

Taiko (called **Wadaiko** in Japan, literally meaning “Large Japanese Drum”) is a combination of percussion, dance and martial arts mixed with power, speed and synchronous movement...resulting in an awe-inspiring experience.

Between seven and ten thousand years ago, in the Jomon Period, simple taiko beats would be used to signal that the village hunters were setting out to gather food, or to signal that a storm was coming and everyone should find shelter. The taiko drums were used as a way of calling out to the whole village at one time to relay certain messages or to call a village meeting. This was used as a simplistic variation of village and town loudspeaker announcements which take place in many parts of modern Japan. The taiko were also used as a means to pray for rain and for a successful harvest, as well as to strike fear into an enemy before battle. Since that time, taiko has been a deeply rooted aspect of Japanese history and culture. The rumbling power of the taiko has also long been associated with the gods, and has been appropriated by the philosophical beliefs and Shinto religion of Japan.

In the modern era, taiko drumming was revolutionized and made popular by Grandmaster Daihachi Oguchi, who is noted as the person who created the original performance art of taiko drumming when he established his own performance group in 1952. Since 1952, Grandmaster Oguchi travelled extensively to teach many the art of kumi-daiko (ensemble drumming), eventually helping to establish many other groups in Japan, the U.S. and Singapore.

This dynamic style, pioneered by Grandmaster Oguchi and also made internationally famous by two other groups, Oedo Sukeroku Daiko and Ondekoza, has grown quickly to incorporate the three distinct components of percussion, martial arts and dance, which are interwoven with kakegoe (voice), kata (form) and waza (technique) to create a highly sophisticated form of solo and ensemble performance.

Art Lee had previously studied the Osuwa Daiko and Oedo Sukeroku Daiko styles of taiko while in the U.S., however, he began extra study with Grandmaster Daihachi Oguchi shortly after moving to Japan in 1998. Art Lee was greatly honored in 1999 when Grandmaster Daihachi Oguchi invited him to join Osuwa Daiko, and then the newly-formed, internationally touring group Ashura-gumi in 2002.

Apprentices and performers of Wadaiko Ensemble Tokara are all taught the traditional style of taiko, including the Osuwa Daiko style. Extensive training in these traditional styles as apprentices is a prerequisite to begin training in the unique Tokara style.