

**Silver Hall Series:  
Yume Daiko at the Maltz (Apr. 25)**

by Jarrett Hoffman



Percussion music is full of nuance, but you can also boil it down to the single, simple action of striking something. And whether you're the one doing that, or you're watching it happen, it can be cathartic, which is one reason why that genre might feel particularly welcome during a time that still has its share of anxiety.

Indeed, catharsis was on full display — as well as beautiful theatricality and impressive subtlety — during a live-streamed concert by taiko ensemble Yume Daiko on April 25 at the Maltz Performing Arts Center, presented as part of the venue's Silver Hall Series.

The ensemble's leader — Lancaster, PA native Matthew Richards — has a long history with taiko. While living in Japan, he was involved with the group Mukade Daiko for eleven years, during which time his two children Kai and Maya also soaked up the genre. After returning to the U.S., that family trio formed Yume Daiko around 2008, along with a group of players that included Samantha Werstler, whose own daughter, Mae Werstler, is now also part of the ensemble.

On this occasion at the Maltz, Yume Daiko was made up of Matthew and Kai Richards, Samantha and Mae Werstler, and Kristin Taylor. During seven pieces, the musicians fanned out across the stage in several different arrangements, manning several different instruments, from the handheld (such as the fan-like uchiwa-daiko) to the very much not handheld (the largest of the miya-daiko, whose bodies are formed out of a tree trunk).

Often Matthew Richards stood in front of that formidable drum. It was there that he played a dramatic solo to begin the second piece on the program, a Mukade Daiko original titled *Mukade* or “Legend of the Giant Centipede.” Moving from single, powerful strikes to a gentle roll, he then gathered and released energy in the form of a long wave.

Another impressive solo followed in the short *Yatai*, a Japanese traditional work. Here, Richards impressed with a beautiful, gradual diminuendo that revealed his virtuosic level of control. Later on, in the program’s finale, both he and Kai Richards showed off another type of virtuosity: constant, acrobatic activity.

*Yatai* was also memorable for its instrumentation and its choreography. Samantha Werstler’s *chappa* hand cymbals added wonderfully to the spectrum of timbres, while Mae Werstler and Kristin Taylor, both seated, leaned away and then back toward their instruments, again and again. You knew that moment and so many others in the program had to be tough on the body, and likely on the mind as well, but the performers’ movements and music-making remained decisive, and their smiles infectious when the moment inspired it.



One challenge in the percussion world is simply moving large instruments from place to place. Here, whenever stage transitions were necessary, either Matthew Richards took to the mic to speak to the virtual audience, or Samantha Werstler took to the *fue*, a bamboo flute, to play slow, elegant melodies, occasionally with light percussive accompaniment from one of her colleagues. The musical workouts might have taken their toll on the flute playing, and also had an effect on Richards’ commentary, which was humorous as he tried to catch his breath.

But the only real complaint about this enjoyable performance was the lack of context. Richards was kind enough to share information about the performance with me in an

email afterwards, but future concerts from Yume Daiko would only be more immersive and more educational if audiences had a printed program at their fingertips.

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