

My Son, the Whirlwind

By Dennis Payton Knight

During that five-day period, he was the whirlwind. I went along for the ride and claim credit for being the windbag that kept him going.

Thomas Knight is already the definition of a whirlwind. He is a family man, a dad, a grandfather, and a son I can be proud of. He is a chef and business man supervising a large area of the country for a national company in the sushi business. In addition, he is a natural singer who feels at home on the stage, and, for the story at hand, a crazy-good taiko drummer. The Japanese art of taiko itself is a performance whirlwind.

Thomas told me weeks before that he had been asked to be part of a benefit concert in Washington D.C. For the show he would need his Odaiko, the biggest drum of them all, one built especially for him. The logistical problem was getting it there. Shipping it would be prohibitively expensive for the benefit organizers. I volunteered to help however I could.

The concert would be on a Saturday night. Thomas had a business commitment earlier in that same week and was booked to play the following Tuesday evening at Red Rocks as part of another group. That gave us a five-day window. He could rent a van large enough to carry the drum. It would be a whirlwind. I would go along mostly for support. Jehnie, his life partner, biggest fan, and a whirlwind of her own, would arrive by air in the wee hours Saturday morning.

First thing Saturday morning Thomas and I got the drum and its stand, some three-hundred pounds, to the venue and unloaded. He stayed behind to set it up, while Jehnie and I drove past the White House, then visited the Lincoln Memorial, seeing the Washington Monument from afar. Thomas joined us there, and, in a whirlwind, we saw the nation's capital, sort of. Then he returned to the venue to prepare for the concert.

Thomas has a first cousin who is a bass-baritone on the roster of the Metropolitan Opera Company, and he, too was on the program. They have complementary voices and the organizers invited them to do a duet. With little opportunity to rehearse, they sang "You'll Never Walk Alone" from *Carousel*. It was the first time they had ever performed together, and it was outstanding.

But the evening's climax was the taiko solo Thomas simply calls Odaiko. It isn't written down, but a new creation every time he does it, spontaneous, gentle, powerful, and passionate.

The show was over. We got Jehnie back to the airport a few hours later, and Thomas and I, the van and the drum made it back to Denver late Monday afternoon, right on time.

How do you tell someone about taiko? You must be there to see it, to hear it, and to feel it in the seat of your pants. It defies description, like a whirlwind.