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# 1,000 taiko drummers drumming

By Steve McClure

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**P**ercussion is an integral part of Brazil's musical culture, as anyone who's ever swayed to the samba's seductive beat can attest.

So it makes sense that Japanese-Brazilians eager to get back in touch with their cultural roots should get into taiko drumming.

"There's a resurgence of interest in Japanese culture among Japanese-Brazilians," says Isaku Kageyama, a member of Tokyo-based taiko group Amanojaku, noting that there are now about 60 taiko groups in the Latin American country. "It's not like in the U.S., where there's been a denial [of Japanese roots] and more assimilation."

To mark the centenary of Japanese immigration to Brazil, Amanojaku is organizing a performance of 1,000 drummers in Sao Paulo's Skol Arena Anhembi samba venue on June 21.

The players, mostly Japanese-Brazilians in their teens and 20s, will perform "Kizuna" (Bond), co-composed by Amanojaku leader Yoichi Watanabe.

Taiko performances on a similar scale have been held in Japan, but the Sao Paulo event will be the first such mega-taiko event ever held outside Japan, Kageyama says.

Kageyama and other members of Amanojaku have been traveling to Brazil regularly over the past couple of years to teach taiko techniques to students of the Japanese style of drumming.

"The first time we went there, we taught them the fundamentals, such as how to sit in the [kneeling seiza position]," says Kageyama, adding that on each subsequent visit the students learned more advanced techniques.

"The biggest challenge was to get the kids interested to a level where they would accept the hard work and discipline needed to play an instrument well," he says.

That contrasts with the rather more laid-back Brazilian lifestyle. "People would come to class late and their friends would give them a kiss on both cheeks," Kageyama says with a laugh. "You can't do that in taiko."

Kageyama—who admits that his Portuguese is minimal—says about a quarter of the drummers speak Japanese, while roughly half are conversant in English.

He says that so far the Japanese media haven't paid that much attention to the June 21 event. "I don't know if they realize how important the issue of identity is to these Japanese-Brazilian kids," he says. "It's about who they are."

Amanojaku—a "new wave" taiko group that combines tradition with innovation, mainly performing pieces by Watanabe—is holding



Photo by Naoya Ikegami  
Yoichi Watanabe in action

a taiko workshop for beginner, intermediate and advanced players at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Space on March 29. For more information, e-mail Kageyama at [isaku.kageyama@amanojaku.info](mailto:isaku.kageyama@amanojaku.info) or check the Amanojaku Web site at <http://amanojaku.info>.