

Music in these drums



LEONARD TURNEVICIUS

McMaster's Convocation Hall will resonate with the thunderous sounds of taiko drumming Friday night, courtesy of the Kiyoshi Nagata Ensemble.

"Taiko literally means drum, more specifically, it refers to a Japanese drum," said Nagata over the phone from his Scarborough studio last week. "In Japan, it's believed to have been around for more than 2,000 years."

Taiko drums are normally carved out of tree trunks and have "heads" made from cowhide. Nagata's group uses taiko drums from a Japanese company that has been in business for 400 years and has had 17 generations of drum makers.

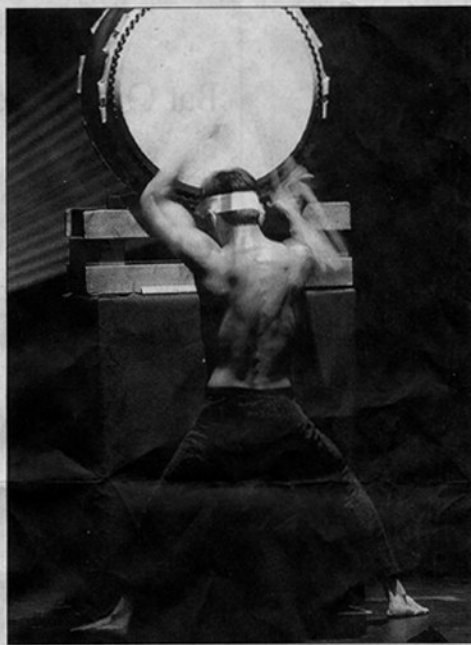
In Old Japan, Nagata explains, the taiko drum was used to accompany dancing, chanting and prayer — or simply to signal the time of day.

Nagata's ensemble has taken folk drumming traditions and written its own music to be performed in a concert hall.

"Since we're a Toronto-based group, we also try to take influences not only from Japan, but from within Canada so that it's accessible to western audiences," said Nagata.

The opening work in Friday's concert, *Tentetsu No Kase* for 11 taiko drums, is just such a piece. It contains basic rhythms that Nagata says "you'd find in a traditional festival." Within the piece, Nagata has incorporated spots for improvised solos that may contain influences of jazz.

Nagata, 37, began taiko drumming in the Japanese Community Centre in



SPECIAL TO THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

The Kiyoshi Nagata show is not just drumming — it's a visual experience, too.

Showtime

Who: Kiyoshi Nagata Ensemble

When: Friday at 8 p.m.

Where: Convocation Hall,

McMaster University

Cost: \$17; senior, \$12; student, \$5

Call: 905-525-9140 ext. 24246

Toronto when he was 12. Ten years later, he moved to Japan for two years of study.

When he returned, he studied classical percussion at Toronto's Royal Conservatory of Music. "To learn more about music as a whole," Nagata founded his Ensemble in 1998 and trains each of its members. The group has toured Canada, the United States and Italy.

On Friday, Nagata will bring along

five other members to perform 12 works using taiko drums, flutes, brass cymbals, gongs and voices.

Nagata emphasized there's a visual element to the show. Unlike western drummers, taiko drummers play with drum sticks that resemble thick logs and they use full, swinging motions of their arms. The group dresses in traditional happi coats and occasionally dons masks. In one piece, the men wear a fundoshi (the traditional Japanese male loincloth).

"It's going to be a little bit more of a theatrical production," said Nagata. "People who have never seen (the show) before are almost always blown away by it. It's not just going to be loud drumming music for two hours. There's a lot of variety."

Leonard Turnevicius is a music educator and organist.
leonardturnevicius@hotmail.com