

Hakone Gardens

and

Taiko Drumming

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The Hakone Gardens and Taiko Drumming are physical outlets to Japan — whether it be auditory (drumming) or visual (gardens), the spirit and tradition of Japan lives on in the Santa Clara Valley. A national landmark located in the wilderness of Saratoga, the Hakone Gardens have provided guests with aesthetic beauty and relaxation for nearly half a century. With its four splendid gardens and meticulously crafted buildings, the Gardens are splitting images of Japanese gardens found across the Pacific. Taiko Drumming was founded nearly a quarter of a century ago by ambitious Asian-American musicians in San Jose. Since then, it has become a universal form of music, incorporating various cultures and music styles from around the world. Both have given the Japanese-American population in the South Bay great pride. When I was younger, I would embark to the Hakone Gardens on bike — with my grandmother cycling not far behind — and would stand at awe at the precision and grandeur of the gardens, ponds, and environment. Since I was raised with a musical background, Taiko Drumming had a similar effect — the relentless and fast-paced drumming would have me swimming in a sea of excitement. The Gardens and Taiko Drumming are on opposite ends of the spectrum: the former embodies peace and equilibrium while the latter stresses intensity and non-stop movement. Regardless, both have impacted not only my life, but thousands upon thousands of people (of all races) as well.

Michael Cho 4/2/97

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Introduction

The sleepy town of Saratoga is an early Californian lumbertown nestled in the lush redwood-covered foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains. If there is any prevalent theme surrounding Saratoga, it is the grandeur and beauty of her botanical environment. The forces of Mother Nature provided the town with a myriad of trees and vegetation which have more urbanized communities like Cupertino and San Jose blushing with envy. To escape the monotony and pressures of everyday rat race, many a stressed patron of the grinding Silicon Valley machine have found Saratoga a perfect haven for relaxation and internal rejuvenation – an ideal place to just unwind. And nowhere is this escape for tranquillity more apparent than in the serene beauty of the Hakone Gardens – the only authentic Japanese garden in North America. The gardens, from a aesthetic point of view, is pure charm; an enchanting and meticulously-maintained work of dedication.

Since the Santa Clara Valley is one of the most diverse areas in the United States – a prism of cultures – the Hakone Gardens serve as a paradigm of Japanese-American pride. It is an unparalleled monument of physical and mental labor; an achievement evolving around the culture's traditional values of hard work, simplicity, loyalty, and unwavering respect for nature. A visit inside and through the gardens (located on 21000 Big Basin Way off Highway 9) is a journey to rural Japan – a refreshing and invigorating look into the traditions and values the Japanese have to offer. In addition, a glimpse of Taiko Drumming – an extraordinary auditory and visual performance with Japanese roots but Western-style tempo – will be provided.

History in a Nutshell

In 1915, Isabel Stine attended the opening ceremony of the Panama Canal. Many countries around the globe were present at the festivities – to set up exhibits demonstrating their various cultures. In this crowd of exhibits, one specific presentation caught Stine's eye: the beautiful and unique Japanese Tea Ceremony. Inspired, Stine went to visit Japan (1916) to explore the culture of the "land of the rising sun." On her trip, she stopped at the Fuji-Hakone National Park and was stunned by the systematic beauty of the gardens – especially the intricately-laid out gardens used for Zen meditation. Upon her arrival back to the states, Stine set off to replicate what she had witnessed in Japan. In the fall of 1916, Isabel and Oliver Stine (San Francisco art patrons) decided to build a Japanese-style 16-acre summer retreat for their friends and family. Noticing the peacefulness and favorable weather of the South Bay, Stine decided her rendition of the "Hakone Garden" would be constructed in the lovely burg of Saratoga. Helping her recreate the gardens she saw at the Fuji-Hakone National Park were experienced Japanese architects and landscape designers familiar with the Herculean task of building Japanese-type gardens. Through the Stine family's dedication, hard work, and affection, the dreams of Hakone Gardens became a reality. After the Stine's relinquished ownership of the gardens, Bay Area financier C.L. Tildern became the owner in 1932 and added the main gate to the entrance.

Structure/Design

The main difference between western and eastern-style gardens is the setting. The eastern technique involves a hands-on-approach – a majority of the plants are groomed and the purpose of the garden is for relaxation and meditation. Western parks, on the

other hand, leave nature to turn its own course; the plants grow wildly and there are large areas for which people can congregate and recreate amongst the environment. In other words, do not expect to find any blazing barbeques, company softball games, loud music, or high levels of human congestion in these Japanese gardens. The gardens have a simple aspiration: to calm and soothe the human soul; to lightly caress and ease out the stress and pressures of everyday life with her beautiful, relaxing atmosphere. If you want to spend an afternoon playing a game of tackle frisbee or one exploding hot dog wieners and patties over a fiery inferno, embark to nearby Vasona Lake. But if you crave for quiet, placidity, and a transcendental time to reflect deep into your spirit, choose the Hakone Gardens. Basically, if Henry David Thoreau was alive and well today, he would find the gardens at a par with his Walden back East – a scenic get-away from the capitalistic, pressure-laden, and fast-paced civilization of America.

There are a number of different components of the Hakone Gardens, including two houses, a cultural center, and four major gardens. The first building erected at the site was the Upper House (1918), designed by architect Tsunematsu Shintani. The structure was constructed entirely without nails – the purpose of the house was to be a place where one could view the beautiful gardens and, on clear summer nights, view the moon and glistening stars far above in the heavens. The house sits on the appropriately titled Moon Viewing Hill. Inside, the floors are covered with traditional “tatami” mats and the rooms are decorated with Japanese-encrypted scrolls and flower arrangements.

The second building – designed western-style -- was assembled in 1922. This three-bedroom Lower House was originally intended for family use during summer retreats – however, in 1980, it was remodeled by the city of Saratoga into a “cha-shitsu” or tea ceremony room. The city’s intent for the newly converted building – equipped

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with a large reception room and tea separate tea ceremony rooms -- was to provide the community and visiting public access to a traditional Japanese facility. In 1966, the Hakone Gardens had been purchased by Saratoga to protect it from real estate development. The city hired Tanso Ishihara, Kyoto-trained landscape gardener, and appointed him the Japanese Garden Specialist at the Hakone Gardens. With full support from Saratoga, he began the arduous task of restoring the Gardens and maintaining its beauty and authenticity.

Lastly, the Cultural Exchange Center was completed in 1991 as an identical reproduction of an ancient 19th-century Kyoto tea merchant's house. The center was first constructed in Japan, then each and every piece of the building was labeled, packaged, and shipped to Saratoga. Timbers were cut and first assembled in Japan with the use of traditional tools and methods. Here, a team of seven Japanese carpenters re-assembled the building on US soil. The final cost of this construction was approximately \$250,000 -- all the funds was funded by a generous Japanese dermatologist practicing in Tokyo. Because of his goodwill offering, the center will act as the donator's home if he ever decided to visit the states. Similar to the Lower House, this building can be used to demonstrate the Japanese Tea Ceremony. Other purposes include a variety of classes, lectures, workshops, museum, and demonstrations, as well as an artists-in-residence program. The public is invited to attend this special ceremony the first Thursday of every month from 1-4:00 p.m.

The Gardens

The four splendid gardens in the Hakone Gardens include Hill and Pond Garden, the Tea Garden, the Zen Garden, and the "Kizuna-en." The Hill and Pond Garden is the heart

and soul of the region and used primarily for strolling through. When in bloom, an abundance of wisteria and cherry blossoms line the walk for a beautiful scene. The Tea Garden path is a quiet and soothing walk – enclosed for privacy. It includes a traditional Japanese water basin in which people can purify the hands and mouth with. Along with the calming silence, it is meant to prepare visitors who are about to enter tea ceremony rooms. A mainly dry garden, the Zen Garden is composed of meticulously-raked patterns of gravel interspersed with large stones representative of islands. A sight for intense personal contemplation and meditation, the garden is for viewing only and never entered. The Kinuza-en is a bamboo garden which symbolize the close relationship that Saratoga and its Sister City, Muko (Japan), have shared. Large groups of white stones represent the City Councils of both cities while the smaller white gravel represents the vast Pacific Ocean that lies between them. A suitable metaphor, the purposely-aligned rocks explain that even though Japan and the US are separated by a great distance of water, the two countries are still close together at heart. The citizens and city of Muko donated not only their expertise, but also many of the bamboo specimens to this project. The Japan Bamboo Society of Saratoga is responsible for maintaining this garden. The site is closed in the spring months to protect new growth of bamboo shoots.

Needless to say, a visit to the Hakone Gardens transcends all rational explanation – the trip is different for every individual. One can peruse through the gardens and find himself in the heart of the natural environment: Mother Nature and all her splendid beauty. Yet another can embark on a more personal journey: when walking through the systematically-structured and meticulously-furnished gardens (especially the Zen Gardens), the person is in an ideal realm to think long and hard. Since the theology behind Zen embodies the concepts of self-purification and meditation, one has an

opportunity to contemplate about life in the Gardens. Separated from nature or personal reflection, one can merely visit the Gardens to see an aesthetic work of architectural and botanical wonder. The landscape of the various gardens and the simplicity of the wooden-reinforced buildings are exceptional and pleasing to the eye – an unorthodox yet essential haven in the progressively urbanizing Santa Clara County. Heading into the new millennium, society has seemed to ^{have} lost an appreciation for the arts, for nature, and for history. Everything now revolves around paychecks and 9-to-5 careers. In other words, we need to spend more time enjoying life and its simple pleasures. A walk through the Hakone Gardens provides a mother lode of revelations – personal enlightenment, appreciation for the arts and history of Japan, visual beauty, and a place to relax. Once-a-month excursions – take an ordinary weekend morning for instance -- to the gardens will offer not only physical, but mental gratification.

Organization/Recent History

The Hakone Foundation was composed in 1984 to maintain, enhance, and further develop the gardens. This non-profit organization strives to decrease the public financing of the Hakone Gardens by encouraging contributions, managing the rentals of buildings, and sponsoring programs that promote cultural awareness and appreciation of Japanese values. Anyone is welcome to join this foundation – the membership fee is \$25 yearly. Benefits include free parking, Hakone Views newsletters, and notice of special events. More importantly however, contributors are helping to preserve the beautiful gardens and spirit of Japanese ingenuity for future generations. In addition, the Hakone Gardens, with full backing by Muko, offer a \$500 scholarship (Gomersall) to individuals with an interest in the Japanese culture. Applicants must submit a proposal to Hakone Gardens

for review. Among the winners in past years are a Foothill College student and his presentation of sumo wrestling and a university professor and his proposal of a new bamboo park. Volunteers provide daily tours, act as staff in the gift shop, and assist in the garden and office.

Taiko Drumming at Hakone

Throughout the year, various celebrations of Japanese art and culture will be held at the Hakone Gardens. At these festivals, there is a wide variety of outdoor entertainment which includes Taiko, Japanese Ceremonial Drumming, as well as other musical performances and martial arts demonstrations. Various displays, lectures and demonstrations about Japanese art forms will be held – including Ikebana, flower arranging; Bonsai, miniature trees; Shodo, a form of traditional calligraphy; Origami, extraordinary art of paper-folding; and Sumi-e, brush painting, as well as doll-making; cultivation of bamboo; and Nihon Shishu, Japanese embroidery. There are also a variety of Japanese foods offered from various organizations within the Japanese-American community, as well as a number of craft vendors selling both Japanese and Western items.

For nearly a quarter of a century, San Jose Taiko (SJT) has mesmerized audiences with the powerful, spellbinding and propulsive sounds of the taiko drums. Inspired by traditional Japanese drumming, SJT performers express the beauty and harmony of the human spirit through the voice of the taiko as they strive to create new dimensions in Asian-American movement and music. San Jose Taiko was founded in 1973 by young Asian-Americans searching for an artistic and musical outlet to convey their unique experiences as third generation Japanese Americans, or Sansei. Looking to Japan for

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inspiration, they selected the symbolic Japanese taiko or drum as their instrument of expression.

An example of the American-Japanese fusion of styles, "One World," a 1986 composition by Gary Tsujimoto, focuses in conveying the message of equality and color-blindness in its drumming. The theme of this piece is cross-cultural and is inspired by the people of color who have expressed enjoyment of taiko. The musicians share a combination of drums, creating a fusion of African, Latin and Japanese rhythms. It is an exciting brand of drumming, guaranteed to send shivers down the listener's spine.

Taiko as a symbol holds much of the essence of the spirit of Japan, replete with continued possibilities, renewal and transformation. Taiko has its origins in the daily life of common people; priests used taiko to dispel evil spirits and insects from the rice fields; Samurai used taiko to instill fear in the enemy and courage in themselves; peasants used taiko in their prayers for rain, in festivals, and in thanksgiving for a bountiful harvest. In keeping with tradition, the practice and performance of taiko requires dedication, physical endurance, and a harmony and collective spirit. SJT has taken the essence and voice of the traditional taiko, and infused it with the vitality and freshness of their American spirit to create a dynamic and compelling Asian American art form. They use the power and beauty of taiko to transcend cultural barriers and to foster greater understanding of Japanese American culture. Taiko is so deeply a part of the traditions of the Japanese and the Shinto and Buddhist religions, that it can be considered the essence and the heartbeat of the Japanese spirit.

Under the managing direction Roy Hirabayashi and the creative direction of PJ Hirabayashi, the performance and expression are predicated upon a profound respect for each member of the group. The spirit and essence of both rehearsal and performance

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require physical endurance, with aerobics and exercise required of all members during practice sessions. The majority of the compositions performed by San Jose Taiko are written or arranged by members of the group or are commissioned pieces by guest composers. Composing, choreographing, designing and producing costumes, and handcrafting and maintenance of the drums are part of the holistic process in which all members participate. Through this singleness of mind and spirit, harmony is achieved and the music rings with unity and clarity.

San Jose Taiko has broadened and embellished the historical artform into a style that joins the traditional rhythms of Japanese drumming with the beat of world rhythms including African, Balinese, Brazilian, Latin and jazz percussion. The resulting sounds are contemporary, exciting, new and innovative, bridging many styles, while still resonant of the Asian soul in America. Company members also study both traditional and contemporary dance with leading choreographers, producing performances that are fully choreographed, theatrically lit extravaganzas of musical sound. Individual members of San Jose Taiko have also toured with Kodo, Ondekoza, Miyarabi Taiko and the jazz/fusion group, Hiroshima.

San Jose Taiko regularly performs concerts and residencies throughout the United States, Canada and Japan. Besides playing at the Hakone Gardens, past engagements include a performance at Reno's Nugget Casino, performing on Jerry Lewis's Muscular Dystrophy Telethon, and extensive touring throughout California, Hawaii and the Midwest. SJT's 20th anniversary performance was a critical success in 1993, and at year end the musicians had their premiere performance in New York's Carnegie Hall. Additional highlights include a performance on the Arsenio Hall Show and national touring.

Since 1987, when San Jose Taiko became one of the first American taiko troupes invited to tour Japan, the company has collaborated in joint concerts with internationally renowned Asian performing artists including KODO, Ondekoza, Eitetsu Hayashi, Michiko Akao, Oedo Sukeroku, Osuwa Taiko and Miyarabi Taiko. SJT has also collaborated with artists and companies from other disciplines, including Brenda Wong Aoki, Kenny Endo, Eth-Noh-Tec, American Conservatory Theater, George Coates Performance Works, San Jose Repertory Theatre, The San Jose Museum of Art, Margaret Wingrove Dance Company, Abhinaya Dance Company, and most recently, with Keith Terry and Crosspulse.

In addition to performing, SJT conducts workshops, lecture demonstrations, and master classes as part of its outreach and educational activities. From its weekly taiko classes for over 80 students, it has nurtured and developed a Junior Taiko ensemble for ages 13-17, publishes the quarterly newsletter ODAIKO, and has been invited to present seminars and workshops to numerous other North American and Japanese taiko groups.

SJT has been recognized for its artistic and managerial excellence with an Advancement Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Chevron Award for Excellence, and a two-year grant from the Knight Foundation. In 1994, SJT was honored by the Arts Council of Santa Clara County with a commendation for community leadership for its efforts to foster cultural and ethnic diversity in the arts. San Jose Taiko participates on both the Western States Arts Federation and California Arts Council touring rosters through the 1995-96 season.

Final Note

The Hakone Japanese Gardens in Saratoga have provided nearly a half-century's worth of relaxation and cultural experience for Bay Area partisans. Many people have visited the secluded treasure not only to learn more about the Japanese culture and perspective on nature but to be one with themselves and nature. An afternoon visit to the gardens is a period for unwinding (physical and mental) and thoughtful contemplation. This botanical and architectural wonder is a symbol for the entire Santa Clara Valley to be proud of – the Hakone Gardens are not just an authentic replication of a Japanese garden, it is one of a kind in North America. With a strong population of second and third-generation Japanese-Americans in the Silicon Valley, the Hakone Gardens provide an outlet for the people to look back into their ancestral history; to learn more about their background and traditions. Accompanied with the Taiko Drummers of San Jose, the Hakone Gardens reveals the spirit – the discipline, music, the arts – of Japan. Where the gardens express the Japanese affection for nature, pattern, and tranquility, the Taiko offers another perspective of Japan – a universal fusion of sound. Taiko is not strictly a Japanese form of expression – it is a combination of American entertainment, Asian mythology and religion, and worldly rhythms. In words, it is an Americanization of Japanese music. I think this is what makes the drumming so special and entertaining to observe.

Regardless, the gardens provide everyone – of all race, age, and religion – with an experience of the Far East: the touch of artistic beauty, the discipline and heritage involved in the tea ceremony, and the unparalleled respect for nature's gift to mankind. The Japanese culture (religiously and socially) radiates calmness, discipline, and self-pride. The Hakone Gardens – with its authentic Japanese gardens, buildings, koi ponds,

and bamboo grooves – incorporate these characteristics for the entire melting pot of San Jose to see, experience, and appreciate.

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