

Listening : Ethnomusicology and Performance Studies

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I offer this paper from my perspective as an ethnomusicologist, and I would like to address the key questions of this colloquium through the lens of music and performance. Methodology was the driving theme and issue of this conference and it raises a number of questions, including: what is 'analysis?', how is the object of study defined within any field of the arts, and how is a 'methodology' different from the work of interpretation?

Music poses a series of interesting challenges right away, and the main one is its ephemerality. Put simply, sound doesn't stand still: it moves through time, and the sound of music is a moving object that refuses to be pinned down for examination or revisitation. What can be examined are *representations* of sound, e. g., notated music, recordings, etc., and there are many, many ways to analyze or to interpret those objects; indeed, entire fields (e. g., 'music theory') are devoted to those projects. But the thing itself—'music'—is vexingly slippery and fleeting.

I would like to complicate this even further by suggesting that 'music' is a problematic object for ethnomusicologists (as compared to historical musicologists, composers, or music theorists). Ethnomusicologists study sound as culture, or rather, they approach music as part or even constitutive of culture, and they view it as inextricably embedded in everything else that makes up culture and society. Some ethnomusicologists choose to focus on music as sound alone—that is, they spend their careers focused on the notes, the sounds, trying to understand the relationships between rhythms, melodies, repertoires, and the like—but such ethnomusicologists are actually very few in number. Most of us end up considering far more than the sound of music: we tend to believe that 'the music' only

makes sense if you understand its relationship to political structures, religion, history, gender and sexuality, local and global economies, environment, social aesthetics, etc. One question might be why ethnomusicologists seem to be concerned about so much besides 'the music'. Ethnomusicologists are essentially anthropologists who study music, so 'music' is regarded as more than notes or sound : it is reconfigured more broadly as 'performance', or as part of a range of expressive behaviors that are beautifully and alarmingly difficult to contain, or around which to draw clear boundaries.

This essay has several origins. First, I have generally not addressed structures of musical sound in my scholarly work on the musics of Thailand and Asian America. I am deeply distrustful of traditional music analysis, even though I know that that rather sweeping generalization ignores the spectrum of possibilities presented by the field of contemporary music theory. Still, I have an abiding sense that the things I want to understand about music are fundamentally at odds with the most basic principles and ideologies of music analysis. Unable to offer an alternate way of thinking about sound, my work has been vulnerable to the criticism that I don't address 'the music itself'. I would argue that 'the music itself' is never just the sounds or 'the notes', but I am in fact affected by musical sound, so I am here, finally, dealing head on with the problem of finding a more satisfying way to address sound.

Second, this essay is a direct response to a panel on the problem of music analysis and ethnomusicology featured at the 2003 annual meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology. It is inspired by two of the papers on that panel, by René T. A. Lysloff and Fred Maus. Both Lysloff and Maus treated music analysis not as a given but as a historically specific set of practices that presumes a certain ideology of music ; both identified the tenets of music analysis. As Maus put it, music compositions are regarded as "self-sufficient" on the one hand and as enactments of abstract principles on the other. A "common technical vocabulary" creates flattening theoretical exemplars (e. g., "the dominant seventh typically leads to a tonic triad") that pull away from the particularities of any given 'piece' of music. On the other hand, that same language is relied upon to arrive at "a non-contextual generality" about any piece (Maus 2003). Lysloff argued that the

over-determined role of notation in the western art music tradition has generated a series of assumptions about the nature of music that made possible the entire field of music theory and analysis. As he wrote, "More often than not theorists analyze scores rather than real acoustical phenomena," and rely on an epistemological elision that makes the score into 'the music' (Lysloff 2003). Rather than trying to make music analysis 'work' for non-western musics (the problem that sidetracks too many ethnomusicologists), Maus tried to imagine a music analysis that would open up other aspects of the western art music tradition, i. e., one that could reverse the naturalized hierarchy of "composition versus performance, music itself versus experience, structure versus embodiment."

Ethnomusicologists' energies have been much drawn off by the necessity of explaining how and why our work is different from historical musicology, but it seems a moot point to me. Our debt to anthropology is obvious, even if the study of performance still takes a second seat to political economy, kinship, etc., within that discipline. It is far more useful to see how we might fit into the young field of performance studies, and I have argued for this elsewhere (Wong 1998). Performance studies emerged in the 1970s from the confluence of theater studies and anthropology; it was the result of a friendship and intellectual partnership between actor/director/critic/theorist Richard Schechner and anthropologist Victor Turner. Together, they set in motion a new approach to 'performance' as a broad range of behaviors that had the simultaneous effect of redefining 'theater' (with all its western bias) and blurring the lines between the proscenium stage and the performance of everyday life (Turner 1986, Schechner 1985, Schechner and Appel 1990). Three lively doctoral programs in performance studies dominate the young discipline in the U. S.¹⁾ I believe that ethnomusicology is more productively located within the field of performance studies than under the rubric of musicology.

So the challenge is this: how can we (1) resituate the study of music vis-à-vis performance studies, and (2) still find some new ways to talk about musical sound without activating all the old problematic moves that objectify it. These two gestures have to go hand in hand. One can certainly do (1) without (2), but to do (2) without (1) is too risky—i. e., could too easily depend on music-as-

object assumptions.

I would like to explore these issues through the lens of Japanese American taiko or *kumi-daiko*, by looking at one 'piece' (though I immediately intend to complicate the very notion of the 'work') in several ways. I write about the North American tradition of taiko in more detail elsewhere (Wong 2004), but let it suffice here to say that its older traditional forms (as Buddhist ritual practice and as festival music) were reworked in the 1950s-60s by young Japanese from the post-war generation into a folkloricized tradition featuring large ensembles of massed drums; the music was infused with the principles and choreographies of the martial arts and transformed into a presentational music for the proscenium stage. *Kumi-daiko* was brought to the United States in 1969 by Seiichi Tanaka, who founded San Francisco Taiko Dojo and a large circle of students who continue to form the pedagogical core of the North American taiko scene. Although *bon-odori* and certain kinds of *matsuri* drumming were already part of the Japanese American immigrant community, *kumi-daiko* appealed to Sansei (third-generation Japanese Americans) in particular ways: its strength and presence spoke assertively against regimes of racist representation that young Asian Americans were then just beginning to address. At this point, there are about one hundred and fifty taiko groups in North America, mostly on the West Coast and mostly amateur; each group addresses the range of possible identifications (as Buddhist, as Japanese American, as Asian American, etc.) in different ways. I began studying taiko in 1997 with Rev. Shuichi Thomas Kurai, a Japanese American Zen Buddhist priest and taiko master. (Fig. 1) The Southern California area has about twenty taiko groups in it, so when Rev. Tom (as he is

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- 1) The Department of Performance Studies at New York University was the first of its kind, created by Schechner; it is decidedly interdisciplinary and its faculty contains folklorists, anthropologists, literary theorists, and theater studies scholars. At Northwestern University, the Department of Performance Studies has a more anthropological bent. At UCLA, the Department of World Arts and Cultures has a somewhat stronger tie to intercultural performance praxis (especially in dance), and its faculty is made up of dance scholars, folklorists, ethnomusicologists, and theater studies specialists. Each doctoral program has a distinctively different character and produces markedly different kinds of students.



Fig.1 Rev. Tom Kurai.

known to his students) created a group of his own in 1999 called Satori Daiko, we became part of a broader community of taiko practitioners. This essay will become part of a book I am writing about the cultural politics of taiko in Southern California.

I turn now to a 'piece' for taiko written by my teacher. Rev. Tom created "Aranami" in 1997. Notice that I say 'created' rather than 'wrote': the idea of 'writing' a piece of music is inextricably bound up with western ideas of musical composition and music notation, and immediately raises all the problems that I am writing against. In the western art music tradition, it is generally assumed that music is notated, that that notation is prescriptive (i.e., it tells performers what to do), that it was put down by an individual creator known as a composer, and that the notated object is more authoritative than any single performance. When Rev. Tom created the piece that he named "Aranami," he was the director of a taiko group in Southern California called Kishin Daiko. One could say that he created "Aranami" 'for' them, but as time went on and he left Kishin and taught other taiko groups, "Aranami" was also learned and played by a number of other taiko groups, most recently by Satori Daiko, the group to which I belong.² The piece is thus disseminated by Rev. Tom, and according to the etiquette of the taiko world, any group only plays pieces that they created together, that their

teacher created, or that they received directly from another teacher. Anything else is a bit unseemly. In fact, it would be in extremely bad taste to 'lift' a piece from another group by learning it from a recording without their permission. One could say that "Aranami" exists only in relation to Rev. Tom: no taiko player would play it unless they had come into contact with him, or at least unless their teacher had.

Is Rev. Tom the 'composer' of "Aranami"? The simplest answer is yes, but the conceptual sphere defining a 'composer' is historically, culturally, and ideologically complex. It is understood in the western art music tradition that composers are individuals (as opposed to groups), that they create pieces of music full-blown, out of their imaginations, and that those pieces are each idiosyncratic and unique. "Aranami" is and isn't utterly unique. Rev. Tom clearly drew from a vocabulary of formulaic rhythmic motives in order to create it (cf. Lord 1960), and he employed one of four standard taiko "base lines," as they are called in English, to underlie it. That is, the small drum known as *shime-daiko* plays *teke-teke-teke-teke* (continuous eighth notes) throughout. The patterns that make up the piece are found in many other works for taiko, in many other groups: *don don don don*, and *doko-doko-doko-doko*, and *su-don su-don don*, and so on. Rev. Tom's compositional gesture lay in ordering these motives in a certain way, dividing them across different taiko in particular ways, and situating them in his students, i. e., 'composing' with the expectation that these sounds would (at least initially) be played by the musicians closest to him. It is very clear that he is proud of the ways that "Aranami" has become widespread because this is metonymic of his impact as a teacher.

But Rev. Tom is quite aware of the western art music complex defining 'pieces' and 'composers', and he regards himself as the composer of "Aranami." On concert programs, he lists himself as its composer and often includes the year

2) Rev. Tom has also taught "Aranami" to Chikara Daiko of Centenary Methodist Church, Little Tokyo, Los Angeles; Yoki Daiko of Tenrikyo (Shinto) Church, Los Angeles; the University of California, Riverside Taiko Ensemble class; and, in a fascinating case of Japanese American/Japanese exchange (which I will write about in my book), to Yamanari Daiko of Tsubetsu Town, Hokkaido, Japan.

1997 as the date of its composition. He gave the work a name—a title—to indicate that it had its own identity as distinct from other pieces for taiko. By giving it a Japanese name—he always translates “Aranami” as ‘turbulent waves’—he locates the work as Japanese and as for taiko. Sometimes he describes “Aranami” as part of a “trilogy” of works: he has created two other works, “Ame No Mori” and “Arashi,” and although they were not written to comprise a larger unit or group, he regards them as a trilogy because they all have names that refer to water. This begs the question of why he names many of his pieces after nature, in Japanese, and why he locates himself within traditional Japanese aesthetics of nature. . . and this raises the matter of how and why certain signs and symbols are coded across the Japanese American/Japanese divide, and how they acquire power in each via the logic of heritage and orientalism (Wong forthcoming).

An analysis of “Aranami” along the lines of traditional music theory would probably focus entirely on rhythm, and would also probably leave many traditional theorists at a loss because the rhythms in themselves are not particularly ‘complex’. A formal analysis would have the same problems, as “Aranami” is quickly and easily described as having ten phrases or motives that are repeated four times, and then the piece is over. “Aranami” is a short work, as are most of Rev. Tom’s pieces. Like most taiko pieces, it is solidly in duple meter. Percussion pieces are often treated by music theorists as if they are entirely ‘about’ rhythm, but one could also do a pitch and dynamic analysis of the work, which in taiko is related to the size of drum as well as the dynamic level. Two phrases of “Aranami” feature different sizes of drums, i. e., the *chudaiko* play one line alone and the *odaiko* answer with another. This creates a programmatic effect, as do the crescendos in some of the phrases near the end. Crashing waves are thus depicted through parameters including rhythm but keyed especially through the deployment of dynamics and pitch.

[See Figure 2.] Taiko players often learn pieces not only by playing them but by ‘speaking’ them, that is, by learning mnemonic phrases reflecting the rhythms. These syllables only address rhythm, and somewhat inexactly at that. Although these mnemonics are written down and collected as notation by taiko players, it

would be difficult if not impossible to learn a piece from such notation: it is always necessary to hear the piece played in order to learn it. When taiko players 'speak' through such mnemonic patterns as part of their learning or review process, they add a number of elements not present in the syllables themselves: they often move their hands as if they were holding drumsticks (*bachi*) in order to associate right hand and left hand strokes with particular syllables, and they 'speak' dynamics not only through the volume of their voices but usually through relative pitch as well. A crescendo is mnemonically spoken by starting soft/low and ending loud/high. I would venture to say that this is how taiko players hear such lines when they play them on a drum.

Fig. 2. "ARANAMI" IN MNEMONICS.

DON DON DON DON DON DON DON DON
 DOKO DOKO DOKO DOKO DOKO DOKO DOKO DOKO
 DORO KAKA DORO KAKA DORO KAKA DORO KAKA
 KAKA DORO KAKA DORO KAKA DORO KAKA DORO
 DORO TSUKU DORO TSUKU DORO TSUKU DORO TSUKU
 [4-count rest]
 SU-DON SU DON DON SU-DON SU DON DON SU-DON SU DON DON SU-
 DON SU DON DON
 (HO /) DORO DON-DON DON-DON DON-DON DON-DON DON-DON DON-
 DON DON-DON (2 times)
 (HO /) DORO DON-DON DON-DON DON-DON
 (HO /) DORO DON-DON DON-DON DON-DON
 (HO /) DORO DON-DON (HO /) DORO DON-DON (HO /) DORO DON-
 DON (HO /) DORO DON-DON
 DON-DON (HO /) DON-DON (HO /) DON-DON (HO /) DON-DON (HO /)
 DON

I could go on in this vein, but the relationships between purely 'musical' parameters of this sort are only part (and perhaps the least) of the ways that taiko players experience and understand the works that they play. I would like

to turn now to other ways of understanding the 'work' of taiko, and by that I mean quite deliberately to play with the idea of the 'work' as an isolatable musical object and the corporeal, sensual, spiritual, and political work that goes into creating the complex of understandings called taiko. Another way of addressing taiko methodologically is through the body, which opens up a host of issues.

And this is the crux of my argument. Rather than think of 'music' as a sound object, I want to move toward a conception of **music as body** : the movement of music through bodies over time, between bodies (both within and across time), the placement of music within particular bodies and its generation by particular bodies, the linkages created between bodies through sound, and the metaphorical leap from the corporeal, material body to the body politic and the body of the community. Resituating the music-object onto/into bodies has radical implications, and this methodological approach would work for any 'piece' or 'tradition' of music ; it moves the discussion away from an isolated 'thing', wherein much effort must be focused on identifying its shape and its boundaries, and instead towards the connective traces of processes and activities across time and space. It offers both a material and a metaphorical means for regarding the 'work' of music, that is, the things that music does. For taiko, the pleasure of such an analysis is doubled because this tradition is explicitly (emically) grounded in a social, philosophical, and political aesthetics of the body.

Taiko is intensely physical, and it represents a corporeal aesthetic system that is both Buddhist in origin and decidedly contemporary in its realization. Contemporary *kumi-daiko* is explicitly based on certain Buddhist values linking the mind, body, and spirit via the principle of *ki*, energy. *Ki* is the vital energy that can be realized physically but is in fact mental and spiritual as well ; it blurs and even collapses distinctions between the physical, spiritual, and mental. The pragmatics of how *ki* is used and actualized in taiko is drawn from the Japanese martial arts, and the teachings of taiko master Seiichi Tanaka (the founder and director San Francisco Taiko Dojo) are consistently drawn upon by North American taiko practitioners to theorize the complex of mind/body/spirit that is viewed as central to taiko.³⁾ The body is thus always more than the body : it is

understood as a corporeal realization of vital principles that exist beyond the body, but without demoting the body to secondary importance. The importance of *kata*, or 'form', in taiko and the martial arts bespeaks this. Much attention is given to the body by taiko practitioners. At the very least, warm-up exercises precede all rehearsals, and the Japanese groups Oedo-Sukeroku and Kôdo are (in) famous for their extreme physical regimens focused on long distance running (e. g., Sukeroku members' participation in a Boston marathon followed by a full-length concert, and Kôdo members' habit of running up to ten miles every morning before rehearsal). Preparing the body for taiko in these ways is actually preparing the mind and spirit for the 'work' of taiko. Bodily experience is something that taiko players like to talk about and to theorize. Blisters and aching muscles are an honorable part of the taiko experience, but they speak more deeply to the centrality of the corporeal/spiritual conjuncture in taiko. Some groups bring beginning students into the tradition through physical exercises, introducing them to the drums and 'the music' only after weeks or even months of bodily training.

"Aranami" is a bodily experience, both individual and shared. Rev. Tom tends toward minimal choreography, with few unnecessary movements (unlike some groups that put extensive effort into choreography for its own sake). In "Aranami," as in many of his works, the individual players stay put throughout,

3) As described online at <http://www.taikodojo.org/pages/school.htm#OP> (accessed on October 29, 2003) :

All students study the Tanaka style, which incorporates traditional and contemporary rhythms, dance, and martial arts training. Taiko Dojo members go through many hours of physical and mental training before being allowed to perform.

4 core elements practiced at Taiko Dojo :

KARADA : Discipline of body strength, power, and stamina.

KOKORO : Discipline of mind, self control, and spirit

WAZA : Musical skills, physical expressions, and rhythm
Rei communication, manner, harmony, language, unity of spirit

REI : Communication, manners, courtesy, respect, harmony, language, and unity of spirit

Tanaka Sensei believes these are the basic elements of Taiko and cannot stand separately. They must come together as one unit.

standing solidly in front of each drum (whether *shime-daiko*, *chudaiko*, or *odaiko*). Playing “Aranami” makes you feel strong, and this is all in the upper body since the lower body doesn’t move at all. Starting out with strong, steady and repeated strikes (*don don don don*) rather than a more complex or involved set of rhythmic motives is strong; doubling the density of those repeated strikes (*doko doko doko doko*)—and thus doubling the effort—is strong. The repeated gesture of accented downbeats with the right hand is strong: the sensation of flicking out those accents—of raising the right arm a little more and then flinging the extra *ki* out along the length of the arm, from shoulder to elbow, through the forearm, snapped through the wrist and out the length of the *bachi*—is strong. Moreover, these repeated accents and the physical gesture, just described, creating them is a physical representation of a wave. Certainly this happens too quickly for it to register visually for an viewer, nor do taiko players explicitly think or talk about it this way, but if you slowed down video footage of the right arm in motion as it pushes out these strong accented downbeats, it would register as a retreating and advancing wave.

Another key gesture in “Aranami” is the four-count “rest” in the middle. Sonically, nothing happens in that rest except for the lone *shime-daiko*, which continues to play the baseline (though one of our *shime* players is fond of jazzing this measure up). Again, a sound-focused analysis would miss the point behind this “rest,” which is actually anything but a rest. It is filled with the slow considered movement of raising the right arm from the drumhead to full extension above the head. At its best and its most *ki*-filled realization, raising the arm doesn’t begin straight from the drumhead but is rather preceded by a quick pull back that allows the player to bring the *bachi* up from below in a scooping and arcing motion, literally pushing the *bachi* up, leading with its tip in a movement that actually generates a tremendous amount of *ki* as the arm goes up to full extension. You can feel your body fill up with additional *ki* if you do this. You find yourself instinctively inhaling through the entire motion, the entire measure, filling yourself up with air, expanding the chest. The next phrase—*su-don, su-don don*—is explosive for two reasons. First, the expenditure of *ki* matches, fills, and exceeds the ‘silent’ measure preceding it. Second, the half beat “rest” at

the beginning of the phrase generates yet more *ki*, but in a slightly different way than the measure preceding it. Taiko players don't experience that half beat as empty: it is filled with the mnemonic *su*, and this may be literally shouted or may be sounded in the head, silently (though at this point the distinction between sound *heard* and sound silently *felt* begs the question). Furthermore, the movements most filled with *ki* always have a pronounced beginning. That is, the most *ki*-filled movements are kicked into motion via a slight motion of drawing back or pulling up in a quick, small gesture that makes all the difference. In other words, the arm doesn't just start moving: an extra small movement gets the big movement into motion. It is like a kick start, and it too generates *ki*. Rev. Tom explains and demonstrates this in his classes, so again, this is part of the theory of taiko and *ki*. The half beat "rest" at the beginning of this measure should be filled with that kick start—that is, the arm should already be fully extended above the head as it arrives at the end of its arc from below, but in that split second of *su* (the rest), you raise your arm through the shoulder a few inches higher still. Indeed, that small additional lift starts all the way down in your feet: you may even lift up from your toes, and at this point it becomes evident that the lower body has not been immobile and uninvolved through all of this. Rather, that arc from below may be visually defined by the right arm, but it is galvanized by a slight pivoting rise through the legs and torso as well. The kick start involves the entire body, really: the reach upward is created from below, starting down at the toes and rising through the legs to torso to shoulder to arm to *bachi*. Rise up into the kick start, and bring the right arm down on *don* at the same time as you explosively exhale. . . . and as you simultaneously raise the left arm in a scissors motion to put it into position for the next movement.

This is such a complex set of kinesthetic relationships, you might say, to create such a small moment. Yet it is metonymic of a bodily theory of taiko. It has taken me two long paragraphs to unpack the physical movements in one measure of "Aranami," so this is a micro-analysis at best, but it also calls a number of assumptions into question. How can we think about the relationship between sound and movement, then? It is a problem of vocabulary and more: shall I say that the movement is 'behind' the sounds, or that the movement 'drives' the

sounds? Neither metaphor really works. Fronting and backing isn't an accurate description of the sound-body relationship—the theory of *ki* makes that clear. Nor is sound simply a consequence of something more primary—movement isn't the driver in the driver's seat of the sound machine. Rather, the circular, synergistic set of relationships between body, *ki*, and sound is made visible and audible when a microanalysis of this sort is offered.

What then are the boundaries of 'the work' in taiko, and how should they be defined? My university campus has a taiko club called Senryu Taiko that is run and organized by students ; like many collegiate taiko groups in North America, they mostly create their own repertoire, but they learned "Aranami" from Rev. Tom (ca. 1998) when they were still establishing themselves. When I saw them perform it about a month ago, I didn't recognize it for a moment : the rhythmic patterns were 'the same' as what I know as "Aranami," but the students had completely transformed the feeling of the work by creating their own choreography for it. Senryu Taiko used two different *kata* (first diagonal, and then facing the *chudaiko*) and they utilized the space around their *chudaiko* in strikingly different ways than Satori Daiko, by shifting stances and deploying a broader range of strokes, e. g., large sweeping strokes that crossed in front of the body.⁴⁾ The overall effect was extremely graceful and physically lyrical, unlike the powerful stationary affect of Rev. Tom's minimal choreography.

'The work' is thus something flexible and potentially open to rearrangement and rechoreographing, though in this case it retains its original attribution to Rev. Tom. This suggests a comparatively open-ended approach to authorship, where the attachment to an originating individual isn't lost but 'the work' assumes a slightly different shape and character in its bodily realization by another group. This difference isn't incidental : it isn't ornamental detail laid over 'the work' itself. I literally didn't recognize 'the work' as "Aranami" for a long moment when I watched Senryu Taiko's version of it, despite the fact that

4) Junko Ihrke, one of the current student co-directors of Senryu Taiko, told me that their arrangement of "Aranami" was created by former co-directors Mieko Moody and Reina Fuji, who have since graduated.

“Aranami” is part of me, heart and soul, having played it so many times over the years. I was actually disoriented for that long moment, suspended in a jarring sense of knowing but not knowing. It sounded familiar but I didn’t know what it was because its bodily realization was so different.

But this ‘analysis’ needs to go further in two ways, and perhaps even three. *Kumi-daiko* is literally a group experience: few of us ever play alone except to practice, and that needs to be part of any analysis. This is a tradition of massed drums, with no emic theory of how many are too few or how many are too many. I played “Aranami” with approximately one hundred other taiko players in 1999 for the opening of the Japanese American National Museum pavilion in Los Angeles, and the huge taiko group put together for the opening ceremonies of the Winter Olympics in Nagano is now infamous in taiko circles. The experience of the sound and the experience of playing are meant to involve the multiple: many sounds, many performers. Satori Daiko has eighteen members, and while we don’t all play in every piece, we are used to a certain density of sound. As in many amateur taiko groups, some but not all of us have ‘training’ in music, which means that we don’t all play with a metronomic sense of exactness or subdivision, and we don’t play as a large group with an expectation of rhythmic precision—whatever that might mean. Some of our members have extensive training in music, and the inexactness of attack and the inability to control tempos with any certainty is a source of frustration for them, so I am not proposing an emic taiko theory of rhythmic messiness but rather a community of performers for whom a diversity of ability is a given, though this is not accepted by all participants with equanimity. Another way of putting it would be to say that the amateur taiko scene does not discourage participation on the basis of a lack of musical training. It is assumed that playing makes you into a musician—not that you have to be a musician in order to play. Musical chops are recognized and admired, but they are not the only criterion for being a ‘good’ musician. Rev. Tom selects the members of Satori Daiko from his many classes, and he has said more than once that solid playing ability in itself isn’t the only or even the main thing that he looks for: he chooses students who have a good ‘attitude’ as much as anything else, and that attitude is the thing often referred to as the ‘taiko spirit’, i. e., a set

of values that includes a lack of ego or arrogance, the ability to work well with others, putting the group before your own concerns, the will and desire to learn, and the motivation to work hard. When we rehearse, we go over the matters that might be considered good 'ensemble' playing in other western traditions, but we also attend to spirit. We are used to hearing quite a bit of flammings: we do and don't all come down on downbeats together in any absolute sense. We have limits to how much flammings we will tolerate for ourselves, but these limits are not the same as those for studio musicians. The relationship between playing with spirit and playing with metronomic exactitude has a wider envelope than in some other traditions.

Playing with a group of other people has deep bodily implications. You become used to the sensation of hearing and feeling sound all around you. We are trained to look around us, at each other and at the audience; there is no notation in which to bury our heads or eyes. Taiko is loud, invasive, and visual: a deaf musician could easily become an accomplished taiko player through the bodily reception of sound vibrations and visual cues. You learn to follow certain sounds more than others: the sound of the *shime* or the *kane* cuts through the mass of other sounds, so 'listening' in taiko is both involuntary and selective. You are subject to all the sounds around you, but you learn how to focus on some of them over others.

But isn't a lot of music-making like that? What do performers in any tradition hear, and how are they brought into or socialized into certain kinds of listening? To what extent are those skills valued? The multiplicity of sounds that is so much part of amateur taiko groups (notice that I am avoiding other words like "inexact" or "imprecise") is hard to talk about because taiko players too are subject to the aesthetics of western art music ideas of precision. Messy playing is neither valued nor encouraged. But I will reach a little to suggest that the theory versus the practice of taiko is an essential distinction, and I would even go so far as to suggest that the noise of messy, imprecise, unprofessionalized playing is quintessentially part of the political aesthetics of taiko. In flammings, I hear something else besides an inability to subdivide: I hear the activation of the body politic, which is where I have been headed all along in this 'analysis'.

Taiko has been central to Japanese American and Asian American identity work since the 1970s. I write about this in great detail elsewhere (Wong 2000), but will summarize this point by noting that taiko posits strength, discipline, organization, group consciousness, etc.—the very things that define the Asian American movement as a political presence. Further, taiko took off in North America during the decade when universities were creating Ethnic Studies programs and when the Japanese American reparations movement was defined: taiko was part of a new and assertive Asian American sensibility, and it has come to represent not only Sansei confidence but also the vital consciousness that being Japanese American is also being Asian American—that Japanese American issues, especially the internment, affected all Asian Americans. The pan-ethnic gesture of the ‘Asian American’ is a coalitional grouping, not an erasure of history or difference. (Fig. 3) The cover of William Wei’s important book, *The Asian American Movement* (1993), for example, features a photograph of a taiko player at a demonstration commemorating the death of Vincent Chin⁵) and protesting anti-Asian violence. Taiko becomes a metaphorical and an actual manifestation of the Japanese American/Asian American body politic, though the extent to which this is acknowledged or deliberately activated varies. Part of its power, I think, is the dynamic difference between the ‘Japanese American’ and the ‘Asian American’ as separate but interconstitutive and even overlapping identities. This is central to my own interest in taiko and is manifested in some of the sites where we play. Satori Daiko played “Aranami” at the annual pilgrimage to the site of one of the ten Japanese American internment camps: we played at Manzanar in central California in April 2003. All of the camps were

5) Vincent Chin was a Chinese American beaten to death in 1982 outside a bar in Detroit by two White American men who had been laid off work at an auto plant. Thinking that Chin was Japanese and thus linked to the demise of the U. S. auto industry—and the loss of their jobs—the two men killed Chin with a baseball bat. They were charged with and pleaded guilty to manslaughter, and each received a sentence of three years probation and a \$3,000 fine; neither served any jail time. The case was memorialized in the documentary *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* (1988, produced by Renee Tajima-Pena; directed by Christine Choy; distributed by Filmmakers Library) and is seen as emblematic of anti-Asian violence in the U. S.

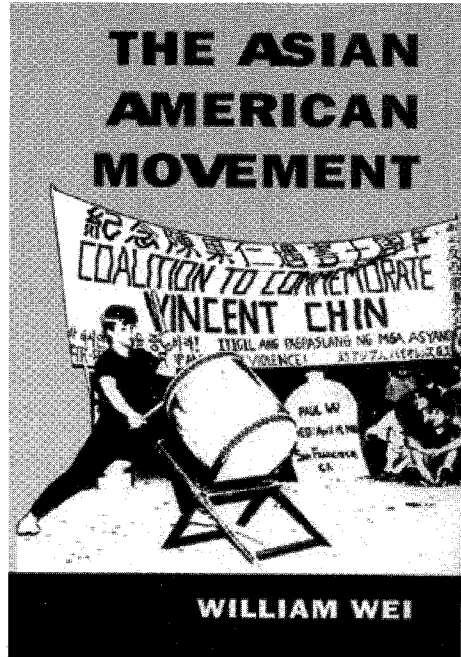


Fig.3 The cover of William Wei's book, *The American Movement* (1993), featuring a taiko player.

located in remote areas and few have any remaining structures: most are now barren expanses of rock, grass, sand, and tumbleweed punctuated by the foundations of the barracks that housed over 110,000 Japanese Americans from 1942–45. Since the 1970s—that key period when Japanese Americans and Asian Americans got politically organized—former internees have organized annual pilgrimages to these sites that serve the purpose of keeping memory alive and linking past and present civil liberties issues. The pilgrimages always feature music, speeches, religious services at the camp cemeteries, testimony from the now-elderly surviving internees, and more. They are a compelling example of self-consciously created ritual, and Satori Daiko participated in the pilgrimage to Manzanar. We spent a long morning in the hot sun and desert wind surrounded by others determined to remember—elderly former internees, young Asian American activists, local schoolchildren—listening to music and speeches, participating in an interdenominational religious service, etc. And we played. We

played "Aranami," with the snow-topped Sierra Mountains behind us, the hot desert wind in our faces, and the stirring, sobering presence of Manzanar's ruins around us.

In that context, what did "Aranami" mean? One could riff on the programmatic meaning of turbulent waves and the metaphoric connection to advocacy and resistance, but this wasn't Rev. Tom's original intent, nor was it brought up at the time—it is simply part of our core repertoire, you could say, and its non-specific message of strength and power fit the bill. At another level, the sheer presence and sound of a taiko group—any taiko group—was the point, for all the metonymic reasons I mentioned a few moments ago. At yet another level, we were there because Rev. Tom worked with one of the founders of the Manzanar Committee in the 1970s, when he was drawn into the Asian American movement and the Japanese American reparations movement, so our presence in 2003 was an extension of his personal history and his coming into political consciousness as a young Japanese American. Satori Daiko became part of the way that Rev. Tom was drawn into a particular body politic, and therefore we became part of it, too. "Aranami" becomes part of a web of associations: First World/Third World patterns of labor migration, the racialization of bodily economies, the surveillance of these economies, etc. This aggregative process is the mechanism behind political process: how do individuals draw together into formations? How does an idea become shared? How does a movement become political action? How is the body politic activated?

I want to draw together the three parts of my argument into an idea for how music might be addressed—i. e., towards a methodology for analysis, if those are the terms you care to use. Musical sound is a bodily product; attending to the body means taking experience seriously; experience is always individual but implicates the collective. The production of musical sound through the body politic is the thing most worth getting at, it seems to me, and a few key ethnomusicologists have focused on this challenge at both the micro- and the macro-levels.

I focused above on the dynamic sound phenomenon of musicians playing together in ways that draw on the sonic reality of multiple presences. Charles

Keil's construct of "participatory discrepancies" is useful here, as he argued that these micro-moments of coming in and out of any exact or absolute conception of downbeat or pitch is centrally part of the vitality and excitement of playing.⁶⁾ He wrote that "The power of music lies in its participatory discrepancies," and that "Music, to be personally involving and socially valuable, must be 'out of time' and 'out of tune'" (Keil and Feld 1994: 96). In focusing on the moments when things don't line up exactly, he identified the "discrepancies" that make performance alive and "participatory"; in a way, he argued for the primacy of liveness, and he couched it in terms of a cultural "ecology" of life, identity, and performance that is both compelling and oddly romantic (97). Keil argued for moments of peak experience achieved through performance—in his case, through polka dancing or listening to the blues—describing these as moments when one is "swept up," full of "euphoric feelings," as immersed in a "deeper and more satisfying knowledge of who we are" (98). Ethnomusicologist Steven Feld's expansive work on a Kaluli community in Papua New Guinea also situates sonic multiplicity as a principle. In conversation with Keil, Steven Feld posited the lift-up-over-sounding sonic aesthetic of the Kaluli as a worldview or, as he put it, as a "spatial-acoustic metaphor" (Keil and Feld 1994: 114) that becomes more broadly and deeply a model for perceiving the world and relationships between everything in that world. The Kaluli most value musical sound and conversational speech that is dense and overlapping, drawn from their perception of the sonic and visual space of the Papua New Guinea rainforest.

In short, these two ethnomusicologists—who not coincidentally have worked together closely over the years—have both focused on how sound relationships map out the imbrication of aesthetics with everything else in a culture, from social and environmental ecology and beyond. Both suggest that sound relationships matter, though how they are to be heard is locally specific. Both focus on how the sounds don't 'line up', as it were, and they find important and epis-

6) My thanks to Jeff Packman for bringing up participatory discrepancies and for information on American studio drummers' attitudes toward flammings that provided a comparative perspective.

temologically essential meanings in those overlappings and discrepancies. This is not to say that all musics everywhere contain their most profound meaning in the interstices of mismatch and misalignment,⁷⁾ but rather that the very terms of such values probably tell us—or rather, the people making them—something important. This is more than a reiteration of homology models for music and culture.⁸⁾ Musical sounds have a synergistic relationship with the body politic and with the supercultural and subcultural interactions posited by Mark Slobin (1993). Sound and movement are realizations of the body's work as well as a site where the body is (re)formulated. The body in performance does a lot at once: it moves in obedience to supercultural imperatives, it recapitulates the terms of that obedience, it formulates the means for questioning and refusing those terms, etc., and all this happens simultaneously. For instance, ethnomusicologist Veit Erlmann draws on Foucauldian scholarship to consider how the global placement of any such consideration is essential. He compares the work of the body in the late capitalist First World to its placement in the laboring Third World and argues that these distinctions outline different parameters for understanding “the work in the work of art” (1996: 25). Which is emphasized, which is most enabled: the agency of the body's work, or its control?

7) Michelle Kisliuk (1995: 79) takes issue with Keil's terminology and the phantasm of 'science' looming behind it:

I agree with Charles Keil's call for a focus on “groove”. . . . But the term “participatory discrepancies” puts Keil in a bind. It has a distancing, scientist flavor, and implies that syncopation and drive relationships are somehow “discrepant,” that is, abnormal. The term itself is un-groovy, foreshadowing the contradictions embedded in Keil's rhetoric (“participation theory and funism” are what Keil says he is after, but measuring the groove does not sound like much fun to me).

8) The search for homologous relationships between music and culture was one of the major contributions of ethnomusicology during the 1980s, when anthropologists of music—particularly Judith Becker, Steven Feld, and Marina Roseman—looked closely at the iconic relationships between the formal characteristics of music and the societies containing them. Becker demonstrated how the cyclic time structures of Javanese gamelan music are related to Javanese conceptions of calendrical time (1979); Roseman showed how Temiar conceptions of song as a pathway are both metaphorical and literal, opening up channels between the sacred and human worlds (1984).

As musicologist Christopher Small puts it, any musical performance articulates a “whole set of ideal relationships” between sounds as well as between people (1998 : 213). Like Fred Maus, Small takes a long look at the late twentieth-century phenomenon of western art music as a cultural construction, and he doesn’t like what he sees. He reflects on the practices defining the performance and reception of symphony concerts and reluctantly concludes that “they are too hierarchical, too distant, and too one-dimensional for my taste” (Small 1998 : 213). Arguing that the music we choose to make and listen to tells who we are, he comes to the painful conclusion that the repertoires which “have been a source of pleasure and satisfaction since my earliest days” no longer work for him—that they “go counter to the way I believe human relationships should be” (220). He takes it further, insisting that the question must then be, “Who am I that I should go on wanting to play and hear the works in this repertory?” (ibid.). As a young person, I went through the same process of immersion and identity formation through western art music and later, as an ethnomusicologist, not only reached the same conclusion as Small but went in search of musics that constructed a different version of social reality and different models for ideal human relationships. As an Asian American ethnomusicologist, I think taiko provides a compelling template for a social, cultural, and musical reality that unambiguously emphasizes relational experience.

I realize that I still haven’t focused on sound. One could say that I have written around it, circling around the thing itself, addressing the bodies producing the sounds more than the sounds themselves. Working through “Aranami” has shown me this: my own immersive experiences of “Aranami” generated a pressing desire to understand how and why it is so thrilling to make its sounds and hear them alongside other people, both taiko players and audience members. Clearly, I am both unable and unwilling to talk about the sounds ‘themselves’ as isolatable or meaningful. At the beginning of this essay I was set into motion by music theorist Fred Maus’s observation that music analysis sets up an opposition between “composition versus performance, music itself versus experience, structure versus embodiment.” I have followed his lead in finding that, for taiko practitioners, performance is more meaningful than composition, that the experi-

ence of performance is foregrounded (not the 'music itself'), and that the embodiment/enactment of sound creates affective, choreographic structures of meaning and effect that are just the opposite of the objectified structures at the heart of traditional music analysis.

In sum, these are the matters that can be pursued through 'analysis': the primary values and the social vision driving the experience of music, whether listening or performing. That experience may or may not be euphoric or one of flow—it may be manifested in very different terms than those I described for taiko—but it will certainly hinge on the shift in sensibility from the individual to the collective and back again. I close with the sense that "Aranami" is and isn't something that holds still, something that allows analysis. Rather, it suggests that the vestiges of the body and the work of performance may be found in 'a work', but 'the work' might better be regarded as a stop-off point, a room with many doors. Attention to the sonic means redefining the act of listening.

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