



## Trashmagination Podcast #12 – Taiko

Welcome to Trashmagination, a podcast about reimagining trash. I'm Carla Brown.

So you already know that one of my hobbies is creatively reusing trash. I have another hobby which is to play taiko, or Japanese drums. You probably have seen taiko if you have seen that style of drumming with a really big drum up on a stand. The drummer has his or her back to the audience hitting the drum with really big drum sticks.

I'm going to tell you about taiko as part of a creative reuse podcast because I have found there are many surprising connections between my two hobbies!

I learned about taiko through Trashmagination. My friends often send me stories about creative reuse. My friend Jess told me about a webinar featuring people who make musical instruments from trash. It was hosted by Make magazine, the same organization that puts on the Maker Faires that I talked about in early episodes. At the end, they talked about making a taiko from a garbage can.

Initially my idea was to make such a drum and bring it to events like the Maker Faire. But I had never played drums. I found a beginner taiko class offered by Mark H. Taiko [<http://markhtaiko.com/>].

At that point in my life, I was evaluating a career change. I was working with a life coach to track which activities made me most happy. The first time my drum stick, or bachi, hit the drum, I felt that rush of joy. It was a surprise! In the past, I might have taken just one class, but since I was already looking to change things in my life, I decided to keep learning.

I took classes for a year and then auditioned to be an apprentice with the taiko group Nen Daiko. Nen Daiko is located in Fairfax Station, Virginia and is associated with Ekoji Buddhist Temple. The group accepted me as an apprentice and 10 months later, in spring 2015, I became a full performing member.

This podcast is coming out right before our busiest performance time. We perform almost every weekend as part of the Cherry Blossom festivities in the Washington DC area. I'll link to our performances page from the show notes.

So you might be wondering at this point – how is taiko connected with creative reuse? Let me tell you about times when I saw creative reuse pop up during my time learning about taiko.

### Taiko Construction

In Japan, taiko have been made from a tree trunk of a Japanese zelkova tree. To make the largest taiko, the drum makers used very old trees. In North America, most drums are made from wooden whiskey barrels. That is creative reuse! Nen Daiko's drums were constructed by the founding members back in the 1990s. Nen Daiko replaces the drum head – the part made from a cow skin – when they start to wear out.

I mentioned that the first time I heard about taiko, it was a webinar about making a taiko from a trash can. This is called a gomi-daiko which means trash-drum. Making a gomi-daiko is not an example of creative reuse because it's made from a new trash can. You cut the bottom with a box cutter knife and make a drum head from layers of packing tape. The

people in the webinar used an old x-ray film from a veterinarian's office to give the drum head more strength, but I have only ever used tape. I have three gomi-daiko that I set up in my guest room at different angles because I am more likely to practice if the drums are already set up.

About the word gomi – my friend Françoise told me about a practice in Japan called sodai-gomi day, which is a day about once a month where people put out extra larger trash like furniture. When she was living in Japan teaching English, she told me that many fellow teachers from Canada and the US got their furnishings and appliances on sodai-gomi day. I have asked a few friends who speak Japanese how you would say Trashmagination. I have been told it might just be Gomi-imagination because the word imagination is actually popular in Japan spoken phonetically like the English word.

### **The Song “Motainnai”**

In 2016, I heard a group at the Smithsonian Folk Life Festival called FandangObon [<https://www.facebook.com/FandangObon/>] in partnership with a group called Quetzal. This is a collaboration with a Buddhist group that incorporates taiko and a Latin group. They performed a great song called Motainnai which is a Japanese term that you say when you regret waste. What a perfect Trashmagination term! The song was written by Nobuko Miyamoto. It's about how a grandmother warns her grandchildren about wasting things. It is accompanied by hand motions like you might see in a Bon Odori dance, which is a type of community dancing held at Buddhist temples at the summer Obon festivals. The lyrics go like this:

Remember what Baachan used to say, (Baachan comes from the Japanese word for grandmother which is Obaasan)  
What a waste, what a shame, what you throw away,  
Every piece of paper, every grain of rice,  
Every drop of water, she would use it twice.

### **Taiko Crafts from Recycled Materials**

I have been inspired to design taiko-themed craft from recycled materials:

- a drum craft using recycled applesauce plastic cups - <http://trashmagination.com/making-taiko-ornaments-for-nen-daiko/>
- a taiko player from plastic caps - <http://trashmagination.com/taiko-crafts-from-recycled-plastic-caps-and-wine-corks/>
- an okedo - or the type of drum you wear on a strap over your shoulder – from wine corks - <http://trashmagination.com/taiko-crafts-from-recycled-plastic-caps-and-wine-corks/>
- a tenugui – or the towel that you dance with at traditional Obon festivals - <http://trashmagination.com/making-handmade-obon-tenugui-for-bon-odori-dancing/>

In future, I want to design crafts that creatively reuse broken drumsticks (or bachi). I was thinking about cutting these across into circles but I'm not sure what I want to make yet. I also would like to design a craft for the cow skin scraps left over after we replace a head on the taiko. We've talked about making mini-taiko but it's a big job!

## Buddhist Taiko

The last connection I have found between taiko and Trashmagination is perhaps a more philosophical one. I have so many reasons why I love to play taiko, and definitely near the top of the list is the fact that I feel so connected with the other drummers in Nen Daiko when we practice and perform. Our goal is to play in sync to the best of our abilities. Our bachi should hit the drum at the same time so it makes one big sound. The word for playing together is kumi-daiko. When we are not in sync, we say we are playing “batta batta” which is fun to say.

Nen Daiko is associated with Ekoji Buddhist Temple and I love learning about Buddhism from the other drummers. The concept of interdependence is central to Buddhism and taiko is a great example of a group of interdependent people.

Likewise interdependence is a theme of Trashmagination. By being more mindful about trash, I feel more connected to the greater whole of humanity.

There is another commonality between my two hobbies of Trashmagination and taiko, and that is both involve doing something that some people might view as unusual, but I do them anyway. They make me feel great. Neither of these hobbies came to me through my family, my schooling or my career. But somehow I recognized they are both a big part of me. They have brought me some of my happiest moments.

Today I want to introduce an idea of a Trashmagination checklist – recommendations of things you can try based on the podcast. Today’s checklist is:

1. **Try a new activity** – Expand your happiness by continuing to try activities, even when you think you are old enough to be set in your ways. I tried a whole bunch that I didn’t continue, such as tae kwon do, guitar lessons, nia, yoga, Zumba and probably a few more. But taiko was definitely the one that lit me up the most.
2. **Find a taiko performance near you** – The number of community-based taiko groups is increasing, even here on the east coast of the United States. Spring and summer is a great time to find taiko as we participate in Cherry Blossom events in spring and Obon festivals in summer. If you live near Washington DC, I hope you’ll come see my group perform! (link in show notes)
3. **Find a group of people who want to chase a goal with you** – It’s one thing to work with a team where people are paid to show up. It’s another to be part of a group where everyone is motivated with the idea of doing something great.

So until next time – May you see your trash as just another source of music in your life.