

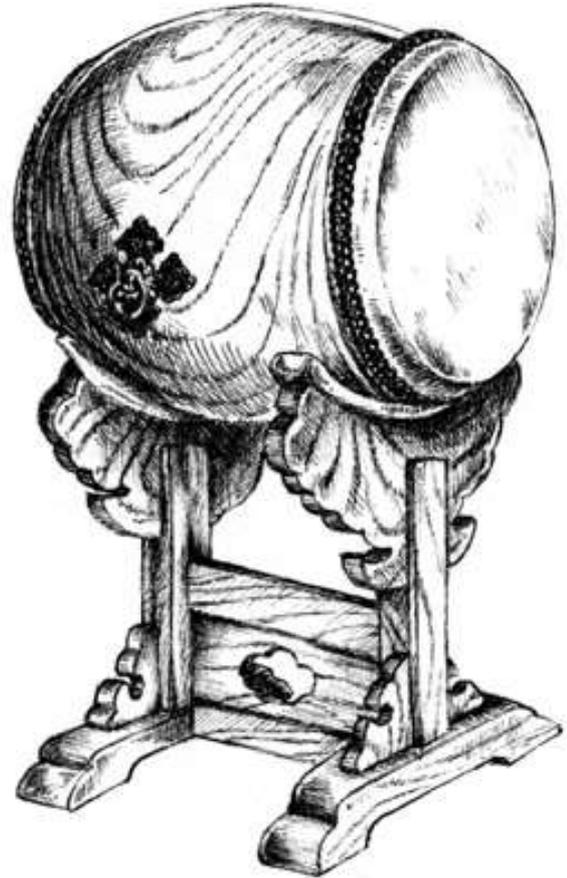
## INSTRUMENT DESCRIPTIONS

*Taiko* is the Japanese word for 'drum'. When rendered in *kanji*<sup>1</sup>, taiko appears thus: 太鼓. The first character, – *tai* – means 'fat' or 'big around' and the second, 鼓 – *ko* – is 'drum', hence 'big, fat around drum'. Taiko instruments come in many shapes and sizes and, generally speaking, can be grouped into two overall categories according to their method of tuning:

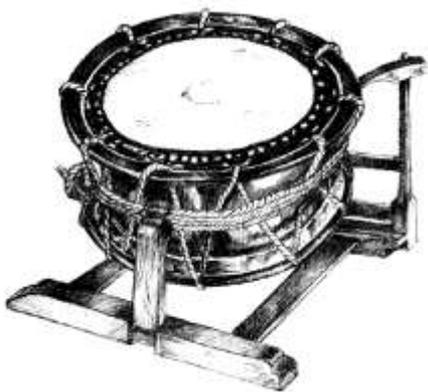
1. *Miyadaiko*
2. *Shimedaiko*

*Miyadaiko* (literally, 'shrine drums') are solid-body taiko usually carved from one tree log with the skins tuned and held in place by tacks. Another term for this type of taiko is *byōdaiko*<sup>2</sup>.

Miyadaiko<sup>3</sup>



*Shimedaiko* on the other hand, can either be solid-body or stave-construction drums with skins that are tuned by means of rope.



Shimedaiko

<sup>1</sup> *Kanji* are Japanese written characters based on Chinese script.

<sup>2</sup> The Japanese word *byō* means 'tack' in English.

<sup>3</sup> All illustrations by Meegan Parkee

## Miyadaiko Chūdaiko

*Chūdaiko* is a modern way of referring to a 'medium [sized] drum'. The shell is carved from a single trunk of wood, the finest of which is *keyaki*, a hard, dense and very heavy wood that results in a sound with great carrying power.

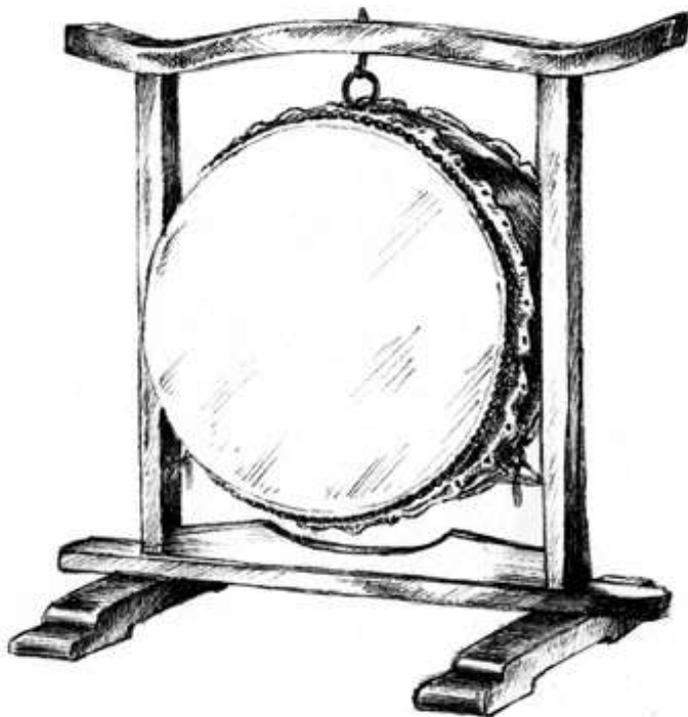
There are many styles in which this taiko can be played, including the popular Chichibu Yataibayashi style, which places the *chūdaiko* on a stand at an angle with the player seated at the instrument, and Miyake style in which the *chūdaiko* is placed on a low stand, horizontal to the floor, and beaten by players on each end.



Chūdaiko

## *Nagadō* (also known as *Nagadōdaiko*)

This is similar to the *chūdaiko*, but its body is slightly longer than it is wide (from *nagai* meaning 'long'). *Nagadō* skins are also slightly thinner than those of *chūdaiko* and therefore higher and lighter in tone. Nevertheless, the two terms – *nagadō* and *chūdaiko* – are interchangeable.



all modern adjustments made by Kodo.

Hiradō

## *Hiradō* (aka *Hiradōdaiko*, *Hiradaiko*)

*Hira* means 'flat' and *dō* (pronounced 'dough') 'body'<sup>4</sup>, hence 'flat-body drum'. The skin of the *hiradō* is tuned and held in place by tacks (*byō*) with the flat dimensions of the wooden shell producing a deep pitch, but without the resonance of the longer-bodied *ōdaiko*. This taiko is traditionally much smaller than the modern and now very common, large *hiradō*, and is suspended in a frame using ropes, played vertically. Laying the drum down, making it bigger, and sometimes playing it with a single bachi shaped like a baseball bat are

<sup>4</sup> *Dō* is more correctly translated as 'trunk' or 'torso'.

## ***Ōdaiko***

The ‘ō’ in *ōdaiko* literally means ‘big’ or ‘grand’. These days the term is often used for any drum larger than 84cm in diameter but it can also refer to the largest drum in the musical ensemble; for instance, even though the *chūdaiko* used in Chichibu Yataibayashi is measured around 2-shaku<sup>5</sup> (60cm) in diameter, the Chichibu players often refer to this taiko as *ōdaiko* rather than *chūdaiko* (medium drum) because it is the largest taiko in the ensemble (the other being *shimedaiko*).

Australian-made  
*ōdaiko*



(Photo by Régis Lansac)

Traditionally, the *ōdaiko* was played in a side-on position. However, because this method has a tendency to limit the freedom of movement in the left arm and hand, one of the most significant innovations of taiko soloist Eitetsu Hayashi was to ‘equalise’ the two arms and hands by facing the *ōdaiko* (i.e. playing with his back to the audience). In *Ondekoza*, Hayashi was the main *ōdaiko* player: with the encouragement of the group’s leader Tagayusu Den he developed this unique method of playing in order to achieve greater power, dynamic control, rhythmic complexity and ultimately a higher form of musical expression. It is no surprise that the style of playing the *ōdaiko* with the back to the audience (now called *seitai-gamae* style) has become extremely popular.

Taikoz’s main performance *ōdaiko* is over 1-meter in diameter (3.6-shaku in the old Japanese measurement) and was made in 1996 by two Tasmanian craftsmen, internationally acclaimed wood sculptor Marcus Tatton and drum maker Dan Magnus. It is made from a single trunk of Stringybark eucalyptus. The original Tasmanian-made skins were replaced in January 2011

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<sup>5</sup> *Shaku* is an old Japanese unit of measurement that is still used to measure the size of a taiko. One *shaku* is approximately 30cm.

A *shaku* is made up of 10 smaller units called *sun*. The largest *ōdaiko* in Japan can reach over 6-*shaku* in diameter; i.e. 180cm or more! The word *shakuhachi* (end-blown bamboo flute) literally means ‘one *shaku*, eight *sun* – a common size of *shakuhachi*.’

with Asano Taiko skins. The head of the Asano Taiko Company, Yasuo Asano, undertook the tuning of the skins.

## **Shimedaiko**

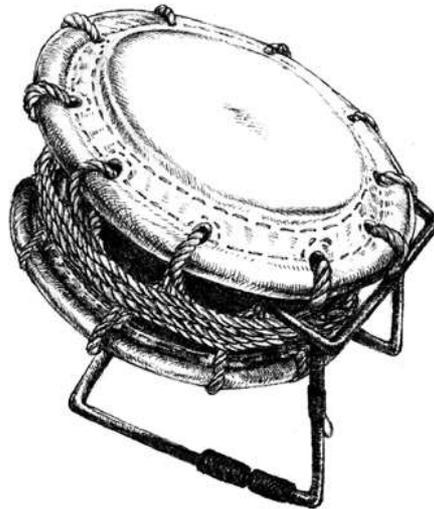
### ***Shimedaiko***

This name comes from two words: *shimeru*, the verb ‘to tie’ or ‘fasten’ – most commonly with rope – and ‘taiko’. The *shimedaiko* is a small high-pitched drum that is seen and heard in *min’yō* (Japanese folksongs) as well as the *kabuki* and *noh* theatres. Each skin is wrapped around a metal ring and held firmly in place by stitching. Holes in the skin allow the rope (called *shirabe*) to be fed through, which is then tensioned and tied with a series of knots to attain and hold the optimum pitch. A small patch of deerskin is pasted to the centre giving the drum a soft, mellow tone. (See previous illustration).

### ***Tsukeshimedaiko* (aka *Shimedaiko*)**

The *tsukeshimedaiko* ‘affix’, ‘attach’) is more *shimedaiko* and is similar described above, but It can be tuned to a high although bolts are now *shimedaiko* is most (festival) music and is a taiko ensembles.

*Tsukeshimedaiko* come in a measured by the depth of corresponding thickness of and lightest sized *namitsuke* and this ranges strength to 5 *chogake*<sup>6</sup> common size used in ensembles is 4 *chogake*



(*tsuke* means to ‘append’, often referred to simply as to the *shimedaiko* without the deerskin patch. pitch by means of rope, often used. This style of commonly used in *matsuri* mainstay of most mixed-

range of sizes that are the wooden shell and the skin. The shallowest *shimedaiko* is referred to as upward in thickness and *shimedaiko*. The most professional taiko

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<sup>6</sup> *Chogake* refers to a system of measurement commonly used for *tsukeshimedaiko*. There are four sizes that range from 2 *chogake* to 5 *chogake*. 2 *chogake* *shimedaiko* have lighter shells and thinner skins, whereas 5 *chogake* *shimedaiko* have the heaviest shells and thickest skins. Because of their very solid materials, 4 and 5 *chogake* *shimedaiko* are capable of being tuned to a very high pitch. *Chogake* is often shortened to *cho*.

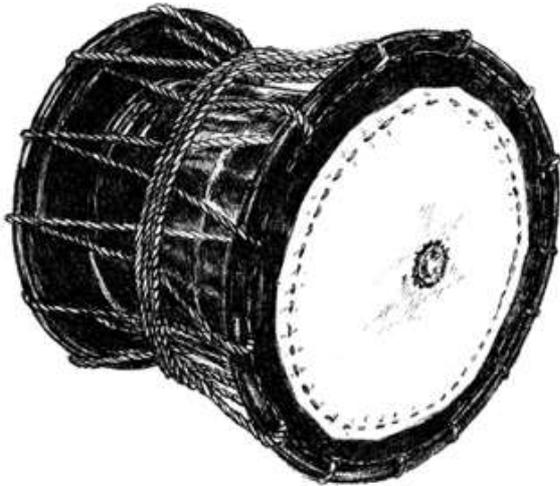
***Okedō* (aka *Okedōdaiko*, *Okedaiko*, *Okejimedaiko*)**

The name stems from two words: *oke*, meaning 'bucket' or 'tub' and *dō* meaning, 'body'. The shell is made from staves of lightweight *hinoki* or *sawara* wood that are held together by glue and a ring made of bamboo. Generally speaking, the *okedō* has a medium to low pitch depending on its diameter and depth. The skin is stitched to a metal ring similar to the *shimedaiko* described above.

There are sub-categories of *okedōdaiko* such as:

**• *Dengaku Okedō***

*Dengaku* literally translates as 'rice-field music', a type of music derived from a popular genre of dance and music entertainment in the 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The *dengaku okedōdaiko* used to accompany the dance is made from *hinoki* wood, covered in lacquer, tuned by rope and light enough to wear around the player's shoulders.

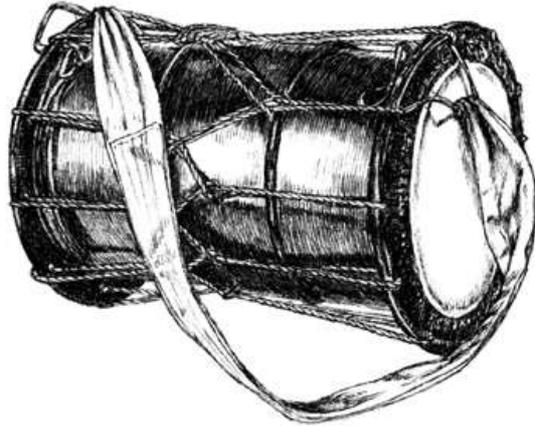


**• *Eitetsu Okedō***

Eitetsu Hayashi, the great taiko soloist and innovator, developed an *okedō* whose shell is slightly longer than its diameter. The sound is generally deeper and fuller in tone and often used as part of the taiko set.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The taiko set is essentially a drum kit of taiko comprising one or two *shimedaiko*, one or more *okedō* with the addition, sometimes, of a small *nagadō*, which gives a single player a relatively wide choice of tones and pitches.



• **Katsugi Okedō**

Literally ‘shouldering *okedō* is of lightweight under 10kgs – enabling

taiko over the shoulder and play while moving. The virtuosic stick work most commonly associated with this instrument is a modern development widely attributed to the Kodo ensemble. *Katsugi okedō* is capable of fast, intricate rhythms and, as such, is often used in up-tempo, festive music. The metal ring that the skin is attached to does not protrude beyond the wooden shell as much as Eitetsu-style and *dengaku okedō*, allowing for greater ease in executing the fast, fluid cross-over movement of the left hand *bachi* (stick).

drum’, the *katsugi* construction – usually a player to sling the



**FUE (Flutes)**

**Takebue, shinobue, komabue, kagurabue**

*Fue* means ‘flute’. Another meaning ‘bamboo flute’. The *shinobue* refers to a specific *shino* that is often used in

***nohkan, ryūteki,***

name is *takebue*<sup>8</sup>, more common type of bamboo called making *fue*.

A wide range of bamboo, side-used in combination with the most common, while the

blown flutes can be taiko: the *shinobue* is instrumental ensemble that

<sup>8</sup> The *fu* in *fue* changes to *bu* when following a prefix.

accompanies *noh* and kabuki. Other types of side-blown flutes are *ryūteki*, *komabue* and *kagurabue*.

The shinobue is a transverse flute made from the upper length of *shino* bamboo. The shinobue is used in *kagura*<sup>9</sup> performance as well as in the *noh* and kabuki theatres and as accompaniment to folk songs, but it is most commonly heard in the *hayashi* ensemble. With its high pitch and musical versatility, it lends itself very well to the modern taiko ensemble and is now a mainstay of most groups.

There are two types of shinobue: *uta* and *hayashi*. The *uta* flute has seven finger holes and is tuned to a scale that equates to the seven tones of the Western diatonic scale, while the *hayashi* flute has six holes and adopts different pitch intervals that are well suited to festival and folk music. Because the *shinobue* is used in a variety of musical contexts – and often as accompaniment to singers and to instruments such as the *shamisen* – players are often required to have a range of different pitched shinobue at their disposal.

The inner bore of the *shinobue* is often covered in *urushi* (lacquer). Sometimes the outside is lacquered, too – the shiny, black *shinobue* used in Onikenbai from Iwate Prefecture is a good example of this type of *fue*. Often the ends and middle are bound in thin strips of bamboo (rattan), which helps prevent the flute from splitting in extreme weather conditions.

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Extract from *Wadaiko: A Handbook* by Ian Cleworth  
Illustrations by Meegan Parkee

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<sup>9</sup> *Kagura* is an ancient Shinto theatrical-dance-music form that is said to predate *noh*