

Boston-born Taiko group takes drumming to new heights

Thursday, Nov. 20, 2008

In its earlier days, confides Odaiko New England's managing director Juni Kobayashi, this Boston-bred taiko drumming group coaxed rhythms from makeshift instruments and hand-me-down equipment.

"We drummed on old, taped-up tires and borrowed taiko," Kobayashi said of music-making efforts in the mid-1990s. "With Japanese taiko drums being prohibitively expensive, we followed in the footsteps of fellow North American taiko groups and made our own taiko from California oak wine barrels. To this day, (the ensemble) still makes some of its taiko."

Now presenting a more polished appearance, along with its ever-present sense of rhythm, Odaiko New England (ONE) has performed throughout the United States, including shows at the North American Taiko Jam in Los Angeles, the Kennedy Center's Cherry Blossom Festival in Washington, D.C., and the First Night Boston Millennium celebration, as well as concerts and festivals at universities and community organizations throughout the Northeast. In addition, ONE members teach community members in weekly adult and children's taiko classes and community and corporate workshops.

The group will return to North Conway for a 7 p.m. performance Friday, Nov. 21, at Kennett High School.

"The performance last year was so exciting and inspiring," said the school's music director Therese Davison. "We had to have them back so that people could see them again, and those who missed them could have a chance to experience taiko for the first time."

The energetic performance features the powerful sound of the taiko combined with dynamic movement.

In Japan, the sounds of these drums are infused into various aspects of daily life.

"From Shinto and Buddhist rituals to celebratory festivals, the taiko is said to be the voice and spirit of the Japanese," show officials said. "ONE continues the exciting tradition that is the hallmark of American taiko groups, combining traditional Japanese rhythms with other musical elements drawn from jazz, rock, Latin and African traditions."

Performers will include Kobayashi, artistic director Mark Rooney, Shigeru Watanabe and Kristen Koyama, as well as the Kennett High School's drumline. *Tickets to the Northern New Hampshire show are \$5 for students, \$10 for adults and \$20 for families, and are available in advance from the KHS Performing Arts Department at 356-4360.*



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