



FINAL REPORT for TAIKO COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

From Body to Taiko and the Taiko Roadtrip Challenge: Loco Ladies and SkyFire Taiko

Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, Canada

This mentorship and performance project built partnerships and fulfilled dreams. It all started with an inspiring workshop experience that invited the question about coming to Yellowknife to see the Aurora and hearing the answer “Yes!”.

The Loco Ladies, a taiko trio based in Europe including Romina Taverna, Mel Ski and Chiara Codetta Raiteri, arrived in Canada on February 21 for a two-part tour of workshops and performance in Calgary AB and Yellowknife NWT. Midnight Taiko Kai in Calgary was the southern partner in this initiative and the Northern Arts and Cultural Centre (NACC) in Yellowknife was the northern partner, both collaborating with SkyFire Taiko to make this project a reality. This report is about the Yellowknife portion of the project.

After a successful workshop and performance in Calgary (see separate report), the Loco Ladies arrived in Yellowknife on February 27 and were treated to the Aurora show of the winter! The week started on a high that never came down!

Romina Taverna composed two original songs for this project – one for the students in the Yellowknife Taiko Community (Yama no Tabi – Mountain Trip – video included) and one for SkyFire Taiko (Taiko no Yume – Taiko Dreams – video included). The songs were sent to Nancy Mullick of SkyFire Taiko in November and December 2022 respectively, and she instructed both groups in these new compositions. During the week in Yellowknife in February/March 2023, Romina held a one-hour workshop with each group to provide feedback and comments to polish the performances before the world premiere performances of both pieces during the Taiko Roadtrip Challenge at NACC on Saturday, March 4.

The concert at NACC was a co-production between NACC and SkyFire Taiko and the Taiko Road Trip Challenge was part of the NACC Season. This partnership and support from NACC helped to increase the profile of taiko in Yellowknife. The show featured one 45-minute set by SkyFire Taiko (featuring the Yellowknife Taiko Community students and the two world premieres of Romina Taverna’s compositions) followed by one 30-minute set by the Loco Ladies. The concert culminated in two collaborative pieces: one with the Loco Ladies and SkyFire Taiko performing an original composition by Kevin Cull and arranged by SkyFire Taiko (37 Pieces of Flair – video included); and, the performance finale that included the students for a total of 15 drummers on the NACC stage. The NACC performance was a sold out show (300 people) – the first sold out event since before the Pandemic.

The Loco Ladies instructed a four-part workshop, From Body to Taiko, at the Collective Soul Space on Sunday, March 5. Sixteen (16) spaces were available and reserved. On the day, there were 14 participants as two withdrew at the last minute.

After the workshops, the Loco Ladies were available for a one-hour “Meet the Ladies” session where students could ask questions and have discussions in an informal way.

An evaluation was sent to participants after the workshop and below are some of the comments received (participants have given written permission for their names to be shared):

This workshop was designed and delivered in a way that brought together experienced drummers and student drummers in a very comfortable learning environment. We learned about our bodies and how our movement and muscles relate to our taiko artform, while learning new taiko songs together. I liked the way we shifted through a series of workshops that brought all the learning together at the end into a fun taiko song played in multiple parts together. – Cathie Bolstad

I really liked the approach of preparing your body (on a regular basis and not just immediately before playing), setting intent and approaching the drum with attitude before you even think about playing. Dropping the bachi and playful quietness were a-ha moments but the highlight for me was playing the song at the end, switching between parts and feeding on the group energy. – Lynda Yonge

[It was an] interesting contrast between drumming lightly with Mel & then drumming hard with Romina. Drumming beside Romina on the big drum, I felt enveloped on a wave of energy - really wild! Also loved Romina’s conducting of the three parts playing together. – Lani Cooke

From the objectives of this mentorship and performance projects included:

1. experience new teaching methods,
2. learn how their bodies can move more fluidly when they play,
3. gain new perspectives on the practice of taiko (locally and internationally), and
4. strengthen the new community that is growing and attract new participants to try it and love it.

All of these objectives were met.

1. Through the workshops, members of the Yellowknife Taiko Community and SkyFire Taiko learned new things from three very talented instructors who brought different approaches to each workshop and topic.

2. The participants were exposed to new techniques for playing taiko as well as a deeper understanding of body mechanics that allowed them to try new movements for more impactful play.

3. During the performance, the Yellowknife Taiko Community and the Yellowknife audience enjoyed a wide variety of song styles and showmanship in presenting taiko.

4. After the show, SkyFire Taiko received emails and requests about when the next

Introduction to Taiko sessions would be offered. Twelve (12) new contacts were added to the mailing list.

The project organizers would like to thank the Taiko Community Alliance for generously funding this project. The funds were used for international travel and travel insurance, costs that were not eligible expenses through other funding agencies. The flexibility in how the funds could be applied made this project possible. With the exchange rate at the time, there were some extra funds to put toward a tourism experience in Yellowknife and the Loco Ladies were able to try kicksledding with a local tour company (photos and videos included).

Throughout the week that the Loco Ladies were in Yellowknife, there were many opportunities to enjoy the northern hospitality of the Yellowknife Taiko Community. People cooked meals for us using local ingredients like moose and bison. One evening the Ladies enjoyed a fish fry of lingcod from Great Slave Lake. The day before the performance, we had a free day with no rehearsals and the Yellowknife Taiko Community hosted a day of outdoor activities at the homes of two students who live in the wilderness “off-grid”. There was a bonfire with grilled wild meat, followed by hokking (similar to cross-country skiing, but with special short skis for greater stability) through bush trails and then back across the lake (@ 6km round trip). The day ended with a huge potluck dinner with 25 people.

Other unique northern experiences included Aurora watching, seeing local wildlife that live within the city limits (foxes, ptarmigans, ravens), visiting the Snow King Castle and the natural Ice Caves, and learning how to dress for the weather to stay warm and be able to enjoy being outside!

The links below are two interviews in Yellowknife around the performance with Cabin Radio and CBC Radio One.

Cabin Radio: Mornings at the Cabin: <https://www.spreaker.com/user/cabinradio/20230302-S7np6p>

CBC The Weekender: <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2180072003906>

This link is for a newspaper article promoting the performance in The Weekender:

<https://www.nnsl.com/arts/powerful-drum-beats-to-resonate-at-nacc-this-weekend/>

The link to the full concert is available here:

DISCLAIMER: Our concert video has been uploaded to YouTube as an unlisted video. This means you need to have the link in order to view the video, and that it cannot be searched on YouTube.

You may share this link with family and friends who were not able to see the show in person. Due to potential copyright issues, do not share this on your social media. This is purely for your records and personal/familial viewing pleasure.

This link is for photos and videos from the week in a folder on Google Drive:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1XNNzktBbdBjV-3KPQmTY1JJzuXseTo5?usp=share_link

The name of the photographer is in the file name for each photo for photo credits.

TCA Post Event Write-up

Evaluation of Loco Ladies Workshop & Concert

Accomplishments and Achieved Goals

Our group set out to learn more about body awareness while playing taiko, and then to incorporate what we learned into a new song. Over three days of workshops, we accomplished both goals.

During the first part of the weekend, members of Midnight Taiko participated in the Body to Taiko Workshop along with other taiko drummers from Calgary, Edmonton, and Lethbridge. We learned how to use our bodies in more nuanced ways. For example, we were taught new warmup and practice drills that incorporate the full body including foot and hand dexterity, posture, and core engagement. The Loco Ladies also introduced us to several different ways of striking the drums that are new to our group and that we can now incorporate into our existing repertoire.

In the second part of our project, we built on what we learned in the Body to Taiko workshop. Midnight Taiko members collaborated in small groups to create rhythms based on one key lesson from each of the instructors' lessons from the day prior. The resulting brainstorming was then organized into a composition. This composition reflects the combined ideas of our members and the new skills we learned during the workshops. As we continue to play this piece and develop it over time, it will be an embodied reinforcement of the concepts we learned.

We finished the event with a fun collaborative concert by Midnight Taiko and the Loco Ladies. We were happy to share live taiko with Calgarians and introduce taiko artists from Europe to the Calgary community. Our members had a lot of fun performing the two collaborative pieces with the Loco Ladies, offering a festive way to finish off the concert.

This project successfully supported our mandate which includes: playing multiple styles of taiko, moving our bodies, and making connections with other taiko artists from around the world.

One significant area of learning for our non-profit was the process required to invite international guest artists to Canada. Topics we learned about included taxation, work visas, and border crossing requirements. We are now better prepared to invite international artists in the future. This project strengthened our operational knowledge as a non-profit arts organization in Canada.



Community Impact

MIDNIGHT TAIKO AND THE TAIKO COMMUNITY

Our event drew workshop participants from Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge. As such, this project enabled us to bring together the Alberta taiko community to share in a learning experience and social activity. We facilitated the building of new relationships and bonds with European taiko artists, the Loco Ladies, who were new faces to most of the Alberta taiko artists. This intensive weekend of learning, sharing, physical endurance training and communal meals offered a rich environment to get to know one another on a deeper level as everyone was pushed to the max creatively, physically, and cognitively. The collaboration amongst SkyFire Taiko and Midnight Taiko to coordinate the two events was successful and increased the bond between our two taiko groups.

From the perspective of the guest artists, this funding allowed us to open the door to European taiko instructors sharing their knowledge and experiences here in North America. Our guest instructors expressed their gratitude for this opportunity, as they sometimes feel somewhat isolated from the taiko communities of Japan and North America.

MIDNIGHT TAIKO AND THE CALGARY COMMUNITY

This funding allowed us to build more awareness about Japanese cultural artforms in Calgary and bring more awareness to the Calgary Japanese Community's annual cultural events. The social media presence for this event introduced new people to our organization, many of whom had never heard of taiko before. We have since seen increased participation at our monthly taiko drop in classes, allowing us to share the joy of taiko with even more Calgarians.

MIDNIGHT TAIKO'S INTERNAL SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND TEAM CAMARADERIE

The high level of teamwork that took place in order to execute this project created stronger bonds amongst members and an increased sense of pride in our organization. Everyone in our organization had a large role in organizing the event and the communication and participation was top-notch. We grew as an organization in order to fulfil the demands required to execute this project successfully.

Attendance Figures

From Body to
Taiko Workshop

23 Participants

Composition Workshop

16 Participants

Public Concert

135 Attendees

Media Coverage

Please follow the links below to see examples of the digital media presence showcasing the support of the TCA.

[Social Media Posts](#)

[Workshop Eventbrite Ticketing](#)

[Concert Eventbrite Ticketing](#)

[Concert Program](#)