

## ***Dora* Gongs**

*Dora* are small metal gongs mainly used in tea ceremony (*chanoyu*). They are made with an alloy called *sahari*, a carefully calibrated mixture of copper, tin, lead, and silver. The balance of these metals is key to producing a *dora*'s distinctive resonance, while the size and thickness of an individual gong determine its pitch and timbre.

Gongs made of various metals were brought to Japan via mainland Asia, possibly originating with percussion instruments from the southern islands of Java and Sumatra. Originally, they were used as musical instruments in the performing arts and to signal events like military maneuvers and ship departures. As tea gatherings developed into a social and aesthetic practice in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, *dora* gongs were incorporated as a means for the host to signal to participants that it was time to enter the tea room. The low, long-lasting reverberations were intended to set a suitably meditative tone for the gathering. Even today, *dora* remain essential implements in all modern schools of tea.

*Dora* are cast using a lost-wax method. First, a base form is crafted using a mixture of clay and rice chaff. When this base form is fired, the chaff turns to ash, creating small holes that will allow gas to escape during the casting. The still-hot base is then covered with layer upon layer of *mane*, a blend of clay and sand, which can be shaped and smoothed with a wooden template into the desired gong shape. Once dried, the *mane* can be further carved or scraped to add texture and ornamentation, although this will also affect the tone of the finished gong. Together, the base and *mane* layers create the bottom half of the casting mold. A layer of wax is pressed into the sculpted depression, and a clay-and-rice-chaff top completes the mold. When the entire construction is heated, the wax layer drains out, creating a gong-shaped hollow in which to pour the molten *sahari* alloy.

Once cooled for about an hour, the mold is carefully chipped away to reveal the gong within. The artisan will finish the piece with polishing and sometimes hammering. The completed *dora* is then hung in a wooden frame.

The making of *dora* gongs was designated an Important Intangible Cultural Heritage in 1955. That same year, Ishikawa native Uozumi Iraku I (1886–1964) was designated a holder of Important Intangible Cultural Heritage for his skill at making *dora*. In 2002,

his grandson Uozumi Iraku III (1937–) was also designated a holder of the technique. The Ishikawa Prefectural Museum of Art collection includes *dora* and other metalworks produced by the Uozumi family.