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Home / News

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Traditional Japanese drum show promises loud, energetic presence

By JACKSON FRENCH jfrench@bgdailynews.com 13 hrs ago

Van Meter Hall will shake and tremble Friday amid the percussive attack of an outfit that uses massive traditional Japanese drums as its weapons.

Yamato, a Japanese ensemble that plays music primarily on Taiko drums, a well-established musical tradition in the group's homeland, will perform a free concert at 7:30 p.m. as part of Western Kentucky University's Cultural Enhancement Series.

According to Scott Harris, head of WKU's department of Music and a member of the Cultural Enhancement Series Committee, no tickets will be distributed for the event and seating is first-come, first-served.

Harris said a Yamato performance means an energetic and visual show for audiences.

“This is Taiko drumming, which is very visual and very physical so it’s not really a traditional classical concert experience,” he said.

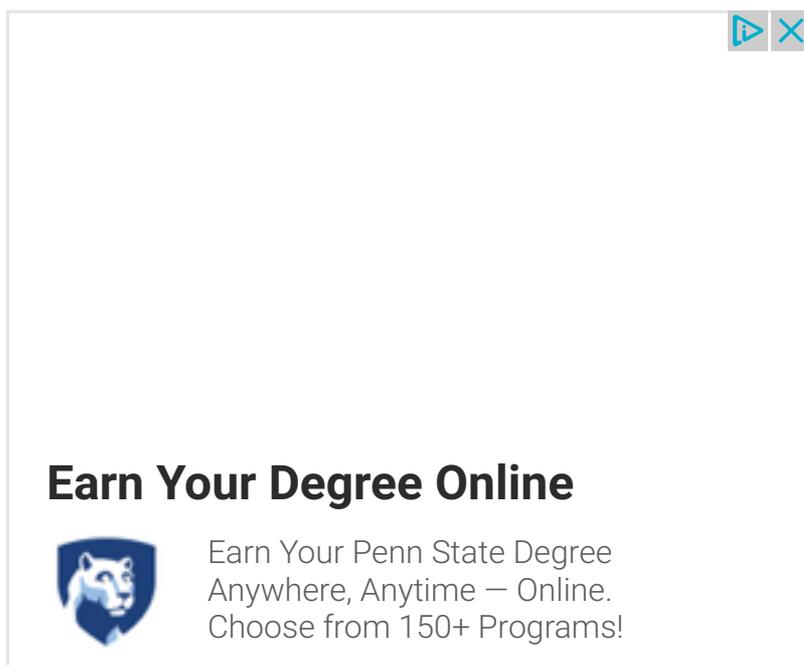
Masa Ogawa, Yamato’s artistic director, who communicated with the Daily News via email, said the performance seeks to be a highly energetic show.

“Yamato will try to give you a big energy by the loudest sound of huge Taiko drums ... we want to try to give our energy to the people,” he wrote.

Despite the group’s dedication to wowing audiences with its thunderous drums, Yamato employs other instruments as well, like chappa hand cymbals and the shinobue, a Japanese wooden flute, Ogawa said.

According to a Yamato news release, Taiko holds a special place in Japanese culture.

“Through pin-point precision and ferocious skill, these musician-athletes exhibit originality and innovation through this deeply sacred Japanese musical instrument that is the epitome of the Japanese spirit and, like the heartbeat, the very pulse of life,” the release said.



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The drums used throughout the performance range greatly in size, from relatively small 22-pound drums to a massive Taiko weighing roughly half a ton, the release said.

With 40 drums that fall into four general categories in its arsenal, Yamato will present a range of sound during its performance, Ogawa said.

“You can feel the wide range of the possibility of Taiko drumming because we will bring 40 different Taiko on stage,” he wrote.

Though Taiko is steeped in tradition, Yamato will not be playing any traditional songs, instead relying exclusively on songs Ogawa wrote, he said.

The shows on the group’s current tour are named “Chousensha-The Challengers,” a name that Yamato feels indicates the troupe’s commitment to challenging the audience with a lively, energetic show.

“Yamato wants to give the challenge, spirit and the energy to the audience and also wants to get the spirit and the energy from the audience,” he wrote.

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