we feel secure when we hear a steady beat even when we’re adults. Listening to the beat of taiko, I think of the heartbeat I must have heard in my mother’s body. When I give myself over to this, I feel safe. So I understand why, in spite of its volume, some children even fall asleep while hearing this drum. Now I’m lucky enough to have the opportunity to teach children how to beat the taiko. And I have realized the power it has. Just touching the drum can change the expression on a child’s face. Their eyes begin to shine and they burst into smiles. It builds up their energy, and with this energy they make their paths to the future. I’d like to be a drummer who can inspire children’s hearts and bring them energy for life.

Satomi Ikeda
Shin-on is the heartbeat that throbs in our bodies. Time passes without me being aware of it. In fact, I think this means I am in good health, and so I give thanks for this. I feel able to communicate with people when I feel their heartbeats inside me. When I play the taiko with friends, our heartbeats and our feelings become one. The drummers’ breath becomes one with the audience. In the end, the sound of our shin-on does not actually reach our ears – it seems as if it were echoing in space, sometimes with passion, sometimes with gentleness. When I feel shin-on, I feel a peace of mind. It is the first sound everyone in the world experiences. A heartbeat is the first great comfort that enveloped our whole body. This is the sound I want to bring from my taiko.
Midori Tamai
When I considered what shin-on means for me, what first occurred to me was the simple sound of the heart: the heartbeat. I’ve never been very conscious of my own, but when I think about it, the throb of the heartbeat is the sound we hear from birth to death. It is the most familiar sound we will ever hear, the one we will hear for the longest time, and I think we feel it unconsciously at every moment. The sound of the Japanese drum is like a heartbeat: we don’t hear it with our ears, but we feel it naturally in our bodies. This is the sound I’d like to make with the taiko: one we don’t listen to, but feel.

Tetsuro Ohkubo
Shin-on or heartbeat continues without pause from birth to death. For me, it is the very source of my being. Rock music sometimes makes me impulsive and I lose my reason. I cannot explain this feeling, but I think it must come from the depths of my body, from my shin-on. On the other hand, when I am calm and relaxed, the shin-on in my body will sound just as calm, and it envelops everything in me. Everyone has this shin-on, and I’d like to feel it with people from all over the world. It can travel everywhere and to everyone, and it makes me feel that we are living together in the same place at the same time. Sometimes passionately, and other times quietly…

Tomoko Kawauchi
Shin-on is what seems to have existed forever, but will not persist forevermore. It beats irrespective of my will, and, depending on my feeling, sometimes it pounds and sometimes it fades imperceptibly into the background. Since I’m pretty sure it will be completely gone someday, I’d like to spend my time on earth coloring this sound in my heart. I communicate my shin-on through the taiko. Playing it alone can be powerful, but when we play taiko with friends, the sound of the instruments and our heartbeats resonate together, and the power of our shin-on becomes mercurial and endless. This is the feeling I’d like to bring from the stage and give to the audience, so that all of us can beat together. Five years have passed since I joined Yamato, and everyday my shin-on has been evolving little by little. During the Shin-on Tour, I’d like to make the sound of my heart strong yet gentle.

Saori Higashi
I beat the drum. The drum sounds. The sound travels. Shin-on. For me, shin-on means the voice of the eternal spirit. It is the spirit of the people and the people themselves. I wonder how much of my spirit and humanity I can put into each sound of the taiko. I would like to be able to give this energy to different people all over the world, but sometimes I doubt if I am experienced enough to convey all my thoughts through the sound of the taiko. So, the first thing I need to do is to train, and when I think that someday my taiko could reach people, I get excited about the endless possibilities before me. I’d like to fill up spaces with the sound of my heart today and for as long as I live.

Takaoki Masui
Shin-on means the music that the heart plays. When it comes out of peoples’ bodies, sometimes it is expressed as jazz, rock, popular song, hymns, indeed every type of music. It reaches people through other kinds of artistic expression as well, such as painting, architecture, movies, fashion, and literature. Shin-on transforms itself into different activities and echoes in the air. Whatever the form, when people are in touch with each other, they communicate by means of this music of the heart. My shin-on is expressed as wadaiko or traditional Japanese drum. Once it sounds, my heart dances. My shin-on resonates with the water in my body and the vibration makes me shake. This music from my heart becomes the sound of wadaiko, and that makes you shake. My body and your body sound together. Water, land, sky, and all living creatures encompassed by them resonate and become one. Wadaiko has the power to unite everything on the Earth. Today, when I beat the wadaiko,
I will listen to this great symphony of everything around me and myself together, and I will abandon myself to the newly born harmony.

**Marika Nito**
Shin-on is the sound of the heart and must be received before it can exist. Created in this way from the communication between hearts, shin-on is born of people and felt by people. Various thoughts I have – gratitude to others and to things that have supported me – these feelings I share with someone else through my shin-on. This shin-on exchanged between two people will go onward to more people and continue to spread out until it becomes one big circle. I would like to be in the center of this circle and for all the people in the circle to feel the same way I do. I’d like to create my space, my stage, in which I feel in communion with people, creating this sound of the heart with others. Today I will beat the drum with someone in my mind, hoping that my sound can motivate that person. I wonder how much thought I can put in the sound of wadaiko when the sticks in my hands touch its surface.

**Maiko Doi**
The word shin-on reminds me of three words: the first, shin, meaning “heart”; the second, “sincerity,” whose Chinese character is the same as shin; and the third, “core” or the most important part of something. When I use these words to reflect on my own shin-on, I ask myself, Heart: How much sympathy do I have for others? Sincerity: Do I lead a sincere life? Core: What is the steady thought in the center of my mind? Life is a struggle sometimes. In this life, my shin-on is always with me, sometimes changeable and other times constant. I hope my heart will be able to communicate with yours through the sound of my taiko.

**Gen Hidaka**
Boom, boom, boom... This is the sound of shin-on for me. Without batteries or a plug, it has been beating in me ceaselessly for 24 years. It persists whether I am feeling fine or feeling down. Wherever I am and whatever time of day, I hear this sound in my chest. I’ve heard the sound unconsciously every day, but when I listen to it carefully, I feel alive. It is the sound that tells us of the power of life on the Earth. I feel the limitless energy of this power, and I strive to express it every day through the taiko. This is what I’d like to make – the sound that gives energy to people – but I feel like I’ve only just scratched the surface. As long as my shin-on beats, I will keep on trying.

**Misato Sugiyama**
For me, shin-on (“heartbeat”) is like waves that ebb and flow without pause in people’s hearts. I’d like to think that these waves come together and become one through the wadaiko. The warm waves of shin-on surging back and forth in our hearts synchronize with the sound of the wadaiko and intertwine with the waves in the hearts of the audience. Together, they become one big wave wrapped in the sound of wadaiko. This feeling of being wrapped by one great shin-on is like that of a child being held in his mother’s arms. When I give myself over to these waves, I feel very comfortable. It is a moment when we can recognize each other perfectly. This wonderful power of wadaiko makes my emotions overflow. I’d like to create this one great shin-on together with many people and share it with them every day.

**CREDITS**

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