



FIRST NIGHT REVIEW

# Concert: Yamato at Peacock Theatre, WC2

The exhilarating feel-good factor of this performance by flamboyant and bouncy musicians makes you want to join in

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March 17 2017, 12:01am,  
The Times

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★★★★☆

The 11-strong cast of this production by the Japanese company Yamato batter a gamut of taiko drums. The vicarious impact of their boundlessly energetic physical aggression is primal, exhilarating; you want to do it too.

Yamato hails from the village of Asuka in the Nara prefecture. Founded in 1993 by Masa Ogawa, the company has been seen by millions of people in more than 50 countries. Its members live and work communally and a sense of collective purpose permeates the stage. Clad in colourful, layered, neo-hippy-meets-samurai garb (by the fashion designer Kansai Yamamoto) and with several sporting flamboyant haircuts, these genially bouncy musicians sometimes seem like a gang of overgrown kids let loose in a ceremonial playground. They are there to show off their masterful skills, but they have fun too and let us in on it.

The show, entitled *The Challengers*, is quality commercial entertainment that sustains itself over two acts. I was surprised at how much variety Ogawa and his engaging cast provide. Measuring over 6ft in diameter, the biggest drum is a thunderingly deep monster but there are smaller ones of a lighter, sharper timbre. No matter what they play, the cast's sense of attack is usually full-bodied and full-on.

At one point, five men sit on the floor to straddle the largest drums, leaning back to whack these resonant beasts as if they were doing sit-ups. Drums, however, aren't the sole instrument. Four women embrace and handle banjo-like samisens in the ecstatic style of bona fide rock chicks, while a blatantly comic interlude for the men, who wield small, silvery-toned cymbals, has a goofy charm.

Throughout, the feel-good factor remains high.

**Box office: 020 7863 8222, to March 25, touring to May 1,**

[yamatodrummers.com/uk](http://yamatodrummers.com/uk)

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