

CREATIVE LICENSE AMBASSADORS

Written by
Johanna Hickle

Illustrations by
Ben Henderson

Photography by
Daniel Garcia

sanjoseculture.org

Social Media
[sjculture](#)

To be human is to be creative. It's as intrinsic as blinking. Many confine this word to the work of paid artists—but creativity isn't merely wielding a paintbrush or crooning a melody. Creativity can be as simple an act as inventing an engaging icebreaker or spinning an elaborate bedtime story.

Recognizing art's role in everyday life, the San Jose Office of Cultural Affairs has formed the Creative License Ambassador program to celebrate and promote everyday creativity. The ambassadors selected for the program's first year are Corinne Okada Takara of Okada Design, Franco Imperial of San Jose Taiko, Barbara Day Turner of the San Jose Chamber Orchestra, and Rodrigo García of Teatro Visión.

Each artist holds a deep appreciation for projects that dialogue with the community. "It's not the artist's voice," Takara enthuses. "It's really trying to tease out the voice of the public and getting people confident with their creative voices." Similarly, García expresses a desire to "help shed light on creative activities that we don't regard as being an art form" (like carefully crafted tacos from a street vendor or hand-embroidered clothes at the Mexican market).

An application of San Jose-specific creativity wouldn't be complete without addressing our city's ethnic diversity and encouraging cross-cultural connections. "[There's a] ripple effect that happens beyond the borders of our community," Imperial says of cultural celebration. "It's what we share. It's our gift to the world." Maestra Turner adds, "It is a platform from which to encourage the inclusion of artistic and musical expression of all sorts, for all members of the community."

So here's to activating our community's creativity, to crossing new cultural bridges, and to celebrating unassuming art forms.



CORINNE OKADA TAKARA | FRANCO IMPERIA L | RODRIGO GARCÍA | BARBARA DAY TURNER

CORINNE OKADA TAKARA

Artist and Arts Educator


Fall 2018

okadadesign.com



**“I think it’s important we play together
in our public spaces.”**

A mixed-media artist and the first Creative License Ambassador in the program’s pilot year, Corinne Okada Takara composes technology-integrated projects and crafts sculptural work out of elegant yet mundane materials, like silk, food wrappers, newspapers, and plastic produce netting. “The sculptures explore the pulling apart and reassembling of modern-day artifacts,” she explains on her website, Okada Design. “I am fascinated by the resulting textures and colliding and merging stories.” Increasingly, this creative has found her art extending beyond self-expression and toward interactive engagement. Her workshops for museums, libraries, and classrooms act as a bridge ushering others into the realm of creativity. She describes her job as “giving people a canvas to work on,” adding that it equips them with “confidence in their own creative voices.”

Takara’s project, Layers of SJ, revolved around stickers—a medium she finds both “playful and inviting.” Each sticker contained an image of an artifact representing the San Jose community, past and present, and the public was encouraged to incorporate these into collages. Though Takara gathered a number of images from library and museum collections, as well as with her camera, she also enlisted community involvement by welcoming anyone to submit pictures. The Layers of SJ booth sparked conversations between strangers who couldn’t help discussing (or puzzling) over images, swapping stories, or pondering possibilities for symbolic objects from their own neighborhoods. “I think it’s important we play together in our public spaces,” Takara shares. 



FRANCO IMPERIAL

Artistic Director
of San José Taiko
Winter 2019

taiko.org

“We can help people understand (or own up to) the fact that we are all artists.”

Like most taiko drummers, Franco Imperial knew he wanted to learn this enchanting blend of music, dance, and martial arts after attending his first performance. His current position as artistic director of San Jose Taiko allows him to direct, produce, compose, promote, and share the taiko spirit with the world. A ceaselessly curious soul, Imperial appreciates that taiko is less concerned with knowing the answer (or final product) and more focused on “the journey and the people you meet along the way.” He enjoys considering new ways to extend the artform beyond festival or theater settings. One such opportunity was *Inspiration by Discovery*, an exploration of how composing the music and action of taiko might be inspired by San Jose-specific locations such as Circle of Palms Plaza or San Jose City Hall. The project was so well-received, viewers contributed their own location suggestions for future performances.

Imperial’s project will be built on the previous “Japantown Immersive,” an open-street celebration partnering San Jose Taiko with the Japantown community to share the area’s art and culture. Among the participatory experiences at the last event were learning dance moves combining taiko and swing music, playing Hanafuda, a classic Japanese card game, capturing photo booth pictures in traditional kimonos, and creating LED *uchiwa* fans. “We can help people understand (or own up to) the fact that we are all artists,” Imperial says. “I see my job as outing artists where and whenever possible.” Another hope is that participants will join him as fellow ambassadors of his beloved Japantown. “It belongs to all of us,” he insists. 📍



BARBARA DAY TURNER

Founder and Music
Director of the
San Jose Chamber
Orchestra

Spring 2019

sjco.org

“Art should be a part of everyday life for everyone in whatever form they choose.”

Nearly three decades ago, Barbara Day Turner opened her newspaper to find an announcement about her new chamber orchestra. The problem was, she hadn't founded one yet. When she called the columnist, he told her plenty of local musicians were interested in expanding their options—and he thought she could use a little push starting the administrative process. Today, Maestra Turner has grown the San Jose Chamber Orchestra to a series of seven-plus programs per season as well as premiered over 170 works. She continues to be fascinated with exploring “this alternate way to express oneself without necessarily using words.” Her other conducting experience includes 18 years at Opera San Jose as well as numerous guest opportunities in the States and abroad. She is also a harpsichordist. “I was intrigued with how you learned to interpret music when you didn't have the complete range of expression that later instruments had,” she explains.

Maestra Turner has yet to finalize the specifics of her project, but she knows the main takeaways she wants it to inspire: “that everybody is a creative being, that in their lives they have ways they use creativity to express themselves, and that art should be a part of everyday life for everyone in whatever form they choose.” She understands that performing in communal spaces is more than fun—it's also beneficial for mental and physical health as well as an opportunity for connection. “I would really like to urge people to get out the instruments that are sitting in their closets that they haven't played or to go join some kind of choir,” she explains. 📍



RODRIGO GARCÍA

Artistic Director
of Teatro Visión
Summer 2019

teatrovision.org

“We need to have spaces where we’re able to hear each other.”

As a boy, Rodrigo García was told that performing arts made a good hobby, not a career. This assumption was flipped on its head, however, after he moved from Mexico City to the States and encountered Teatro Visión, a theater that inspires, empowers, and dignifies Latino voices while also exploring the social and psychological experiences of Latinos. As its current artistic director, García oversees the development of works performed by the theater, including original pieces developed with community feedback, and ensures that artistic excellence is brought to the stage. He is captivated by the directing process—of taking a plain paper script and raising the words off the page. “Little by little, I start imagining the possibilities, the color, the forms, the movement,” he explains, using words like “magical” and “spiritual” to describe the end product.

García’s project—focusing on theater, possibly expanding into spoken word, music, and dance—is still in its developmental stage, but he knows it will allow LGBTQ artists of color the opportunity to share through performance. He doesn’t necessarily expect viewers to agree with voices different than their own, but he does hope it will result in deeper compassion for other points of view. “We need to have spaces where we’re able to hear each other,” he observes, “where we’re able to share our stories to create mutual understanding.” Not only does this honor the ambassadorship, but it exemplifies Teatro Visión as a place seeking to replace passive contemplation with “sparkling conversations between people.”