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taiko, the artistic, powerful and physically demanding discipline of Japanese ensemble drumming.

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Innovative taiko concert comes to Tucson!

Tucson, AZ — On Saturday, Jan. 30, 2016, Tucsonans have the rare opportunity to see two of North America's leading taiko (Japanese ensemble drumming) performers in the intimate space of The Rogue Theatre. *88: Hachi Hachi* is an intricate weaving of taiko, dance and theatre by Portland's UNIT SOUZOU. Internationally recognized taiko performers Michelle Fujii and Toru Watanabe create a rhythmic journey investigating lineage, personal story and the space that exists between two people.

Odaiko Sonora is proud to once again partner with The Rogue Theatre to present taiko in a theatrical setting. Two performances of *88: Hachi Hachi* are at 2:30pm and 7:30pm. Tickets are: \$18 in advance, \$20 at the door and available at The Rogue Theatre box office, 300 E. University Blvd, Ste 150, by calling (520) 551-2053 or online at <http://www.theroguetheatre.org>.

Taiko players will be interested to know UNIT SOUZOU will hold taiko workshops in Phoenix on Thurs. Jan. 28 and in Tucson on Fri., Jan. 29. Contact info@tucsontaiko.org for details.

ABOUT UNIT SOUZOU (performing group)

Portland's newest professional taiko company, UNIT SOUZOU (*pronounced "sohzoh"*) is at the forefront of a growing artistic movement within the world-wide taiko community. With over 20 years of professional experience, Michelle Fujii and Toru Watanabe, co-directors of UNIT SOUZOU are relentless innovators known for their fusion of taiko and Japanese folk dance. "Souzou" can be written in three ways meaning "creation" (創造) "imagination" (想像) or "noisy" (騒々) alluding to a force by which new ideas are born and take shape in the world. Inspired by these words UNIT SOUZOU focuses on building creative and imaginative works for the art form of taiko. In addition to creating groundbreaking theatrical works, UNIT SOUZOU is deeply committed to sharing taiko through teaching in schools, collaborating with the local community, and offering public classes.

ABOUT MICHELLE FUJII (performer)

Michelle Fujii creates contemporary work as a 4th generation Japanese-American through the art form of taiko, Japanese drums, and Japanese folk dance placing "traditional" ethnic art within the present – not as a preservation – but as an active force that can continue to inspire and evolve. Fujii started her taiko training as a performing member of San Jose Taiko. After graduating with a degree in Ethnomusicology

at UCLA, Fujii rejoined San Jose Taiko as artistic staff. In 2001 she was awarded the prestigious Bunka-cho fellowship from the Japanese government to study with Japan's foremost traditional folk dance troupe, Warabiza, where she studied under the tutelage of master dancer/choreographer Shohei Kikuchi. Fujii has played with numerous groups including TAIKOPROJECT, On Ensemble, Shasta Taiko and served as Artistic Director of Portland Taiko for 9 years.

ABOUT TORU WATANABE (performer)

Toru Watanabe, folk dance artist and taiko performer, began performing and choreographing in college for the Yossakoi Team, Soran Heart, in Hokkaido, Japan. In 2001, Toru became a member of Warabiza, one of Japan's foremost folk dance performing groups based in the northern prefecture of Akita. He appeared in four original musical productions and taught within Warabiza's in-house residency program for youth. In 2006 Toru moved to Portland to join Fujii to work for Portland Taiko as Artistic Staff.

ABOUT TAIKO

The word "taiko" refers to both the instrument — the drum — and the artistic, powerful art form of Japanese team drumming. Taiko began in ancient Japan as a form of communication on the battlefield and in the village. Because of its importance in the rituals of daily life, the taiko became sacred, and its use in Shinto and Buddhist religions (as well as Kabuki and Noh theater) continues into modern times. Taiko has since developed into a performing art that traces its roots to the 1950s, when Daihachi Oguchi formed the first taiko group, Osuwa Daiko. Just 60 years later, taiko is booming worldwide: testament to the universal appeal of these powerful drums. Early North American groups began in the Japanese-American community in the 1960s, in part as a response to the internment of Japanese-Americans during WWII.

ABOUT ODAIKO SONORA (producer)

Since 2002, Odaiko Sonora has brought firsthand experiences of Japanese drumming to southern AZ. The group performs nearly 60 times a year for more than 156,000 people of all ages. Odaiko Sonora offers ongoing taiko instruction, school residencies, community/corporate teambuilding workshops, master classes and more. As Teaching Artists with TUSD's nationally acclaimed arts integration program Opening Minds Through the Arts (OMA), Odaiko Sonora members provide educational programs using taiko for thousands of students and families each year.

In 2006, Odaiko Sonora purchased a building and established Rhythm Industry Performance Factory. This 5,000 sq ft warehouse dedicated to "loud, large art forms" provides vital, permanent studio space for Odaiko Sonora and other Tucson performing groups such as SolAxé, Flam Chen/Tucson Circus Arts, and many others. The warehouse is located south of downtown, at 1013 S. Tyndall Ave. Odaiko Sonora is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization supported in part by the Arizona Commission on the Arts with funds provided by the NEA, the Tucson Pima Arts Council.

ABOUT THE ROGUE THEATRE

The Rogue's mission is to create the highest quality theatre possible, challenging, stretching, and invigorating our community. The company is the recipient of numerous honors, including the 2012 American Theatre Wing National Theatre Company Award. They offer a full season of plays at their own theater space in the Historic Y on University Blvd. See www.theroguetheatre.org.

On the process of creating *88: Hachi Hachi*, from the UNIT SOUZOU website

Camino de “88”

Posted on November 25, 2015

The road to 88: Hachi Hachi



Rehearsals, production planning, marketing – these are typical ways that performers prepare for a new show. Doing an 18 day, 400 kilometer spiritual walk on the “Camino de Santiago” in Spain? Not so typical. And yet, that’s exactly what Michelle Fujii and Toru Watanabe did six weeks before the premiere of their new original taiko production.

Michelle and Toru are not just professional and artistic partners in their new taiko company, UNIT SOUZOU. They have been married for 13 years. That complex relationship is the basis for *88: Hachi Hachi*, the company’s first original production, which will debut October 2-4, 2015 at Zoomtopia, Studio 2 in SE Portland.

In preparing for their innovative taiko production, Michelle and Toru decided to take a number of artistic risks. Chief among them was the Camino de Santiago walk, a historical pilgrimage route to St. James in northwestern Spain, then to Finisterre believed to be the “end of the known world.” Michelle and Toru walked the path as a spiritual artistic practice to delve into their relationship.



Though they knew the walk would be a great challenge and that it was an unconventional way to prepare for a show, the couple learned more than they could have imagined.

The trip was physically and mentally arduous, their feet “crying every night.” Yet each morning they chose to get up and begin another 6-8 hours of walking, Michelle described. For 18 days, their lives stripped down to the daily task of moving forward carrying everything needed on their backs, Michelle and Toru “could not take for granted the simple connection we have chosen as partners.”



In the span of three weeks, the walk became a “miniature version of life” Toru said, of their personal journeys and their relationship. Not just their lives, but also a study of other walking partners and how they negotiated the long path: some walking together, others separating and then reconnecting, most having to compromise in some way.

The culmination of the Camino experience is a fundamental through line for 88: Hachi Hachi, an intimate taiko duet about Michelle and Toru’s multidimensional relationship.

“Hachi Hachi has everything to do with us. This show is a bold new step to creating work that is personally authentic,” Michelle said. The duet intricately weaves together taiko, dance and theatre, exploring relationship, intimacy and lineage.