Taiko Master KENNY ENDO’s CONTEMPORARY ENSEMBLE
45th Anniversary Tour
Breaking Through Tradition to Innovation

Thursday, April 7, 2022 at 7:30 p.m.
Bowker Auditorium

Kenny Endo, taiko, kotsuzumi, percussion
Kaoru Watanabe, Nohkan, shinobue, otsuzumi, taiko
Abe Lagrimas Jr, ukulele, vibraphone, drums
Sumie Kaneko, koto, shamisen, vocals
Sho’on Shibata, taiko, percussion

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Photo: Ken Berry
Land acknowledgement

In a year-long consultative and deeply collaborative process with respected advisors from local Tribal Nations, the UMass Native Advisory Council co-developed this campus Land Acknowledgement. This Acknowledgement affirms our campus connection and relationship to the land the campus is built upon and our continued connection to the Nations who were the original inhabitants and caretakers of this land. The University of Massachusetts Amherst acknowledges that it was founded and built on the unceded homelands of the Pocumtuc Nation on the land of the Norrwutuck community.

We begin with gratitude for nearby waters and lands, including the Kwinitekw -- the southern portion of what’s now called the Connecticut River. We recognize these lands and waters as important Relations with which we are all interconnected and depend on to sustain life and wellbeing.

The Norrwutuck community was one of many Pocumtuc Indian towns, including the Tribal seat at Pocumtuc (in present day Deerfield), Agawam (Springfield), and Woronoco (Westfield) to name just a few. The Pocumtuc, who had connections with these lands for millennia, are part of a vast expanse of Algonquian relations. Over 400 years of colonization, Pocumtuc Peoples were displaced. Many joined their Algonquian relatives to the east, south, west and north—extant communities of Wampanoag, including Aquinnah, Herring Pond, and Mashpee, Massachusetts; the Nipmuc with a reservation at Grafton/Hassanamiisco, Massachusetts; the Narragansett in Kingstown, Rhode Island; Schaghticoke, Mohegan and Pequot Peoples in Connecticut; the Abenaki and other Nations of the Wabanaki Confederacy extending northward into Canada; and the Stockbridge Munsee Mohican of New York and Massachusetts, who were removed to Wisconsin in the 19th century. Over hundreds of years of removal, members of Southern New England Tribes would make the journey home to tend important places and renew their connections to their ancestral lands. Such care and connection to land and waters continues to the present day.

Today, Indigenous Nations in southern New England continue to employ diverse strategies to resist ongoing colonization, genocide, and erasure begun by the English, French, Dutch, Portuguese and other European Nations, and that continued when Tribal homelands became part of the United States. Native Americans from Tribal Nations across the U.S. and Indigenous peoples from around the world also travel into these Pocumtuc homelands to live and work. This land has always been and always will be, Native Land.

We also acknowledge that the University of Massachusetts Amherst is a Land Grant University. As part of the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862, Tribal lands from 84 Native Nations west of the Mississippi were sold to provide the resources to found and build this university.

This Land Acknowledgement is the first step in the university’s commitment to practice intellectual humility whilst working with Tribal Nations toward a better shared future on Turtle Island. We aim to foster understanding, deep respect, and honor for sovereign Tribal Nations; to develop relationships of reciprocity; and to be inclusive of Native perspectives and thriving Native Nations far into the future. Members of Massachusetts-based Tribal Nations who are kin to the historic Pocumtuc contributed their insights in composing this acknowledgement -- namely Tribal representatives from Mashpee, Aquinnah, and Stockbridge Munsee. As an active first step toward decolonization, we encourage you to learn more about the Indigenous peoples on whose homelands UMass Amherst now resides on and the Indigenous homelands on which you live and work.
A message from Kenny Endo

Welcome to Breaking through Tradition to Innovation!

It has been a challenging few years. During the pandemic, many people suffered and many lives were lost. Slowly, we are starting to see some recovery. The performing arts are beginning to come back. For me, 2020, marked 45 years of performing, teaching, and composing for taiko. I feel fortunate to have made a career doing what I love. Traditionally, taiko was used to bring good fortune, drive away evil spirits, and bring people together. We hope that our music will help to heal, inspire, transform, and bring peace to the world. We dedicate our performance to the people of Ukraine and to people suffering from aggression all over the world.

Thank you for being here today. Please enjoy the performance.

Aloha,
Kenny Endo

About the Kenny Endo 45th Anniversary Tour

“His ability to interweave ... traditional taiko style with jazz drumming has enabled him to create an incredibly dynamic style ... that captivated the audience ... literally breathtaking.” (The Grateful Web)

"Kenny Endo has probably taken taiko the farthest among Americans." (Natural History, the North American Taiko Conference report)

Celebrating his 45th anniversary in taiko, Kenny Endo stands at the vanguard of the taiko genre and is one of the leading personas in contemporary percussion and rhythm in North America and in Japan. For 45 years, Kenny has led the way in this Japanese style of drumming in the United States.

As a jazz percussionist and early innovator in Japanese taiko, Kenny Endo embodies the history of taiko drumming in the United States. His adventurous spirit continues to stretch the taiko genre by incorporating influences like funk, jazz, Afro-Cuban, and Hawaiian, with roots firmly grounded in tradition. His performances are nuanced, brilliant, exciting.

“... the concert was absolutely amazing. Each performer was a master soloist in their own right, and you all came together in a very special ensemble ... all blended into a modern approach to percussion that I believe is unique in the world today.” — chair, Department of Music, Lafayette College

Endo tours with his Contemporary Ensemble featuring renowned musicians from the United States and Japan who perform on taiko, vibes, drums, ‘ukulele, flute, koto, and shamisen. The recipient of numerous awards and accolades, including special recognition in Japan, Kenny was the first non-national honored with a “natori” (stage name) in Japanese classical drumming. Most recently, Kenny received a 2022 US Artists Fellowship, an award that celebrates artists and cultural practitioners who have significantly contributed to the creative landscape and arts ecosystem of the country.
About the Program

Clarity
By Kenny Endo
This piece relates to the elusive quest for clarity of purpose. The music is inspired by African-American funk. The performers seek to create a cohesive groove through melody and non-traditional rhythms.

Yume no Pahu (Dream of the Pahu Drum)
By Kenny Endo
This piece was inspired by pahu drum maker, Cioci, who had a dream that he was playing an unusually shaped pahu (Hawaiian drum) and chanting in a clearing in the forest. After awakening, Cioci constructed a drum exactly like the one in his dreams. The drum is now in the Drum Museum collection in Tokyo. The first musical section is based on the Hawaiian mele (composition) Ua Nani o Nu’uanu. The second section is influenced by a Tahitian rhythm called titau, arranged as a solo section. Yume no Pahu is dedicated to the indigenous people of Hawai’i in support of their struggle to control their land, their culture, and their destiny.

Ame, Tears of the Earth
By Kenny Endo
Ame means rain in Japanese. My interpretation is that the Earth is crying out. Ame is dedicated to victims of aggression all over the world, particularly in recent history, the events surrounding 9-11 and the current crisis in Ukraine. We hope to counter negativity with love and creativity through this musical performance.

Swing, Soul, and Sincerity
By Kenny Endo
The American singer Bobby McFerrin once said that musicians must have swing, soul, and sincerity. This piece features the melodic instruments with two rhythmic interludes by the drums and percussion.
Spirit Sounds / Miyake
By Kenny Endo / Traditional
The odaiko (large taiko) is traditionally carved from a single tree trunk, hundreds of years old, with skins of stretched cowhide. This work features traditional taiko and voice patterns found in Kabuki and an Afro-Cuban 6/8 rhythm. This composition is dedicated to the spirits of the tree and of the cow, which are united and reborn as a powerful musical instrument. When an artist's spirit becomes one with the spirit of the taiko, the full potential of musical experience can occur. Miyake is a powerful, traditional style of festival drumming from Miyake Island, Japan. It was arranged during the 1980s into a popular composition by the taiko group Kodo. This arrangement adds improvisations to the original rhythmic patterns and signature low stance.

Sounds of Kabuki
(Traditional)
This piece features the nohkan, kotsuzumi, otsuzumi, shamisen, and vocals performing music influenced by traditional Kabuki theatre.

Soaring
By Kenny Endo
The joy of flying with confidence and peace is depicted in this rapid but quiet piece.

Sunflower
By Kenny Endo
The sunflower is a source of light and energy. This composition features the ‘ukulele, koto, and shinobue in a pentatonic scale.

Symmetrical Soundscapes
By Kenny Endo
The drummers perform mirror imagery through sounds. The first part consists of traditional patterns found in Japanese classical drumming. The work then flows into solos intertwined with images of mountains and valleys. The second part is a lively mixture of Brazilian rhythms, Tokyo festival music, and an improvised "conversation" between the players.

Jugoya (Crystal Clear Moon)
By Kenny Endo
Literally meaning fifteenth night, Jugoya refers to the brightest full moon of the year in the old lunar calendar, which was the fifteenth night of the eighth month. In the modern calendar, it corresponds to the harvest moon that takes place in Asia during late September.

About the artists

Kenny Endo (taiko, kotsuzumi, percussion)
Kenny Endo is a performer/composer and a leading spirit in contemporary taiko. Utilizing the traditional Japanese drum in innovative collaborations, his music blends taiko with rhythms influenced from around the world in original melodies and improvisation. Trained in western drums and percussion from childhood, Endo began his studies of kumi daiko (ensemble drumming) in 1975 with Kinnara Taiko (Los Angeles) and the San Francisco Taiko Dojo. In 1980, Endo embarked on a decade-long odyssey in Japan studying with the masters of hogaku hayashi (classical), matsuri bayashi (festival), and kumi daiko. He is the first non-Japanese national to be honored with a natori (stage name and master's license) in hogaku hayashi, and has an MA in music with a specialty in ethnomusicology from the University of Hawai'i. As a composer, Endo has released ten CDs. He has performed as a taiko soloist with the Honolulu Symphony,
the Hong Kong Philharmonic, percussionist Kiyohiko Semba, the Hawaii Opera Theater, and with singer Bobby McFerrin. Endo also serves as Artistic Director of Taiko Center of the Pacific, a school of traditional Japanese drumming in Honolulu. Working with artists in various genres, he has paved new directions in using the taiko, by bringing a refreshing and creative approach to music through his background in western, ethnic, and traditional Japanese drumming.

Kaoru Watanabe (nohkan, shinobue, otsuzumi, taiko)

Kaoru Watanabe is a practitioner of various Japanese transverse bamboo flutes, taiko drum and Western flute. His music is an ever-shifting blend of Japanese folk and classical traditions with contemporary improvisational and experimental music. He was born in St. Louis, Missouri to symphony musician parents. After graduating from the Manhattan School of Music with a BFA in jazz flute and saxophone performance, he moved to Japan and joined the internationally renowned taiko drum ensemble Kodo. He studied and performed taiko, traditional Japanese folk dance and song, and specialized in various fue (bamboo flute) such as the nohkan, ryuteki and shinobue. In 2005, Kaoru began acting as one of Kodo’s artistic directors, focusing on their world music festival, Earth Celebration, and curating and directing collaborations with such artists as Zakir Hussein, Carlos Nunez, Giovanni Hildago, and Yamashita Yosuke. Kaoru left Kodo and returned to New York in late 2006 to teach and continue performing fue and taiko as well as the western flute in collaboration with musicians, dancers, and visual artists of both western and eastern disciplines. Kaoru has performed and recorded with such artists as Jason Moran, Stefon Harris and the great Kabuki actor Bando Tamasaburo.

Sumie Kaneko (koto, shamisen, vocals)

Sumie Kaneko started playing koto (Japanese zither) at the age of five. In 1995, she won the Takasaki International Competition in koto performance. She studied Japanese traditional music at Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music and studied jazz vocals at the Berklee College of Music. Her performance highlights include Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, TED Talk, Getty Center, Boston Ballet, and the Museum of Fine Arts. In 2014, her group, J-Trad, was invited to the Washington DC Jazz Festival by the Embassy of Japan. Kaneko was the first shamisen player to perform in Paula Vogel’s Pulitzer Prize winning work, The Long Christmas Ride Home. Her international tours include Brazil, Peru, Bolivia, Jamaica, and Bangladesh.

Abe Lagrimas Jr (ukulele, vibraphone, drums)

Abe Lagrimas Jr. is a versatile multi-instrumentalist who began his musical journey when he first sat behind the drums at the age of four. As he learned more about music and his career progressed, Abe gained an interest in other instruments becoming highly proficient on vibraphone, drums and ukulele. He now performs throughout the world on all three instruments and in many musical genres. Abe continued his studies and attended Berklee College of Music as a scholarship recipient. He has performed with notable artists such as Eric Marienthal, Lalo Schifrin, Gabe Baltazar, Jake Shimabukuro, and James Ingram. He is a member of one of South Korea’s top jazz groups, Prelude, and a regular member of the Hawaii-based groups Don Tiki and Bop Tribal, and the Boston-based Waitiki 7. He serves as musical director for LA-based vocalist Charmaine Clamor. Abe has released albums on major labels including Universal Music Japan, Sony Korea, Pony Canyon Records. He received a 2011 Na Hoku Hanohano (Hawaiian Music) Award for his Michael Jackson tribute album Solo 'Ukulele - The King of Pop. Abe is endorsed by Canopus Drums, Paiste Cymbals, Vic Firth Drumsticks, Beato Bags and Koolau Ukuleles. He currently resides in Los Angeles, California.

Sho’on Shibata (taiko, percussion)

Sho’on trained as a fellowship recipient with Kenny Endo’s Taiko Center of the Pacific, prior to joining the ensemble. A trained ethnomusicologist and advocate for world music with a focus on East Asian music, Shibata earned his BA at SUNY Potsdam in New York State, and Crane School of Music. At Crane he founded its first taiko group. His studies included African drum and dance, trombone, and chorus. His
extensive taiko drumming research in the US and Japan, was presented during the SUNY Potsdam Learning and Research Fair, as well its Presidential Scholars Honors Colloquium. Shibata has an MA in ethnomusicology with a focus on Japan from the University of Hawai‘i, Manoa.

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Kenny Endo uses taiko provided by Miyamoto Unosuke Shoten of Tokyo.
Kenny Endo's costume is designed by Anne Namba.

**Artist Representative:**
Pasifika Artists Network
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This season, we celebrate 28 years of our mission to present the artistic and cultural heritages and living practices of Asia (broadly defined) and the Asian American experience as a lens to promote cultural awareness, intercultural dialogue, and social justice. Through performances, educational outreach, community engagement, and residencies by artists, scholars, and other experts, we serve learning communities and audiences at UMass and the Five Colleges and greater western Massachusetts region, as well as nationally and internationally through virtual programs. We have presented such world-class artists as Kodo, Cloud Gate Dance Theater, Amjad Ali Khan, and Sankai Juku, contemporary innovators like Takao Kawaguchi, Kristina Wong, and Kadri Gopalnath, traditional masters such as Zakir Hussain and Sidi Goma, and many others.

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- *Ragmala - A Garland of Ragas*
- Thursday, April 21 – 7:20 p.m.
- Bowker Auditorium

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