

WADAIKO 遶 TOKARA

Wadaiko Ensemble Tokara was founded on March 7th, 2004 in Nagano Prefecture, Japan by Wadaiko Artist Art Lee, who brought together various taiko and percussion group members to begin the challenge of intensified training of the mind and body in the strict discipline of the taiko. Since then TOKARA has become a strong force in the world of Wadaiko (Taiko Drumming) both in Japan and internationally.

While incorporating arrangements of traditional Taiko pieces into their performance, Tokara has created an all new style of Taiko, where speed and power meet eloquent movements of dance and the circular fluidity of the Chinese martial arts and aikido.

Tokara's new style of Taiko music also brings rhythm signatures from other cultures around the world to create a jazzy and exciting style of taiko music.

Since the groups inception, Tokara tours three to four times a year in Asia, the U.S., various countries in Europe, Australia, and India, as well as making regular appearances at some of the top Taiko performances all over Japan.

In addition to international touring, Tokara has created a unique education program of bringing Taiko enthusiasts and groups to Japan for various types of training. The group annually produces the Saiwai Shimoina Wadaiko Festival, as well as two award-winning intensive education programs; the INADANI Taiko Drumming Course for beginners and the TOKARA Wadaiko Bootcamp for intermediate/advanced practioners. (www.tokara.net)

ART LEE (Artistic Director/Composer/Performer, Wadaiko Ensemble TOKARA) is considered to be one of the leading Taiko artists of his generation. After starting taiko in 1993 in Sacramento, California, he soon became a performing member of the Sacramento Taiko Dan. Later, he was invited to join one of the world's most famed Taiko groups, Za Ondekoza.

After moving to Japan, Art Lee became a soloist and won the Unique Prize for Skill and Artistry at both the All-Japan Wadaiko Contest in Fukui Prefecture and the Kumamoto Odaiko Championships.

In November 2001, Art Lee first received international acclaim for becoming the first person in the world to be awarded an artist visa from the Japanese government to teach Taiko and lead the life of a professional Taiko artist in Japan. Then again on October 15th, 2005 for becoming the first non-Japanese to win First Place in the Solo Odaiko section of The Tokyo International Wadaiko Contest – the most prestigious and renowned Taiko contest in the world. Since then, he has performed in some of the world's most prestigious theatres including Aoyama Gekijyo and Suntory Hall (Japan), Tonhalle (Germany), and Carnegie Hall (New York) and is also the only non-Japanese taiko artist in the world to be selected four times to perform at the annual "All-Stars of Japan" Taiko concert in Tokyo, Japan.

Art tours the world both as a solo artist and as the artistic director of internationally touring group, Wadaiko Ensemble TOKARA, as well as being the founder of Suiko and Nadeshiko taiko groups, and the festival group, Haruka in Japan.

Wadaiko Tokara

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YUKARI ICHISE (Costume Designer/Performer, Wadaiko Ensemble TOKARA) has been a performer with Tokara since 2006 although she has been playing taiko since 2004 and working with Art Lee in concert production since 2000. She is the principal costume designer for both Art Lee and Tokara, and has also, until 2008, been an integral part of the Tokara Office as head-of-staff at Art's solo concerts and events. Yukari has become known in particular for her Kakegoe (Taiko shouts) and her enthusiastic playing style. As part of the Tokara Masters program, Yukari will make her one-piece solo performance debut during one of Tokara's concerts in 2014.

DEAN HAVIXBECK (Performer, Wadaiko Ensemble TOKARA) is from Winnipeg, Canada where he began learning Taiko in 2001. Dean first studied Taiko in Japan when he joined the INADANI Taiko Drumming Course in 2006. He moved to Ina City, Japan in the autumn of 2007 and soon after became an apprentice of Art Lee. Since then, he commuted over two hours to practice with Art Lee and Tokara every weekend. Dean became a full member of Tokara on June 12th, 2010.

As part of the Tokara Masters program, Dean will make his one-piece solo performance debut during one of Tokara's concerts in 2014.

TAKAFUMI ONOZAWA (Performer, Wadaiko Ensemble TOKARA) moved from his home in Matsumoto City to become an apprentice with Tokara in August 2010. From 2012, he began traveling with the group for tours both in Japan and abroad and became a performing member of Tokara on December 12th, 2012.

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