

Shasta Taiko was founded in 1985 by Russel Hisashi Baba and Jeanne Aiko Mercer, both recognized artists in traditional and contemporary taiko, new music, and jazz.



Russel Baba, Jeanne Mercer, Masato Baba - ShastaYama 2006

Photo: Bob Hsiang

Shasta Taiko's mission is to introduce, teach, develop, promote, and preserve the art of taiko and related music and arts, thereby culturally enriching the community and artistically evolving the art.



Julie Bennett, Eli Marconi - Shasta Taiko, ShastaYama 2008

Photo: Tom Pava

Starting with grant awards from the California Arts Council and sponsorship from the Mount Shasta

Parks and Recreation District, Baba and Mercer have offered lessons and exposure to traditional and modern taiko - Japanese style drum - to the Mount Shasta community.



Richard Berchett, Rebecca Duff - Shasta Taiko, ShastaYama 2008

Photo: Tom Pava

Shasta Taiko was one of the first American taiko programs to include children, and Russel and Jeanne continue to inspire, influence, and develop "next generation American taiko artists."



Kelsey Demarest, Eli Marconi, Jessica Catlin - Shasta Taiko, ShastaYama 2007

Photo: Gary Ono

Former Shasta Taiko members who started taiko as children, Masato Baba and Shoji Kameda, are now recognized a leaders of a new taiko generation. Recent high profile performances for these

two include the 2009 Academy Awards for Masato and the 2008 National Democratic Convention for Shoji.



Shoji Kameda, Jeanne Mercer, Masato Baba - ShastaYama 2006

Photo: Bob Hsiang

Baba and Mercer began their taiko training with Grand Master Seiichi Tanaka and San Francisco Taiko Dojo in 1972. Their contribution to the development of taiko in American is significant. In 1996, Baba and Mercer established a successful annual formal taiko show - Shasta Taiko In Concert.



ShastaYama 2006

Photo: Bob Hsiang

In 2005, the yearly show successfully expanded outdoors to Mount Shasta's Shastice Park and was renamed ShastaYama. ShastaYama is now developing into a major taiko and music festival. Baba and Mercer were recognized as influential American taiko pioneers at the Big Drum: Taiko in the United States exhibit at the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles and at the North American Taiko Conference sponsored by the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center.



Russel Baba, Jeanne Mercer - ShastaYama 2007

Photo: Gary Ono

They led the 1st National Summer Taiko Institute for young American taiko leaders and have performed and led workshops for 5 North American Taiko Conferences, 5 National Collegiate Taiko Invitationals, and 3 Northwest Regional Taiko Gatherings.



Jeanne Mercer

Photo: Bob Hsiang

Russel and Jeanne and former Shasta Taiko members, Masato Baba and Shoji Kameda, are also featured along with others in several national video documentaries and studies on American taiko - most notably, "Spirit of Taiko," and "Big Drum."



Russel Baba

Photo: Bob Hsiang

A video documentary, "Shasta Taiko," also won the 16th Annual National Cable ACE award in cultural affairs.

"Spirit Drum - Taiko Stories From America," is a CD recording of their original work and features former Shasta Taiko members, Masato Baba and Shoji Kameda.



Eli Marconi, Rebecca Duff - Shasta Taiko, ShastaYama 2008

Photo: Tom Pava

Shasta Taiko members perform for area schools and organizations, and for community benefits and events. Performing members have toured the west coast from Los Angeles to Alaska.



Distance Floating - Shasta Taiko, ShastaYama 2008

Photo: Gary Ono

Shasta Taiko repertoire consists of original compositions by Baba and Mercer, some based on

traditional Japanese taiko rhythms, some with world music and jazz influences, and some inspired from nature.



Wanda Welbourn, Ethan Catlin - Shasta Taiko, ShastaYama 2008

Photo: Gary Ono

Besides an "orchestra" of drums of various sizes and tones, the compositions often utilize a variety of percussion as well as wind instruments - Japanese bamboo flutes, Mexican clay flutes, saxophone, conch shells, and Australian didgeridoo - combined with dramatic choreography to present a colorful auditory and visual experience.