ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis:	THE WOMEN AND TAIKO MOVEMENT: QUESTIONING GENDERED LEADERSHIP THROUGH EMBODIED PRACTICE
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The tradition of North American taiko drumming has been rife with discussion on gender passed down from its Japanese origin. It is known that women, and even more so Asian American women, feel empowered performing taiko. Despite this feeling of empowerment, there has been minimal leadership roles held by female taiko players, roles such as: solo artists, workshop leaders, and composers. Women are also left out of the mainstream narrative of taiko drumming, which centers on masculine performance and performance styles. A coalition formed and launched the Women and Taiko movement—dedicated to solving these issues through webinars and by enhancing the visibility of female leadership. This movement expanded, including the first all-female, professional level taiko performance and women-created compositions. This thesis discusses this movement as a social movement that seeks to disrupt gendered systems of power and embodied knowledge through pragmatic solutions formed through discussions and by performance.

THE WOMEN AND TAIKO MOVEMENT: QUESTIONING GENDERED LEADERSHIP THROUGH EMBODIED PRACTICE

by

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Dedication

To my mother, Keri Alice Coe (1962-2014), who inspired me to work hard despite unimaginable challenges and to have patience in the face of frustrations. Also, to my mentor Dr. Maria Paula Survilla (d. 2020), who initially taught me about the world of ethnomusicology and showed me the value of mindfulness and meditation.

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Introduction

A line of seven women take the stage at the 2020 HERbeat concert. Cheers erupt from the crowd as these professional women artists prepare to play Tiffany Tamaribuchi's piece "Kokorozashi." Tamaribuchi plays her taiko in the center with loud strikes from her bachi on a nagado-daiko and shimedaiko set. Kiai (shouts of energy) erupt from the other performers' chests. After a short solo from Tamaribuchi, every taiko artist joins in to play in unison, a powerful drum beat that reverberates around the Ordway Music Theatre in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Energy-filled crescendos pull me forward from my seat and draw me in to the empowering example of female taiko performance on stage. Passionate solos travel down the line of the seven performers as the artists create a playful atmosphere through facial expressions that dare the other players to a challenge or tease each other by leaving space before hurriedly beating the drum before their solo is over. More play and laughter are generated as performers walk down the line of drums, interrupting and taking over the drums of the other artists. More expressions of teasing and artificial frustration fuel the energy of the piece before the unison drum pattern returns once more. Another round of solos show off the virtuosic abilities of the performers before a loud vocalization of kiai leads the group into the final unison section. After the last beat, each performer's left bachi is pointed to the sky and I am left exhausted without even having beat a drum. My heart feels like it could fly from my chest and my mind spins after witnessing the possibilities of female taiko performance and leadership styles at play through this historical concert. "Kokorozashi" was just one piece of the

HERbeat concert that sparked my love for seeing women be women on a taiko stage and forever changed the possibilities of North American taiko drumming, not only for myself, but for the taiko community at large.

Taiko drumming, specifically North American taiko, is a style of Japanese performance that is a mixture of percussive drumming, dance, and martial arts. Put together, these aspects create a powerful and beautiful artform that is imbued with Japanese and Asian American culture. When referencing North American taiko, it is important to note that the scene is most popular in the United States and Canada, while less focus is placed within Mexico. The term taiko can refer to both the Japanese drum and to the genre of drumming, and both can sometimes be used in the same sentence. Although North American taiko drumming was born out of Japanese taiko practices, the artform in North America has its own styles and communities that were born from Asian American, and more specifically Japanese American, values, religion, and activism around the 1960s. The practice of musical activism, Japanese values, and the powerful sounds of the drum fueled the community's growth and popularity. While Japanese taiko drumming was a historically male-centered practice, as participation and interest grew, women were allowed to practice the art off the stage and eventually were able to perform alongside the men in front of audiences (Carle 2008: 57). In North America, the taiko practice centered on the male-performance practices, but women were a part of the artform from its inception. Many articles touch on how North American female performers enact masculinity through performance to be perceived as a good or valued player of the drums.

The discussions about the state of women within North American taiko ensembles and organizations have been an ever-evolving topic of conversation within the North American taiko community, especially within the last ten years. While taiko drumming's origins in Japan are male-centered, women in the North American taiko community have been an integral part of the tradition since its first iterations. The 2016 Taiko Census done by the Taiko Community Alliance shows that women make up about 2/3rds of taiko players in North America (Walker 2017: 4). These women do everything from performing, secretarial work, artistic decision making, and composing to leading classes and workshops, among many other tasks. However, it has been brought up repeatedly through discussions at North American Taiko Conferences (NATC) and community discussions that women in this artform have frequently been left out of the narrative that imbues value, prestige, and professional connections for those recognized as significant or important taiko artists. In this thesis, I hope to analyze and promote the voices of women and, in a similar vein, LGTBQ+ persons, who have worked hard to create change through the Women and Taiko social movement, HERBeat, and connected events within the North American taiko community.

The Women and Taiko movement—which will be capitalized to indicate the movement as well as the website which is connected with the movement—is dedicated to "increasing the visibility of women in the art form" by offering resources, models, workshops, meetings, and hosting webinars (Women and Taiko 2021). All of these goals are aimed at creating a change within the taiko community: centering the visibility of female and non-binary taiko players, promoting the history

of how women have impacted "taiko culture," and challenging the gendered value system present in North American taiko drumming (ibid.). *HERbeat,* a concert that took place in February 2020, promoted similar aims. The *HERbeat* concert playbill states, "we are putting women center stage, celebrating talent and perseverance, highlighting the depth and diversity of talent pools madly percolating in isolation for decades…Taiko drumming has thundered through Japanese art and culture, traditionally reserved for men…Patriarchy and sexism persist, a systemic problem reflected in the arts" (Weir 2020) Through this statement, this concert is dialogically connected to the Women and Taiko movement. While the large majority of participants in the Women in Taiko movement are based in the United States, Canadians also have a significant presence in the community and both event organizers and my interlocutors present themselves as part of a North American movement, rather than one that takes place solely in the US (Although I have not met any participants based in Mexico, my understanding is that they would also be welcomed into the fold). This thesis will analyze how the actions and musical performance of the Women and Taiko movement, along with the HERBeat concert, have created change in the taiko community by disrupting historically determined systems of "power, prestige, and value" (Koskoff 2014: 31).

Positionality

My own history with the art of taiko is closely tied to my femaleness and the usual stories of how taiko empowers women. I am not Asian American, rather I am white, and am not tied to the historical gender expectations placed on Asian American women. Therefore, I do not claim to fall into the "gendered orientalist tropes that

position Asian and Asian American women as quiet, docile, and sexually available" (Wong 2019: 121), and my relation to taiko empowerment does not come from a source that is racially determined or enforced by Asian or Asian American gender roles. As a child and through my teenage years, I was always shy and meek. I rarely shared my ideas at school and was not one that chose to stand out. While I was not necessarily prim and proper, I was not tomboy-ish either, and my face would frequently redden if I was called upon to do anything that involved speaking alone or performing a task in front of the watchful eyes of my peers or teachers. However, one year I attended a week-long band camp where I got to partake in a group drumming course. A high school in Midwest Iowa had bought taiko drums to share with the college where the camp was held, and they brought the drums with them for this course. In Iowa, there is only one formal taiko group, Soten Taiko, and a collegiate group at the University of Northern Iowa, Kaji-Daiko.[1] So, it is uncommon to find or see taiko, especially in my hometown in Eastern Iowa, as both of these groups were more than two hours away. This band camp used drums from the University of Northern Iowa and their shared drums from the high school to teach the students *kumidaiko* (group taiko). I vividly remember envying the students who got to play the largest drums available, as the sound reverberated through my body and electrified my voice. I quickly became the exact opposite of my quiet, withdrawn persona and volunteered to play rhythms on my own and ask questions about movement and the

[1] "Soten Taiko." Japan America Society of Iowa. https://www.japaniowa.org/soten-taiko (Accessed March 24, 2021.)
"Taiko Ensemble." UNI School of Music. https://music.uni.edu/ensembles/small-ensembles/taiko-ensemble (Accessed March 24, 2021.)

positioning of my body. While this experience did not translate immediately outside of this class, it blossomed as the week went on and the memory of playing those drums stayed in my mind.

I attended the school that hosted the camp for my undergraduate education and was able to play the drums periodically throughout my time there. In my senior year, I was assisted by the host professor of the camp in an independent study researching the history of taiko from the earliest iterations of the drum to its inception in North America. It was at this point that I developed my own practice drum out of a tire and some heavy-duty tape and began practicing taiko compositions on my own. Again, the feeling of empowerment filled me with excitement and prompted me to start paying more attention to the online activities of the "taiko community," since I was not close to any taiko group with whom I could connect. The concept of a taiko community, which will from now on be referenced without quotations, is not a definition that I created, but rather is something established by taiko players themselves. Deborah Wong states "[taiko players] believe themselves—mostly—to be a community of practice, though across vast geocultural spaces," (Wong 2019: 6) and online spaces reflect this, as well. As of February 2021, around 6,700 people are a part of the public group named "Taiko Community" on the social media site Facebook (Taiko Community 2001). This group is a home for the global taiko community, and people from multiple continents subscribe to this page. There are, in fact, many taiko pages and groups for other subcommunities of players within the taiko community, such as Taiko Europe for European taiko players, Taiko Builders for those who are sharing information on building taiko, and one that is of particular

importance to my research: the "Women and Taiko Group," which is connected together through a Facebook page, "Women and Taiko." It was my discovery of the "Women and Taiko Group" Facebook page that prompted my own questions about gender and taiko and which transformed into this research.

Research Questions

My questions began with an interest in why this group page needed to exist. From my partial insider experience, I knew there were many more women in the taiko community than men. However, I was enough of an outsider to the taiko community to not understand the deeper gender politics at play. It was at this point in my research that Deborah Wong's 2019 book, *Louder and Faster: Pain, Joy, and the Body Politic in Asian American Taiko,* was published. In this book, Wong focuses a chapter on how Asian American women feel playing taiko. She states, "Taiko offers a compelling space to Asian American women because it posits an empowered collective social body in gendered and racialized terms. I refer to this deeply physical and profoundly political process as the erotics of taiko" (Wong 2019: 201). Her work describes how the playing of taiko leans on the muscled body and spectatorship that are commonly perceived as inherently masculine, noting: "Our gender politics are conflicted. Taiko practitioners, overwhelmingly women, are routinely inserted into male costuming and absorbed into master narratives of a feudal (read: patriarchal) past. Taiko also offers liberatory possibilities for choreographing new kinds of gendered, racial, and ethnic identity" (ibid.: 136). Her understanding of the female body politic in taiko argues that "taiko offers new ways for Asian American women to come into voice and to assert a new bodily awareness" (ibid.).

Knowing more about how performing taiko embodies Asian American gender constructions through Wong's book, I understood how a group for women and taiko would help other women taiko players to feel empowered and challenge gender constructs through taiko performance. Then, as I explored the "Women and Taiko Group" Facebook page, I came across a webinar hosted by the Women and Taiko coalition that led me to the website that held their activities. At the bottom of their homepage was this paragraph:

> Increasing the Visibility of Women in the Art Form
>
> Taiko is a dynamic art form that is very old yet changing rapidly. About 2/3 of taiko players in North America are women, and taiko's gendered history is fundamentally part of its beauty and power. This website offers resources and models for how women have been central to taiko from the beginning. We believe that the North American taiko community is often radically inclusive in its aspirations yet has over-emphasized masculine ideas about authority, skill, and leadership. This website aims to tell a different story about taiko and gender. (Women and Taiko 2021)

This paragraph balanced what I had learned about masculinities and femininities from Wong's book with my central question about why the existence of this group was necessary. It recognized how gender has impacted bodily expectations and visual consumption of taiko and how, despite the taiko community's "radically inclusive" aims, there is still an imbalance of power regarding the narrative of "authority, skill, and leadership" in taiko drumming (Women and Taiko 2021). The main word that stuck out to me in this mission-statement-like paragraph was *visibility*. While there were indeed many more women than men in the taiko community, male taiko players have long been more visible to those outside and inside the taiko community. In Angela Ahlgren's book, *Drumming Asian America,* she states exactly this: "the oral

tradition of taiko history already rehearses an established narrative that centers men as the most important leaders, composers, and performers, despite the acknowledgement that there are 'a lot of strong, powerful women with bachi [drumsticks] out there'" (Ahlgren 2018a: 17). My research questions then shifted to ask why the feminine taiko leader was being left out of the mainstream narrative and what the Women and Taiko movement was doing to change that, what impact it has had, and how their activist work has informed taiko practices.

In my research, I continued to ask questions that dug deeper into this question. I asked my interlocutors about the current state of gender and leadership in the taiko community, past gender inequality, the impact of gender inequality on leadership styles and practices, and how the Women and Taiko movement, including the Facebook group and page, website, and hosted events, challenge the mainstream narrative on leadership in taiko. I also asked about how or if there had been any noticeable change in community reception of women leadership seen by the team organizing the movement and those who attended events. What I found was that this movement was tied to notions of power that had much to do with a person's gender reception and performance, and that this group used both physical and online spaces to empower female taiko players in ways that challenged the popular masculine styles of performance and leadership. I hope to elaborate on these points through my thesis and shed light on how the Women and Taiko movement impacts broader notions of feminine and masculine styles of performance and leadership.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

My theoretical framework adapts analytic constructions from various sources in order to position this research appropriately within previous work on gender, taiko and gender, social movements, and performing fieldwork before and during a global pandemic. I use Ellen Koskoff's book *A Feminist Ethnomusicology: Writings on Music and Gender* to situate my research in the broader understanding of how gender and music connect to ideas "of power, prestige, and value" (Koskoff 2014: 31). I also use Noriko Manabe's "theories of music in social movements" in her book *The Revolution Will NOT Be Televised* to describe how the Women and Taiko movement uses physical and virtual space to incite change and empower others to act against mainstream notions of gender (Manabe 2015: 12). Lastly, I use Liz Przybylski's book *Hybrid Ethnography: Online, Offline, and In Between* (Przybylski 2021), Julian M. Murchison's *Ethnography Essentials* (Murchison 2010), and Emerson et al.'s *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (Emerson et al. 2011) to inform my methodology. I work to expand upon Deborah Wong's body of work on taiko drumming, specifically her book *Louder and Faster: Pain, Joy, and the Body Politic in Asian American Taiko* (2019), and Angela Ahlgren's *Drumming Asian America: Taiko, Performance, and Cultural Politics* (2018) in order to situate and connect my research to the broader studies on North American taiko and its gendered practices. Below, I will expand upon my uses of each source as part of my theoretical framework and methodology.

Theoretical Framework

In Ellen Koskoff's *A Feminist Ethnomusicology* she summarizes a question feminist theorists have posed against the notions of power that Michel Foucault and Pierre

Bourdieu proposed: “If power was everywhere, coming from multiple directions and sources at once, requiring constant diligence…where did autonomy exist and how could constantly created docile bodies ever become empowered?” (Koskoff 2014: 24). She further notes that their theories did not account for the “resistance and ultimate overthrow of male dominance” (ibid.). This thought, I felt, is directly tied to the activist work being done through the Women and Taiko movement. The female-identifying individuals in the Women and Taiko movement are actively resisting male dominance (read: power) over leadership and performance styles in the North American taiko community by creating new spaces of performance that not only use varied leadership and performance styles but also discuss ways to enact them through empowerment and questioning the embodied knowledge of taiko drumming’s gendered performance practices. As I continued to read her work, I understood more about how closely the Women and Taiko movement fit in to her conception of gender and power. Koskoff writes, “[I hoped] to develop a general theory that could explain musical performance in terms of gendered belief systems based on notions of power, prestige, and value, cross-culturally…[but] only one universal statement based on the existing literature I surveyed could tentatively be made: nowhere did men and women have equal access to all musical experiences and opportunities within a given society; gender-based restrictions of some sort existed everywhere (mostly for women, but also for men)” (ibid.: 31). This statement is true for women in the North American taiko community. Despite their large numbers, male taiko players have more access to musical experiences and opportunities because of the historical gender hierarchies of Asian American society and even American society at large.

Koskoff continues to develop this theory, asking "What, however, is the relationship between gender, music, and social standing or prestige? It is here that we can begin to ask questions that will help us to understand why those gender asymmetries reflected in music exist and are maintained" (ibid.: 42). In order to move closer to a framework that answers this question she adopts Sherry Ortner and Harriet Whitehead's notions of prestige structure, developed in their article "Introduction: Accounting for Sexual Meanings" (1984: 14), and concludes that ideas of prestige structures "[order human relations into] patterns of deference and condescension, respect and disregard … and command and obedience' a gender system can be regarded as a prestige structure in itself. In all known societies, men's actions receive higher value and prestige than those of women, and frequently a loss of male status is equated with female-related behavior" (ibid.: 42). She uses this framework to answer her question:

> If we see, for example, human societies ranging on a social continuum from total oppression to total equality, value existing on a separate continuum from high to low, and gender-related behaviors existing on a third dimension of relative maleness to femaleness, then we have created a multifaceted model for the discussion of music activity, one that is sensitive to the complexities of social contexts. Within this framework, we can begin to answer some of the questions of why correlations seem to exist, first, between gender-status asymmetry and resulting gender-related music behaviors and, second, between social deceptions surrounding music and the maintenance of order… we must also begin to address the valuative role that music and its performance play in defining and reflecting established social and sexual orders and in acting as an agent in maintaining or changing such orders. (Ibid.: 43)

In addition to this framework, I draw on Koskoff's emphasis on performativity and language as a form of knowing—and therefore embodiment of—performative

practice as a way to analyze how the musical behavior and discussions within of the Women and Taiko movement and *HERbeat* concert act to change the established social order within the performance of gendered taiko performance and leadership styles.

In Noriko Manabe's *The Revolution Will NOT Be Televised*, she combines multiple scholars'—Thomas Turino, Mark Mattern, Henri Lefebvre, and David Harvey's—theories on musical behaviors, social movements, and space to "[address] the ways in which the content, performance, style, and role of music in a given social movement vary according to (1) the position of the *person* playing it, (2) the *space* in which the music is played, and (3) the political conditions underlying the movement at that point in *time*" (Manabe 2015: 14; emphasis in original). I believe this to be useful to my research because it allows me to analyze the various ways in which the Women and Taiko movement and the *HERbeat* concert allow taiko players to interact in physical space and cyberspace to discuss, challenge, and enact embodied ideas of leadership and performance of taiko important to their cause. For the purposes of this research, I will be focusing mostly on the way taiko practices, discussed and performed in the Women and Taiko social movement's online and in-person meeting spaces and the *HERbeat* concert space, are used to challenge historically maintained concepts of gender roles and leadership within the North American taiko community. Although Manabe's application of this framework is in reference to social movements in Japan, and in particular the positionality of Japanese artists and knowledge of Japanese events over time, I believe its application can be transferred to other contexts such as this, which I will lay out below.

In Manabe's parameters, she lays out three variables of music used in social movements: positionality of the person, space in which music is performed, and the political conditions over time. While Manabe's discussion of positionality specifically addresses degrees of Japanese artists, such as avocational, independent, and major-label musicians, and their ability to speak about political ideas, her argument is specifically tied to the power held by or held over the artists that influence their ability to express controversial ideas and perform at controversial events (ibid.). It is the concept of positionality tied to power that I draw on and apply to the constraints or reconstructions of power that are placed upon female taiko artists when they perform and lead during concerts and workshops. Manabe's use of the second variable, space, focuses on Lefebvre's theory that the use of physical and cyber space is a "product of hegemonic control and the acted-out responses of the people in that space" (ibid: 15). While Manabe looks at urban spaces in relation to physical spaces of performance such as festivals and street demonstrations, I will be applying her construction of Lefebvre's theory to spaces of performance such as the stage in which *HERbeat* was performed and spaces where the Women and Taiko movement met for the brief time that physical meetings were allowed during this research. In terms of social spaces, Manabe frequently applies the concept of hegemonic control over space to the social media site, Twitter, but also references Facebook and YouTube (ibid.: 18). I will be analyzing the social site Facebook, as the taiko community frequently uses it to communicate, share, and organize, as well as the womenandtaiko.org website which is used as a hub to inform, organize, and empower its followers through information sharing and posting of webinars held through the meeting

software, Zoom. Zoom is also an online space used by the Women and Taiko movement in which music is used and discussed in order to incite change, and I will be analyzing the use of this space as well. The last variable, time, is used by Manabe in reference to different stages of the anti-nuclear movement, and she notes, "all social movements go through periods of increasing and decreasing fervor, as well as changing focus" (ibid.: 27). I will briefly include the already existing research on different forms of activism used by the North American taiko community in the past, specifically the research done by Deborah Wong and Angela Ahlgren, which centers women taiko players as well as the North American taiko community's social activism. By using past research, I will be able to understand the periods of "increasing and decreasing fervor" that directly relate to female empowerment and social activism to answer part of my research question regarding why the issue of gender inequality in taiko has persisted.

By using a combination of Koskoff's and Manabe's theoretical frameworks, I am able to analyze how performances such as *HERbeat* and embodied knowledge about performing discussed by the Women and Taiko social movement seek to challenge the ideas of "power, prestige, and value" (Koskoff 2014: 31), as it relates to gender, through "the content, performance, style, and role" (Manabe 2015: 14) of North American taiko drumming.

Methodology

The start of this research began as part of a course from ethnomusicologist Siv Lie aptly named "Field Methods in Ethnomusicology." I began forming my research questions and conducting in-person ethnography, for the short time I could, through

this class. Unfortunately, the Coronavirus, or COVID-19, pandemic has played a large part in my ability to conduct research, do ethnographic field observation, and interview interlocutors. I was extremely lucky that much activity in the taiko community was adapted into an online format. Therefore, I encountered the need to understand more deeply how to conduct online and offline ethnographic fieldwork. I turned to Liz Przybylski's book published in June 2020, *Hybrid Ethnography: Online, Offline, and In Between* (2021), to inform my virtual ethnographic methods. For the short time I was able to perform in-person ethnography, I referred to scholarship encountered in my class on fieldwork, specifically *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes,* by Emerson et. al (2011), and *Ethnography Essentials: Designing, Conducting, and Presenting Your Research,* by Julian M. Murchison (2010). Through the aid of those three books, I was able to do participant observation both online and offline, gather online data and document it in an organized way, and conduct interviews through the application Zoom with a variety of informants.

Before the coronavirus pandemic became a threat to life in the United States I attended the *HERbeat* concert in Minneapolis, Minnesota. That weekend functioned as my only in-person participant observation experience. In between the bustling activity from the greetings and pre-concert energy, I was able to write ethnographic notes that detailed how the taiko community responded to the *HERbeat* event while experiencing it for myself (Emerson et. al. 2011: 3). My notes were organized on paper with sections dedicated to reference information, personal thoughts, and more in-depth descriptions of the speakers, quotations, staging, instrumentation, and the musical elements of each piece. Overall, I sought to place more emphasis of the

sensory aspects of the concert and the words of the performers (Murchison 2010: 72). This note-taking method helped me to later reflect on each piece of the event, such as each musical piece or the speeches that were peppered throughout the performance, extract important words or meanings, and note any particular processes that were used elsewhere (Emerson et al 2011: 13). However, I was not able to use this note-taking process through the rest of the weekend, as attendees of a gathering held by the Women and Taiko coalition were asked to not take notes during the event for privacy. At this point, I wrote a detailed reflection and summary after the event, carefully starring information I wanted to ask individuals in interviews later. I was subsequently able to interview many of the individuals from this event and get their opinions about the movement. With this method, I sought to respect the boundaries of my interlocutors while still "detail[ing] the social and interactional processes that make up people's everyday lives and activities" in a broader form (Emerson et al. 2011: 15; Murchison 2010: 78).

Unfortunately, it was only two weeks after the *HERbeat* concert that the COVID-19 pandemic prompted research restrictions to be put in place and shut down any in-person events that would have allowed for more in-person participant observation. The pandemic significantly impacted my ability to become involved in the real-world, everyday interactions of my interlocutors. At the time of this writing, we are rounding out a full year of pandemic precautions. The precautions have varied in intensity across time and place, and vaccine developments have lessened the threat of the deadly virus. Despite this, large-group events and activities, like taiko drumming classes, performances and workshops, are still being cancelled or moved online, for

fear of spreading the virus and harming loved ones. Many in the global taiko community have lost their main source of income because of the pandemic.

However, many members of the North American taiko community are not strangers to communicating through social media and hosting online events. When I first started to integrate myself into the North American taiko community about two years ago, I became a part of many taiko-centered social media groups that were hosted on the platforms Facebook and Instagram. On these two social media sites, Facebook allows large groups of people to connect in ways that facilitate conversation and interaction, more so than Instagram, with its "Groups," "Events," and "Pages" features that many sub-groups of the global taiko community use Facebook to organize. The members of the Women and Taiko movement have used this site as a primary way of communicating before and during the pandemic. Because of this, I decided to continue ethnographic work by observing the public communications of this group by monitoring their activities on both Facebook and the corresponding website womenandtaiko.org.

As many in the Women and Taiko movement know each other in real life and had already met in person prior to the pandemic, I could not treat this Facebook group or the website as its own virtual world. Those involved in the Women and Taiko movement do not just function solely on the web, but also interact through various projects and collaborations that are facilitated both online and offline. This group moves between the two spaces of online and offline. The actions in the physical and virtual spaces dialogically generate the movement itself, and considering this process is important to analyzing the movement. Liz Przybylski's work was extremely timely

for this research and helped to guide me along the process of generating a field log for online interaction, participating and documenting my online experiences, collecting and managing data I downloaded, and generating connections and analyses using what information I had.

Przybylski's work on developing charts and tracking time spent online helped me define the times when the Women and Taiko page was most active and therefore the time I should spend browsing, commenting, and sharing and the time spent documenting the information that I found online while following the norms of interaction used by others on that page (ibid.: 51-52). Using Przybylski's method, I saved my interactions in the form of screenshots that included the time, place/page, and date of the shot and notes saved in a document that correlated to the file name of the photo (ibid.: 54). This type of documentation helped me to analyze information, such as which topics generated discussion and whether the phrasing of the post mattered in terms of engagement and looking at "who reacts, when, and how," when reflecting on to get a better view of the "dynamics of [my] scene" in its online space (ibid.: 60).

Although I had met and introduced myself to many people I would later interview at the *HERbeat* concert, the weeks afterward showed that in-person interviews were not going to be possible. Instead, I chose to conduct interviews through the video application Zoom. I determined this to be the most appropriate way to conduct interviews because the Women and Taiko organization had hosted many events through Zoom prior to and during the pandemic. I knew my interlocutors would likely have the application downloaded and I was already familiar with its abilities to record

and screenshare. After the interview, I tagged any important words that came to mind in a document that was added to the interview's folder, and later included a transcription of the interview as well. While writing, I sought to establish a form of dialogic editing, sending my transcriptions or paragraphs to the interlocutor to double check that I was representing their ideas correctly and to make sure they were comfortable still having those ideas presented. I took into account their feedback and used it to inform how I wrote my analysis.

Literature Review

Taiko drumming, more specifically the type of group drumming commonly called *kumidaiko,* has been thoroughly studied and documented over the years by various scholars. However, there is a divide in studying taiko practice in Japan and in North America, as the practices have changed independently throughout the years. Therefore, this literature review will separate the scholarship done on Japanese taiko and North American taiko and will look solely at scholarship in English. Because I do not speak or read fluently in Japanese, my understanding of taiko drumming and this thesis scope of research is filtered through the North American taiko scene. In this literature review I will note the key books for each geographical area and summarize their main points. A more expansive look at the scholarship on taiko in relation to gender will be discussed in Chapter 1.

Japanese Taiko

Much of my understanding of contemporary taiko practices in Japan comes from two books. The first came out in 2005 (with a second edition published in 2013): Heidi

Varian's *The Way of Taiko* (Varian 2013). In this book, Varian talks about her own experiences playing with Grandmaster Seiichi Tanaka, widely considered to be the founder of North American taiko. Varian uses that as a stepping-off point to discuss the history, sounds, movements, and training that goes into Japanese-style taiko drumming. Grandmaster Tanaka founded the first Japanese taiko drumming group in 1968 (Varian 2013: 9). His teaching and drumming style were directly related to what he had learned from his taiko practices in Japan. Varian uses this as a way to teach readers about the practices of taiko such as vocalizations (*kiai)*, skill and technique, training needed to perform such a physical practice, and notions of respect and unity within taiko ensembles (ibid.: 62-63). This book presents taiko drumming as a Japanese tradition and explores it as such, while also creating a handbook of sorts that lays out the practices of Japanese *kumidaiko.* Varian is sometimes critical of the Americanized practices that have diverted from the Japanese etiquette and form but overall emphasizes the beauty of the artform even in its variations.

The second book that details taiko drumming in Japan is Shawn Bender's *Taiko Boom: Japanese Drumming in Place and Motion* (Bender 2012). Bender discusses similar topics as Varian, such as taiko's history, aesthetics, and popularity. However, he does so with more depth and complicates taiko in terms of race, place, gender, and technique. Bender specifically explores the Japanese body in reference to U.S.-Japanese aesthetics of performance and challenges the idea of what it means to authentically perform Japanese taiko. He also complicates the notions of gender, noting that women who play taiko are consistently held to male standards and are confronted with the need to address issues of their femininity in terms of power,

stamina, and visual presentation. Lastly, Bender discusses the globalization of taiko drumming and the need to articulate the specific style of "Japan taiko" to "preserve styles of folk drumming in danger of extinction" as taiko groups in Japan and other areas of the globe develop styles of *kumidaiko* that fit their own needs (ibid.: 171). While these two books are not the only scholarship on taiko drumming in Japan, they are both sources that look at the playing of Japanese taiko with a wide lens and bring the ideas of an evolving taiko practice to the forefront.

North American Taiko

There is much more scholarship on the actions and changes of the North American taiko. (Many of these books and articles will be discussed in greater detail, as they pertain to gender, in Chapter 1.) Ethnomusicologist Deborah Wong has been a major source of information about the North American taiko community and has written two major books that address taiko drumming in North America. Her first, *Speak it Louder: Asian Americans Making Music*, focuses on taiko drumming as just one instance of Asian Americans using music to challenge historical racial and gender "norms" through music (Wong 2005), while her most recent book, *Louder and Faster: Pain, Joy, and the Body Politic in Asian American Taiko* (Wong 2019), specifically addresses her experiences as a North American taiko player and the negotiations of Asian American selfhood that are encountered when playing taiko. Another influential book, *Drumming Asian America: Taiko, Performance, and Cultural Politics*, by Angela Ahlgren, looks at how the movement and choreographic aspects of taiko contribute to Asian American social movements and embodied knowledge of what it means to be a taiko player (Ahlgren 2018a). Ahlgren and Wong

have also each written a plethora of articles that address topics such as queerness (Ahlgren 2018b), folk dance and social movements (Alhgren 2016), improvisation (Wong 2006a), and filmic representation of taiko (Wong 2006b). Between Deborah Wong and Angela Ahlgren's publications, readers get a comprehensive examination of the culture of the North American taiko community. Their works all directly tie to the body politic inherent in Asian American music making through race, gender, and social activism.

Other significant contributions to the body of work on North American taiko come from scholars such as Kimberly Powell and Paul Yoon, who have both written works that center perceptions of Asian American identities. Kimberly Powell focuses on how individuals learn and reflect sociocultural through taiko drumming practice (Powell 2012, 101; Powell 2003), and Paul Yoon focuses on how Asian masculinities inform taiko drumming in film (Yoon 2001) and how Asian identities are reflected Asian American identities (Yoon 2008). Both of these authors expand upon the works of Ahlgren and Wong and each piece of literature is in dialogue with another.

Significance and Goals

My hope is to continue the pattern of begun by Wong, Ahlgren, Powell, Yoon, and others, using their scholarship to inform my own research and engaging in a dialogue with it throughout my analysis. The extensive body of work that has already been collected on the activities of North American taiko groups has been able to examine the many facets of representation in the North American taiko community; I believe that my research will document and expand upon the evolving understanding of gender representation happening presently in the North American taiko community.

My goal for this research is to show how the Women and Taiko movement, in tandem with the *HERbeat* concert, is challenging Asian American gender perceptions on leadership that are deeply integrated within taiko performance and, more broadly, gendered leadership in music. Leadership, for the purpose of this paper and in the context of the North American taiko community, means composing, performing, teaching, and participating in ways that are not necessarily louder and faster but reflect an array of styles. I believe this thesis will show how the Women and Taiko coalition and the corresponding movement are using musical practice and embodied knowledge to broaden ideas on what it means to lead and how that leadership must look in terms of gender representation. While much research has already been done on gender representation in the North American taiko community in the past, the activism and social change currently happening in the community is working to change the previously established conceptions of gendered leadership and performance. In this research, I seek to elaborate on the work regarding gendered performance in taiko drumming and the efforts to change it, the impact that has been seen since the movement began, and how the movement relates to broader ideas on gender, power, and social life.

The purpose of this research is to not only detail the activities of a social movement within the taiko community but to expand upon the scholarship in broader academia about gender performativity and ethnomusicological scholarship on gender performance as it regards to music. As Ellen Koskoff states, "we must…ask how music behavior itself reflects and symbolizes gender behavior" (Koskoff 2014: 35). I believe my work engages this question and shows how musical behavior reflects,

symbolizes, and can be used to change concepts of gender behavior. This work is important to understanding how present correlations between gender and power structures are related and how the challenging of gendered social perceptions through musical behavior can disrupt the order and power within certain societies. This work is significant for the discipline of ethnomusicology because it relates to how music is used as a way to engage in social change and "where actors can negotiate their ideas concerning gender" that translate to broader social change (Hutchinson 2016: 74).

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1 will take a deeper look at the conceptions of gender that have historically been present in North American taiko drumming through an in-depth literature review. Through this chapter, I will use the current body of knowledge of North American taiko drumming to outline understandings of performance for male and female taiko drummers and establish the lacuna of scholarship on women taiko leaders.

In Chapter 2, I will discuss the timeline of events that generated the Women and Taiko social movement and the events that have brought attention to its cause and impacted the North American taiko community, along with reflections on doing fieldwork amidst a global pandemic. I will also discuss the in-person events such as the *HERbeat* concert alongside the "Pre-Show Extra" that happened in Minneapolis near the end of February 2020 and the corresponding *HERbeat* gathering held by the Women and Taiko coalition.

Chapter 3 begins my formal analysis. I look deeply into the Women and Taiko organization's website and Facebook group and the webinars that took place in Fall

of 2019. Using Manabe's framing for analysis, I take account the politics and use of space to analyze online performance videos important to the Women and Taiko movement. I also look at the use of the movement's online medium in terms of accessibility, reach, and mobilization through the performances, as well as the pages made for community organization.

Lastly, in the Conclusion I will give my thoughts about the movement, events and ideas that have stemmed from parts of the movement, and what further research could be done. I also establish broader connections to movements that have happened in North America such as #MeToo and conversations about anti-Asian violence as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Chapter 1: Engendering Taiko

The taiko community has been discussing issues of gender almost since the beginning of its rise to popularity in North America during the 1960s. In its move to North America from Japan, taiko kept its male-dominated narrative and its stylized performance and visuals were aimed at showing the power and strength of the East Asian American male in contrast to the media's feminized portrayal. However, as it became more popular, East Asian American women began to pursue taiko as a means to put to rest stereotypes of meekness and submission. As both male and female taiko artists sought to put to rest depictions of "normalized" behavior, they aimed to reinscript the narrative tied to their gender performance. Gender, as theorized by philosopher Judith Butler, is performed through the repetition of everyday actions that have come to be defined as the "norm" for one's category of gender yet are "inherently unstable" and can be reinscripted through variation or deviation from the "norm" (Sugarman 2019: 79). Butler's concept of gender is closely tied to sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's ideas of the habitus, meaning "the individual's internalization of the defining structures of her or his society" (ibid.: 76). In this way, the internalization of structures of gender can seem "natural" despite being socially constructed and become embodied, practiced as an everyday behavior that can reaffirm the idea of the habitus and become seemingly self-evident. Because many individuals interact with similar institutions of power, communities of individuals form similar conceptions of habitus and therefore gender. French theorist Michel Foucault studied "the character of power and its relationship to both knowledge and bodily practice" and determined that language, or discourse, is a form of knowledge

production that “exert[s] power and constitute[s] reality” (ibid.: 78). In this chapter, I look at academic articles and books that pertain to gender, its function within North American taiko, and how the language surrounding taiko performance and leadership has created embodied practices that tie gender to value. I describe the authors' focus and findings, locate trends, and point out the lacunae. I will start by discussing scholarship on gender in the taiko community in general, then transition to works that focus on masculine taiko, then feminine taiko. Then I will discuss queer taiko, a relatively new scene which closely connected to the understandings of female taiko playing. Lastly, I will briefly discuss the lacunae that I will focus on through my thesis.

Gender in Taiko: An Overview

Although taiko is a historically male-centered artform in Japan, its transition to North America found women, East Asian American women in particular, being empowered by its practice. Most notably, ethnomusicologist Deborah Wong focuses on this in her books, *Speak it Louder: Asian Americans Making Music* (2005) and *Louder and Faster: Pain, Joy and The Body Politic in Asian American Taiko* (2019). In *Speak it Louder,* Wong notes that seeing taiko played made her “want to be strong and loud like those Asian American musicians” (Wong 2005: 195). Much of Wong’s work within taiko focuses on her own personal experiences and race, but she also focuses on gendered performance, specifically when taiko is represented in the media. She does so in one context using the movie *Rising Sun,* when a sex scene is paired with all-male taiko drummers. Using the erotics of the male taiko performer’s body in tandem with a sex scene that implicates a dominant Japanese male, an unusual trope

for Japanese men, Wong states, “The militarism, volume and masculine strength of taiko equals the man’s sexual conquest of the beautiful White woman. We get it. Tanaka-sensei’s muscled back and arms is the perfect eye candy for the trope of the martial” (ibid.: 211). Within *Speak It Louder,* she understands that taiko is “constructed as both masculine and sinister” (ibid.: 212) but also wonders: “why are the majority of taiko players in North America women?” (ibid.: 216). She continues this line of inquiry by discussing the history of women in North American taiko drumming (ibid.). Wong connects the qualities of the *Rising Sun* scene to why Asian American women are attracted to taiko: its “strength, control and loudness” (ibid.: 216). Historically, the qualities named have not been qualities associated with the Asian American woman, and also not with the Asian American or Japanese man (ibid). “The transformation of the Asian / Asian American woman from a delicate, submissive stereotype to a figure capable of moving with power and authority is clearly the appeal,” as Wong states, and she goes on to show how aspects of taiko drumming allow men and women the chance to challenge the pre-scripted physical and sonic spaces imposed on Asian Americans by historical value systems (ibid.: 217).

Wong also focuses on this in her most recent book, *Louder and Faster.* She states that “Asian American women’s pleasure in taiko offers the terms of social change” and “the construction of a body redefined as strong, disciplined, and loud works against overdetermined gendered orientalist tropes that position Asian and Asian American women as quiet, docile, and sexually available” (Wong 2019: 121). Years later, Wong is still writing about the potential for change that taiko has for Asian

American women, yet I question: Why hasn't this change been solidified yet? Wong continues by describing interactions between a White male drummer new to taiko and an Asian American *sansei,* meaning third generation Japanese American, woman who has been playing taiko for 40 years. She explains that the White male drummer took over authority in the absence of their *sensei,* or teacher, even though an experienced Asian American woman has been put in charge during the absence. Wong believes that because the male drummer did not understand the taiko value system or the hierarchies in place and thought his drumming experience was better than the seasoned females he felt comfortable seizing power.

However, this is not all she states about male taiko players throughout this book. Wong notes the differences in Japanese taiko when her group visited Asano Taiko's headquarters and took part in group lessons with both male and female taiko professionals. A male taiko player focused on "a sternly still, controlled stance (kata), and he thought we all moved our hips too much: he made his point by swishing across the room in a parody of queer effeminacy, all loose hips and wrists. As the group lesson went on, he said to several of us, 'Forget you're a woman!,' though it wasn't clear (to [me], at least) what that might mean. Play more stiffly and less fluidly, more strongly and less softly, more assertively and less gently? Something like that," but the women-led taiko lesson emphasized "play[ing] with grace, flexibility, and expressivity, realizing the metric and synergetic complexity of their pieces with their bodies. Jige said, 'We don't use a lot of furi [movement, or flourishes]. We play naturally, according to the body. You should learn pieces so that your body knows them. We use a lot of concentration and focus and energy'" (Wong 2019: 130). This

dichotomy of performance shows that not only do historical values impact gendered taiko playing, but so do bodily performance techniques.

Sarah Carle, another ethnomusicologist, also talks about taiko and gendered performance in her master's thesis, "Bodies in Motion: Gender Identity and the Politics of Representation in the American Taiko Movement" (Carle 2008). Carle begins by stating, "although taiko in Japan has traditionally been male-dominated, its practice in America reflects changing attitudes toward the perception of both Asian American women and men in American society," and she uses Judith Butler's ideas about gender performativity "to show how taiko serves as a locus for the construction and re-negotiation of gender and [how it] represents a multiplicity of meaning for both performer and audience" (ibid.: 61). Carle notes that people go out of their way to explain how taiko is empowering for female members and that taiko has the potential for social transformation, but, unlike Wong, Carle notes that sometimes women taiko players "put on" or enact masculinity in their performances, rather than finding a uniquely women-centered way of performing taiko (Carle 2008). Carle points out how the idea that "a woman must 'go beyond' womanhood to get closer to manhood in order to be a successful taiko player is certainly problematic for those who strive to be equal performers," and notes that performance of the *odaiko*, the largest drum on stage, is usually given to male performers because of their perceived strength (ibid.: 68). As both Carle and Wong have shown, taiko is male dominated with regard to performance practices, visual presentation, and leadership style, yet female dominated in terms of participation. Because of its Japanese historical ties, male stylized performance has become the norm, and in this way male forms of

leadership have also been the dominant mode of teaching and learning. In the next section, I will expand upon maleness within taiko drumming and show how history has influenced the current taiko practices as a gendered mode of performing and learning.

Masculinity/Maleness in Taiko

As stated previously, taiko drumming is a historically male-centered practice, and many articles outline taiko's maleness in a variety of ways. Ethnomusicologist Paul Yoon, in his journal article "Asian Masculinities and Parodic Possibility in Odaiko Solos and Filmic Representations," focuses on taiko masculinity in film and how it was translated from taiko playing practices in general (Yoon 2008). Yoon specifically focuses on the semiotic meaning of power placed on the *odaiko*: "The size of the drum, the volume, the endurance of the player all manifest this power. Power is etched on to the performer's body as taut musculature and scarcely a trace of fat" (ibid.: 102). Looking at the "metaphorically neutered post-World War II Japanese male," Yoon notes that Ondekoza, one of the original *kumi-daiko* (group taiko) performing ensembles, seeks to "highlight the power of the Japanese male through drumming as a way of reclaiming...Japanese masculinity" through the power of an *odaiko* solo and its usefulness in showing power, beauty, and strength that can come from a Japanese male (ibid.: 105).

In one of Yoon's interviews, the interviewee notes that the "Japanese woman cannot recreate this strength, neither can the White man reproduce this image because his limbs are too long" (ibid.: 106). The *odaiko* solo and the power from taiko allow Asian males to break free of previous stereotypes set by the Western world of "the

subservient, quiet, lotus blossom female or the effeminate, computer geek male," and within North American taiko "power, strength, and, to a degree, aggression, are typically coded as masculine, and grace or dance is coded as feminine" (ibid.: 110). Yoon doesn't stop his analysis of feminine codes in taiko there. He points out that the inclusion of women in taiko is new to Japan but has almost always been present in North American taiko; however, "a majority of those in positions of power (e.g., leaders of groups or widely recognized authorities and teachers of taiko) have been men" (ibid.: 111). He then states that this dynamic is changing, although he gives no further comment on group leadership practices and gender (ibid.). Yoon does note an exceptional, singular female who was given an *odaiko* solo, Tiffany Tamaribuchi, who is known throughout the taiko community as one of the few females who broke through the barrier of male leadership but did so by scripting herself as masculine in many ways. The analysis of Tamaribuchi's performative practices is discussed in more detail further on in this chapter.

Hideyo Konagaya, Professor of Social Sciences, found similar connections to Japanese American male representations and taiko's impact on those representations. Konagaya notes that it is "the popular American perception [that] Japanese American men [are] effeminate, lifeless, small, and weak. In the United States, taiko was often the most conspicuous display of Japanese tradition at various festivals in areas with a Japanese American population. It became not only a noticeable sign of Japaneseness, but also of Japanese manliness. Playing the larger drums demands strength and vigor, and bodily animation onstage" (Konagaya 2005: 134). He states that taiko drumming also allowed Asian American drummers to resist the "model minority" label that was

so often placed on them in North America through the loudness and masculine imagery that taiko portrayed, which is the opposite of the feminized images that are typically associated with Asian American males (ibid.: 144). Konagaya describes how gendered performatives carried over from Japan by the *issei* (first generation Japanese Americans) have influenced taiko drumming. He states, "the gender relations of issei ... were characterized by the notion of *soto* (outside) and *uchi* (inside). It was applied to differentiate every aspect of life, including the separation of men's sphere from women's, public and private space, and formal and informal settings. The opposition was structured not complementarily but hierarchically. *Uchi*, the women's sphere, was enclosed and controlled by *soto*, the men's sphere" (ibid.: 140). These spheres had been translated to taiko playing, where men received the solos and more virtuosic parts while women were relegated to playing during the laid back or less strenuous pieces.

In Konagaya's book chapter "Performing Manliness: Resistance and Harmony in Japanese American Taiko," he digs deeper into the history of taiko. Japanese myth describes the taiko drum as a religious instrument used by Miko, a maiden (read female), to summon mythical forces. This use of taiko by a female drummer has been pointed out by many Japanese American women (ibid.: 142). However, apart from myth, taiko's roots stem from Confucianism and Japan's feudal system where men, as samurai, developed military bands and used taiko to awaken spirits for assistance in battle (ibid.: 147). This being the dominant use of taiko in history, it allowed male use to continue, albeit in different contexts, with female use staying extremely minimal. When taiko came over to North America and became a recreational activity as well,

women's participation picked up, and, as Konagaya notes, may have even been necessary if taiko was going to be successful in North America (ibid.: 148). Konagaya also understands women's participation in taiko to be derived from the masculine taiko performance with their stance and clothing, which resemble masculine taiko players' positioning and outfits, despite their not being well suited for females. He notes that this is a form of resistance by females to male dominated forms of performance and an expression of social unity within the Japanese community through its sameness. Ultimately, Konagaya emphasizes the idea that taiko is centered around masculinity, using imagery of the *bachi* (drumsticks) being a male member, and the drum being a female, noting that the body posturing against the large drum is displaying "virility" and "sexual power" that "reinforc[e] the manly demonstration of dominance" (ibid.: 152). As with both Yoon and Konagaya, I agree that it is hard to frame the masculinity of taiko without also talking about the feminine influences in order to situate its masculinity or argue against its femininity. I will now turn to works on taiko that center femaleness and femininity and look at the various ways they have been analyzed.

Femininity/Femaleness in Taiko

Peter Barakan, in an interview with a female Japanese taiko player, discussed with her how femaleness impacts her drumming. The interviewee, Miyuki Ikeda, described how her body and the societal norms established for Japanese women needed to change in order to accommodate the drumming style: "Generally, women keep their knees close together. But playing the drum, you're forced to open your legs wide, like a sumo wrestler. So, I found that I could only do that if I freed myself from the

traditional image of a woman's body" (Barakan 1995: 126). Ikeda also describes how taiko playing has changed her general demeanor: "Until quite recently, I didn't think women should yell, scream, or show their emotion too much. I thought they should have a graceful manner. But now I can say what I want, when I want, and I can laugh with my mouth open. I feel such great happiness" (ibid.: 126). Barakan, in the same interview, speaks with male taiko artist Akitoshi Asano, the director of Asano Taiko, the largest taiko maker in the world. In the interview, Asano also notes that when women play, "It requires a woman to go beyond womanhood and get closer to manhood. But the opposite is impossible. I think when a woman gets closer to manhood, it radiates something terrific. It's also great to have a glimpse of the world of a woman who is prepared to go beyond womanhood" (ibid.: 135). An article by Mizuki Kuwabara reflects the same idea: "the action of playing odaiko (the biggest drum) was considered to be incompatible with female performers because of the physical features and strength of women. This contradiction prevented women from participating in the performance of Taiko. As a result, female performers mainly had the role of odori (a dancer) when they played Taiko on stage" (Kuwabara 2005: 2). In Japan, the belief that women need to get closer to manliness to play taiko is common, but in North America that is not always the case.

Ethnomusicologist Paul Yoon, in the article "'She's Really Become Japanese Now!: Taiko Drumming and Asian American Identifications," suggests that in Asian American taiko "an alternative site is opened where Asian American identifications are altered, negotiated, re-embraced, or discarded in relation to competing identifications, and vice versa (Yoon 2001: 434). These subject-positions are

furthermore situated within existing discourses which, in their own way, shape choices and impose restrictions or limitations" (ibid.) Brenda Joy Lem takes this idea further in her article "Inner Truth Taiko Dojo" when she states, "Taiko originally were played only by men. Many traditional cultures believe it is the men's role to play the drums. By women-centered taiko I mean...a space which not only allows women to drum but works with and values qualities often considered weakness or limitations in women: openness of emotions, grounded energy, internal strength, softness or fluidity, and brings them to the centre of our practice" (Lem 2008: 6). Lem also notes that "there are hundreds of taiko groups in North America and, although most groups tend to have a larger membership of women than men, only a few are led by a woman" (ibid.: 6). Asian American taiko practices do allow for a women-centered approach to taiko; however, it is not widely used or put in place of the dominant male-centered approach, as Lem also found that "even groups which are led by women often focus on dominating values of power, aggression, speed and elitism" (ibid.: 6).

This is reiterated again when Kim Kobayashi, in her article "Asian Women Kick Ass: A Study of Gender Issues within Canadian Kumi-Daiko," discusses why it was hard for women to lead in ways that make sense to them. Kobayashi interviewed Endo Greenaway, a male taiko player, about why group discussions and non-hierarchical processes discouraged male participation (Kobayashi 2006). Greenaway stated, "you had to accept the way it operated, like a collective, which is not an exclusively female domain, but had more of a sense of 'we work together, and we work out things by consensus.' There was not a lot of tolerance for pushing things

through, which is a male stereotype. The whole energy… it felt... can't say female... there was a group-ness, the collective energy of working together" (ibid.: 4). In another interview, Kobayashi spoke with Leslie Komori, a member of Katari Taiko, an all-female taiko group. In the interview, Kobayashi and Komori touch on women leadership in taiko: "Komori also points out that the high numbers of women participating in kumi-daiko does not reflect women holding key positions of power within the group: 'There's women participating and then there's women taking leadership roles. Even if there's a lot of women in the group, there can still be very deep sexism that happens and continues to happen'...the fact that despite the dominance of women in *kumi-daiko,* few were actually composing, a skill she perceives as indicative of taking leadership" (ibid.: 6). However, despite the lack of leadership, all-female taiko groups were and are able "to break stereotypes of Asian women (depicting them as passive and submissive) while engaging in an Asian performance art form that promoted visibility. Taiko, with its loud sonic power, was an ideal medium for Asian-Americans and Asian-Canadians to combat issues of invisibility" (ibid.: 5).

Many of the first women to participate in taiko were drawn in by the power and strength it allowed them to express, as referenced above. Kimberly Powell notes that Asian American women are usually placed within "Oriental Otherness," which she describes as an "exotic, demure Other, given the sexualized identity of geisha, mail-order bride, prostitute or of dutiful and subservient wife, daughter, or girlfriend in the popular cultural imagination," but goes on to argue that this stereotype is being challenged in North American taiko practices (Powell 2008: 913). Yoshitaka Terada,

in his journal article “Shifting Identities of Taiko Music in North America,” emphasizes this in a section of the article dedicated to women and taiko when he states, "stereotypes of Asian Americans have the most devastating ramifications for Asian women. They are often thought to be quiet and passive as well as submissive and mysterious...such stereotypes trap many Asian women into negative self-images and inhibit them from voicing their opinions. For many such women, it was important to break those stereotypes by appearing strong and creative on the stage. In addition, many female taiko players are painfully aware of the psychological disadvantage of not having positive female role models from their own experiences, and they are conscious of their positions as role models for young Asian American girls” (Terada 2001: 42-43).

In the article, Terada also interviews P. J. Hirabayashi and Sawagi ("commotion") Taiko of Vancouver—one a prominent female leader in the taiko community, the other an all-women group dedicated to breaking Asian American stereotypes (ibid.). Sawagi Taiko notably writes and arranges their own compositions as there are not many female composers or arrangers in the taiko community. This is usually understood as a task taken up by leaders in the North American taiko community because of how compositions are taught and circulated. Compositions are usually taught to taiko groups by the composers, and permission is sought before a group learns the composition. Therefore, if a composition is going to gain traction, the composer needs to be well known or have their composition played by many people. Because men have historically been leaders in the taiko community, their compositions are more prominent and have had more time to circulate throughout the

community. Some women have written taiko pieces, and more are doing so; however, because of the leadership gender bias in the taiko community it is harder for women to circulate or come forth with compositions for groups to play. P. J. Hirabayashi, Terada's other interviewee, is one woman who has led in the taiko community almost since its rise to popularity, through her compositions and group leadership.

Hirabayashi has been interviewed by many people about her introduction to and involvement in North American taiko. She states, "perhaps the one thing that really captured my interest was to see two women. It was a mother and a daughter, who were performing members of the company at that time. I just remembered thinking, that's fantastic to see women play such a powerful activity, still be connected somehow to Japanese culture" (ibid.: 42). In an interview with Joyce Lounsberry Hirabayashi elaborates even more on how different North American and Japanese taiko groups treat femininity or non-masculine stylized taiko: "most people think of taiko as only BIG drums and playing massively with complete HARD ENERGY, but taiko is everything. There are different ways to play. Had I been studying taiko in Japan, or had I worked with a master and had a continuing teacher from Japan, there would have been a problem because of the cultural hierarchy, of deferring to your 'sensei' [teacher]...Taiko was something new, it was powerful, and it was an opportunity to artistically express ourselves. We'd never had an art form quite like that; it had the feminine and the masculine energy forms all there, integrated" (Lounsberry 2001: 162; emphasis in original). Hirabayashi's reflections emphasize North American taiko's openness to femininity and women leadership, but she is one of only a few women leaders. Angela Ahlgren, a Performance Studies scholar,

highlights more female leadership in her book *Drumming Asian America: Taiko, Performance, and Cultural Politics,* where she discusses the evolving gender bias and recognizes that there is still a lack of female leadership in the taiko community, as well as queer leadership.

In her book, Ahlgren states, "recent data collection efforts by the Taiko Community Alliance show that women comprise roughly 64% of North American taiko players who responded to their survey, and the genre's feminist appeal is well documented. Still, often its embodiment of masculine power has been put to heteronormative and nationalistic use, and though women make up the majority of players, in many cases it is men who emerge as the stars of taiko" (Ahlgren 2018a: xi). In an interview with Ahlgren, taiko community leader Alan Okada states, "in the evolution of taiko in North America there have, other than at the very beginning, there have been *mostly* women in taiko" (ibid.: 16). In the interview, Okada also acknowledges the lack of women occupying leadership positions. Ahlgren takes Okada's interview as a jumping off point in order to mention the women leaders who have broken through the male-centered leadership sphere, noting P. J. Hirabayashi, Karen Young, Iris Shiraishi, and Chieko Kojima, but she also notes the overall lack of inclusion or recognition that these and many other taiko-playing women face in the taiko community (ibid.: 16-17). Ahlgren uses her platform to privilege women taiko players, and therefore her work is extremely important to my own. Ahlgren's work ends where I begin mine, with the Women and Taiko Summer Taiko institute. Her observations at the gathering emphasized two themes: the challenges of navigating taiko as a woman compared to that of a man's experience, and the structural sexism

that is present in parts of the taiko community (ibid.). Ahlgren understands that "while many women see taiko as a feminist practice that allows for a positive self-image and a range of possible gender performances, women's experiences within taiko groups are gendered in ways that reflect structural sexism present in the wider culture" (ibid.: 102). In this book, Ahlgren also focuses on queerness in taiko and its evolving presence in the taiko community.

Queer/Non-binary-ness in Taiko

Ahlgren's book brings us into the non-binary part of this gender and taiko literature review. In her book, Ahlgren focuses on Jodaiko, one of only a handful of all-queer taiko groups, and puts forth the idea that their "homo-geneity" (read: all-homosexual membership) encourages queer spectatorship and increased queer participation (ibid.: 121). Deborah Wong and Ahlgren both focus on the erotic aspects of taiko, since it is an art form that is focused on the body and its visual representations of movement, placement, and clothing. Ahlgren argues that quotidian performances of gender and the "kinesthetics of taiko…create visibility for queer Asian women and create possibilities for queer spectatorship of taiko" (ibid.: 114). While interviewing Tiffany Tamaribuchi in her 2016 article "Butch Bodies, Big Drums: Queering North American Taiko," Ahlgren illustrates how *odaiko* solos typically go to men, and how Tamaribuchi codes herself as masculine in many ways, mainly in appearance, in which she wears the masculine uniform that shows part of her breast (Ahlgren 2016). Tamaribuchi's queerness invites spectators to question whether she is in fact male or female and brings to the front the illegibility of the Asian American butch lesbian to the viewer. Ahlgren continues this line of inquiry by

connecting to the performances of Jodaiko, where a "multiplicity of Asian American female masculinities becomes recognizable as queer bodies in ways that a single Asian American woman with a butch appearance might not" (ibid.: 15). The Curly Noodles Session at the North American Taiko Conference also offered a site for Ahlgren to better understand the queer taiko community. At this meeting, players discussed "gender identity, trans issues and non-monogamy relationships," and Ahlgren notes that, compared to Paul Yoon's previous analysis of this group, they are headed in a more "out" direction (Ahlgren 2018a: 119).

Paul Yoon writes that the male *fundoshi* (a piece of clothing that can be equated to a loin cloth) also invites male, queer spectatorship (Yoon 2008), and Ahlgren continues with his analysis, stating, "[the] male body becomes literally more visible— and legible— not only as a symbol of strength but also as an object of desire, and it was gay male audiences whose presence in the theater declared the costume a success. The gaze, in this instance, was manipulated in a way that was likely meant to capture the attention of straight female audience members, but it appealed to queer spectators too" (Ahlgren 2018a: 131). Yoon also briefly mentions the Curly Noodles Session—not by name, to preserve anonymity, but he gives enough information that the group is identifiable in hindsight. Using this group as a way to describe a queer community, Yoon parallels its sense of queer acceptance with how the film *Behind the Odaiko* presents queerness in taiko as a punch line by using captions to poke fun at the spectatorship of gay men (Yoon 2008: 117-118). Whether that is ill-intended or not, he does not decide. Masumi Izumi also examines queerness in North American taiko drumming in her article "Reconsidering Ethnic Culture and

Community: A Case Study on Japanese Canadian Taiko Drumming." Izumi notes that "gender and sexuality are extremely important issues, particularly for Sawagi Taiko, an all-Asian women's group, which contains homosexual women among its members. Homosexuality is not fully accepted in the Japanese Canadian community." Although she does not continue deeply into her analysis, Izumi's, Yoon's, and Ahlgren's looks into the queer aspects of the taiko community offer more insight into under-represented gender analyses within the North American taiko tradition.

Lacunae

Throughout this chapter, I have tried to point out a certain lacuna in which I plan to center my master's thesis. Despite the ample research on gender in the taiko community, there has been little to no scholarship discussing why there are not as many female taiko players as males in leadership roles such as composers, leaders of taiko groups, or featured artists, nor more responses about why females are so often left out of the dominant narrative on taiko drumming. Throughout my summaries of previous works within this literature review, I have noted many moments in which the leadership discrepancy was pointed out, but not talked about any further. Both Deborah Wong and Angela Ahlgren end their books by noting how gender and leadership roles in the North American taiko community are changing, but neither offers up an analysis of how leading women or the taiko community are gathering to change the inequity. Ahlgren offers a line of inquiry regarding the Women and Taiko Summer Institute as an epilogue at the end of her book, and it is the activities of this group and their webinars and performances that I plan to use to offer an analysis on the changing gender dynamic within the taiko community (Ahlgren 2018a). However,

based on my assessment of works centered around taiko and gender, there has been no one considering the actions being done to change the gendered leadership practices in the taiko community.

Conclusion

Gender and taiko drumming have a long history. From its origins as myth to its use as a military tool to its rapid popularization in the 1960's and 70's, taiko's gendered past has continued to plague its present. The dominant narrative in North American taiko drumming emphasizes male performers and male success, despite having a population of over two-thirds women. The gender dynamics at play are tied to Japanese gender roles that were brought from Japan to North America, more specifically the United States and Canada. Many North American taiko players who identify as Japanese use taiko as a means to connect to their ethnic heritage through cultural and religious traditions that were brought by first-generation Japanese immigrants and assimilated into American and Canadian cultures (Tsuda 2016: 206). However, as taiko was popularized in North America, gender dynamics stemming from both Japanese and American cultures became imbued within the tradition. Japanese taiko drumming has historically reflected the hierarchical structure of Japanese society where men, the "outside" sphere, are in control of women, the "inside" sphere (Konagaya 2005: 140). This meant that men would have control and authority over their households, including the women that lived within them. This translated into other areas such as the ability to perform in stylistic ways that aligned with behavioral expectations of Japanese men and women (ibid.: 141).

As taiko drumming formed its own style in North America, considerations of these behavioral expectations began to shift to better assimilate it into particularly American culture, but also as a way to resist ideas that Japanese men were feminine and submissive. Seiichi Tanaka purposely "integrated athletic movements of martial arts [to show] what he defined as Japanese masculinity…meant to be arousing expansive, and sensational" (ibid.: 140). As a revival of taiko drumming began in the 1960s two paths were taken by Japanese and Japanese American taiko artists: Japanese performers focused on continuing to define Japanese cultural traditions and Japanese American performers "emphasized [taiko's] display of strength, energy, and power—in short, its manliness" (ibid.: 141). In doing so, Japanese Americans defined masculinity as showing "strength, energy, and power" in order to defy social constructs of the time and therefore defined femininity apart from those concepts (ibid.). Over time, the concepts of masculine performance began to be continually challenged by women taiko players who also sought to disrupt views of Japanese American women as gentle and docile: "adopting the same symbols that embodied men's use of *taiko* for conveying manliness, women acted out in a resistance against traditional male dominance…female performers are known for cultivating the nuances of sounds and drum techniques while men tend to emphasize physical exertion and stamina" (ibid.: 148). Continuing this work, the efforts of the Women and Taiko movement discussed below are efforts of performative resignification. The movement seeks to change what it means to perform taiko in ways designated as valuable, that are usually derived from language used to describe male performance (Inoue 2006: 24).

Throughout the scholarship shown above, it is apparent that gender and gendered representations have been a significant part of both Japanese and North American taiko's history and is deeply tied to the performance style. In addition, it is known that contemporary manifestations of gender in Japan are also strongly influenced by those in the West and that influence is reflected as well in the gendered practices of taiko drumming (ibid.). Men use taiko to show masculine prowess and power and to redefine how Western media emasculates and feminizes Asian American men. Women use taiko as a means of empowerment, to defy the tropes of the weak and submissive Asian American female while also challenging ideas that feminine performance cannot also be strong and powerful. Queer and non-binary players have recently begun to use taiko to empower and gather in unity against negative stereotypes that circulate outside the queer community, as well. While these gender dynamics are often interpreted on an individual basis and tied with other social constructions of masculinity, femininity and the gender binary that have influenced the performance practice of individuals, research has continually emphasized the gender tropes present within the North American taiko community. In my ethnographic analysis below, there is slippage between how different taiko artists understand the gender dynamics present in taiko drumming. I seek to connect with other scholars' perceptions of gender in taiko drumming while attending to the various viewpoints of my interlocutors. I plan to examine and better understand why, despite repeated challenges to the gender dynamics present in taiko performance, a male/female binary continues to exist and has impacted leadership within the North American taiko community. I focus my analysis on the Women and Taiko movement,

brought forth through the Women and Taiko Summer Institute, and the movement's work to change historical concepts of gendered leadership within the taiko community.

Chapter 2: The Women and Taiko Movement: Before and During the Coronavirus Pandemic

The Seed that Grew the Movement

The Women and Taiko social movement is not the first time taiko has been a part of activist practices and, more specifically, Asian American activism. Asian Americans have a history of being racialized and depicted as a model minority: being a part of American culture but still outside of it (Ahlgren 2018a: 7). Angela Ahlgren notes that while many Asian Americans participated in activism of various forms, the Vietnam war brought Asian Americans together to form an Asian American Movement (AAM). Later, she situates the actions of the group San Jose Taiko in relation to the AAM, using their popular song "Ei Ja Nai Ka?" ("Isn't It Good") that reflects the work of Japanese immigrants who moved to America to work on farms, in mines, and on railroads (ibid.: 28). San Jose Taiko, and many other taiko groups across North America, use this popular piece to connect to the past "through their enactment of embodied Asian American histories, organizational structure, and continued struggles with Orientalist representation" (ibid.: 46). Similarly, Deborah Wong in *Louder and Faster* "[follows] the trail of Asian American social justice work, from pilgrimages to the Japanese American incarceration camps to new articulation of Asian American and Asian Canadian feminism," and in doing so details her own experience performing at Manzanar, the site of a Japanese internment camp (Wong 2019: 17, 109). The Women and Taiko movement builds upon this rich history of social justice through a self-reflective type of activism—by challenging

constructions of gender and leadership within the taiko community through pragmatic efforts to engender change.

The beginnings of this movement were facilitated by many individuals who noticed imbalances between what they saw at conferences or while they were presenting or travelling, and what they assumed to be true, that men and women were equally represented. Yurika Chiba, a member of San Jose Taiko, first noticed a difference between how many female and male presenters were participating in a workshop, where she was a facilitator, at a North American Taiko Conference (NATC) in 2011:

> It was when the taiko conference was happening here at Stanford…One of the community members wanted to make gift bags and she's like "I made...half of the gift bags are for men and half are for women" and so I went through the list and went "this is not going to work" because…I can't remember the exact amount but it was something like twenty-nine of the instructors were men and like eleven were women. (Yurika Chiba, video interview, March 5, 2021)

Other interlocutors noted the same moment at NATC a statistic that grounded them and pushed them to action. Mark Rooney, a taiko instructor and performer from Maryland, said of a similar moment:

> I feel like I have been made aware of certainly a lot of the sort of imbalance and it was something that different people to different levels are trying to address… I was the system coordinator for two of the national conferences and one thing that we had noticed over the years, the history of NATC, was that the number of workshop leaders—of female workshop leaders—was declining. and that was sort of great interest, of curiosity for everyone. You're trying to decide why, why that is? And as people were starting: "Well, there are, there are less professional women, taiko players in the country." So, there's a whole question about that idea. Why, why is the taiko community in North America 70% women? And, why is the sort

> of flipside or maybe even less of the leadership, you know, it's not 30% are women, it's probably less? (Mary Rooney, video interview, February 3, 2021)

Rooney's question was echoed in the concerns of well-known taiko artist Tiffany Tamaribuchi when she told me about her inspiration for an event that showcased women in taiko. Tamaribuchi has been credited as a main proponent of the Women and Taiko movement, as well as the *HERbeat* concert, and was one of the first to work towards a more equal gender and leadership landscape in the North American taiko community:

> I could see the disparity all around me, especially very often being the only woman on stage during a lot of the conference instructor showcase concerts. Even when other women were in attendance as instructors…. Our history, our stories, are so important to our craft and what we bring to the stage. I wanted to call attention to [women's] contributions. That is the story of the 70-odd percent of women who participate in taiko, especially the portion of those women who have historically been leaders in the taiko community, largely unknown and uncredited. (Tiffany Tamaribuchi, Personal Communication, March 8, 2021)

In a similar way that Tamaribuchi brings up the untold and uncredited history and stories of women taiko leaders, Angela Ahlgren recounted a similar event in her book *Drumming Asian America:*

> Longtime taiko community leader Alan Okada stopped abruptly partway through his lecture on the history of North American taiko and apologized to the hundreds of taiko players gathered before him. He acknowledged that all of the players he highlighted in his Power Point presentation were men. The crowd murmured. Flustered, Okada said, "As you know, there are a lot of strong powerful women with bachi [drumsticks] out there." […] the presentation was a telling moment in which women did not make it into the official record of taiko history: their pictures were not on the slides and their names were not attached to the important milestones […] it underscored the urgency of recording women's roles in the

> history of taiko as it develops. It also demonstrates a need to craft histories that do not depend on a narrow definition of what constitutes leadership. (Ahlgren 2018a: 16)

Ahlgren's account emphasizes the issue of gender that had gone unchanged in the taiko community. She points out that "the oral tradition of taiko history already rehearses an established narrative that centers men as the most important leaders, composers, and performers…[women] outnumber men two to one. They lead groups, teach classes, compose and choreograph new works, rework traditionally masculine taiko norms and make their livings as taiko performers" (ibid.: 17). The power of a mainstream narrative is an important aspect of why many female taiko players go unrecognized and uncredited. I believe it is also a component of why there is an imbalance between male and female taiko leaders in the North American Taiko community.

In their book *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality* Sherry Ortner and Harriet Whitehead state: "the study of gender is inherently a study of relations of asymmetrical power and opportunity" (Ortner and Whitehead 1984: 4). Ellen Koskoff repeats this idea in her own work and applies it to her theoretical framework that looks at the "cultural concepts of power, gender, music, and value" together (Koskoff 2014: 43). In the reflections on the leadership imbalance between male and female taiko leaders above, value judgements are being placed about what represents good or important taiko, and male leaders come out on top. At NATC conferences, individuals and committees judge who should present workshops for that year. Prestige, a form of value, comes into play in Ahlgren's reflections on the 2015 NATC opening session on the history of taiko. Okada's lecture placed value judgements on historic moments in taiko, and in every moment men were the focus;

despite his apology and acknowledgement that "'there are a lot of strong, powerful women'' influencing taiko, they were still left out of the narrative (Ahlgren 2018a: 16). In many cases the value judgement comes from different sources, whether a self-placed judgement or one implied by a committee of individuals in regard to what works best for a workshop. If men are always central to the mainstream, documented narrative, whether through stage performances, lectures, or workshops, and women are continually underrepresented, an inherent assessment of merit that men are worthy leaders and the male style of taiko is the only style that is valuable then becomes perpetually enforced. When taiko players aspire to hold leadership positions, those public and documented value judgements play a role in "defining and reflecting established social and sexual orders and [acting] as an agent in maintaining or changing such orders" (Koskoff 2014: 43). This is then part of the reason many women question or withhold their participation in various leadership roles within the taiko community.

Many members of the taiko community recognized how historical gender roles and perpetuating judgements of what is valuable to the taiko community were playing a role in impeding female leadership. Under the facilitation of Tiffany Tamaribuchi, Karen Young, Sascha Molina, and Sarah Ayako, and with support from the Taiko Community Alliance, an organization that leads many programs within the North American Taiko Community, a Summer Taiko Intensive (STI) was held in 2017. While I was not able to attend, the conclusion of Angela Ahlgren's book and many of my interlocutors' reflections informed me about the impact that event had in generating more activity for the movement. At the three-day event, women, men, and

non-binary individuals were able to converse about their experiences with gender and taiko and learn about their peers' experiences, including racial and generational issues that intersect with the issues of gender. Taiko was played as well, and in an effort to create a piece to present at the upcoming NATC that year, Tamaribuchi introduced her creation "Joy Bubble," which sparked the addition of dance from another piece, "Tanko Bushi Rock." The history of these pieces come from political situations which had an impact on Tamaribuchi at the time. She states,

> Joy Bubble was composed just after the 2016 election. I was driving from CA to a workshop intensive in Moab, UT. I was listening to the radio, and pundits were discussing the election and how people had been caught up in their own bubbles, especially online where algorithms tend to sort people into virtual echo chambers and communities of like-minded people. Tiring of that I switched to an oldies station, and Sam Cooke's "A Change Is Gonna Come" came on and it hit me that as dire as I felt things might be, I was in my own little bubble relative to my own life experiences, but that a lot of people had lived through great periods of discord and civil unrest and we'd made a lot of progress… [at Moab, UT] We had been struggling through a drill that I then switched the ji [underlying beat] to see if it would help make things easier for everyone to play, and it ended up being super catchy…It was upbeat, and happy, and I thought, "Well, if I am going to get stuck in my own bubble I can make it a Joy Bubble." There were beginning fue players learning the piece and I needed to come up with a simple melody, and then the lyrics and melody and sentiment of "A Change Is Gonna Come" popped up and in true taiko fashion, I simplified it and took the elements that worked best to create something to pull everyone together and ease my own heart and mind. (Tiffany Tamaribuchi, Personal Communication, March 8, 2021)

Ahlgren reflects that "Tanko Bushi Rock" came from the Asian American folk duo Chris Iijima and JoAnne Nobuko Miyamoto who played an *obon* song titled "Tanko Bushi" in the form of a rock song, and it was added to their 1973 album that

specifically addressed social justice and Asian American identity issues (Ahlgren 2018a: 138). Together, "Joy Bubble" and "Tanko Bushi Rock" created a moment for attendees to "practice joy amid disheartening, unjust national rhetoric focused on exclusion, misogyny, and white supremacy" (ibid.: 139). The conversations and collective performance created a space for women, men, and non-binary individuals to discuss the "multiple perspectives, questions and disagreements about what the future should bring for taiko" (ibid.: 141). This moment created a space for change that sparked future conversations and events important to the movement that the Women and Taiko coalition emphasizes on its webpage. These include Stay Connected Calls, webinars, and gathering spaces hosted at certain events (Women and Taiko 2021). The political connections and conversations that generated the movement have continued over the past few years and resulted in the womenandtaiko.org website, the corresponding organization, and the movement itself which has sparked other events such as the *HERbeat* concert.

It is important to make a distinction between the Women and Taiko Group Facebook, the Women and Taiko Facebook page, and a womenandtaiko.org website that will be introduced later, as they will be analyzed in close connection to one another, and the names have the potential to become confusing. In Table 2.1, I am summarizing the name, function, administrators, and who can post and interact in each group in order to draw clear separations between them.

Table 1: Table of Women and Taiko related pages and groups

Name	**Function**	**Administrators**	**Who can post/interact**
"Women and Taiko Group" Facebook page	A page for members of the taiko community that wish to participate	Various attendees of the Women and Taiko 2017 Summer Taiko Intensive	Members of the group
Women and Taiko coalition	Sustain the Women and Taiko movement and update the womenandtaiko.org website	Various taiko players, members from around the globe	N/A
Womenandtaiko.org	To enhance the visibility of women in taiko and provide a hub for events related to the Women and Taiko movement	Women and Taiko Coalition members	Only those who have the ability to edit the website can post anything, no one can comment or like anything on the page
"Women and Taiko" Facebook page	A social media page for communicating material from the womenandtaiko.org page and the Women and Taiko coalition	The Women and Taiko coalition's mobilization committee	Only members of the 2020 Women and Taiko Mobilization Team can post, but anyone can like/comment/share

*In this thesis, the groups will be referred to by the names in the left-hand column.

Before I dive into analysis of the Women and Taiko movement's activities and spaces in the next chapter, I would like to provide a brief overview of the Women and Taiko events that have occurred since the STI in 2017. Many of these events are cataloged on the womenandtaiko.org website. The website itself is a hub for announcements and connections for supporters of the Women and Taiko movement and those that are looking to "grow [their] awareness of gender roles in [their] group" (ibid.). There is a page for projects which contains a list of actionable tasks and questions that focus readers on asking how gender roles may shape their taiko practice titled "What You Can Do" (ibid.). It also includes a list of female workshop leaders who are available to teach, making women leaders more visible to the community. Also on this page is the composition "Nakama no Koe: Our Voices" that was written at a Women and Taiko event in Northern Ireland during June of 2018, and links to the webinars that were hosted by the Women and Taiko organization over the fall and winter of 2019. I will look deeply at the webinars from the fall of 2019 as I attended many of them informally, as a taiko community member. Topics included "How to Apply to Lead an NATC Workshop," learning about emerging taiko artists, hearing the stories from prominent women taiko leaders, getting insight into the 2019 Women and Taiko Fellowship from the inaugural cohort of fellows, and discussing the impacts that COVID-19 has had on the taiko community (ibid.). Part of my analysis will be discussing the impact on embodied knowledge the webinars generated. I will also analyze the video that accompanies the 2018 composition and discuss its relation to the goals of the movement. The activities posted on the womenandtaiko.org site are important instances where members of the North

American taiko community use online spaces to generate support and create change through discussions of power relations, historical gender roles, and music making. These activities have been important means of access, and their online format, although restrictive in terms of group music making, has allowed those across North America to participate in the conversation that would not usually be able to afford travel to an event. It also allows access to taiko players who may not be on the professional level yet, giving a platform for discussion and practice that prepares them for leadership roles. Therefore, analysis of the webinars gives key insight into the movement's discussions on women and taiko and also reflects on the broader North American taiko community.

Another site of ethnographic analysis, the ground-breaking *HERbeat* concert and connected Women and Taiko gathering that occurred in February of 2020, is a site of critical inquiry, as it was the first event that centered on women's taiko drumming. I will describe various moments throughout the weekend of the concert and analyze how the performance informed the Women and Taiko movement in terms of subverting power relations and challenging what can be claimed as taiko performance. The conversations that took place before and after the concert have also provided spaces for discussion and community that have an impact on how female taiko drumming is thought about and practiced in the community. As this event was the most recent public event to be held that formally relates to the womenandtaiko.org site, my analysis of the Women and Taiko coalition will end here. However, I will continue analysis of the movement by looking at the posts, conversations, and events happening on the "Women and Taiko" Facebook page and the corresponding, public

Facebook group. The "Women and Taiko" page itself is "created and supported by the 2020 Mobilization team," a branch of the Women and Taiko coalition. The group is not organized by any one person or persons but rather is an affinity space for individuals supportive of the movement and whose focus is mobilizing the movement. The activities on these sites directly reflect the values and impact of the Women and Taiko movement through the content and discussions posted there. My analysis will look at the content that is significant to the movement and how it is expanding and reifying the goals of the movement, even throughout a global pandemic. The pandemic has not been easy on the taiko community. Many teachers and performers lost thousands of dollars' worth of income and opportunities for connection because of cancelled gigs or workshops.

"HERbeat, HISbeat, OURbeat": The Women and Taiko Movement's In-Person Events

Before the COVID-19 pandemic cancelled taiko performances all over North America, the *HERBeat: Taiko Women All-Stars* concert had marked the beginning of an epoch for the Women and Taiko movement. This concert invited eighteen women, along with other performance ensembles, to perform at the Ordway Music Theater in Minneapolis, Minnesota. An event that connected and centered women taiko artists' talents and performance styles had never been held before this moment (Weir 2020). In the concert program, *HERbeat* Director and Producer Jennifer Weir states: "the contributions, achievements, and innovations of female players have been downplayed and even erased from the history of the artform" (ibid.) This concert was a culminating moment for the movement as a whole, bringing examples of diverse

performative styles of taiko that expand the notion of what is the "correct" way to perform taiko. The concert was the center of a multitude of events centering women that weekend. Before and after the concerts there were workshops held by female taiko artists that focused on topics such as *odaiko* drumming or how to perform specific pieces. Before the concert, a "Pre-Show Extra" discussed the making of the *HERbeat* documentary, and the morning after the concert the Women and Taiko coalition held an event to deeply discuss the issues surrounding women in the taiko community. In this chapter, I will analyze the Women and Taiko coalition gathering and the *HERbeat* pre-concert talk and concert to show how these events furthered the Women and Taiko movement through actions on stage to flip the gender-power dynamic, and how discussions of embodied knowledge of taiko performance and life work to challenge the beliefs of taiko performers about leadership.

"Pre-Show Extra": The Untold Stories of Women and Taiko and the HERbeat Concert

My father and I walked into the Ordway Musical Theatre from the Minneapolis city streets which had the faint glow of dusk still lingering in the sky. We were early for the pre-concert discussion of the *HERbeat* film but still found ourselves surrounded by taiko players and concert attendees who had come from around the world. The pre-concert waiting area was bustling with chatter and the Ordway's architectural style created an elegant and almost extravagant theatre atmosphere. I was a bit taken aback at this concert hall, thinking it was extremely formal for a taiko concert. My knowledge of taiko performance spaces brought me to think of outdoor or festival spaces where viewers and performers become rowdy and participate with cheers and

kiai. Taiko performances are usually quite participatory, with shouts happening after virtuosic soloing or vigorous performance techniques. As I keep this in mind, my father and I found our way up the stairs to where the pre-concert talk was set to begin at 6:30. As more people entered the space, the energy and excitement in the room grew with anticipation. I sought out a position in the room where I could see the screen but could also observe the reactions of others watching. Right at 6:30 the Pre-Concert talk began, and Jennifer Weir got the attention of everyone in the room. She was happy and tearful as she spoke about the thousands of students who visited over the two-week *HERbeat* residency and how diverse the eighteen "all-star" women on the stage were in age, styles, experience, and philosophy. Weir finished her opening remarks by referencing how *HERbeat* was "planting seeds of what is to come" by challenging the male-dominated notions of taiko performance and making space for women.

Next, the crew that had been filming and editing the *HERbeat* documentary came out to stress the importance of the almost all-female film crew and describe their adventures as they followed the group of women taiko artists around the United States and Japan. Part of the upcoming documentary, slated for late summer 2021, was shown to the audience. Bits of performance were featured between exposition that captured the audience members through the joy and hard work reflected in the film clip. It was emphasized how traditionally only men were allowed to perform taiko and despite the growth and change that has occurred in the practice of taiko drumming, twenty years later there are not more women in the spotlight or getting

equal pay. The end of the clip and the pre-concert talk was met with thunderous applause and cheering. It was almost an electric feeling as the pre-concert talk ended.

People dispersed to their respective seats in the four-story theatre. My third-floor seat at the front of the balcony provided a clear view of the whole stage. People flowed in and I overheard an older couple to my left reminisce about a concert some of the artists held in Japan and speak of the incredible power that reverberated throughout the space at that concert. The family on my right excitedly told their children that this concert was going to be the best they have ever seen. Cheers were let out as taiko artist Jennifer Weir took the stage to give an introduction for the event. Again, joyful and teary-eyed, Weir referred to taiko as a "sporting-event," warning those who knew only little about the taiko scene that taiko performances are not the type where people sit and listen, but that participation is encouraged. Weir continued by framing the importance of the event, stating: "this kind of gathering has not happened before" and touted the "all female crew" that was working on the documentary. Weir pointed out that at the center of the stage was an *odaiko*, designed by a Portland artist, that featured the *kanji* symbol for woman: *Onna*. The creation of the drum was sponsored by KaDon, an online taiko learning resource, and held a special meaning of support and empowerment for the artists.

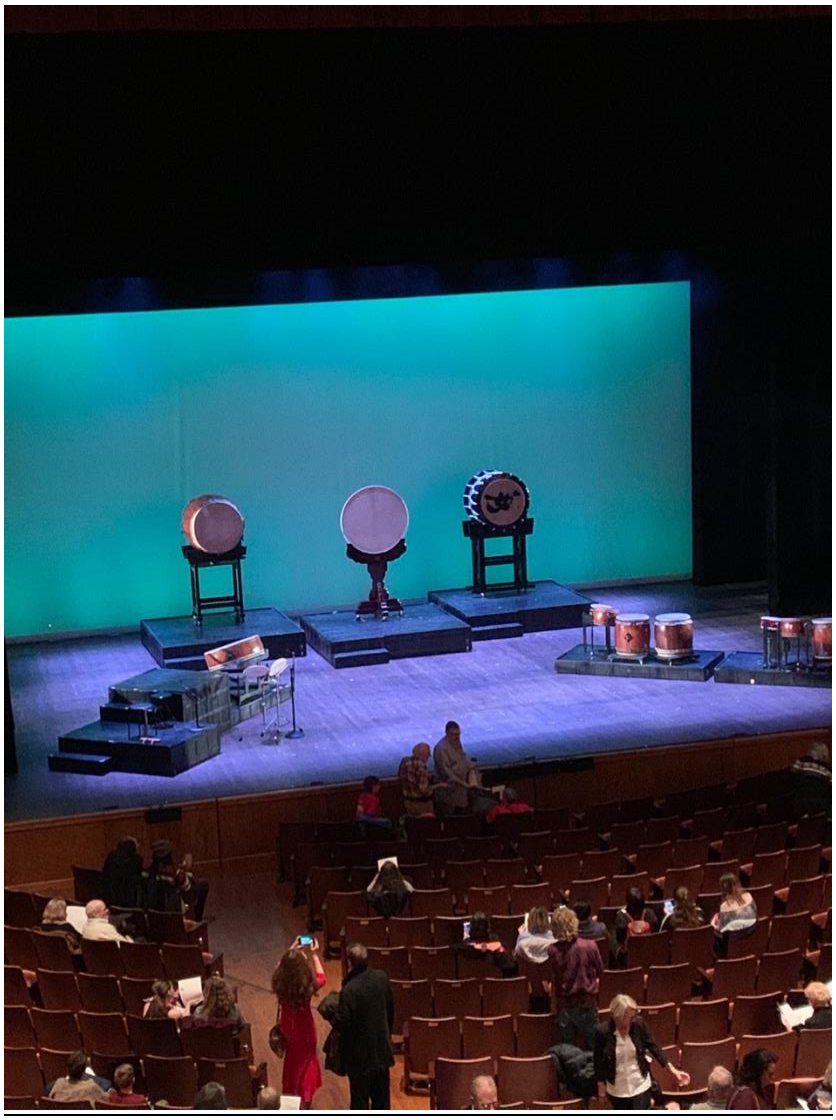

Figure 1. The stage at the Ordway Theatre and *Onna* drum farthest on the right, in the back. Photo by Allison Coe.

Weir's speech established the political motivations for hosting a concert that featured women taiko artists. The space itself, a concert hall, imbued a sense of prestige and power constructed by female taiko artists to represent the strength and variety of female artistry within taiko drumming, "[appropriating] the space that otherwise dominates them" (Manabe 2015: 16). Using Noriko Manabe's description of this control over space, "by challenging the hegemonic order" through creating a female-only performance on stage "they raise onlookers' awareness of the power

structures that are inherent in the production of space and that are taken for granted. They reimagine the spaces of representation, if only momentarily" (ibid.). When I asked Weir, in an interview, about her own experiences with male and female styles of leadership in taiko drumming, she reflected on *HERbeat*'s impact on hegemonic spaces:

> I think anytime you operate from a place of privilege…you almost have this assumption that there is inherent equity, and that you don't have to work hard to make space for people, that they will just show up and be themselves…So I think that conversations I've had with female artists, both around *HERbeat* and just like in one on ones, about how much, how hard they've had to create space for their voice, in different environments, more male-dominated in different groups where men were in leadership, things like that, like the effort it took to create space for them to speak their voice, or to claim their space was something that it was completely not on the radar of the male leadership….When we came up with the *HERbeat* concept of like, let's create this *HERbeat* project to bring these amazing female taiko players together for the first time and just really make space for them: centerstage, celebrate, make it awesome. And a lot of men were thinking not like, "Oh, that sounds terrible. I hate it." But more like, "Well, why can't they just, why do you need something special? They're working, they're performing? They're drumming beside me. They're doing just fine." You know? And yes, that's true to a certain degree, but to the degree that you don't realize how slanted and dominated things are one way until you just kind of flip it the other way... I think once they saw it, then they were like, "Oh!", you know, "Yeah, that's something special. I haven't seen that before." Basically the takeaway, like, "Look, this is awesome. Now make more space for this in what you do." And it's not just women making space for themselves, but men sharing the stage, you know and all non-binary, gender fluidity kind of things in between as well. (Jennifer Weir, video interview, February 17, 2021.)

Weir presented the concept and part of the film for *HERbeat* at the World Taiko Conference and shared part of the film in her presentation. She stated "but what

hasn't changed or what is only slowly changing now is that the leadership and who gets sponsored and who gets featured on stage and who tours and who leads workshops is still dominated by men…taiko is a wonderful way to demand attention, to show power and grace in a way that's unique, in a way that's connected to culture, connected to our bodies, and our full expression as a human…when I see women play taiko it's so exciting because I see a kind of power in their expression that I connect to and that feels revolutionary in some way" (World Taiko Conference 2020). Below, I will highlight moments of each piece performed at the *HERbeat* concert that helped further the movement's goals, showing how powerful women lead through performance, virtuosic ability, technique, and composition.

The first piece, a mix of "Wanshima" by Anna Sato, "Ryu-zing" by Kaoly Asano, and "Joy Bubble" by Tiffany Tamaribuchi, all arranged by Jennifer Weir, brought each female artist onto the stage slowly. Each woman came out holding their own taiko drum or approached one already set on stage. As they entered the stage, a new round of cheers came from the audience. The beginning of the piece was slow and broad, but as each woman entered, the energy and tempo quickened into a celebratory energy-driven party. An instrumental interlude brought in performers who were non-drummers: a fue, shamisen, and singer which led the piece into an energetic finish with drums, chanting, and high-energy dancing. The artistic collaboration between four different female taiko artists set the tone early that this event was going to be done by and for women taiko artists. As discussed above, Tiffany Tamaribuchi's "Joy Bubble" is an exceptionally meaningful song about creating a space of joy amidst political strife. The next two pieces were also composed by participating taiko artists.

The first was Michelle Fujii's "Itsuka," meaning "Someday," and then Mayumi Hashimoto's "Odaiko Kaze." Fujii's piece featured soloists and was centered on movement, flow of motion, and silence, showing gracefulness and beauty tied to an immense amount of control that was needed to perform the intricate choreography. An article about this piece noted that it is about having "to fight for your dreams," something that these taiko artists were working towards (Schorow 2008). "Odaiko Kaze" featured the drum skills of three powerful *odaiko* players. As it is the largest drum on stage, those who play it need to have enough arm strength to strike the drum clearly with the large *bachi.* Along with the arm strength required, the women on stage featured powerful arm motions that activated their leg and core muscles that were also accented by their outfits, which clearly showed their arms and backs.

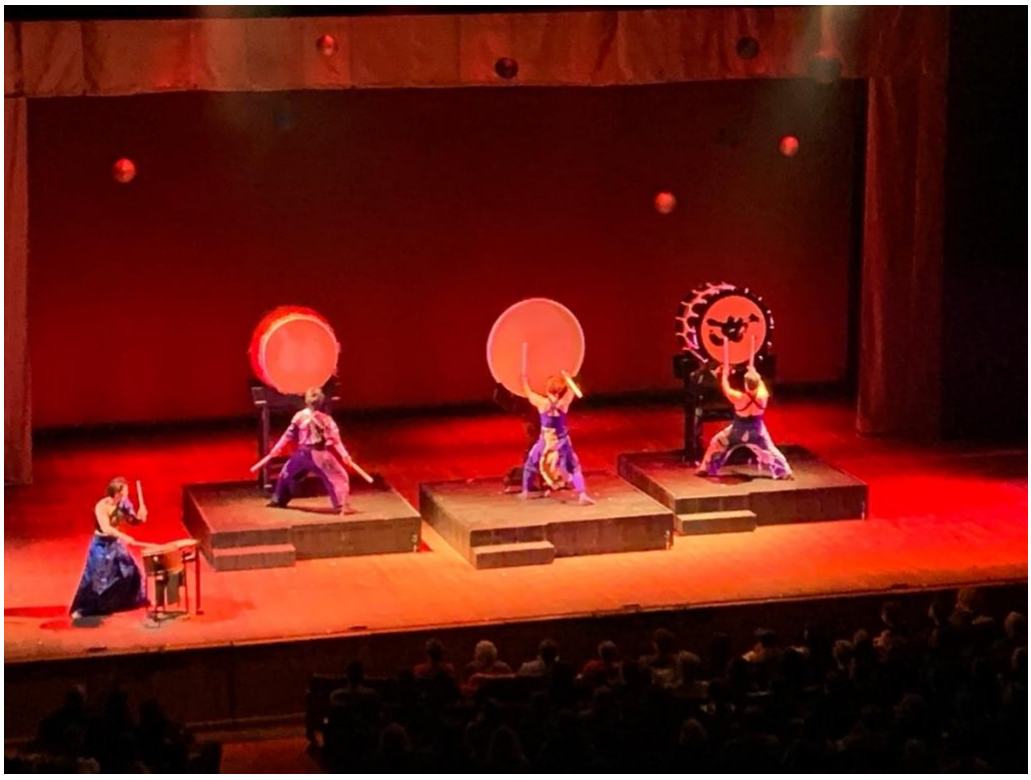

Figure 2. Four taiko artists, three of whom are playing *odaikos* for "Odaiko Kaze" in various stages of motion. Photo by Allison Coe.

Historically, *odaiko* solos were reserved for men; However, the visual and auditory power that each woman poured into this performance challenged this historical practice, not only through their presence in front of the drum but also through the reading of their muscular bodies as strong and capable *female* performers.

The next song was my personal favorite, and the most interactive song of the night: "Great Big Fish" by Yurika Chiba. Paper lanterns in the shape of bubbles filled the ceiling and performers were in a half-circle on the floor. Chiba came on stage and asked the crowd to join in shouting "I am okay! You are okay! We are okay!" before solos were passed around the on-stage group. This piece, with its participatory chanting, and later stomping and clapping from the crowd, heightened the party-feel it exuded. The solos from each performer gave a chance for artists to show off their individual virtuosity and skill while keeping a high energy effect throughout. The next piece, titled "Ode to Mississippi River," was created and performed by all the Japanese artists who flew over for the concert. The last song before intermission was "Mochizuki," which included the chant "We are Minnesota desu." This is another celebratory song with more high-energy solos and dancing that would usually be performed at a traditional celebration, in this case making *mochi* cakes. After a brief intermission, Hawaiian taiko artist Chizuko Endo's piece "Yamamba De Ko'olau" told the story of a wandering spirit of an old woman on Hawaii's Koolau mountains. This piece showed off a form of artistry that was the opposite of the mainstream version of the strong and powerful taiko player. Instead, it featured the beauty and story-telling aspect of taiko drumming, a style typically associated with the feminine.

Through the performance, it reclaimed the beauty and command over the stage that a feminine style of taiko performance can have.

However, the next piece was played in the quintessential strong and powerful taiko style, but a pre-performance speech from its composer, Tiffany Tamaribuchi, established the fact its power comes from the players' "perseverance through adversity," noting the "will and determination" the piece demands, and stating a political message, as she urged the audience to vote with a small nod to her own political preference. Tamaribuchi also stated that the piece, "Kokorozashi," was the best she had ever written, specifically stating that it requires the players to bring their best self. In this piece, a line of taiko women facing the audience vigorously played *nagado-daiko* and *shimedaiko* sets. This piece was powerful and playful as unison drum hits established a sense of unity and the playful interactions between performers brought joy and confidence to the stage.

Figure 3. The performance of "Kokorozashi" by Tiffany Tamaribuchi. Photo by Allison Coe.

The eighth and ninth pieces, “Insight Through Sound” by Roy and PJ Hirabayashi and “Slipping Through My Fingers” by Michelle Fujii, featured a *uchiwa-daikos,* small, flat handheld drums, and showed the avant-garde style of taiko, exploring the sounds of the drums through exposition and self-reflection. “Hana Hachijo,” by Japanese artist Chieko Kojima, shows off the Japanese roots of taiko drumming through its beauty, grace and color. The drummers started off with a slow beat which built as two taiko players drum on opposite ends of the same drum. A feminine character was juxtaposed with another artist in more masculine attire. Both showed their artistry and power, showing off the duality of the female taiko practice. For the last official piece, Japanese artist Kaoly Asano gave a short introduction to her work, “ELEVEN.”

Figure 4. Kaoly Asano’s piece, “ELEVEN.” Photo by Allison Coe.

Asano stated that this piece uses all the members of *HERbeat*—the eighteen artists and members of various taiko groups that came to the performance as well, which included male and non-binary taiko performers. Asano, in her own words, detailed how *HERbeat* means its "HISbeat" and "OURbeat" because of the connections shared as humans on Earth. Asano specifically related this to "ELEVEN," as the song is about the earthquake and tsunami that happened in Japan on March 11, 2011. Asano spoke on how it reflects the hurt, pain, and confusion of all Japanese people and the hope these people had during their struggle to rebuild.

Each of the twelve pieces were performed by memory: the choreography, drumming, and instrumentals were all done unassisted. The concert itself featured the efforts and creativity of women taiko artists, and it reclaimed the stage from the hegemonic forces that have undersold women's efforts in the taiko narrative. Each composition performed was created by women. Women were seen in a variety of roles: drummers, singers, dancers, instrumentalists. Whether the piece was fast or slow, intended to show muscular prowess or flow and grace, the women that were on stage executed it with precision and musicality. Whereas before this point, no concert had presented solely women on stage intentionally performing all the parts and styles of taiko drumming possible for female identifying drummers. The *HERbeat* concert showed women reclaiming spaces that they were once excluded from, such as the *odaiko*, and redefined spaces that ostracized them, such as singing or instrumental parts. The concert itself showcased the skills, ability, creativity, power, and grace of female taiko artists, as well as their work beyond the stage. Tamaribuchi's reflections

on the event show the passion and intention that was also included in the efforts of the concert:

> It was…an opportunity for a bunch of artists to collaborate and bring some amazing performances to the stage. It was also a great opportunity for participating artists to network and be seen…and again getting hired to perform or to teach is generally based on people having a chance to see you perform previously, so that hopefully opened up avenues for everyone as professional artists to get more work. Then, too, there is just the impact of seeing badass women artists performing, and all the things that come with taiko being inspirational generally, so the community got that infusion of spirit and energy and all the little shifts that come along with that sort of energetic push. (Tiffany Tamaribuchi, personal communication, March 8, 2021)

This momentary time where female artists took the stage sparked further conversations and impact around the nation. Jennifer Weir touched on the impact she had seen already because of *HERbeat* and the Women and Taiko Movement:

> "In terms of the TCA leadership and the conferences and the World Taiko Conference, I could tell that they were really trying hard to get female voices in there, even though it was still very, you know, it's still very Japanese, but they were really trying to get diverse kind of voices in terms of North American artists and worldwide artists and more females. And I could tell that that was a conscious effort. That wouldn't have happened, like three years ago" (Jennifer Weir, video interview, February 17, 2021).

HERbeat Gathering

The morning after the concert the Women and Taiko coalition held an event called "Sparking Community Conversations" at a local pub in Minneapolis. Michelle Fuji and Karen Young hosted the event and many performers from the night before, along with other supports of the Women and Taiko movement of all genders, were present.

The gathering began with everyone doing the call and response performed on Yurika Chiba's song "Great Big Fish," and everyone chanted "I am okay! You are okay! We are okay!" At this event I was able to listen to the stories of influential taiko artists who encountered sexism and misogyny during their time as a taiko player and hear about the impact their actions had on new and emerging taiko artists. Since I did not take notes at this event out of acknowledgement for the privacy of those attending, I was not able to create a specific timeline or remember specific moments of the conversations at the gathering. Regardless, I was able to pick up on themes of conversations as the time passed. Frequently, topics of collaboration, mindfulness, and community were brought up and echoed back as being important to the process of individual taiko artists and to the Women and Taiko movement. Fujii and Young referenced the film, the coalition's website, and other events related to the movement to focus on how women have long been a part of the taiko narrative, but it is only just now that the inherent inequality is beginning to change. This movement, as they recalled near the end of the meeting, is meant to bring women to the face of taiko, a place that has been dominated by men.

Discussion was also a major theme of this event, and affinity groups were formed where individuals could discuss what aspects of taiko life were important to them. Groups were formed around ideas that put taiko in conversation with parenting, LGBTQ+ inclusion, business, and activism. At the end of these discussions, the groups were able to share their concerns and discussion points. One thing that stood out to me at this meeting and in my later interviews with some of the taiko artists who performed that weekend was the focus on how parenting or the expectation of

parenting disrupted the narrative of women being professional taiko players. Many of my interviewees also spoke to this point. Artist Chizuko Endo noted her own experience from when she lived in Japan: “[a] man made the comment that women could not be professionals because they had to be responsible for their children and families which would take away from the focus and the concentration needed to become a professional” (Chizuko Endo, personal communication, February 7, 2021). As I continued to do interviews this point of conversation continued to come up around the discussion of Japanese gender roles and expectations, which were reflected when taiko artist Jennifer Weir said:

> It's the cultural kind of environment in Japan, that makes it a lot harder for young women to be taken seriously, because their assumption is that, "Well, we could train you, but then you're going to get married and have kids and go off. So why would we invest that much in you as an artist?" You know it's just, it is more common for male artists to have a wife or family support network that will help support them as a touring artist that a lot of women may not have, just because of the constructs of their social circle and their relationships and whatnot. So it takes a lot to be a professional taiko artist, they're sort of rare birds. And anyone who can do it is utterly amazing. But I just think that the expectation is that it's really going to be unusual for women to succeed there. (Jennifer Weir, video interview, February 17, 2021)

Other topics were also brought up at the gathering, such as the acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals within taiko groups and creating a space where they feel welcome. As this meeting began to close the topic of the public narrative of taiko and diversity began to come into the conversation once more. I was able to talk to host Michelle Fujii about this more in an interview. Fujii summarized this well when she said:

> I've been talking about the taiko community as an ecosystem. And the reason why I love to think about that word, is when we look at it in different, specifically natural, ecosystems the amount of diversity necessary to hold all of it together, is recognized without necessarily making any one particular thing an enemy or an other…And what I found through my research is that otherness is actually another way of saying uniqueness…And so that's what I imagine, I imagine a messy, unorderly sort of celebration of uniqueness in an ecosystem that celebrates diversity… And I think that is so important, telling stories, talking about our experiences, again, on the full ecosystem, I feel we have had the danger of a single story. The danger of a single story is that we actually believe that one story is the full story, but it isn't…I just feel that we are working too much in this binary and that, right now, it's one against the other, which I don't believe in. How much are you one sided, maybe, in telling the story of an art form? But the question I have is, this is taiko, in what vantage point? And right now, I think the male lens has had a lot of concentrated ability to be *the* story of taiko. And I have experienced personally, and also witnessed and researched that there are more stories out there. For me, I am tired of hearing that single one as the norm, we've got to make that not normal. (Michelle Fujii, video interview, September 9, 2020)

The *HERbeat* concert and its surrounding events challenged the norms that Fujii talked about in our interview. By showing another "story" of how taiko can be performed, how leadership can be presented and in what ways, the *HERbeat* concert fueled the Women and Taiko movement to continue challenging the narrative of taiko drumming present in North American taiko and abroad.

HERbeat, along with the activities of the Women and Taiko coalition and the online spaces generated from the coalition and community at large, have provided spaces for women to challenge the dominant, male-centered narrative of taiko drumming by creating spaces of performance and discussion that enable female-identifying taiko players to feel empowered and encouraged to lead. In creating these

spaces, the power structure inherent in taiko drumming is challenged through discussions of embodied performance and value, and the visual aspects of performance are also disrupted through female-created compositions, performances, and presentations. While different taiko ensembles exist in various places on the spectrum between total equality and hierarchy, it has been shown that the value of male taiko performance and leadership style is regarded as more valuable to the narrative of North American taiko drumming through the sole inclusion of males in the history of taiko presentation at the North American Taiko Conference and through the disproportionately small number of female taiko artists who are invited to give workshops, teach, or perform throughout the United States. In reaction to this concept of "valuable" taiko performance and leadership, the Women and Taiko movement has sought to change the narrative, increase the visibility of female taiko leadership and performance styles, and empower others to become more aware of gender bias in their taiko practices "through a conscious awareness of [the] performative power" within North American taiko drumming (Koskoff 2014: 152).

Fieldwork Reflections: Spring 2020

Working on this thesis and doing fieldwork during the global pandemic has brought many challenges and prompted creativity in order to navigate new situations. I began my research being able to physically go to one field site, the *HERbeat* concert, and setting up plans to go to others. During that time, China and Italy were the countries in the middle of a massive health crisis that would soon make its way to the United States. As spring of 2020 moved forward, more and more opportunities to do fieldwork were shut down or postponed. My fieldwork was related to not only my

thesis but also to my field methods course. Some of my assignments were based around going "into the field" to learn how to do fieldwork by practicing it. However, when the University of Maryland shut down in-person classes and installed research restrictions for the safety of students and the community, my options for fieldwork became extremely limited. My fieldwork, although intended to be partially virtual regardless of the pandemic, ended up being mostly virtual, done from my home in Iowa. The taiko community has a history of organizing online and, thankfully, because of this, my capacity to perform virtual fieldwork was not restricted. This was my only "in the field" experience before the pandemic shut down the United States just three weeks later. Many times, I have compared this singular experience to the virtual fieldwork I have done since then. The difference in virtual fieldwork versus physically being in the field had its positives and negatives, and I will address these in conversation with my description of my virtual fieldwork in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Using Cyberspace and Physical Space to Challenge Taiko Leadership Norms

The events leading up to the start of this research took place as in-person gatherings where people were able to play taiko and discuss their experiences face to face. However, the connection with the Taiko Community Alliance and the popularity of the Summer Taiko Intensive (STI) event sparked a need for an online community space that could generate connections across the globe. The first instance of the Women and Taiko movement's online presence was in 2017, when the "Women and Taiko Group" Facebook group page was created "to increase the visibility and leadership of women in the art form" (Women and Taiko Group 2017) as a response to conversations had at the STI titled Women and Taiko: Past, Present, and Future (Women and Taiko 2021). The page itself is moderated to make sure what is posted is relevant to the mission of the page and has been consistently in use since February 2018. Many of the first posts in this group were centered on events that were led by women and non-binary individuals. Some posts asked questions of the group about teaching or mentoring opportunities. As I continued to monitor the posts, I noticed that they became more about sharing accomplishments and attracting attention for workshops geared toward professional development in teaching, performing, and event logistics (Women and Taiko Group 2017). When other events in the broader taiko community were happening, posts related to those events appeared on the page and tried to garner attention and participation. Discussion and posts on this page were mostly done by page administrators and were correlated with those involved with the Women and Taiko coalition, despite the groups not being directly connected to each

other. Activity on the page picked up even more as plans for the *HERBeat* concert were beginning to form, and many taiko enthusiasts were writing promotional posts to garner interest and monetary support; soon thereafter, the Women and Taiko coalition began posting about the fall 2019 webinar series related to the broader Women and Taiko movement.

Then, on May 6th, 2020 a new page for Women and Taiko movement activities was created with a different structure (Women and Taiko Facebook 2020). While Facebook "group" pages center community-based discussion and organization, Facebook "pages" allow for organizations and businesses to better show what they represent to their followers in a more streamlined way. The new "Women and Taiko" page focuses specifically on the activities of the Women and Taiko coalition, and while it diverges somewhat from the community sharing aspect of the "Women and Taiko Group" page, it allows for events and activities that are related to the organization to be housed in an easily accessed place that allows for real-time feedback, unlike the womenandtaiko.org site which does not contain that feature. Since the "Women and Taiko" page was created more recently, it has fewer posts and less engagement than the group page, and because of its organization only those with administrative access can post on the page. Therefore, the content is more easily controlled because the focus of the page is the Women and Taiko organization and related events. The events are posted on the womenandtaiko.org page, as well—another facet of the Women and Taiko movement's online presence. The website itself contains pages dedicated to news, projects, and important women to know in the

taiko community, along with an "about" page that explains the inception of the Women and Taiko organization.

Overall, these online spaces detail the developments from the first moments of the Women and Taiko movement to its current state in an online format, which became an increasingly important form of communication after the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted everyday life. Tied together with the activities of in-person, pre-pandemic spaces, the Women and Taiko movement uses these spaces to disrupt the mainstream taiko narrative that centers on the accomplishments of male performance and leadership styles and brings attention to the different ways of leadership possible for taiko drumming. Below, I will analyze how these online and physical spaces have informed and mobilized the Women and Taiko movement through live, livestreamed, and recorded performances, as well as hosting discussions on understanding and changing the embodied knowledge within taiko performance and leadership practices. These spaces give power to taiko players who wish to explore the performative boundaries of taiko and allow them to challenge the embodied knowledge of how taiko drumming is taught and performed.

The "Women and Taiko Group" Facebook Page: Continuing the Work from the 2017 Summer Taiko Intensive

One of the first posts on the “Women and Taiko Group” page came from Karen Young, stating the purpose of the page: “Hello Women and Taiko!! Our event just finished and it was requested that we create a page to stay connected. Please help invite people, post photos, and keep each other inspired” (Young 2017). The goal for the page was to connect a community of supporters and disseminate information that

centers the performance and leadership-based practices of taiko-playing women. In the first few months of the group's establishment there was not much activity, as another group dedicated to the Summer Taiko Intensive was created. Almost six months later, administrators of the group began to change the page's profile photos and events started to be shared. I am unsure of what prompted the change in activity, but despite the new activity the mission of the group stayed the same.

While observing this page, I noticed that certain individuals continually posted content, and I found some important conversations that stuck out amongst the event sharing. The first significant post that I found was shared by Cabs A Jenifer and contained a YouTube video titled "2017 Women and Taiko Video (overview + NATC performance)" (Jenifer 2018). This video detailed the events around the STI Women and Taiko retreat. A key moment stuck out to me within the video, read by Karen Young:

> Women are not well represented as professional taiko artists or workshop leaders and we wanted to know why. One thing that became perfectly clear to use is that visibility is a key issue. You can't be what you can't see. Most of us couldn't name professional women taiko artists or workshop leaders outside Tiffany, P.J., Michelle or Chizuko and that's concerning to us. (Women and Taiko 2017)

The concept of visibility stuck out in other areas of my research. Women were left out of the North American Taiko Conference (NATC) speech on taiko history in 2015, rendering them invisible in the records of that speech despite the brief verbal mentions of a few women taiko players. The womenandtaiko.org page features a Visibility Campaign to highlight women who have been leaders in various ways and put them "in the spotlight" (Women and Taiko 2021). In order to create change, the

Women and Taiko movement began to form a pragmatic response to the gender issues within the taiko community by coming together to create the change needed. In using Noriko Manabe's theoretical framework, I found that she employs Mark Mattern's conceptions of "musical behavior as a function of political circumstances" of which he determines there are three: confrontational, deliberative, and pragmatic (Manabe 2014: 13). I believe that the Women and Taiko movement is pragmatic, as it focuses on solving the problem through "[using] music to promote awareness of shared interests and to organize collaborative efforts to address them" rather than confronting the problem through protest or debate (Mattern 1998: paragraph 16).

2017 North American Taiko Conference STI Performance

The activism of promoting visibility of women in taiko factors into Manabe's analysis framework as part of understanding the "political conditions underlying the movement at [the] point in *time*" in which the music was created (Manabe 2014: 14; emphasis in original). Returning to the YouTube video posted on the "Women and Taiko Group" page, the narrators give a statement prior to the viewing of the song created at the STI event which explains how the attendees "combine taiko, movements and spoken word [to] express key points that were shared during [their] collaboration: isolation, tendency to hold back, issues of visibility, perception of women on the taiko stage as *kazarimono* or decoration…we are presenting our shared experience of the STI and our vision and hopes for the community" (Women and Taiko 2017).[2] The presentation of the song was done at the 2017 North American

[2] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JUIeKnDV6nE

taiko conference and was performed as a slideshow of pictures taken at the STI played in the background. It begins at 00:02:57 within the video as a performer hits her *bachi* against the *odaiko* as the piece begins, increasing in speed before quieting. A *shimedaiko* begins after a moment of space, playing a steady beat before chanters enter with the phrases "you are not strong, you are not a soloist, you are not a teacher" (ibid.) While the chants are being performed two dancers are slowly moving between two poses. In the first pose, both performers stretch their arms out to the sides as if showing off something before they move into the second pose that has them put their one hand under the chin and the other under their elbow, parallel to the floor, which sometimes represents "prettiness" by framing the face. The chanters get louder, repeating themselves three times before shouting "You are *Kazarimono!*" which refers to how women are viewed as stage decoration, and at this time the two dancers turn to face each other and point towards another (ibid.). This first section emphasizes the views of the attendees of the 2017 STI—noting specifically how women taiko players are sometimes just for decoration, to be shown off but not in a way that reflects strength and viewed as not knowledgeable or strong enough to be considered as teacher or soloist.

At 00:04:00, the chanters then transition to saying the words "reflection, identity, culture, family" as the *shimedaiko* player keeps the beat and the *odaiko* player fills in the space between words. Four different dancers come to the front of the stage, each folding forward after a word is shouted. There is a space of silence before the chanters begin stating, louder each time: "no obstacles, no boundaries, no limits, big voice, big noise, big power" (ibid.) As they do this, the dancers push off the floor,

join hands, and lift up onto their toes three times before each turns to the side and falls into the arms of the dancer behind them, similar to a "trust fall." These movements and chants, I believe, are indicative of the ways Japanese cultural values of identity, culture, and family are reflected in taiko drumming, demonstrating the ways in which female behavior is derived from Japanese history and laying out the interpretation for the audience. I do not believe these are meant to show the North American taiko community in a negative way, but rather a positive one, as the movements and chants are not negatively framed in the piece itself and the piece offers positive alternatives later. At 00:05:14, the dancers move out of the trust fall and join hands in open palms, moving one hand to hit the person's palm next to them: a transfer of energy up the line of people and back again as they turn to face away from the audience. Again, there is a space and emptiness for just a moment before the four dancers lift their now clasped joined hands up and three new dancers pass through them to the front of the stage, facing each other in a circle. Chants begin again: "You are strong, you are a soloist, you are a teacher, *kazarimono* no more!" On each phrase, a different dancer creates a downward V with their outstretched arms. This "power pose" takes up space and gives the body a solid foundation or a look of power. A brief space in the music occurs again. At 00:05:23, a *fue* (Japanese bamboo flute) performer interrupts the space, playing the melody from Tiffany Tamaribuchi's composition "Joy Bubble." The dancers sweep their arms to the ground and bring them up simultaneously, as if they are lifting an object up from the ground. They repeat the movement two more times, wiggling their fingers as they continue the

gesture before turning to face stage left and use a similar sweeping movement with their arms out to the audience.

At 00:06:26, the *fue* player is then joined by a *nagado-daiko* drummer playing the beat pattern from "Joy Bubble," and more taiko players move to their drums as others travel off stage into the crowd. *Kiai* are shouted by those who are not playing, and the melody from "Joy Bubble" is finally sung: "I know change is coming, I know change is coming, I know change is coming, change is coming soon." This phrase is repeated seven times before the dancers turn to the audience at the last repetition and replace "change is coming soon" with "change is coming NOW" and the piece ends with one final beat of the drums. The crowd claps loudly and shouts as the performers take their bow on stage, and a standing ovation begins before the performance recording cuts out. By giving a performance example of ways in which women can lead through performance, composition, and dance this piece functions as an example of pragmatic problem solving. This also serves as an example to audience members of the ways in which women are capable leaders and the issues that are the focus of the Women and Taiko movement.

This piece reflects the discussions had at the 2017 STI and emphasizes the feelings of many female and non-binary taiko players about gender expectations in the North American taiko community. Performing it at the North American Taiko Conference meant that their message reached an international stage. Tiffany Tamaribuchi recounts the moment in this way:

> It did reflect the work we did at the STI, and a depth of history and experience that accurately showed and in some ways exemplified the differences that some of the key artists hold dear in terms of their process and what is important to them in their non-competitive practice, in

> direct contrast to what they view as a more showy, masculine approach to taiko A lot of folks saw it as powerful, thoughtful, and meaningful and a fair number thought it was ponderous and disappointing, given their belief that other peers would see it as, “Further evidence that women really can’t play very well.” (Tiffany Tamaribuchi, personal communication, March 8, 2021)

Using Manabe’s parameters of analysis, the original performance of this piece on an international stage risked both negative and positive reactions from spectators because of the space in which it was played. Especially since the issue of gender representation within taiko leadership was just beginning to be discussed, the political frame of this performance or the issue itself had not been noticed as a primary issue for some of the taiko community at-large. In my discussion with Mark Rooney, he reflected on the focus on women and leadership and the political landscape when conversations about women and leadership in taiko began:

> It's interesting that it is this sort of subdivision of the taiko community, to talk about women and taiko. I said this back when we were planning NATC in 2017. And, therefore, simultaneously, we were pushing forward for having a woman in taiko, summer taiko event prior to the conference, and I was like it's almost a shame that we have to have this kind of separate event. I mean, the majority of us are women. So NATC de facto should be women and taiko, that should be the thing. You know, in Vegas, they had set up a panel on women in taiko, that's kind of where the impetus of all that had started. And it's, first of all, 2015, I know this discussion has been going on, but why are we really starting to try to address it now? And from what I hear, and because I was teaching, I was leading some other discussion or panels, I wasn't able to see it. I heard it was very well attended. And I heard that there were very few men in the room. And it's, you know, so the idea, women and taiko is, to me is, it's about our taiko community, we are a predominantly women driven community. So this is central, this isn't like a, you know…if I started like a half Japanese half Scottish, subgroup of that, that's

> very niche, you know, women and taiko's not niche, that's the majority. So we had talked about, like, shouldn't the whole conference…just be that? You know, and not just about this idea of, how do we get more women into leadership positions and such, but we should talk about why is it that there aren't, you know, and we should talk about what are the various struggles, and, you know, in order for that movement, to work, to move forward within the taiko community, it has to be something that is addressed and embraced by the whole community. So you know, if men aren't attending this thing, thinking, "Oh, this has nothing to do with me, this is about the women." Like, no, it's not about the women in taiko, it's about your taiko community. (Mark Rooney, video interview, February 3, 2021)

This performance and the proceeding actions of the Women and Taiko movement have begun to change the power dynamics of the taiko community by using the international stage to attract the attention of sympathetic individuals to their cause and point out to the larger North American taiko community the importance of this political issue. After the performance ends in the YouTube video, various STI participants share tips on what members of the taiko community can do to support women in taiko. These topics include growing their awareness of how gender bias impacts roles within taiko ensembles, being aware of who is assigned to easy or difficult tasks, making sure there is equal representation of men, women, and non-binary individuals, and paying attention to who solos or leads workshops.

There is also advice for those who feel underrepresented in the taiko community starting at timestamp 00:09:28. STI organizer Sarah Ayako explains thoroughly the acronym F.I.E.R.C.E. at 00:10:17. Ayako goes through each letter, stating its importance:

> We can be F.I.E.R.C.E., this is an acronym created by Emma Valentine in Minnesota…first we have F-fear nothing, do five things every year that scare you, I-that's for initiatives, ideas,

> and input. Your knowledge is valuable, so don't be shy about making contributions. E-encourage. We need to support each other and back each other up. That brings us to R. That's for recognition and representation. Notice and acknowledge who is doing the work. Be visible and step up as teachers and performers. Then we have C-connect. Connect with other women and share your stories of triumph and share your challenges. We are stronger together. That brings us to E-education. Educate yourself and others and be sure to know the women who blazed the path." (Ibid.)

Other advice includes reaching out to taiko players who are mothers, asking for help, getting recognition, and establishing a work-life balance. Lastly, a series of attendees passionately state that "change is coming *now*" before the video ends (ibid.: emphasis added.). By stating these tactics for addressing the gender disparity both as and for women taiko players, the STI attendees are constructing a way to perform and lead that challenges the power hierarchies present in taiko drumming. Asking North American taiko community members to become more aware of gender imbalances and issues of representation and showing them how to be F.E.I.R.C.E. prompts the community to address the gender disparity in practical ways within their own rehearsal spaces and creates change through the embodiment of different practices. The inclusion of the NATC performance functions as an example of both the inherent gender issues and the leadership of performance. The posting of this video on the "Women and Taiko Group" page specifically addresses the women who see it, asking them to focus on the "change that is coming" via the values stated in the musical piece and through the reiteration of actionable items in the F.E.I.R.C.E. acronym. By using "repetitive acts of performativity [to] subtly construct, legitimize, and reproduce (in real time) social and sexually normalized" behavior of members within

the taiko community in ways that create more visibility for women drummers, this performance challenges the power dynamic of leadership in the taiko community through the performative acts discussed and shown through the video (Koskoff 2014: 152).

Some of the ways in which the video asks members of the community to take action were discussed by individuals in later posts and prompted community conversations from the members of the "Women and Taiko Group" page throughout the year of 2018. A mentor program was also formed, group calls for cross-community connection were set up, and a professional development workshop was established throughout the next year (Women and Taiko Group 2017). Beginning in 2019, the majority of the posts on the page became about the Women and Taiko coalition events and the *HERbeat* concert. The page gradually moved to become a space that was geared towards the activities of the Women and Taiko movement; however, a few individuals posted their own content that was related but did not directly stem from the movement organizers. Manman Mui, a professional taiko player, posted often about significant workshops Mui was leading, taiko performer and podcaster Tyrone Nakawatase frequently posted about his interviews with women taiko drummers in ways that added to other events posted, and representatives for taiko-related organizations posted to promote their events. This established via Facebook, provided an accessible online community space that connected the conceptions of change established through the digital space to a change in physical spaces where women are often left out of the narrative. The Facebook groups allow members of the Women and Taiko movement to "imagine new uses and meaning for

space in contrast to the conceived space regulated by hegemonic forces" by sharing musical practices and discussing how the embodied knowledge of performing taiko drumming and leading taiko groups can be broadened to include styles that go against the mainstream masculine style of performing (Manabe 2015: 16, 18). Manman Mui discussed with me how this space and its ties to the Women and Taiko STI helped create change:

> Attending the 2017 Women and Taiko Summer Taiko Institute was very influential. Because for all of us to come together and spend three days together and talk about all of this, that opens up so much more for me…it was just like, when I open up the possibility to talk and think and process about gender, and then lead to a place [a] couple years later, and I can say it out loud…I felt like that is [a] changing point. And somehow that also happened at the same time when I moved, like, [made] this big move from Hawaii to here. And I felt like that has been supporting me in some way. I mean, I still run into all these troubling experiences. But yet, it's like something in the back of my mind, are there are people I can fall back to, that I feel a really important relationship within those space. And yeah, like those are also the spaces that leads me to realize "what does feminine/femininity and leadership quality mean?" Now, I'm beyond just having women being leaders, because like I mentioned before, if there are more women being leaders, but yet still perpetuating and upholding patriarchy, then we would still be trapped in that same system of oppression. (Mui, video interview, February 26, 2021)

Mui's response reflects how the space created from the 2017 STI has allowed for thinking beyond just gendered representation in leadership and performance but also thinking towards how different styles beyond the masculine can influence representation and oppression. The "Women and Taiko Group" page has been influential for Mui because of the community it creates which allows for "tensions surrounding power and control" of the narrative and visibility of female taiko

drummers to “be exposed, challenged, or reversed within musical performance” and embodied knowledge transmitted through the online space (Koskoff 2014: 89).

Fieldwork Reflections: Doing Fieldwork in a Pandemic

When I first began practicing taiko, I found connection and membership within the Facebook groups created by members of the taiko community, despite my relatively low level of participation. When I knew I wanted to include taiko drumming in my thesis research, and more specifically its intersection with gender, I came to these online spaces first to see how others in the community spoke about gender. It was at this point that I saw the first scheduled Women and Taiko coalition’s webinar as a post on one of the taiko Facebook groups. Five webinars were hosted by the Women and Taiko organization, and the recordings are available for public viewing on their website. While the webinars themselves happened before I officially began my thesis research, the content within them and my original reflections are still pertinent to my research. Four of the webinars were centered around encouraging leadership by featuring women taiko leaders or giving experiences and tips about leading in various contexts (Women and Taiko 2021).

The latest Women and Taiko webinar was held after COVID-19 began and aimed to have a significant impact on independent artists and taiko groups around the world. The webinar was centered on the strategies and tactics that were being used to continue playing taiko during the pandemic and meant to provide support and a platform for idea sharing across the community. While this webinar was not closely tied to my research because other than being hosted in connection with the Women and Taiko coalition, it focused on topics that were not specifically connected to the

gendered practices of taiko. However, it was helpful to observe how the Women and Taiko website created an accessible space to support taiko artists outside of their primary mission. My experience attending these webinars was very different from my in-person fieldwork, despite many webinars happening before the pandemic. Sitting at home and taking notes while watching a screen felt impersonal, and I struggled to feel the same connection that I did in Minneapolis. While I was not able to make the same connections with individual people, I was able to ask more questions and each panel was able to see and respond to my questions. By attending these webinars, I was able to learn more about discussions surrounding the issues of gender, taiko, and leadership. I was also able to form contacts whom I was able to interview later.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began to impact the United States, many of my interviews and in-person fieldwork opportunities were cancelled. Adapting to this situation was disappointing and I was worried about my ability to connect with interlocutors, never having been able to meet them. However, because of the webinars many members of the taiko community were familiar with the application Zoom and I was able to connect with them in this way, virtually face-to-face. What was challenging was the new level of unexpectedness that life in a global pandemic caused. Sometimes sudden connectivity issues prompted the need to adapt to a different form of contact and caretaking needs became a priority. Overall, the pandemic prompted a change in focus for my fieldwork and caused the research and interviewing skills I applied to have different emphasis.

Womenandtaiko.org: The Coalition Fueling the Movement

Since the "Women and Taiko" Facebook page is directly related to the actions and events held by the Women and Taiko coalition I plan on analyzing it here alongside the website and the coalition itself. However, the "Women and Taiko" page was not created until April 2020, well after many of the coalition's webinars which were shared on the "Women and Taiko Group" page. The coalition is a group of individuals supportive of the Women and Taiko movement, which meets to generate various events and initiatives that aid the movement. This group also runs a website to house information for all of the activities they generate and news of other activities that pertain to the Women and Taiko movement. These initiatives include a mentoring program, a list of female taiko players willing to lead workshops, a page that reiterates the directives from the end of the YouTube video about the Women and Taiko STI, a page that houses compositions (that at this moment contains only one composition, by the Foyle O-Bon/Humber Taiko Women in Taiko Project), and lastly past webinars on topics geared towards changing and redefining the narrative of women taiko players in North America. Below, I will focus on how the Foyle O-Bon/Humber Taiko Women in Taiko Project's composition "Nakama no Koe: Our Voices" and the coalition's webinars work to mobilize female taiko players to lead and challenge the dominant narrative in the North American taiko community. Lastly, I will touch on how the "Women and Taiko" Facebook page is able to further the impact of the coalition's goals and reach.

"Nakama Koe: Our Voices"

Below the video example of "Nakama no Koe: Our Voices," there is a short explanation about the inspiration for the piece and the project for which the piece was composed. [3] While this piece was created through a Women in Taiko event in Northern Ireland, it directly relates to the North American Women and Taiko movement through the participation of many womenandtaiko.org coalition members and the piece's use within the North American taiko community. The activities of the Women and Taiko movement began and have mainly taken place in North America. However, there is some reach beyond the North American continent, such as this composition. The piece itself is open source, with funding from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. The composers' notes detail the intention of the piece:

> At the heart of the project was the plan to bring together an international group of women taiko players to create an open-source piece that could be shared and played across the world. We hoped this piece would speak to and empower women worldwide and to break down stereotypes of women in taiko and in music in general. We also wanted to stimulate collaborative work and foster relationships between women artists and groups world-wide… Every woman contributed to "Nakama no Koe" to create a truly collaborative work. We pieced themes and images together from each of our stories and experiences, we shared our difficulties as well our hopes and plans for the future. We called the piece "Nakama no Koe" which means "Our Voices" and we believe it is a powerful expression of the power and the grace of the women in our taiko community. (Women and Taiko 2021)

The parts for this piece can be found on the womenandtaiko.org website, and the accompanying video of the Foyle O-Bon/Humber Taiko Women in Taiko project group performing the piece gives a visual example of the energy and passion

[3] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZok9drm3f8

embedded within its creation. The composition is separated into twelve parts, and I will be separating my analysis into these parts as well. The analysis below is based on a close observation of this video, aided by the score published on the same website.[4]

Table 2. Table of "Nakama no koe" parts with instrumentation and short notes.

Section	**Instrumentation**	**Notes**
Part 1	*shimedaiko, chu-daiko, odaiko*	*Chu-daiko* players challenge each other from a crossed the stage, unison finish to the next section.
Part 2	*shimedaiko, chu-daiko, odaiko*	Solo section for the *chu-daiko* and *odaiko* players, unison finish to the next section.
Part 3	*shimedaiko, chu-daiko, chappa*	*Shimedaiko* and *chappa* solos, *kiai* shouts from non-soloists while playing quiet background hits.
Part 4	*shimedaiko, chu-daiko, odaiko, chappa*	Quiet drum hits, arms cross to create infinity symbol over the drum and beside the body.
Part 5	*shimedaiko, chu-daiko*	Quiet drum hits, transition.
Part 6	*shimedaiko, fue, dancers, singers*	*Fue* intro and then *fue* player performs song melody throughout the rest of the section, dancers move to a circle at center stage, alto and soprano singers perform two melody lines in the back of the stage, dancers travel in a circle performing motions reflective of echoes, strength, an infinity symbol, breath, and space. Dancers and taiko players stop, sing melody together before dancing back towards their drums to begin next section.

[4] Women and Taiko, "Nakama no koe" - "Our Voices" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZok9drm3f8&t=4s

Foyle O-Bon/Humber Taiko project. *Nakama no koe.* https://www.womenandtaiko.org/compositions

Part 7	*shimedaiko, chu-daiko, odaiko, chappa*	Large flowing movements with drum strikes, drummers creating infinity symbol with their arms, powerful yet graceful, unison finish to the section.
Part 8	*shimedaiko, chu-daiko, odaiko, chappa*	Re-intro of Part 1, unison finish to the section.
Part 9	*shimedaiko, chu-daiko, odaiko, chappa*	*Odaiko* solo, other performers play background hits and shout *kiai.*
Part 10	*shimedaiko, chu-daiko, odaiko, chappa*	Two rhythmic patterns played against each other, *chu-daikos* jumping and yelling: celebratory.
Part 11	*shimedaiko, chu-daiko, odaiko, chappa, fue*	*Fue* reprise, low volume drum pattern as backgrounds crescendos into last section
Part 12	*shimedaiko, chu-daiko, odaiko, chappa*	Call and response from *shimedaiko* to other drums, unison finish.

Part 1 begins with two performers keeping an eighth-note ostinato pattern on *shimedaiko*s before four drummers on stage right strike *chu-daikos* three times with a singular *bachi* at the same time—played as triplet quarter notes. While striking the drums, the *chu-daiko* players move towards another group of four drummers located parallel to them on the other side of the stage, by taking one step past their drum per *bachi* strike. The drummers are smiling widely and leaning towards the players across from them, as if they are daring the other players to a challenge. After two quarter rests, the *chu-daiko* group on stage left does the same rhythm and movement back to the first set of drummers. This happens twice more before all drummers—playing eight *chu-daikos*, two *shimedaikos*, and one *odaiko* drum—play two quarter-note triplet sets followed by two triplet eighth note sets, in unison. This ending phrase

comes back multiple times throughout the piece and unifies the group throughout the various parts. A small pause happens as players shout *kiai* before entering a solo section, Part 2, at timestamp 00:00:23. The solo section alternates two measures repeatedly: the first is comprised of the triplet quarter note strikes from all the drummers except for the *shimedaiko* players, who continue with their original ostinato. The second measure allows each player one 4/4 metered measure to perform a rhythm of their choice. Who is soloing depends on their position in the room: the parallel groups of *chu-daiko*s players are in a U shape, with the *odaiko* and the *fue* player placed between them. The *shimedaiko* players are behind the *chu-daiko*s on stage right. The soloists begin from stage left and pass through the U-shape set of drummers (excluding the *fue*). Lastly, the two *shimedaiko* players finish out the solo section and together the drummers play two triplet quarter-notes sets followed by one set of triplet eighth-notes, one quarter-note, a quarter-rest, and another quarter-note to designate the end of Part 2.

Part 3, starting at 00:00:51, focuses on *shimedaiko/okedo* set solos. The two drummers playing the *shimedaikos* also have an *okedo* drum placed to the left of their *shimedaiko* that has gone unplayed until this moment, creating a set of drums. One of the *shimedaiko* players performs a solo while all the other drummers are softly playing a rhythmic ostinato as accompaniment. The *shimedaiko* solo continues for sixteen measures before the other *shimedaiko* player begins soloing on *chappa* (Japanese cymbals) for another sixteen measures. The energy of this piece has not lessened up to this point as each drummer's face has not fallen from a smile since the start and their bodies have remained engaged in constant playing. At 00:01:28, Part 4

begins as the *shimedaiko* drummers begin their ostinato once more. The *chu-daiko* players hit their *bachi* on the rim of their drums to play a repeating rhythm: drum strikes happen on the off-beats of beats 1 and 2, a space is left on beat three, and then the off-beat of beat four functions as a pick-up to the two eighth notes on beat one of the next measure. This rhythm is repeated as a two-measure phrase, starting loud and getting quieter with every repetition before fading into just off-beats as a transition into the next section. It is here that energy of the piece shifts from loud and sometimes virtuosic to a softer, more melodic section.

Part 5, 00:01:54, introduces a new *shimedaiko* and *okedo* ostinato in a 3/4 meter and the *fue* player begins with an introductory phrase before playing one verse of a melody later sung in by the drummers. While the *fue* is being played, some of the drummers previously playing the *chu-daiko* and the *odaiko* form a circle at the center of the stage and prepare to dance. The drummers who did not join the circle move to the back of the stage where they will sing the melody of the piece. This is designated as Part 6 beginning at 00:02:11. In Part 6, the sopranos and altos sing their individual lines before joining together, all while those in the center of the stage are dancing. The sopranos start this section by singing "Nakama no koe, ga Kodama suru, Yama no ue de odoro // Nakama no koe, ga Kodama suru, Yama no ue de odoro" for sixteen measures. Then the altos sing "Fight for space, Raw and fierce, Twice as hard, Dancing soul, Breathing life, Twice as hard" for sixteen more (Foyle O-Bon/Humber Taiko project 2018). These lines are inspired by the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of the women who are performing and have created the piece. They also translate to the broader feelings of women in the taiko community and even towards

the discussion on global issues of gender. Specifically, the lyrics note the "fight for space" on the performance stage and the historical narrative of taiko drumming, the "raw and fierce, Twice as hard" work that female taiko performers need to do to get noticed, and "Dancing Soul, Breathing Life" reflects on the varied performance styles that women are capable of and the ideas of creation tied to performance but also motherhood. The Japanese sung by the sopranos roughly translates to "Our voices, they echo, atop the mountain," which is reflective of the continuous message of gender inequality within the taiko community. While the sopranos are singing, the dancers are traveling in a circle moving their arms in motions that connect to the words of the song. These motions reflect echoes, strength, an infinity symbol, breath, and space. At the end of Part 6, both vocal parts are sung simultaneously which happens at 00:03:18 in the video. The first time both verses are sung together it is only the vocalists; however, the second time, the dancers and *shimedaiko* players stop to sing the first four measures of the verse without any accompaniment or movement, except for the *fue*, on stage before finishing the verse by having all drummers dance while travelling back towards their drums. Part 7 begins after the phrase is over at 00:04:11 in the video. The *shimedaiko* and *odaiko* players begin an ostinato rhythm. The *chu-daiko* drummers begin to play quarter and eighth note rhythms on the center and rim of their drums, making large sweeping motions with their arms before making contact. What is interesting about these movements is that, while they are performed very gracefully, in the score they are described as "powerful" and "strong." The duality between the actions and the descriptions reflects the duality of the female body in taiko drumming: graceful and fluid yet strong and powerful.

Intentionally, this part of the piece is shown to reflect the opposite side of the spectrum of taiko drumming, moving from the fast and powerful style to the graceful and movement-oriented style.

Part 8 begins at 00:05:12, with a variation of the introductory theme. At first, only one *chu-daiko* drummer plays a triplet quarter note set while the *shimedaiko* players echo back with four eighth notes. Then, each time a triplet quarter note beat is played, a single *chu-daiko* drummer joins in with the triplet rhythm and the *shimedaikos* continue to echo back with eighth notes until all of the players are participating. On the last triplet quarter note set, the *odaiko* player joins in before the group plays two quarter note triplet sets followed by two triplet eighth note sets, in unison, like the end of the original introduction. This leads into an *odaiko* solo for Part 9 at 00:05:29. The score for this moment tells the *odaiko* player to "Go for it!!! Unapologetic Joy!" (ibid.). This direction being included in the score shows the hesitancy that some players may have when performing on the *odaiko* drum, a drum historically reserved for male performers. The phrase is intended to encourage players to become unreserved and play with the virtuosity allowed male players while still being joyful. The other drummers shout "*kiai"* while playing rhythmic backgrounds for the solo to show encouragement for and approval of the soloist's drumming. To signal the end of the solo, the *odaiko* player plays the two quarter note triplet sets followed by two triplet eighth note sets that were used for the end of the introduction. As this happens, the other drummers change from their background rhythms to perform the last triplet eighth note strikes with the *odaiko* player, again coming together in unison before moving forward. Part 10, beginning at 00:06:05, involves intense movement and

shouting from the *chu-daiko* players as they choose from two different patterns: pattern A includes alternating between drumming and yelling hey/hay, while pattern B asks them to do a jumping jack while yelling "HUP!" before beginning their own drumming pattern. During this time one *shimedaiko/okedo* set player and a *chappa* player are repeating an ostinato beat along with the odaiko drummer. These patterns are played four times before Part 11 begins. Once the transition to Part 11 happens at 00:06:32 in the video, all drummers play a quiet ostinato while the *fue* reprises their melody from Part 5 but in 4/4 meter for four measures. On the last measure, all the drummers crescendo into Part 12 at 00:06:48. Part 12 is a call and response between the *shimedaiko* players and the *chu-daiko* and *odaiko* before the return of the triplet quarter note theme. Five back-to-back triplet quarter note sets are played followed by two triplet eighth note strikes and a quarter note hit. A brief rest happens before all players shout "HEY!" and loudly play two quarter notes, two eight notes, a quarter rest and a quarter note phrase that finishes out the piece.

Overall, this piece is seven minutes long, with barely a small break for any of the drummers. The posting of the video and score on the womenandtaiko.org site functions in two ways. First, the video itself is as an example of feminine taiko playing and performance. The stamina and power needed to play the drums and rhythms for seven minutes is immense. The grace, balance, and beauty needed to accurately perform the movements and *kata* also require precision and strength. These qualities presented in this piece purposefully works "to break down stereotypes of women in taiko" (Women and Taiko 2021). Second, this piece also functions as an example of female leadership in taiko, not only through the aspects of its

performance, but through its existence as a composition by women and from women's experiences leading in the various taiko communities. This piece has been used as part of a virtual concert connected to Project Ikigai, a series of workshops and performances from taiko performers ManMan Mui and Amy Naylor that focuses on finding an individual's passion, core values, and life purpose (Mui n.d.). This performance of the piece featured twenty-three women musicians from around the world, expanding the visibility of women taiko players and other musicians globally (Project Ikigai 2020). The piece has also been used as part of a workshop with members of the taiko community in San Diego and shared on the "Women and Taiko Group" page (Calvelo 2019). This composition, through its accessibility as online and opensource, as well as its inherent meaning related to the bodies of female taiko players, challenges notions of power in taiko drumming. This piece defies the perception that female taiko players cannot play with power and stamina equal to a man's by creating a seven-minute-long piece that requires intense physical movement. It also broadens the definition of what taiko performance and leadership can be by emphasizing female gendered taiko aesthetics such as grace and beauty and representing female-created and led composition and performance.

Webinars

Showing leadership as a female taiko player through composing was also an important part of other Women and Taiko coalition projects, such as the Step Up/Step Out Fellowship Program that took place from June to December 2019. This program was highlighted in one of many webinars hosted by the Women and Taiko coalition over the Fall of 2019 (Women and Taiko 2021). The Fellowship cohort, made up of

four women from North America and New Zealand, focused on "[building the leadership capacity of women in the taiko community by providing a supportive platform to develop their unique artistic voice and skills," and the meetings between the cohort prompted the Women and Taiko coalition to create a series of Women and Taiko centered webinars (ibid.). Each cohort member was able to present their compositions to the attendees of a womenandtaiko.org webinar named "Journey" on Dec. 2017, 2019 (ibid.). "Journey" was the third installment in a series of webinars that featured women in the taiko community. One webinar, which focused on submitting a proposal to lead a North American Taiko Conference workshop, preceded this series, and another, focusing on sharing experiences with COVID-19 that are related to taiko, followed the series (ibid.). Each of these webinars provided online, accessible spaces for women, non-binary individuals, and men to learn and share about ways of leadership in the taiko community that may differ from the mainstream, historically masculine style. The accessible online space created a way for taiko community members to learn on their own or as a group, with a way to ask questions and discover alternative ways of leadership and taiko performance that may not have been available to them through taiko conferences. Led by taiko artists Karen Young and Michelle Fuji, the webinars focused on different topics that opened up discussions on what being a leader in the taiko community means for women and were also inclusive of non-binary individuals. Below, I will highlight significant parts of the first four of these webinars and show how they challenge the narrative of leadership in taiko drumming and expand ways in which individuals can lead in the

taiko community by challenging the embodied knowledge of taiko playing that is pervasive in the community.

The first webinar hosted by the Women and Taiko coalition on Oct. 25, 2019, that gathered individuals who had questions on how to apply to lead a workshop at the North American Taiko Conference. Host Karen Young started this webinar by noting how "one of the main things that [came] up when [they] asked women why they didn't submit proposals was that they felt they weren't qualified or good enough or someone, somebody knew something better" and asked those in attendance to give an example of "one thing [they are] good at" (Women and Taiko 2018). Young asked attendees to focus on what they are good at in order to start a conversation about the qualifications each person already has to lead a workshop at the NATC. In an interview I had with Young she reflected on the work the Women and Taiko coalition is doing to engender the movement and taiko players within the North American taiko community and beyond:

> Our process is creative and responding to the moment. There are a couple of different pieces to it. One is creating a platform for discussing gender equity in general. What is out there that isn't seen yet? What are we not seeing that needs to be amplified or elevated? And how can we create a more vibrant ecosystem that includes people of all genders, and what can Women and Taiko do to help make that happen? One is figuring out ways to center and highlight voices that haven't been heard, and the other is to create a space for these kinds of conversations to happen. Looking at what's been hard and why? Often what you're doing is pointing at systems of oppression. Are there ways that things are done so that there's a box and not a box? So like, if this is what taiko has always looked like and been practiced like, that in and of itself feels like a container. So how do you broaden that container so that other things can happen? And how do you create a space for discussion when someone says, "Well,

> I don't think this is really taiko, but this is the way that I practice." When it's very clear to everyone else, "Yes, you're doing taiko." That's because taiko has been defined as this particular container. (Karen Young, video interview, March 1, 2021)

Young's conception of leadership and performing within the North American taiko community as "contained within a box" conceptualizes the way many individuals see possibilities for taiko, in that if it does not fit within the historical male-centered way of taiko performance and leadership, it does not count as taiko drumming. One of the main goals of the webinars discussed throughout this section is to bring out ideas and concepts of performing and leading within the taiko community that may not fit within the mainstream "box" of what can be called taiko.

Some concerns that were brought up in this first webinar were about how taiko players who are aging can continue to play and perform taiko, despite not being able to reach the "standard" quality of taiko performance. Artist and taiko player Yurika Chiba responded to this concern: "[at the Women and Taiko STI] one thing that came up for us is…what does taiko look like for someone whose forty and up who can't like just play out hard and like as fast and just constantly, that maybe you were doing when you were younger and then...to really be able to value a different type of taiko that it's not hard-it's not just louder and faster—its better. Like there's this perception that if you can play really fast, can play really loud, then you're a better taiko player…to really think about what a taiko style could look like or ya know how you could be creative about a different type of playing" (Women and Taiko 2018). This concept of broadening the style and ways of performing and leading taiko was a theme of conversation in many of my interviews with active participants of the Women and Taiko movement. Yurika Chiba, in particular, commented on it in our

interview when I asked about the future of the North American taiko community as the Women and Taiko movement continues. She said:

> What is defined as, as good taiko, or the types of leadership that people are looking for artistically? Like, if you can play really fast and fancy…I always think of that as like a male model and then also different types of taiko becoming valued or desired to play like someone like P.J. [Hirabayashi], who was movement oriented or around energy. I feel like maybe the diversity of taiko that's appreciated, might be bigger. I'm trying to think also of like, like visual, because I'm also visual artist. There are people who are just like "All I want to do is paint representationally. And just the thing looks should look like the thing." And that's like, good art. And then there's other people over here like "no, it has to be very deep, and you just break it down to its essential elements or focus on what and it could" Abstract art is a lot about that. But I think that's awesome that, there's all of these different types of art that's out there and different ways of exploration so I guess maybe taiko will look more like that, that there's all these different artistic branches branching off and for certain, it's already happening, where there's certain groups that this is their mission is about representation of women is…I feel like if we can at least try to respect our differences… really, really trying hard to understand each other's differences and where we come from and why, you know, all of our experiences and stuff are necessary and to see, but I think that's also the power of taiko and art is like, this is an opportunity to express this diversity. (Yurika Chiba, video interview, March 5, 2021)

Chiba's comments, both in our interview and in the first Women and Taiko webinar, bring to light a main impact of the Women and Taiko movement's efforts to change the relationship between "gender, music, and social standing or prestige" in a pragmatic way (Koskoff 2014: 42). By focusing on the value of other styles of taiko performance and leadership through challenging the conceptions of taiko performance, the Women and Taiko movement challenges the narrative of the types

of taiko drumming that are viewed as prestigious and "good." The embodied knowledge of taiko drumming then moves away from a style that is explicitly loud, fast, and strong towards a variety of styles that allows for more expressive choice. This can be seen in the performance from the STI group at NATC and through the "Nakama No Koe: Our Voices" pieces that show varied ways of performance and leadership.

In the second webinar entitled "Wisdom," held on Nov. 5, 2019, P. J. Hirabayashi and Tiffany Tamaribuchi reflected on their own knowledge and experiences with embodied taiko performance and leadership. This webinar is the first of a set of three that were established because of questions asked by the Step Up/Step Out Fellowship Program cohort. This particular webinar focused on women who have been performing taiko in North America for years and who have gained "wisdom" about being a leader in the taiko community. Both Hirabayashi and Tamaribuchi commented on their history as a taiko player, and in listening to them I understood more about the varied schools of thought regarding leadership that have been pervasive in the taiko community. P. J. Hirabayashi and her husband Roy Hirabayashi established one of the first North American taiko groups in San Jose, California, and in this webinar she noted their egalitarian way of leading and performing taiko: "Identity has probably been the foremost theme of staying on the path of taiko…coming from a community organizing background even before coming to taiko…our value system was definitely about how to level the playing field and about how we can empower ourselves and others. How do we step into being one that could be respected, ya know, that honors that respect, that understanding, that acceptance,

and how can I do that without talking…playing…so that allowed me to step into that confidence and like Tiffany, ya know, to be a taiko player is one thing. To perform, to create, and to be a taiko leader…allowed me to step into leadership, ways of leadership, how do I want to lead and that's identity as well" (Women and Taiko 2019a).

However, in reading Deborah Wong's book *Louder and Faster* I noted that Seiichi Tanaka, regarded by many as the founder of North American Taiko, led and styled performances in a very different way. Wong states, "Tanaka-sensei and his approach to taiko represent a meeting of postwar Japanese identity struggles with economic recovery. When Tanaka-sensei became a key player in Asian American kumi-daiko, the martial arts values of his version of taiko—imbued with gendered nationalist sentiment and shadowed by patriotic fervor—in some cases ran head-to-head against a completely different set of values generated by the politics of the Asian American movement. Asian American taiko players looking for a performative means to oppose histories of racism and containment will likely refute social models reliant on an uncritical acceptance of gendered hierarchy" (Wong 2019: 147). These two styles of leadership created different ways in which gendered performance and leadership were viewed within the taiko community. The Hirabayashis' egalitarian approach favored grace and power as critical to taiko performance that established a balance of feminine and masculine performance, where Seiichi Tanaka's favored strength and discipline that is central to masculine playing and established a gender hierarchy as a result. When asked why a majority of taiko players are women while the majority of taiko players who are seen in leadership positions does not reflect that, Tamaribuchi

responds in a way that reflects the legacy of Tanaka's value system: "I think a part of it does speak to the tradition and gender bias that's been certainly adapted from japan and the way it has been taught, and the way that certainly professionals who are peers bring each other along" (Women and Taiko November 6, 2019). Yet she also brings in more discussion about traditional gender roles that are also apart of American society when she states,

> It's not necessarily easier for guys to become professionals, I think that there is, not more incentive, it's just more accessible in certain ways, I think it also comes down…it's not unique to taiko. This is an issue that people in the dance community face, that people in western musical traditions face…there are more male chefs than there are women, there are more male doctors, this is endemic to life in our modern society. But certainly speaking as a professional, its seems that it, it's just, men tend to have more financial/community resources in a way that I as a woman have not, to a certain respect and I think that filters down into, as other women are considering, are moving into to becoming professional players…certainly if there's any desire to be a parent, it is physically much more difficult for a woman to get through the whole process of having a baby and being a parent…overall it's a lot easier and to a certain extent its cultural, where guys are more likely to put themselves out in a way that women don't and because…looking at how workshop selections are made for different events, it's harder because people don't know who the women artists are because…they are not marketing themselves in the same way. (Ibid.)

However, this second webinar also discussed the changes that are happening in the taiko community and being amplified by the Women and Taiko movement to bring out variations of leadership and performance in taiko drumming. P. J. Hirabayashi noted this in her response to the same question:

> There has not been too many roles models that are out there professionally, its mostly men and it also has a particular character of how those men play. So, its perpetuating kinda of a

> stereotype of what taiko should be and what I'm seeing, ya know, is different layers are happening and it's for both men and women that now that taiko culture is starting to expand to include other instruments ya know where I feel that there's a lot more women that are standing up to sing or dance or shamisen ya know other instruments that will be part of the ensemble. Ya know I think these are another way to look at how to develop that leadership and also have roles for women hopefully more so in the future. (Ibid.)

In response to both Hirabayashi and Tamaribuchi's comments, host Karen Young stated more about how the Women and Taiko coalition have been asking similar questions about how value is placed on different styles of artistry:

> You can't be what you don't see…if you see taiko only done this particular way "hard, fast, strong—this way" on stage…that's supposed to be, what taiko is. So that makes it difficult if you do taiko in a different way, in a different capacity with different values, like" Is that taiko?" and I think that's what I'm also seeing in the community…there's different kinds of ways of doing taiko and I guess there's a question artistically ya know "what is taiko?" Ya know, we've been talking about that, but I feel like there's many valid ways to be a taiko artist and I think part of the challenge is actually giving that work visibility so that people can say "oh I don't need to do it like, ya know, that I can do it like this, and I think that it's really exciting. (Ibid.)

The third webinar hosted by the Women and Taiko coalition on Nov. 19, 2019, focused on similar discussions. As the second in the set of three connected to the Step Up/Step Out Fellowship Program, titled "Emergence," this webinar discussed the paths of three emerging taiko artists and how they decided to focus on leading in the taiko community. This webinar specifically identified how the Women and Taiko coalition has thought about their own work. Hosts Karen Young and Michelle Fujii specifically stated that "this webinar is directly in line with what we are trying to do, which is really share the stories and experience of women in order to really highlight

those stories that we don't always hear" and "we realized that when we were developing this program, to be able to have the opportunity to hear from different people going into leadership within our taiko community that that was going to be a big part and we decided that instead of just doing that as a conversation with our fellows that we wanted to provide that as an opportunity for anyone to be able to hear to, thus a webinar" (Women and Taiko 2019b). Near the end of this webinar, a discussion point came through that asked each of the emerging artists their thoughts on the future of the Women and Taiko movement. Many of the reflections conceptualized the need for support, collaboration, and value. A similar question asked of the three artists was posed later, asking "how do we empower women to lead in taiko without repeating same old typically male patterns of leadership...How do we not continue to encourage these same patterns and start disrupting it and modelling it?" (ibid.). Artist ManMan Mui emphasized how the Women and Taiko movement "is creating those spaces to educate ourselves about what does open communication mean" as a way to change the narrative of women taiko artists. Host Karen Young noted the need to "model different styles" and question what is "the right way or is not the taiko way" (ibid.). Mui added to this idea by emphasizing the concept of elitism in the taiko community, noting further, "what I hope is actually the taiko community will have more different taiko players step up and step out and show…to have different role models, different samples…Because it's really hard to break that ideology. Sometimes a lot of us kind of get stuck into that and start thinking 'what is the best taiko, who is the best taiko player, like who is the best something, something' but why do we have to think about it as best, why can't we just look at it as a much

bigger box. I think that would be one way to empower more women to lead in taiko…because we have to think out of the box" (ibid.).

I was able to discuss these ideas further with one of the artists in this webinar, Manman Mui, through an interview. When I asked Mui about the relationship between masculinity and femininity in terms of taiko leadership styles, Mui said:

> I kept asking myself and them too, "Where do you get these standards from?...What are you measuring with when you tell other people what they need to do, and what you're doing, in order to achieve, higher achievement in your career?...I remember, my experience with the Women and Taiko movement that made me realize there are so many leadership qualities, that are being downplayed, and most of them were taken up by women in the community. And that really changed the way I look at the word leadership. Because I realized, I got these pictures of leadership of like high up and [having] to do everything and know everything. But that thought was given to me with this social construct that upholds patriarchy. And when I take a look around me there's so much different leadership [that is] quality. And so, leaders, is not just one person or it's not about climbing to the top, it's about how you create a fractal, create…an ecosystem that values everyone's contribution to, to move together. (Manman Mui, video interview, February 26, 2021)

Mui's reflection is one of many others who have been impacted by the dialogue held through the Women and Taiko movement and more specifically the Women and Taiko coalition. In the fourth webinar, the last in the series of three and held on Dec. 17, 2019, connected to the Step Up/Step Out Fellowship Program, the fellowship cohort members were able to discuss the impact the movement has had on their own knowledge of what it means to lead in the taiko community in terms of what is valuable taiko leadership.

Each member of the fellowship cohort tasked themselves with creating a composition or series of compositions as a stretch project that allowed them to explore leadership in that format (Women and Taiko 2019c). I was able to interview three of the four cohort members to discuss how the Women and Taiko coalition and movement influenced their understanding and embodied knowledge about what leadership and performance of taiko means. I first interviewed Lisa Shiota, a taiko performer from Maryland, who touched on how leadership was focused on throughout the fellowship:

> It was a really good experience, it was really not what I expected, I don't think it was…what any of us said expected, because we're kind of assuming it was going to be kind of like a leadership fellowship, you know, like how to how to be an effective leader, and you know, that kind of thing. And it was nothing like that. It was, the whole experience is more about, more internal, knowing yourself more. We did a lot of exercises as to like, what we think, you know, our strengths are, and how we relate to different situations... (Lisa Shiota, video interview, February 3, 2021.)

Jessie Gibbs, a member of the cohort from New Zealand reflected in a similar way on her own experience:

> It was an overall like a really, really good fellowship, that got me thinking about a whole bunch of things that I've never, ever, ever even thought about. With women, and also race, in taiko, and a lot of like, I was expecting it to be different, when I went into it to what it was, which isn't a bad thing. Like they weren't so much like, this is your project that you're going to do and engage with the community or whatever. And we're going to work on that it was more like, let's work on you as a person, as well. So that was that was quite interesting. So, it helped me as a type of player or more like a leader, really, that helped me think about things that I'd never thought of before. (Jessie Gibbs, video interview, February 24, 2021)

Lastly, I was able to speak with Eileen Ho, a taiko artist from Michigan, who reflected on what she gleaned from the fellowship experience:

> So, for me, being a taiko player was a lot about developing myself in the art form, but also the, the satisfaction or the reward for me was sharing the art, sharing the joy. So, this was a really great chance to be in a cohort with three other women and talk intimately about, like, what we're feeling what questions we have. And really, Michelle and Karen were great guides for us, opening up ways for us to think and feel about ourselves, and how we relate to the art form and how we relate to other artists in our community. (Eileen Ho, video interview, February 12, 2021)

In all three of these reflections, it became apparent that both Young and Fujii were focused on the ways in which the fellows felt about their leadership and about themselves as artists, highlighting the introspective while challenging the embodied knowledge about valuable leadership work that is tied closely to gender. After my time with Lisa Shiota, she e-mailed me a link to a site that was the base model for how Fujii and Young created the fellowship. Shiota recalled it as "the Whole Person Leader model by the Asian Pacific American Women Leadership Institute (APAWLI), which Michelle Fujii…had participated in 2016" (Lisa Shiota, personal communication, April 1, 2021). The APAWLI leadership institute holds three sessions over seven months that focus on personal improvement, strengths and skills, and power, authority, and influence (CAPAW 2021). The topics covered in the APAWLI sessions were extremely applicable to the issues of power, authority, and influence in the North American taiko community. In an interview with Michelle Fujii, she discussed the impact and purpose the Step-up/Step-Out fellowship had on changing the women and taiko narrative:

> [It was] to find a space for women, or self-identified womxn taiko leaders to sort of unpack without someone trying to fix them: to unpack, reveal, sort it out and make decisions on their own, to create a platform for that. And that Karen and I, after doing that…[It] ended up being an answer to thinking about leadership and how the Women and Taiko banner could amplify this in a very important and also sustainable way. (Michelle Fujii, video interview, September 9, 2020)

Overall, through the actions and events stemming from the Women and Taiko coalition and the connected Facebook pages, the narrative of women taiko leaders is not only being documented digitally but has also begun to take up space in the minds of North American taiko community members. The online, archived performances of women challenge ideas on how women taiko artists can perform and what is possible, and women-created compositions are visual and auditory examples that have addressed issues of gendered taiko ideals through performance. The webinars hosted by the Women and Taiko coalition have challenged the embodied knowledge of taiko artists globally by creating spaces for women to work through how traditional gender roles impact their own practices and perceptions of taiko drumming as well as the practices of women taiko artists around them. In doing this work, the Women and Taiko coalition fuels the Women and Taiko movement by "making and experiencing—the where of music, not only the physical space, but the symbolic space created together by musical bodies and sounds; constructing—the how of performing, not only the music itself, but oneself in the music; and situating—the what of performing, not only the specific pieces of music, but also one's position within a set of many intersecting identities" women within the larger narrative of taiko drumming (Koskoff 2014: 188). By defining the where, how, and what of taiko

performance in relation to female taiko artists, the Women and Taiko movement challenges the dominant narrative of taiko drumming by disrupting the power hierarchies that determine what is valuable taiko leadership through performance and discussion of embodied knowledge and empowering what were once deemed “docile” bodies (ibid.: 24).

Conclusion

Within the previous chapters I have included examples and descriptions of the Women and Taiko movement. Starting out as conversations and evolving into performances that were embodiments of these conversations, the Women and Taiko movement has worked towards changing gender inequality in the North American taiko movement through collaborative efforts of problem solving. Through online and offline spaces, the members of the Women and Taiko movement established communities that were able to disrupt the hegemonic narrative of taiko drumming and imagine new ideas about what good or valuable taiko performance and leadership means. In turn, the conversations and reworking of meanings translated into the performances at the North American Taiko Conference, various performances of "Nakama no Koe: Our Voices," and the *HERbeat* concert. Performing these reconstructed interpretations of value resists and challenges the male-dominated narrative of taiko performance and leadership styles, allowing "docile bodies [to] become empowered" (Koskoff 2014: 24). By discussing the value of varied performance and leadership styles to the North American taiko community and presenting them in contexts that represent their value, such as the stage, or as part of funded projects and workshops, the individuals supporting the Women and Taiko movement even out the continuum of value, tied to gender, that has been established (ibid.: 43). In doing so, the actions and performances related to the Women and Taiko movement have opened up new avenues of taiko performance that are not related to the historical louder and faster way of performing and masculine-centered way of

leading but rather show an expanse of styles that range from grace and movement-oriented to the powerful and virtuosic.

Doing this also opens up an avenue for non-binary forms of leadership and performance that can further challenge what styles of performance and leadership are possible. Throughout my research I came to notice a budding area of inquiry that continued to pop up related to non-binary means of performance and leadership. Many of my interlocutors noted and included the non-binary, gender-fluid community in their statements and reflections. While I am aware of groups present in the North American taiko community that focus on or have the membership of non-binary and gender-fluid individuals, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to adequately discuss the identities and representation of this community. As the Women and Taiko movement continues to flourish, I believe that more discussion about identity, specifically gender-queer and non-binary identities, will permeate the North American taiko scene. In the future, this will be an important area of inquiry for someone who can connect and properly represent members of the taiko community who identify in such a way.

Some work has already started on questioning the inherent assumptions of binary constructions that are related to taiko drumming. A Canadian taiko ensemble, Raging Asian Womxn, held a webinar the summer of 2020 to discuss "noticing and dismantling the gender binary in our artistic and activist practices within and beyond the taiko community" (Raging Asian Womxn Taiko Drummers 2020). The conversations held at this webinar discussed the challenges that non-binary individuals encounter as binaries are implied or connected to the spaces they inhabit

and narratives they witness. This webinar interviewed non-binary and female-identifying panelists about their thoughts and experiences on taiko and non-binary constructions of identity, as well as racial identity that come into play within the issues. As conversations like the one above continue to happen, I feel that the ideas presented in this document will continue to expand and allow for even more fluidity in styles of performance and leadership that have not yet been conceived.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has halted many events and avenues for connection, the work being done by the Women and Taiko coalition, the Facebook pages, and *HERbeat* continues. The Women and Taiko coalition's mobilization committee has just met this March 2021 to let the community know of their activities in their first full year of membership (Women and Taiko 2021). The *HERbeat* film that was created from video of the two-week residency and performance is slated to be published late this summer. Both Facebook pages are bubbling with activity and conversation that promotes and uplifts women and non-binary taiko members. Activity centered around the recent hate and violence against the Asian American community has been especially prominent, as just a few weeks prior to the writing of this chapter eight individuals, six of whom were of Asian descent, were killed in the Atlanta Spa Shootings (Fausset et al. 2021). Circulating talks of hate crimes against Asian Americans and statements of support or condemnation of the crimes have proliferated. Other issues of race and gender have been chatted about on the Facebook sites: discussions about the #MeToo movement and spaces for healing or gathering after harmful events have taken place. Overall, the community and spaces that have surfaced because of the Women and Taiko movement have sprouted to allow for

further discussion on difficult topics and support for members of the community who are struggling.

Throughout this thesis I have documented the practices of a movement that uses music to challenge hegemonic narratives and create spaces that are representative of what they want to see within the taiko community. In this way, they have redefined the historical values, based on gender, that are present in the North American taiko community and expanded conceptions of what is valuable and successful drumming practice. It is my hope that I have aptly represented the musical practices and discussions circling the musical practices of female members of the taiko community. I have sought throughout this thesis to prioritize their stories and thoughts about the systems of value, power, and gender that are present in the taiko community and to accurately represent them through my ethnographic analysis. This research is in no way all-encompassing or the complete story of the Women and Taiko movement and its impact on the North American taiko community at large, but rather a singular individual's "understanding of men's and women's musical practices…[and] ongoing and infinitely varied interactions, interrelationships, and interdependences of men and women" in the taiko community (Koskoff 2014: 132). In the words of Tiffany Tamaribuchi's "Joy Bubble" performance as part of the Women and Taiko STI presentation, "change is coming, now."

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