

## Matsuri Season

Summer has arrived in Japan and it brings with it more than just humidity and blazing heat. This time of year is filled with many festivals, also known as 祭り (matsuri). It is a time for celebration and relaxation. People of all ages dress in traditional Japanese summer wear, jinbei or yukata, and enjoy the festivities with friends and family. The sound of meat sizzling on the grill, ice being shaved and splashed with sweet syrup, and metal spatulas scraping the yakisoba griddle can be heard all around. Despite the crowd, people weave through the masses knowing exactly where to find their favorite yatai (food stall). While munching on their snacks, festival goers can see performances like the mikoshi (portable shrine) processions, yosakoi dance and taiko.

It is hard to miss groups of mikoshi bearers carrying portable shrines on their shoulders, swaying back and forth noisily through the neighborhood as they make their way to the main shrines. As people shuffle along the street, they can see Yosakoi dancers performing high energy moves to upbeat festival music in perfect synchronization. Not so far away, the strong beat of the taiko drum can be heard as the drummers' rhythms resonate through the festival streets.

We hope that this glimpse into Japanese summer life has been informative and delightful. Thank you for reading and we hope you are looking forward to our next issue.

-Victor Minh Nguyen  
4th Year YEF



YEFs attend the Yokkaichi Grand Fireworks Festival

From left to right: Monika Tayag, Victor Nguyen, Christine Leung, Charitarith Meas, Alexander Smith, Ana Lee, Lara Petersen, David Hayter

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### YEF Newsletter

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YEF  
Program

# Christarith Meas



**O**ur new Yokkaichi English Fellow (YEF), Christarith Meas, graduated from California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) in May 2016 at the age of 23. As a Long Beach native, he demonstrated an exceptional interest in the community. This dedication to creating bonds within the community inspired him to participate in the YEF Program through the Long Beach Yokkaichi Sister City Association (LBYSICA).

Christarith first decided that he wanted to come to Japan while attending Long Beach Polytechnic High School. He learned about the YEF Program from a high school friend who participated in the LBYSICA Trio Program, which started in 1965. The program allows for cultural exchanges of students and teachers between Long Beach and Yokkaichi.

After studying Japanese in high school, Christarith decided to study Linguistics at CSULB. His studies focused on Japanese language and culture. During college, he worked as an office assistant in Long Beach City Hall while volunteering as a teaching assistant for Signal Hill Elementary School. He also returned to his high school to tutor students in Japanese.

Christarith said that he is excited to work in Japan. While in Japan, he hopes to study traditional Japanese martial arts and travel throughout Japan. He especially wants to visit Osaka to taste the local foods and learn about the Kansai dialect which is popular in the region. We wish Christarith the best in his future with the YEF Program.

# Tristan Roberts



**T**his August, we welcomed Tristan Roberts to the YEF Program. He is a 27-year-old from Santa Barbara, California and came to Yokkaichi through the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme. He attended Pomona College, where he earned a BA in Philosophy with additional courses in Religious Studies and Russian. He also ran cross-country.

Tristan brings a wealth of teaching experience to the YEF Program. After graduating from college, Tristan decided to leave his comfort zone and move to Georgia, a country in Eastern Europe. Tristan worked there for one year as an English instructor in elementary schools before moving to neighboring Russia. He taught English in both Moscow and the provincial capital of Tver for the next two years, while studying Russian language and literature, before returning to the USA.

After returning to the United States, Tristan moved to Oakland, CA and completed an Emergency Medical Technician course. He then worked as a CPR instructor. From this experience, he rediscovered his passion for teaching and decided to apply for the JET Programme.

Tristan is thrilled to begin teaching in Japan. He is interested in studying Japanese and practicing Japanese grappling martial arts like judo and jiu-jitsu. Tristan wants to make the most of his time in Japan by hiking and sightseeing all over the country. When Tristan is not working, he enjoys running, cooking, reading Russian literature, listening to jazz and classical music, and meditating. We look forward to working with Tristan and learning from his prior teaching experiences.

## YEF Spotlight

# Alexander Ryoichi Smith



Nice to meet you!

Alexander Smith presents his Self Introduction lesson to the new YEFs.

Alexander Smith has worked hard in the YEF Program for the past three years. So far, he has taught at ten schools throughout the city of Yokkaichi. Outside of the classroom, he participates in many community activities including traditional Japanese drumming (taiko) and festival dancing (yosakoi). He performed taiko and yosakoi for the residents of the city at the annual Grand Yokkaichi Festival in August. His yosakoi team, Fordiesta, took first place in this year's competition.

The following is an interview with Alexander done just before the festival by Christine Leung, a third-year YEF, about his involvement in taiko and yosakoi:

**C: How long have you practiced taiko? What made you want to get into taiko?**

A: I've practiced taiko for about two years. I decided to try out taiko to experience Japanese culture. I prefer interactive things rather than looking at or just reading about something. It's also fast-paced. I prefer things with rhythm and music.

**C: What's the most challenging aspect of practicing taiko for you?**

A: The most challenging aspect of taiko is the posture. When I perform, I have to be in a squatting position and it's tough on my legs. Performances can range anywhere from 15 minutes to 2 hours so it's a good workout.

**C: What's your most enjoyable memory of playing taiko so far?**

A: I would have to say being able to engage with people that I practice taiko with. It's been fun getting to know them. I also enjoy the sense of accomplishment I get when I can perform a song well..



Dance time!

Alexander Smith gets ready for the Yokkaichi Yosakoi Competition.

**C: So, let's change the subject. How long have you practiced yosakoi dancing? Why did you start?**

A: I started yosakoi a few months ago because I wanted to understand Japanese culture. This was my third year living in Yokkaichi and each year they have a massive festival where many yosakoi teams dance in a competition for a few hours. I thought it was interesting and wanted to try it. Also, many of my co-workers have been on the team in the past, so I have been invited before.

**C: How are practices going so far?**

A: I am busy with teaching responsibilities, so my practice time has been very limited. But, overall I think I am prepared for the performance.

**C: What's the most challenging aspect of practicing yosakoi for you? Do you have any final comments?**

A: I'm big, so I have to make sure my steps are smaller so I stay in formation. It can be a little stressful to make the practices and remember the moves, but I've really enjoyed it so far. I like moving to the music and I think yosakoi is a strong expression of Japanese unity.



Taiko time!

Alexander Smith performs at the Yokkaichi Festival.

## Summertime Fun



Second Year YEF **Anthony Matthews** goes for a dive with tropical fish in Okinawa.



Kuwana Fireworks Festival

**“Fireworks in the sky  
Cicadas singing aloud  
What fun summer nights!”**

**-Lara Petersen  
3rd Year YEF**



Fourth Year YEF **Amy Lin** poses for a picture after reaching the summit of Mt. Senjougatake.



YEFs and friends get ready to enjoy The Yokkaichi Grand Fireworks Festival.



Mikoshi (portable shrine) bearers parade through the main street of downtown Yokkaichi.



Locals perform a traditional dance at the Hinaga Obon Dance Festival.