

Carolyn Brandy, Janet Koike and Tina (Bean) Blaine are three stunning artists who combine the art and cultural history of Japanese Taiko drumming with Middle Eastern, African and Afro-Cuban percussion to create a performance and teaching experience for young people.

The teenagers at Marin Juvenile Hall approached them with their social masks in place, faces impassive, arms folded, heads slightly bent, looking up from under skeptical brows. The distance between audience and performer was shattered immediately by the powerful drumming and compelling personalities of these three women who, between them, have 70 years of musicianship.

By the second number and after the introduction of the dozens of instruments, many handmade, adorning the performance area, bodies were upright, faces and mouths open, even a hand raised to ask "How long did it take you to make that?"

When the time came to ask for participants to come up from the audience, more than half the group volunteered to create a polyrhythmic number all their own. The institutional staff broke out the polaroid cameras to take commemorative pictures for the teens to keep. By the final number which features Janet Koike playing the taiko drums while she jumps, spins and tosses the taiko sticks, there was no reserve, only mutual appreciation.

Carole Robinson
Program Coordinator
Bread & Roses

Photos by Amy Carr