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CENTENARY OF JAPANESE EMIGRATION

'Taiko' extravaganza to set the tone in Brazil

By YABO KARASAKI

Staff Writer

It's a mind-boggling picture, with a deafening sound to match: 1,000 taiko drums, all beating in unison to mark the centennial of the first Japanese emigrants to set foot in Brazil.

Isaku Kageyama, 26, a Japanese-American taiko performer based in Tokyo, is helping to organize the mass drum performance that is set to take place in Sao Paulo on Saturday.

Kageyama hopes that through the *semin daiko* (thousand drums) performance Saturday, young Brazilians of Japanese descent will gain a sense of pride in their heritage. One hundred years ago, about 800 Japanese emigrants arrived in Brazil in 1908.

"Through the experience of performing together, I hope that they will be able to touch base with their roots, and find their own identities," Kageyama said recently in Tokyo.

The drum performance will take place at Sao Paulo's Arena Skol Anhembi, a 500-meter samba parade ground. Crown Prince Naruhiko, visiting Brazil to mark the centennial, is scheduled to attend, along with other dignitaries.

Kageyama, a member of the taiko group Amanojaku, based in Tokyo's Nerima Ward, has made four trips to Brazil in recent years to teach Japanese-Brazilians the basics of taiko, along with the discipline and traditions that



Isaku Kageyama, second from right, gives advice at a taiko workshop in Tokyo's Toshima Ward.

are integral to the art.

Kageyama says the task was not easy at first. Many young Brazilians tend to be too laid back, he said.

"Some students would show up late, and then others would start hugging and kissing them. You just can't have that (during taiko practice)," Kageyama said.

Over time, however, his pupils came

to appreciate the value of devotion, teamwork and respect for others.

Kageyama said he eventually noticed big changes in his students—some would set up the taiko before practice, without waiting for instructions, planning the best layouts for the drums on their own.

One older Japanese-Brazilian also told him that since the drum lessons

began, more younger people had started showing up at barbecue parties or other social events and mingling with older members of the community.

Kageyama's devotion is rooted in the fact that taiko helped him develop his own identity as a Japanese-American. Born in San Francisco, Kageyama was just 6 when he started studying taiko. He was taught by a percussionist who performed with his father in a band. At that young age, the taiko was a source of fun for him and little more, Kageyama said.

When he was in junior high school, Kageyama moved to Detroit, where few Asians lived at the time. He was quickly made aware that many people there saw him as an outsider.

And when he tried to play up his Japanese side, Kageyama encountered another problem.

Back then, there were no baseball stars like Ichiro Suzuki or Hideki Matsui to whom Americans could relate. With no Japanese role models, Kageyama was uneasy identifying himself as Japanese. Taiko filled that chasm in his identity, he said.

"I think my *sensei* (drum teacher) was teaching me how to be a better person, a person who can take responsibility for themselves and for others, and not just how to be a good performer," Kageyama said.

This weekend, when the sound of 1,000 taiko fill that Sao Paulo arena, he will pass on that lesson.