

# Leonard Eto



Leonard Eto is one of the best and most innovative contemporary taiko players whose vision and creativeness deeply molded the way taiko is performed and viewed in the world today.

Leonard Eto's distinctive hallmark is the fluidity and luminous, dancing quality of his play, the immense joy that perspires in his music and the coexistence of power and effortlessness.

Leonard was born in New York in 1963, whilst his father, the koto player Kimio Eto, was making a career in the States performing with such eminent artists as the Philadelphia Orchestra under the conductorship of Leopold Stokowski and Harry Belafonte, among others. The musical environment at home and his father's pioneering path to expand the expression of a traditional instrument into new realms deeply inspired Leonard's own quest in music.

In 1984 Leonard joined the Japanese taiko drum group Kodo and completely invested himself in researching, composing and playing taiko. He soon became Kodo's principal player, organizer, music director and composer travelling to over 50 countries. Leonard's new ways of staging and performing taiko influenced not only Kodo and subsequent taiko groups, but also well-known entertainment formations such as Stomp and Blue Man, as well as other areas of the Western music scene. His compositions for Kodo became an integral part of the contemporary taiko repertory. In 1992, Leonard left Kodo to pursue a solo career.

Leonard has always been interested in crossing borders and enjoys collaborating or improvising with artists of any musical style. In 1994, he won high acclaim for his

performance with such great artists as Bob Dylan, Bon Jovi, The Chieftains, INXS, Ray Cooper, and Roger Taylor (Queen) at *"The Great Music Experience"* at Todaiji, the temple of the Great Buddha, in Nara, Japan. Through his participation in the Megadrums Europe Tours ('90, '93, '99) as well as a variety of festivals and recording sessions, he performed with such world-renowned artists as Zakir Hussain (tabla), Andreas Vollenweider (harp), Milton Cardona (per.), Doudou Ndiaye Rose (per.), Max Roach (ds.), Michael Shrieve (Santana), Siouxsie Sioux, The Creatures and others. In 2004 Leonard joined Siouxsie Sioux's U.S. tour and London concerts as special guest - a highly praised performance.

Leonard is an esteemed composer. His original works have been featured in Hollywood film productions such as *"JFK"*, *"The Lion King"*, *"The Hunted"* and *"The Thin Red Line"*. His compositions have also been used in ballet representations by Nina Ananiashvili - with whom he performed in 1998 - and Patrick Dupond, as well as for the figure skating performances of Elvis Stojko. *"Tsu-Ku-Tsu"*, a work specially commissioned by Pilobolus, the renowned American modern dance company, premiered in Boston in May 2000. It opened to critical acclaim and enthusiastic audiences in New York at the Joyce Theater in June 2000, where it enjoyed a three week run. A.J. Hewat of the New York Times raves, *"He's got rhythm, They've got moves: It's a fit"*.

Ever since leaving Kodo, Leonard has been producing and touring his own projects. His quest gradually developed from his collaborative activities - where he was challenging his own technical and expressive skills to gain the freedom and spontaneity to communicate with any musical style - to working on blending taiko and dance, taiko and Western drums and, the until then unthinkable, combination of taiko and digital sounds.

His formation "Blendrums" where the taiko dialogues with the sounds and movements of tap dancing opened up a completely new, unexpected, dynamic and an inspiring world of stage performance where a fusion between dance and rhythm happens. It was highly praised at all venues when touring Europe in 2009.

Leonard has also been touring with an all women ensemble of taiko players and tap dancers - contesting the martial, male and power based image of taiko performance with the excellence, fluidity and dancing play of the women.

2013 finds him combining these works into a bigger production called "Theater Blendrums" aiming to give more space to the creation of a high quality stage work of dance and taiko. A storyline is incorporated into his former live performances, bringing taiko, contemporary dance, tap dance, Western drums, guitar and digital sounds together.

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