

WHY TAIKO?
 UNDERSTANDING TAIKO PERFORMANCE AT NEW ZEALAND'S
 FIRST TAIKO FESTIVAL

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ABSTRACT

Established and active taiko (Japanese drumming) groups in New Zealand have a relatively short history. While one group was founded nearly two decades ago, and has a connection to tertiary education, several other groups have emerged more recently as a result of individual enthusiasm and community interest. At the core of much of this taiko activity is a negotiation between innovation and authenticity. Based on ethnographic research at New Zealand's first taiko festival, this paper highlights the ways players often look to Japan as the home of taiko, yet at the same time include experimentation as a way of realising the existence of a taiko group in contemporary New Zealand. The study of diaspora and transplanted music has received much attention in ethnomusicological discourse in recent years, and this paper addresses issues pertinent to this literature as well as identifying themes relevant to the New Zealand context. The aim of the research is to document taiko activities in New Zealand and attempt to understand some of the transformations that are a result of this practice.

INTRODUCTION

Japanese drum (*taiko*) groups,¹ which are known as *kumi daiko* (literally: group, drum) or *wadaiko* (literally: Japanese, drum),² are well known the world over and thrill audiences with their stunning musicality, choreography, stamina and visual spectacle. In the 1950s, drum groups such as Osuwa Daiko and Yushima Tenjin Sukeroku Daiko (later known as Ō-Edo Sukeroku Daiko) pioneered the phenomenon of ensemble *taiko* performance, and in the 1960s the group Za Ondekoza, which was established on Sado Island, helped pave the way for the founding in 1981 of the group called Kodō (also based on Sado), which is

renowned for its place in promoting the international popularity of Japanese ensemble drumming (see Fujie 2001).

This paper is the first to explore the phenomenon of *taiko* playing in New Zealand.³ The research methods utilised include music ethnography—albeit for just several days—and a critical approach to current literature pertaining to the topic, either directly or indirectly. Several participants were interviewed at the festival under study, and thirteen attendees provided answers to questions through email correspondence (eight from the drum group Wai Taiko). Any writing based on ethnography must reflect on how it presents social reality (Van Maanen 2006) and for these reasons the preliminary draft of this article was presented back to several key informants for their critical reflection on what I had written about them and their *taiko* activities (cf. Brettell 1993).

Based on ethnographic research with select New Zealand *taiko* groups at the first New Zealand *taiko* festival in Hamilton in February 2008, as well as drawing from the fields of ethnomusicology and cultural studies, the paper divides into several parts to explore and discuss why *taiko* drumming is of profound importance to some of the participants in the first *taiko* festival in New Zealand. Underlying much of the paper is a primary interest of discussing the New Zealand-based *taiko* players' negotiation between authenticity and innovation. I relate this study to others I have undertaken on the gamelan (Johnson 2006; 2008), where a similar number of ensembles are scattered around New Zealand's main urban centres (and interestingly requiring a similar group-oriented approach to learning and performing, and being inspired by key individuals; cf. Johnson 2005a). The paper divides into three main parts. The first looks at Japan in New Zealand from a broad position that aims to show diverse influences; the second part is a musical ethnography of New Zealand's first *taiko* festival; and the third part is an analytical and critical discussion of research findings. It is this latter part of the discussion that points to some of the underpinning tropes connected with *taiko* in New Zealand, and helps explain why the groups are of growing interest among an increasingly multiculturally aware population. The nature of this research has not enabled a substantial study of each group but other ensembles and enthusiasts could be included within future investigations.

Drums have a long history in Japan and are found in many music ensembles. For example, orchestral court music (*gagaku*), which was transmitted to Japan from the Chinese Tang Dynasty in an earlier form and was officially established in the Japanese Imperial court in 701, includes several types of drum. Also, drums are found in a variety of other genres and contexts, including

Shintō and Buddhist music, *nō* and *kabuki* theatre, festival music and various folk performing arts. However, the phenomenon of a performing *taiko* ensemble was only firmly established in the latter half of the twentieth century, and there are now more than 5,000 such groups in Japan (Alaszewska 2008). The drummer, Oguchi Daihachi (1924–2008), is seen as a pioneering figure in the development of ensemble *taiko* performance, and a performance by him at the 1964 Tokyo Summer Olympics (Games of the XVIII Olympiad) inspired many others.⁴ *Kumi daiko* is clearly a recently invented tradition (cf. Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Vlastos 1998), and because such groups use instruments that mostly have a long and established history in Japan, it gives the impression that it has a much longer tradition than from the 1950s. Also, while ‘communities throughout Japan are forming such ensembles, competing for members with traditional *minzoku geinō* [folk performing arts] . . . [t]he international popularity of groups such as Kodō risks misleading non-Japanese as to the nature of village performing arts’ (Alaszewska 2008; also Kishibe *et al* 2008).

Japan has many types of drum and there are numerous specific and general terms for a variety of such instruments (Johnson 1996). Different types of drum are used in *taiko* groups, but are often characterised by large, double-headed barrel drums. While called *taiko* generically, the drums have distinct names depending on their size, shape and method of attaching the drum skins to the wooden body, including *nagadōdaiko*, *ōdaiko*, *ohayashidaiko*, *hiradaiko*, *okedōdaiko*, *eitetsugata okedōdaiko*, *katsugioke*, *shimedaiko*, *okedō*, *tsuzumi*, and *uchiwadaiko*. The most common drums are various size double-headed barrel drum with skins attached to the body by studs (e.g., *nagadōdaiko*, or *ōdaiko*, *kodaiko* and *hiradaiko*). Cylindrical drums are also common to *taiko* groups and include such drums as *okedōdaiko* (double-sided cylindrical drum with skins attached by ropes between each end) and *tarudaiko* (double-sided cylindrical drum with skin attached by rope at each end). One other type of drum that is usually found in *taiko* groups is the relatively small *shimedaiko* (double-sided shallow barrel drum with skins attached by ropes or bolts). Ensembles also often include several types of other percussion instruments (e.g., gongs, cymbals and clappers: *chappa*, *atarigane*, *dora*, *sōban*, *dōbyōshi*, *hyōshigi*, *surizasara*, *binzasara* and *yotsudake*) and wind instruments (e.g., *horagai*, *nōkan*, *shakuhachi* and *shinobue*). Nowadays, some groups also include, for example, the *tsugaru shamisen* (three-string lute of the Tsugaru region) and *kokyū* (three- or four-string fiddle) (e.g., Asano Taiko Bunka Kenkyū Jo 2002).

The various size drums might be played in several different ways. The barrel drums, for example, as the more usual and louder instruments, range in size

from skins with a diameter of around 30 cm to over 100 cm. The drums are also placed in a variety of stands, or suspended, which allows the player a means of playing it slightly differently depending on the piece of music and choreography.

As with many other historic and contemporary global flows that have seen the adoption of instruments from one culture to another, *taiko* groups are now found in many places outside Japan (Alaszewska 2008). For example, groups have been established in the United States of America since the late 1960s with San Francisco's Taiko Dojo dating from 1968 (Terada 2000; Wong 2004; 2005),⁵ and other places such as South America, Europe and Australia too boast highly visible ensembles (e.g., de Ferranti 2006).⁶ While some early groups in the USA were dominated by Japanese-Americans, *taiko* is now an ensemble with a contested ethnic association, and in the USA there are over 150 active groups (Izumi 2001; Terada 2000).⁷ In New Zealand, established and active performing *taiko* groups have a relatively short history. As discussed in more detail later on, while one group was founded nearly two decades ago, and has a distinct connection to tertiary education, several other groups have emerged more recently as a result of individual enthusiasm and community interest.

Over the past two decades an array of scholarly and enthusiastic literature on *taiko* has been published in Japan and overseas. In English, *taiko* drumming has been the topic of several academic papers ranging from Asian identities outside Asia to music ethnographies of specific groups or regions (e.g., Alaszewska 2008; de Ferranti 2006; Oguchi 1987; 1993; Wong 2004; 2005; Yoon 2001).

The study of diaspora and transplanted music has recently received much attention in ethnomusicological discourse (e.g., Averill 1994; Béhague 1994; Eisentraut 2001; Lau 2001; Lornell and Rasmussen 1997; Manuel 2000; Radano and Bohlman 2000; Ramnarine 1996; Slobin 1993, 1994; Um 2005). This paper addresses issues pertinent to this literature as well as identifying themes relevant to the New Zealand context (cf. Johnson 2005a; b; c; 2006; 2007; 2008).

As a way of extending this discourse, and bringing the study of *taiko* specifically to the New Zealand context, the present article explores the country's first *taiko* festival with the aim of not only explaining this particular ethnographic context, but also understanding what *taiko* performance means to those participating in the festival. Festivals are an important context for ethnomusicological research, as argued by, for example, Lindsay (2002; 2004) and Harnish (2006), although the type of festival studied in this discussion is notably differ-

ent to the festival explored in Johnson (2007) in that it is an example of musical transplantation in a relatively small context (cf. Johnson 2008). This study of a *taiko* festival contributes to literature on how community music making engenders musical and cultural identity, community and culture creation (cf. Hennessy 2005).

The core of much of the international *taiko* activity is a negotiation between notions of authenticity and innovation. This raises issues such as, how closely should *taiko* groups follow their Japanese counterparts? Do players have to be Japanese to play *taiko* in New Zealand? Do players need to have a comprehension of Japanese culture? What does it mean to be a *taiko* player in New Zealand? This paper considers these questions and key themes to highlight the ways players often look to Japan as the home of *taiko*, yet simultaneously including innovation as a way of realising the existence of a *taiko* group in contemporary New Zealand. *Taiko* performers in New Zealand reproduce or replicate culture, and also create culture.

JAPAN IN NEW ZEALAND

Just as Asia has had a long and lasting—and increasing more influential—impact in the making of New Zealand (Johnson and Moloughney 2006), Japan has been particularly significant in the changing ways that New Zealanders view the Asia-Pacific region. As *taiko* drumming has distinct roots in Japan, it seems pertinent to consider the influences of Japan on New Zealand to assess how culture is transmitted and why *taiko* drumming or any other form of Japanese culture should be found in New Zealand.

Since the 1990s, Japan has had a growing influence on New Zealand. Whether through trade (in 2007 Japan was New Zealand's third largest export market at 10 percent of the market; imports were 8.9 percent), tourism (over 121,000 Japanese tourists visited New Zealand in 2007) or cultural connections, Japan in one way or another increasingly features in the lives of New Zealanders.⁸ The electronics and automobile industries indicate how prevalent Japanese industry is in the everyday lives of many New Zealanders, with for example, new and second-hand cars dominating the market place. New Zealand has 46 Japanese sister cities;⁹ it has Japanese gardens in many cities and towns; and it has cultural factors that are ever more visible and part of everyday life. For instance, Japanese cuisine is part of New Zealand's culinary culture with *sushi* bars and *tenpanyaki* restaurants as an established feature of most shopping streets; students have been learning Japanese in schools and universities over the past few decades; many New Zealanders travel to Japan to teach English;

New Zealand is the home of numerous language schools that cater particularly for Japanese students; Japanese martial arts are common place in gyms and sports clubs; local and visiting Japanese musicians are frequently found on the concert stage or community hall; and contemporary Japanese fashion such as the Lolita phenomenon is seen on New Zealand streets, worn not only by Japanese and other Asians, but by New Zealanders too.

Statistics New Zealand provides data regarding actual Japanese residents in New Zealand. In comparison to other New Zealand identities, in 2006 Japanese represented approximately 0.3 percent of the total population, which included 8.8 percent of self-identified Asians.¹⁰ Compared to other Asian ethnicities, Japanese were a relatively small group, with Chinese the largest at 41 percent of the Asian population, followed by Indians at 29 percent. While in diasporic terms the Japanese presence is relatively small, although growing, in comparison to other Asian ethnicities in New Zealand, Japanese influence is arguably highly visible in other cultural spheres (cf. Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu 2008).

Japanese influences on New Zealand are therefore diverse. The increased global flows of people and culture over the last few decades have helped raise the presence of Japan in many world cultures, and New Zealand exhibits such influence, whether, for instance, social, cultural, economic or political. However, while Japanisation in New Zealand might be compared to Americanisation as a hegemonic force based on global economic wealth and power (Japan's globalisation differs to the USA in terms of the latter's military presence and influence on many nations), it is one that continues to grow and have an influence on the everyday lives of many New Zealanders.

As shown next, while Japanese are a pivotal force in the production of *taiko* performance in New Zealand, their presence occupies an ambiguous space in that they often represent authority and authenticity, yet at the same time mainly non-Japanese in New Zealand participate in this creative performance genre.

NEW ZEALAND'S FIRST *TAIKO* FESTIVAL

Taiko Festival NZ 2008 was held at the WEL Academy of Performing Arts at the University of Waikato, Hamilton, from 29 February to 2 March 2008 (figure 1).¹¹ The three-day event was hosted by Hamilton-based *taiko* group, Wai Taiko, and featured guest Japanese male drummers Yamauchi Riichi and Furutate Kenji.¹² Most of New Zealand's *taiko* ensembles travelled to Hamilton for



Figure 1. Flyer for Taiko Festival NZ 2008.

the festival, and there were approximately forty people participating (roughly divided equally between men and women). Most of the festival consisted of drumming workshops with Yamauchi and Furutate, and performances by the visitors and New Zealand groups.

Taiko drumming is an area of music performance that is increasingly visible within the New Zealand soundscape. The art form has been transplanted to New Zealand and replicated by at least eight enthusiastic amateur ensembles, after being made well known to a world audience through the highly spectacular and physically demanding performances of *taiko* groups such as Kodō. In the New Zealand context, *taiko* playing emerged in the early 1990s. The first *taiko* group in New Zealand, Kodama Drum Team, or simply Kodama,¹³

was established in 1990 at International Pacific College (IPC) in Palmerston North. At around the same time, two groups in and around Wellington were formed as a result of key individuals bringing knowledge from Japan to New Zealand: Taiko Za, which was founded by a New Zealander who had studied *taiko* performance in Japan, and Mukume, which was established by a Japanese *taiko* player who has subsequently moved back to Japan. Other groups have since been established, including two in Auckland (Tamashii and Haere Mai), one in Rotorua (Racco) and one in Hamilton (Wai Taiko). (At the festival several participants mentioned a group in Nelson, Raijin, but information is lacking). These are the known groups based on information gathered at the festival, although there are possibly other individuals around the country with *taiko* skills and knowledge. While the festival attracted most of the main active *taiko* groups, the oldest in New Zealand, from IPC, did not attend on this occasion.¹⁴

Several of New Zealand's *taiko* groups date from the 1990s. While each of the *taiko* groups is based in its own geographic context, some of the players have interacted on several prior occasions with each other. For example, the IPC players have helped Wai Taiko learn new pieces; several former IPC players now play with other groups due to relocation; and some players in the two Auckland groups play in both groups.

Why have *taiko* groups emerged in New Zealand, particularly in recent years? This can be partly explained by many reasons: the world music scene since the mid 1980s has had a huge impact on disseminating the world's music around the globe; globalisation and travel have helped with overseas performances of Japanese drum groups along with the movement of people to Japan to hear and study *taiko*; New Zealand's Asia-Pacific proximity to Japan has enabled increased trade over recent decades and many New Zealand students learn Japanese at school or university, and some travel to Japan to teach English or for a school exchange.

During the festival and as a follow-up question to some of the participants, I posed the question: Why do you do *taiko* drumming? Responses to this question revealed several key tropes, including wanting a mix of music and choreography; to create a sense of community that belonging to a *taiko* group brings; having a love of performing; and wishing to create new pieces. While several of these tropes are explored in the following discussion, it is with the last, and its opposite (authenticity) that I deal with in detail.

The purpose of the festival was essentially to celebrate *taiko* drumming. The participants travelled mostly from the North Island, especially from Auckland, Wellington and Rotorua, and most of the local Wai Taiko members attended too. The participants were particularly enthusiastic about what they found passionate. They openly shared information with each other, practised and performed together, and were keen to continue the new friendships and networks they had fostered. As noted in the festival programme, distributed to all participants and potential participants before the event, 'the aim of the festival is to foster a network between the NZ *taiko* groups. We want to foster a community spirit between the groups and encourage opportunities of performing and learning together in the future'. Measured upon these objectives the festival achieved its aims and was certainly an event that fostered community spirit and encouraged performing and learning together.

The festival was essentially the result of the effort of the two female co-leaders of the Wai Taiko group,¹⁵ Michelle Miles and Lianne Stephenson. With the support of or sponsorship from Waikato University, Ticketdirect, Hamilton Community Arts Council, Sky City and the New Zealand Japan Exchange Programme, the festival was able to bring two guest performers from Japan and host the event at the WEL Energy Trust Academy of Performing Arts at Waikato University. Wai Taiko has had a long association with the University, where their instruments are housed, and many of the players, past and present, including the two co-leaders, have been or are either students or staff. Lianne and Michelle learned *taiko* separately in Japan as high-school exchange students at Tachibana Girls' High School in Kyōto in 1995 and 1997 respectively, and when they met at Waikato University they established Wai Taiko in 2000 with the help of Lianne's father who made their first drum in 1999 from an old wine barrel. The group has around fifteen to twenty members—fluctuating in size as members come and go—and various size drums, flutes and metallophones. Wai Taiko does have several Japanese players, but the core members are not Japanese. As noted by several participants, some spectators have even expected the entire group to be Japanese and not white Europeans/Pakeha. Most of the group's training is done by rote, although the leaders occasionally use a staff notation for their own memory aid. Ironically, only a few of the group's members are trained musicians (in the institutional sense of the term), and even though the group is housed at a university with a large music programme, the group has no members studying music.

The rehearsals held during the festival were for all participants with the aim of learning the piece 'Yaraiya' which was composed by visiting Japanese player Yamauchi Riichi. Because of a limited number of drums to play on during

rehearsals, up to three participants each played on the upper skin of a single drum (mostly *chūdaiko*: medium-size barrel drums). One of the visiting performers led most of the sessions, with the participants copying his moves (drum strokes, chants and choreography) very carefully. He reinforced the sonic and choreographic aspects with vocal mnemonics, *kuchishōwa* (different strokes and combinations of strokes use different sounds).

The festival included two concerts: one was a performance by the two visiting Japanese performers, and the other by the festival participants, which included the visiting performers. The latter concert in the evening of the closing day included eight acts: Tamashii, Racco, Furutate Kenji, Mukume, Yamauchi Ri-ichi, Haere Mai, Wai Taiko (figure 2), Taiko Za and ‘Yaraiya’ performed by the festival participants and the visiting performers; it was gifted to each of the groups.

WHY TAIKO?

New Zealand’s first *taiko* festival brought together most of the *taiko* groups there, with the exception of the most established group from Palmerston North.



Figure 2. Wai Taiko performers in concert at the festival. Courtesy Lianne Stephenson.

Closer study of each of the individual groups would show certain tropes regarding the place of *taiko* drumming for many of the players. Research at the festival, along with a follow-up questionnaire and personal communication, revealed several key aspects about the current state of *taiko* performance in New Zealand and the reason for the festival.

The aim of this ethnographic study was to observe the festival and to attempt to understand the meaning for its participants. Also, and relating to the title of this paper, was the underpinning question, ‘Why *taiko*?’ That is, why was an established—at least recently established as a new tradition—form of Japanese music performance being displayed so visually and enthusiastically in New Zealand? My broader aim was to comprehend why the *taiko* players played *taiko* in the first place, and to ask questions about the participating groups, their instruments and what it means to group members to be a *taiko* player in New Zealand. This is a wide area of study, and the field research and follow-up questionnaire helped gather a large amount of data, but this discussion only centres upon the first question to subsequently propose several answers that help show how and why the festival occurred, and what it signified to the participants.

The festival brought together many of the players of most of New Zealand’s active *taiko* groups (six out of seven particularly active groups attended the festival). The festival showcased New Zealand’s *taiko* community at a unique event (the first of its kind); it illustrated a willingness for players of various backgrounds (ethnicity, gender and age) to come together in one location and openly share knowledge about *taiko* (verbally, visually and musically); it showed a profound sense of musicality by performers who might not ordinarily call themselves musicians; and it displayed an example of contemporary musical transplantation with a sense of culturally reproducing Japanese music in a perceived authentic way, yet also displaying innovation in several aspects of *taiko* performance.

As a cultural spectacle, the festival was well placed as New Zealand’s inaugural *taiko* event that brought together in one context most of the nation’s *taiko* groups and key players. Because the festival was held in Hamilton the participating groups could travel there without too much difficulty (two from Wellington, two from Auckland, one from Rotorua, and the resident Hamilton group). It was a site, or contact zone (Pratt 1991), where players interacted and displayed their musical identity as *taiko* performers. Moreover, the festival allowed players the opportunity to both display their own skills and identity and to observe and learn from others.

Festivals are plentiful in musical worlds, from local to national and international events, and players of many different types of instruments often come together for these very reasons. Was the Hamilton festival any different? As New Zealand's first *taiko* festival, the event showed several underpinning aspects unique to this occasion. *Taiko* drumming is relatively new to New Zealand; there are several active and highly visible groups; and the players come from diverse cultural backgrounds. There were very few players of Japanese ethnicity at the festival. Several groups had one or two Japanese players; some groups had players who had learned *taiko* in Japan; some players had an interest in Japanese culture and had either visited Japan or had studied Japanese in New Zealand; and other players were simply fascinated by *taiko* because of one or more of its choreographic, musical or visual factors.

As a group activity, *taiko* drumming creates a sense of internal community within each group. Players have to rehearse and perform together, and social interaction is pivotal to its success. In addition, groups provide a hub for new friendships, as one informant noted: 'Group consciousness has also developed through social events and group camps that are a mixture of *taiko* practice and socialising'.

As something new to New Zealand and still relatively unusual, there is perhaps a sense of wanting to meet others who are practicing the same art form and establish a real community. The few active *taiko* groups are spread across the North Island, and coming together at one event shows a sense of community-musicians sharing a sense of identity based on the types of instrument they play, along with the acknowledged cultural home of those instruments (cf. Stokes 1994).

Unlike *taiko* drumming in Japan, the majority of players in New Zealand are not Japanese. Most players have different ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Pakeha or Asian). The few Japanese who play in New Zealand have often performed for the first time there (cf. Johnson 2005a). As a transplanted ensemble, players have been attracted to the art form for one reason or another, and they negotiate a way of learning, teaching and performing that still looks to Japan as the home culture, but also offers something unique to New Zealand.

The success of the first *taiko* festival in New Zealand, if it can be measured by the fact that members of most active groups attended, might be explained as a new New Zealand phenomenon with relatively few publicly performing groups. The coming together of players is a way of celebrating the art form and an opportunity to learn from not only the two visiting Japanese musi-

cians, but also from each other. At the festival, players were able to verbally, visually or musically share information about *taiko* drumming. Whether at the workshops or performances, or even in between, players showed an active willingness to share knowledge about their experiences of *taiko* drumming. As one participant observed:

The holding of the Taiko Festival this year [2008] was in conjunction with the coming of two professional players from Japan. These players were invited by a Wai Taiko member temporarily living in Japan and attending practices of a community group mentored by one of these players. The idea for a festival had already been floated about a year earlier, so it was decided to use the opportunity of having the two professionals to have the festival while they were here. Funding was sought from various bodies, and the amount obtained covered a large part of the expenses. Apart from featuring in the festival, these two players also coached Wai Taiko during their stay in New Zealand.

The players taking part in the festival identified themselves as *taiko* enthusiasts in one way or another. Most had no musical training, yet were able to demonstrate a remarkable musicality (learning by rote and performing from memory in a complex ensemble setting). Furthermore, even the members of the Waikato University based Wai Taiko had no members who were studying or teaching music at the university where there is a strong music programme. The combination of mostly percussion, choreography and a highly visual spectacle provide an interconnected aspect of *taiko* performance, while culturally-based notions of musicality and who might learn or perform *taiko* seem to point to amateur enthusiasts who have more of an interest in Japanese culture and society rather than participants who are already musically-trained in their original or another culture's music (cf. Blacking 1976). The social aspect of *taiko* learning and performance seems to be an obvious attraction to *taiko* players. The instruments could involve individual training, but seem to be based around a social gathering of musical and enthusiastic individuals playing and learning as a team.

Taiko performance in New Zealand shows an example of musical transplantation, particularly where the players are mainly from cultural backgrounds that are far removed from the recognised home context of *taiko* (cf. Eisentraut 2001). With increased global flows and movement of musics and peoples, to find *taiko* drumming in New Zealand with several active groups is not necessarily an unusual phenomenon today, but what is of particular interest to this

study of *taiko* is what the activity means to those in the transplanted context. New Zealand's *taiko* players are mainly not Japanese (Racco and Haere Mai have Japanese leaders, and Kodama are primarily Japanese), yet they are passionate about learning *taiko* and draw much from Japanese culture. Some of the players can speak some Japanese. Wai Taiko, for example, is active in bringing Japanese *taiko* players to Hamilton to teach them drumming.

Some aspects of rehearsal and performance maintain distinct Japanese influences. For example, the performers sometimes started their training sessions by counting up to eight in Japanese, the caller saying *ichi* (one), *ni* (two), *san* (three), *shi* (four); and the group response being *go* (five), *roku* (six), *shichi* (seven), *hachi* (eight).¹⁶ As *taiko* playing is very much a physical activity and almost always includes some choreography, the players did some body warm-ups (e.g., jogging on the spot, stretches and star jumps). They also learned some Japanese to greet and thank the visiting teachers. However, on this occasion the players did not bow during the beginning of this meeting (according to Japanese protocol) but they did bow after their performance (in the entertainment manner).

How is a transplanted music genre replicated in comparison to the perceived home country? Is *taiko* drumming in New Zealand simply a replication of another culture's performance art? Can it be authentic? Is there anything else about the New Zealand context that makes *taiko* drumming in its transplanted context different? Is there innovation in New Zealand *taiko* performance? While attempting to answer the first two of these questions there are several points that clearly stand out in terms of notions of authenticity in *taiko* drumming in New Zealand. When posing the question, 'Why do you do *taiko* drumming?', many of the answers from the participants at the festival pointed to a number of tropes, some of which have been outlined above. One, in particular, relates to a notion of authenticity, and naturally to its antonym, innovation. For example, a key player in Wai Taiko noted that after eight years of playing *taiko* as a group 'we're now moving towards being more creative . . . I think I'm ready for that and have written a small piece myself already'. This statement implies that the group was until recently playing pieces (they call them 'songs') that were viewed as authentically Japanese, from established traditions of *taiko* drumming in the genre's home country. This statement also mentions creativity. The informant not only plays authentic and more creative pieces, but has also written as a result of this engagement with *taiko* new music of his/her own. The player is creating culture in New Zealand as a result of being motivated firstly by authenticity, but also reacting against that notion.

Other examples from informants' responses are evident. A follow-up question, 'What does it mean to be a *taiko* player in New Zealand?', revealed a continuation of the authenticity/innovation dichotomy. For example, 'we [*Wai Taiko*] are still keeping to the style of the group in Japan where we learnt'. Here, there is a sense of continuing the tradition in which the players learned while in Japan. This shows a feeling of community across cultural borders, and an example of how a culture's music can be transplanted as a result of travel and cultural influence. While intercultural connections are increasingly quicker as globalisation continues to be a growing influence on the hybridisation of world cultures, the physical distance between New Zealand and Japan is emphasised by one informant: 'We're isolated from the "home country" and to keep the ties there we need to either send people to Japan or bring Japanese people over'. A further comment was: 'As a group we [*Wai Taiko*] are just beginning to form our own style'. As with the previous statement, this further remarks on the current stage *Wai Taiko* are at in their own musical/cultural development of *taiko* performance and creativity in New Zealand. The group has been playing together in one line up or another for nearly a decade (including several key players who have been with the group from the start), and have now reached a level of proficiency where they have the confidence to begin to form their own style. Again, this stresses an idea of authenticity in reproducing a Japanese style of drumming that the group or certain individuals had learned, but also creativity in their own developing style of drumming. Moreover, as an additional informant noted: 'We can create our own style and not be bogged down with "this is how you should do it" mentalities that can be a part of Japanese culture. In saying that we're pretty much keeping it traditional.' This informant stresses the idea of moving away from Japanese culture because of a perceived notion that there is something in that culture that might prohibit innovation.

The *taiko* festival also stressed the Japanese source culture in several other ways, including having visiting Japanese teachers, using Japanese names for the groups, or at least adaptations of Japanese names, calling the drum sticks by their Japanese name, *bachi*, calling the drums by their Japanese names, and using *kanji* on some drum skins to give the drums specific names and Japanese meaning.

In opposition to a notion of authenticity is innovation. That is, a concept of authenticity implies an opposite that helps to produce the notion of authenticity in the first place, something that is inauthentic or innovative. Innovation occurred at the *taiko* festival in several ways. For example, innovation is found with the manufacture of *taiko* in New Zealand by several of the players

(e.g., Wai Taiko and Tamashii), yet most of the groups also import drums from Japan.

In connection with the social sphere of playing *taiko* in New Zealand, one player commented that ‘being a *taiko* player here in New Zealand mean[s] a lot more freedom’. As noted in another comment discussed above, this statement expresses an idea that in the home culture/country (i.e., Japan) of *taiko* drumming there is not as much freedom as in New Zealand. This links with Japanese notions of an in-group (*uchi*) in contrast to *soto* (outside). For most Japanese performing arts, as well as most other spheres of Japanese society, one belongs to an *uchi* in several spheres. In connection with the *uchi/soto* dichotomy, anthropologist Joy Hendry comments that the terms ‘are also applied to members of one’s house as opposed to members of the outside world, and to members of a person’s wider groups, such as the community, school or place of work, as opposed to other people outside those groups’ (Hendry 1987: 39–40). Furthermore, as Japanese sociologist Nakane Chie notes in connection with how the concepts underpin much to do about Japanese society:

Uchi may mean an institution as a whole, or it may mean the department or section to which the speaker belongs. It is common for an individual to belong to a certain informal group (which is often a faction within a larger group), and this is the group of primary and most intimate concern in his [*or her*] social life. (Nakane 1984: 125; also Befu 1980; Ben-Ari, Moeran and Valentine 1990; Hendry 1987; 1993; Hendry and Webber 1986; Sugimoto 1997).

Hierarchical and horizontal axes provide a social framework in which one belongs. Such a system can have an enormous influence on both artistic production and on the transmission of knowledge, and it is this, perhaps, that the festival informant was referring to, or implying.

For the New Zealand public, *taiko* drumming provides a highly visual and audible spectacle. It is innovative in the New Zealand context, and, as another informant observed: ‘Many people have never seen *taiko* and are fascinated by it’. Such a statement points not only to the innovative aspects of *taiko* in New Zealand, but also to a sense of exoticism, or Orientalism (cf. Said 1978). But in the New Zealand context it is a kind of ‘self-exoticism’ and ‘domestic exoticism’ for all present in the performance group (cf. Hosokawa 1999; Mitsui 1998). More specifically, exotic Japanese instruments, music and choreography are replicated in New Zealand, but mostly without Japanese performers, and when Japanese performers are present this adds to the exoticism of the spec-

tacle. Moreover, some people are somewhat surprised that the players are not Japanese, but, nevertheless, as one informant observed, *taiko* ‘creates awareness of other cultures and I’m all for that breaking down the barriers stuff, as corny as it sounds’.

There is also a sense of cultural nostalgia in that many players only learned *taiko* for the first time in New Zealand. Whether Japanese or not, and for the few Japanese players interviewed this was certainly the case (cf. Johnson 2005a); they were only drawn to *taiko* in New Zealand because it was Japanese and they were interested in understanding more about their own culture – a kind of self-exoticism.

CONCLUSION

The question posed at the beginning of the paper was ‘Why *taiko*?’ This was the basis of attempting to understand *taiko* performance at New Zealand’s first *taiko* festival. This paper has addressed this question through ethnographic research, along with a critical examination regarding what it means to be a *taiko* player in New Zealand. While there are several areas of further research for possible future study, including the need for in-depth ethnographic field research with individual *taiko* groups, several conclusions relating directly to this particular investigation can be presented.

Ensemble *taiko* drumming in New Zealand is a relatively new performance activity. As part of its place as a recent phenomenon in the transplanted music scene (along side such genres as gamelan, samba, capoeira, etc), especially in contexts where most and sometimes all the members of a particular group are not Japanese, it is able to mobilise social action and culture creation in several ways. The first national *taiko* festival was one result of *taiko* groups beginning to engage with each other in learning synergies and comparisons of performance practice. Players of some of the groups already had prior knowledge of other New Zealand groups, and in some cases had actively learned from them or had been a member of one group but had now moved to another group; bringing visiting Japanese performers to New Zealand for the festival was part of a wider desire to share knowledge about *taiko* in an authentic way; and bringing players together in this way for the first time was a wish to achieve a lasting community of *taiko* players in New Zealand who might be able to work together on other projects in the future.

As a musical ethnography and critical analysis of aspects of the *taiko* festival, this paper contributes to discourse on how community music making enables

and empowers musical and cultural identity, a sense of community within and across *taiko* groups, and culture creation within the paradigms of both authenticity and innovation. In doing this, the research question had an aim of comprehending why *taiko* players played *taiko* in New Zealand, how and why the festival occurred, and what it meant to the participants.

In summary, the various tropes that have been identified have helped show how a study of *taiko* drumming in New Zealand contributes to a better comprehension of Japanese performing arts and how they are received, interpreted and comprehended in one particular transplanted context. Players at the festival created community; they came from diverse cultural backgrounds; they shared knowledge about *taiko*, either verbally, visually or musically; they showed distinct musicality, even though many self-identified themselves as non-musicians; and they showed through musical transplantation that an adopted music style can simultaneously have a sense of authenticity and innovation.

The study of community music making in one's own culture is far too often a neglected area of intellectual study in music research. However, in the context of ethnomusicological discourse this paper has problematised the areas of diaspora studies, cultural flows, homelands and borderlands in connection with the transplantation of a Japanese performing art, and shown that there are some remarkable social and cultural qualities inherent in *taiko* performance in this particular context, each of which, therefore, not only helps explain why some individuals play *taiko* in New Zealand, but also highlights some of the unique social and cultural qualities that are the direct result of this specific instance of cultural encounter.

NOTES

- 1 The term *taiko* (*daiko* as a suffix) is a Japanese word that means 'drum' (membranophone).
- 2 The term *wadaiko* divides into two main genres: *matsuri-bayashi* (festival music) and *kumi daiko* (ensemble *taiko* music). As noted in de Ferranti (2006: 77–79), there are several older genres of Japanese drumming, but *kumi daiko* refers to the ensemble phenomenon developed in the 1950s by Oguchi Daihachi.
- 3 Approval to undertake interviews with musicians as part of a wider project on Asian music in New Zealand was given by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee.

- 4 See further Oguchi (1987; 1993).
- 5 See further <http://www.sftaiko.com>.
- 6 The first Australian *wadaiko* festival was held in Melbourne in September 2008.
- 7 See http://www.taiko.com/index.php?option=com_wrapper&Itemid=35 for a list of many of the active Japanese, Asian, Australian, North American, South American and European *taiko* ensembles.
- 8 For more trade data see www.stats.govt.nz/externaltrade.
- 9 See <http://www.sistercities.org.nz/Editable/sister-cities/nzsistercities.shtml>.
- 10 Source: <http://www.stats.govt.nz>. See also Bedford and Ho (2008) on New Zealand's Asian population. Note that in this census individuals were allowed to identify with several ethnic groups so the data should be viewed as approximate.
- 11 See also <http://nz.myspace.com/taikofestivalnz>.
- 12 Yamauchi Riichi is the musical director of the Kyōto-based drum group Matsu-rishu (he is also a *shamisen* player). Furutate Kenji was a founding member of the group Dakanto, and in 2003 established the professional group GONNA.
- 13 The group is often referred to as the IPC Drum Team.
- 14 The author has undertaken research with the IPC group and is currently writing about them in connection with their place in the New Zealand *taiko* world for another publication.
- 15 The meaning of the name Wai Taiko is a play on several words. 'Wai' is Maori, meaning 'water'. The term also refers to Waikato, the home of the group, and to the title of this article, 'Why *taiko*?'. As a performing ensemble Wai Taiko has a regular number of public performances and is increasingly in demand. Recently, the group has played at such events as the Taranaki *Last Samurai* movie premiere and Big Day Out. See further <http://www.waitaiko.com>.
- 16 This practice was influenced by TaikOz (a Sydney-based *taiko* group) (personal communication, Lianne Stephenson, September 2008).

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