

TAIKO NOTATION

Taiko is an oral tradition. This means that songs are taught through vocal sounds instead of through the use of written notation. Each kind of drumbeat has a different sound that represents it. This is called verbal notation or in Japanese “kuchishoga”.

Examples:

1 loud beat on the drum is **DON**

2 loud beats on the drum is **DORO**

1 soft beat on the drum is **tsu**

2 soft beats on the drum is **tsuku**

1 beat on the edge of the drum is **KA**

2 beats on the edge of the drum is **KARA**

1 rest (space) is **Su**

Here is an example of a taiko song using Taiko verbal notation:

MATSURI (Festival)

1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&
DON		DON		DON	KARA	KA	RA
DON	DON		DON	DON	KARA	KA	RA
DON		DON		DON	KARA	KA	RA
DON	DON		DON	DON	KARA	KA	RA
KA	DON	KA	DON	KA	DON	DON	
KA	DON	KA	DON	KA	DON	DON	
DON	KARA	DON	DON	DON		KA	
DON	KARA	DON	DON	DON		KA	
DON	KARA	DON	DON	DON		KA	

SOH - LAY! (KIAI over four beats)

You can see from this example why we call it an oral tradition - you can't tell what the song would sound like from reading it off the paper, you have to hear it said to really know how the song goes.

TAIKO WORDS:

Taiko – Japanese drum

Bachi - drumsticks

Kiai – a vocal shout to focus energy

Kata - form or movement style

Oroshi – drum roll

DORO Oroshi - drum roll with a strong attack

Yama Oroshi – a “mountain roll” pattern of increasingly rapid beats leading to a drum roll

Ji - a base rhythm or underlying groove

Suggested resource books:

“The Way of Taiko” by Heidi Varian 2005 Published by Stonebridge Press

“Taiko Drumming Basics” 2020 by Jason Overy and Bonnie Soon