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# The Fresno Bee

## TAIKO PROJECT 7

One banging show

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# TAIKO PROJECT



Japanese drums to roar in Fresno.

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THE WEEK AHEAD  
IN ARTS, DINING &  
ENTERTAINMENT

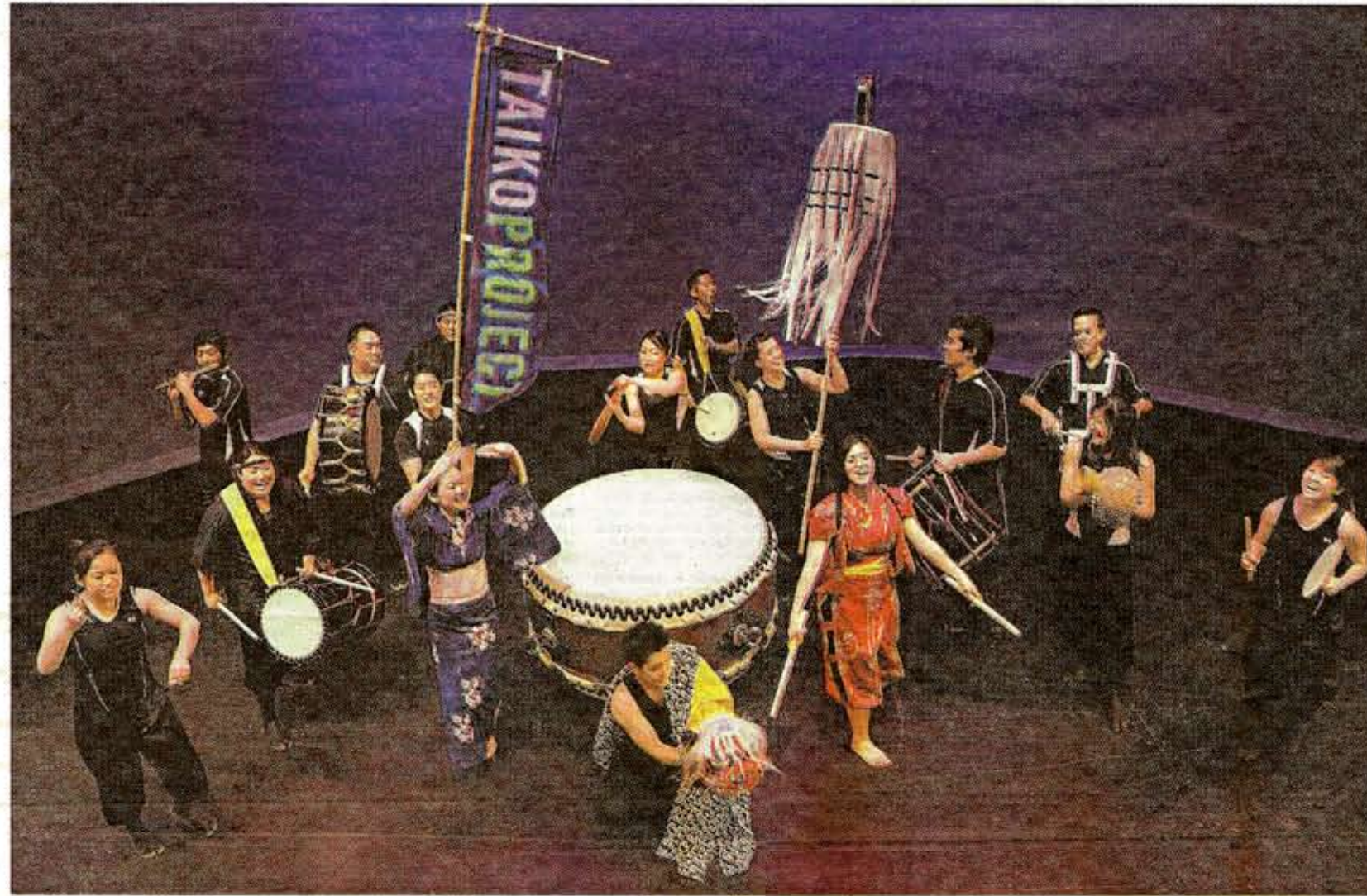


What a Vieux African guitarist in Visalia.  
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Freaky show 'Godling' is a creepy ride.  
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## COVER STORY

# DRUMS LIKE THUNDER



PHOTOS SPECIAL TO THE BEE

TAIKOPROJECT brings its unique style of Japanese drumming Saturday to the Shaghoian Concert Hall. It is the group's first performance in Fresno. They performed at the 2009 Academy Awards.

## TAIKOPROJECT begins Fresno Lively Arts' season.

By Donald Munro  
The Fresno Bee

**D**rum roll, please. The Los Angeles-based TAIKOPROJECT is banging out a pretty big reputation on the performing-arts circuit these days — including a high-profile appearance on the 2009 Academy Awards. That's a reason why Diane Mosier, artistic director of Fresno's Lively Arts Foundation, wanted them for the opening concert of the 2010-11 season.

Long a revered art form in Japan, the company's approach to taiko is theatrical and includes storytelling, music, hip-hop choreography, multi-media and dance. The performance takes place in the Paul Shaghoian Concert Hall on the Clovis North Educational Center campus, a first for Lively Arts.

We caught up with Bryan Yamami, the company's artistic co-director, via e-mail.

**Question: Will this be the first time for TAIKOPROJECT to perform in Fresno?**

**Answer:** "Yes, we are excited to share our brand of American taiko with folks in Central California, where many of us have friends there in the Japanese American community."

**You founded the company in 2000. Has awareness of taiko risen in the U.S. since then?**

"Yes. In the last couple of decades, taiko has found its way into mainstream American culture (before us, with other groups in movies like "Return of the Jedi" and "Charlie's Angels"), and with our work in the Mitsubishi Eclipse commercial campaign (2006), recordings with hip-hop star Kanye West (2008), and the Academy Awards (2009). Taiko is

well on its way to becoming a household word, as common as other Japanese words in the English language."

**For those who aren't familiar with taiko, talk about the basics.**

"Taiko is just the Japanese word for drum. What we actually do is called 'kumi-daiko,' translated as 'group drumming.' In Japan, they would call what we do 'wa-daiko,' as in Japanese drumming. In America, the basic word for drum, 'taiko,' has come to represent Japanese drumming, both 'kumi-daiko' and 'wa-daiko.' In America, the first groups started in the late 60s in California, and has now grown to approximately 200 groups across the country, playing for all types of reasons, from amateur groups who just play for fun, to serious professional groups who record CDs, perform across the country, and push the boundaries of the artform."

**Is there anything like your version of taiko in Japan?**

"There are many other innovative taiko groups in Japan that experiment with taiko. I believe we are unique amongst American groups in that we experiment in all these genres and put them all together in one show. I think our work differs from other innovative taiko work in Japan in that our work is distinctively American in its presentation."

**Tell us about your planned program. Are there new pieces?**

"Because Shaghoian Hall is such a beautiful concert hall, we have developed a musical concert program especially for the hall. We hope to showcase the musicality of our work since it seems appropriate to the venue. We have two songs that were composed earlier this year, called 'Seiza,' and 'Island Groove,' which feature two instruments not typically seen with taiko — the koto (stringed Japanese

harp), and a custom-made Zimbabwean style marimba."

**The Shaghoian Hall, at about 800 seats, is smaller than many of the concert halls you're used to playing in. Does the size influence your performance?**

"Yes, we try to adjust our performance specific to each venue and situation. Our work really isn't 'one size fits all,' so once we get in the space and hear how everything sounds, we'll be able to make adjustments to make the concert the best experience it can be ..."

**Will you have to worry about being too loud?** "Definitely! That'll really be one thing we'll be checking in our rehearsal ..."

**Tell us about some of the performances of TAIKOPROJECT.**

"Playing at the Oscars was a completely unforgettable experience. The production level was about as high as any show could be, and being around celebrities and noted actors around every corner was exciting. Blending taiko drumming along with a dozen other world drummers, 20 dancers, and 6 singers was also a fun creative challenge, as was playing along to pop music arrangements."

**Do you dream about drumming?**

"Most of my taiko dreams are where we start a concert and I don't have any of my costumes, drumsticks and other instruments set. I suppose it's the equivalent of the 'at school in your underwear' dream!"

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TAIKOPROJECT's performance will be designed for the Shaghoian Concert Hall. Each venue is unique.