

FINDING YOUR ROUTES IN RHYTHM

CLASSTAIKO



Dan Jones

CHAPTER 1

Taiko!



I remember vividly my first experience of Taiko. A cold Scottish morning, a Dojo in the Highlands and a style of drumming perceived to be as far removed from modern contemporary music as it possibly could be. I was cold, tired and completely unengaged. The excitement, passion and relevance of Taiko therefore came as a real shock. The lessons imparted to me on those first few days of my Taiko learning changed my approach to music making and helped me find my own roots in rhythm.

Over the next ten lessons I will take you on a voyage of rhythmic discovery as we uncover the secrets of Taiko. Every element of learning will help us prepare you for the musical challenges that follow not just in this book, but in the wider musical world.

Taiko strips away the complexities of Samba and the freedom of West African. It focuses on discipline, performance but above all groove. To really sell a Taiko performance you must feel every note, every rest, every move you make with your soul. Taiko teaches us the skill many musicians neglect; it shows us how to feel the music we play and to truly perform it.

Lesson 1

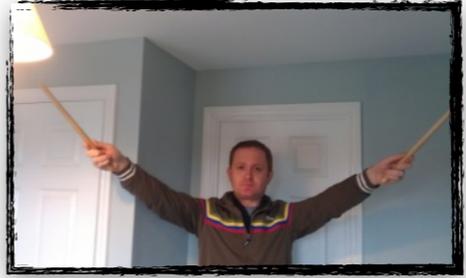
The Language of Taiko

Music is a language all of its own. Just like French, Italian or any foreign language, to truly perform music you need to understand what you are saying. In my experience the language of Taiko is universal. Many of my students after studying Taiko, would read all other rhythms whatever the genre, in Taiko.

Instead of conventional written notation, Taiko uses word rhythms. Each word translates to a strike of the drum or to a part of the rhythm where you do not play.

In most music genres if you are not playing, this is usually called a rest. But in Taiko there are no rests! If you are not playing, you will be doing something with your sticks. This is the choreography element of Taiko.

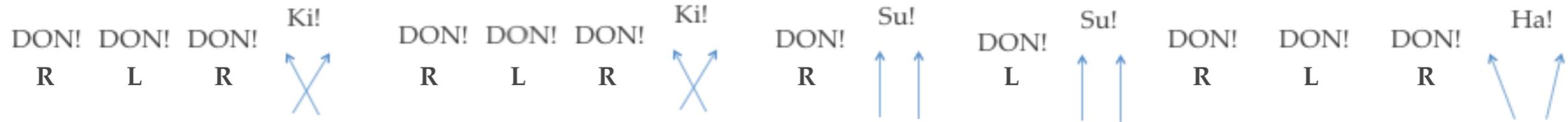
To begin with we will take a look at the basic words used and their meanings:

Image	Word	Meaning	Image	Word	Meaning	Image	Word	Meaning
	DON!	Single Drum Strike		Ki!	Click of Sticks		Ha!	Rest - Occurring at the end of a pattern
	DO-KO!	Double Drum Strike - Played with alternate hands		Su!	Rest			

Activity One

1. Using the Japanese words & meanings table as a guide, read through **Tokyo Thunder – Pattern One** aloud. Whilst doing so, try and picture what you should be doing with your sticks. Make sure each 'Don' is played with alternate hands:

Tokyo Thunder – Pattern One



2. Now say through Pattern One again. This time whenever you say:
 - a. 'Ki' cross your sticks above your head ensuring they make a click sound
 - b. 'Su' point your sticks parallel above your head ensuring your arms are straight
 - c. 'Ha' point your sticks diagonally upwards with each arm making a 'Y' shape
3. Stand up and say 'Pattern One' at least five times through
4. Ensure each musician mirrors the moves of the other members of the group e.g. every Ki, Su and Ha etc. is together



If you can say it, you can play it!

Whenever we make music, as musicians we must think about the notes as we play them. That might sound obvious but you would be shocked how many great musicians become complacent and forget to do this. One of the biggest lessons I want to teach you is, 'If you can say it, you can play it'. This lesson applies to absolutely every type of music. The beauty of Taiko is saying it, is actually part of the performance.

A traditional performance is full of words spoken with force and passion. The Japanese call this 'Ki' which means energy or spirit. As we will discover, the words spoken help us to perform our piece to higher standard but they also give our performance 'Ki'. This is the secret to playing great Taiko!

Activity Two

Ensure you stand now in all Taiko activities. If you are working in a group, stand in two even rows and ensure you all face forwards.

1. Say through Pattern One again
 - Ensure your words are spoken with force.
 - It may feel strange at first but once you start actually drumming, your words will become part of the piece.

Now using 'Tokyo Thunder – Pattern One' as a guide, stand and say through the rhythm between five and ten times:

2. Imagine a drum is in front of you
 - Whenever you say DON, hit your imaginary drum

Top Tip

[Check out Yamato on the internet](#). They are an amazing Japanese group of Taiko players who shout a lot when they play. You need to do the same! It gives the performance authenticity but also helps you keep time.

- Use your whole arm to strike the drum
- Imagine you are painting a wall with a big paint brush, with your drum strike happening at the lowest point in your arm movement
- Try and follow the sticking patterns notated (R meaning right/L meaning left)
- Make you say your pattern as well as play your pattern
- Do not forget the 'Ki', 'Su' & 'Ha stick positions

Top Tip

Always count yourself in before you start. Say steadily 'One, Two, Three, Four', then start. If you are performing in a group, this will help everyone start at the same time. The count in is also a crucial part of our Taiko performance.



Solos & Base Rhythms

Taiko usually features two parts. The first is complex and exciting featuring lots of different drum sounds, shouting and choreography. This part is called the solo and many people like playing these best.

In most genres of music this would be performed by one musician, in Taiko a solo can be performed by one or more musicians. Tokyo Thunder – Pattern One is a great example of a solo.

The second part of Taiko is, I think, the most important. We have all been at a disco and seen how certain songs fill the dance floor and others empty it just as quick. It is the feel or groove of the song that makes you want to dance or not...

Top Tip

Try and use the Japanese words we discover in all your Taiko learning. I have found students remember these words and their meanings tremendously easily. Other groups learn in this way to add authenticity to their performance but also so they can communicate with other players from across the globe.

The second party of Taiko is all about injecting groove and energy. It is called the base rhythm or in Japanese, the ji-uchi. This is a simple pattern which is performed at the same time as the solo, by a second Taiko player or group of players. This helps those musicians playing the solo to stay in time. Imagine Tokyo Thunder is a car. If the solo is the body of the car then the ji-uchi is the engine and the wheels.



Activity Three

There are three main ji-uchis. The first we will look at is called the Gobu-Gobu:

Ji-uchi – Gobu-Gobu

(All speak with force) One, Two, Three, Four:

DO-KO! DO-KO! DO-KO! DO-KO!
R L R L R L R L

1. Stand and say through the pattern four times – if you are in a group remember to make sure everyone is speaking with force and do not forget to count yourselves in
2. Now play through the pattern again four times on your imaginary drum
3. Doko's are faster than Don's so instead of big brush strokes as you strike the drum, use forearm stokes. Keep your upper arm parallel to your body allowing the sticks to move from your elbows * Pic or drawing

Performing Tokyo Thunder

To undertake our first performance of Tokyo Thunder, we need to put our solo with our ji-uchi. To do this we need a group of two or more Taiko drummers.

One group will take the solo, the other will play the ji-uchi. But first we need to understand how the two parts fit together:

Tokyo Thunder - Line 1

	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4			
Group 1 :	DON!	DON!	DON!	Ki!	DON!	DON!	DON!	Ki!	DON!	Su!	DON!	Su!	DON!	DON!	DON!	Ha!			
	R	L	R		R	L	R		R			L			R	L	R		
Group 2 :	Doko	Doko	Doko	Doko	Doko	Doko	Doko	Doko	Doko	Doko	Doko	Doko	Doko	Doko	Doko	Doko			
	R L	R L	R L	R L	R L	R L	R L	R L	R L	R L	R L	R L	R L	R L	R L	R L			

1. Speak through **Tokyo Thunder - Line One**
2. Ensure your first group of drummers follows the Group One line and your second group of drummers follows Group Two
3. See how the line forms into four sections, these are called beats
4. Notice how Group Two have two drum strikes per beat, they will need to play quicker than Group One
5. Ensure Group Two play their first drum strike at the same time as Group One
6. Group Twos second drum strike takes place in between each of Group Ones Dons

Top Tip

How fast or slow you play the piece is called tempo. A great way to judge this is with a metronome. If you do not have access to one, use a watch. If you are playing 60 beats per minute, each Don or Ki should fall in time with the third hand on your watch or the seconds on a digital watch.

About the Author



Dan Jones - Leading an 'Extreme Taiko' open evening

Dan Jones discovered Taiko in 2007, beginning his studies with [Mugenkyo Taiko Drummers](#) in Scotland under the tutelage of Neil Mackie and Miyuki Williams. In recent years he has continued his studies with Teresa Brookes in Northern Italy. Dan pioneered the delivery of Taiko in Wider Opportunities, launching Europe's then leading project in the North East of England. In 2010 Dan launched '[ClassTaiko](#)' with one of his current Taiko students, David Powell, leading the program launch in South West of England. This program continues to grow, one group opened the [Schools Prom](#) last year. Dan is a passionate believer in the power of Taiko for all ages and delivers sessions across the [world most recently in Qatar](#).



[Mix Music Education was formed](#) by former music teacher of the year, Dan Jones in 2010. The company works with educators across Europe, helping them develop self-sustaining, relevant programs. Mix Music Education have pioneered the delivery of Taiko in the classroom with their 'ClassTaiko' program, supporting schools with the supply and basic training in the use of Taiko (Japanese Drums).

Mix Music Education also exclusively supply, install and support the award winning [JamPod™](#) and [JamClassHD iPad music suite](#).

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