

Fri 13 May 2016
Hall One 7.30pm

YUGEN

the mysterious
elegance of
classical Noh



Yoshimasa Kanze
shite main role actor

Masaki Umano
shite main role actor

Yukihiro Issa
nohkan flute

Mitsuhiro Kakihara
otsuzumi hip drum

Tatsushi Narita
kotsuzumi shoulder drum

Kiyoshi Yoshitani
taiko stick drum

Richard Emmert
noh specialist

INTRODUCTION

Japanese classical noh theatre has a traditional repertory of some 240 plays which can take anywhere from 40 mins to over two hours to perform in their entirety. These plays usually feature two to five or more characters, a chorus of six to eight, two or three stage attendants and either three or four musicians.

Our programme this evening features an ensemble of six performing parts of instrumental and dance sections from several of the more popular plays in the classical repertory, as well as a new piece written for the *hayashi* instrumental ensemble.

Yugen is a Japanese aesthetic concept developed in medieval Japanese poetry which came to be widely used in noh drama. It suggests a mysterious profundity as well as hidden grace and subtle beauty.

Notes for each of the pieces follow in their order of performance.

THE PROGRAMME & NOTES

PART I

Sanbaso (Music from the ritual piece *Okina*)

Okina is a highly refined Shinto religious rite that prays for peace and prosperity. In the Edo period (1603-1868) when noh was the official performing art of the warrior class, *Okina* was traditionally performed at the beginning of a full day's noh programme. Today, it is commonly performed at the beginning of the first performances of the new year or on other special occasions. *Sanbaso* features two pieces from the second half of *Okina* which in a full performance would be danced by *kyogen* performers: *Momi-no-dan* (suggests massaging or tilling the earth) and *Suzu-no-dan* (suggests planting and harvesting of rice).

Netori (Music for *nohkan* flute)

This is a *nohkan* solo which takes on various forms in different plays. Well-known examples of *Netori* are the variant performance from the play *Kiyotsune* which is used as a special entrance for the spirit of the dead warrior, or the use of *Netori* to bridge the end of the ritual piece *Okina* to a first category god play piece such as *Takasago*.

Tenko (Dance and Music from the play *Tenko*)

Tenko is a story from ancient China about a young boy named Tenko, literally 'heaven's drum,' who possessed a drum that had miraculously fallen down from heaven. Rumours of the magnificent drum reached the ears of the emperor who ordered the drum be brought to him. The boy refused to give it up and fled, but was finally captured and punished by drowning. The drum was given to the emperor, but strangely no one in the imperial court could make it sound. In the play, an envoy from the emperor goes to the boy's father and orders him to come the imperial court to strike the drum. When the father does so, a most beautiful sound is heard, and the emperor decides to hold a memorial service for the boy. The spirit of the boy then appears and dances. The performance here will be the last part of the play where the boy's spirit dances. It features an instrumental dance called *gaku* which suggests the *gagaku* court music of ancient China. The final song is first sung in *tsuyogin* dynamic style, but then midway switches to *yowagin* melodic style.

Dance: Yoshimasa Kanze Chant: Masaki Umano

Shishi (Music from 'The Lion Dance' of the play *Shakkyo*)

Shakkyo is a play about a priest who has journeyed to China. Arriving deep in the mountains, he comes to a narrow stone bridge (*shakkyo*) over a deep ravine. The bridge is said to lead to the Pure Land of Buddha. The priest intends to cross the bridge but a young boy stops him and says it is extremely difficult for humans to cross. After relating various stories about the bridge, the boy disappears and a guardian lion (*shishi*—an imaginary lion-like animal, the attendant of the bodhisattva of wisdom) appears and dances an auspicious dance among the beautifully blooming peonies. The dance is very powerful musically, and featuring the drum calls of the three drummers, is often performed by instrumentalists without a dancer.

PART II

Mai-iri Dojoji (Dance from *Dojoji*)

This is an arrangement based on the well-known play *Dojoji* (The Dojo Temple) that deals with the legend of the jealous spirit of a woman wronged by a priest of the temple. Featured here is the powerful drum calls of first the *otsuzumi* then *kotsuzumi* in the *ranbyoshi* 'confused steps' dance, followed by the very quick *kyu-no-mai* dance. In the dance section, the *nohkan* flute plays a four-phrase repeating pattern, with each phrase being eight beats long. In the full play, this section would end the first half of the play with the main actor jumping into a large temple bell.

Dance: Masaki Umano Chant: Yoshimasa Kanze

Bibyon ('Beauty Sickness', a new piece by Yukihiro Issa)

Composed and revised between 1987-1989, this piece reflects on how beauty often has a magical power to distract and confuse. It is meant to suggest someone who has been driven crazy due to being afflicted by the sickness of beauty. Noh traditionally is based on eight-beat phrases, but this piece is based on seven-beat phrases that become looped together in a form reminiscent of traditional noh musical forms.

Dance: Yoshimasa Kanze, Masaki Umano

Utaura ('Poem Divination', chant and *otsuzumi* drumming from the play *Utaura*)

This is a story about a fortuneteller-priest who is travelling the countryside telling fortunes using poems. He is approached by a man who is accompanied by a young boy. After a series of poems that the fortuneteller divines, the boy reveals that he is searching for his father. The boy tells the fortuneteller his father's name and they realize that in fact the fortuneteller himself is the boy's long separated father. They are thus reunited. The man now requests the priest to dance the 'hell dance' which the priest realizes will make him become possessed. The priest agrees to do so, and the dance builds as the priest becomes possessed. Finally, at the end of his possession, the dance slows. Here the chant to the final section of the play is presented in which the anguish and torment of hell is presented. Finally, the priest is free from his torment. The chant and *otsuzumi* drum combine for this special abbreviated style of performance.

Chant: Yoshimasa Kanze

continued overleaf...

THE PROGRAMME & NOTES (continued)

Toru (Music and Dance from the play *Toru*)

In the play *Toru*, an old man appears who tells the story of Lord Toru who long ago built a replica of a famous saltwater bay near his home, but after his death, his home and beloved bay both fell into disrepair. The old man reveals that he in fact is the ghost of Lord Toru, and in the second half appears dressed in his own special elegant costume. The last part of the play is presented here in which the ghost of Lord Toru dances in the moonlight from across the bay as he recalls his beautiful home with its replica of the famous saltwater bay. The *hayashi* ensemble performs a *banshiki hayamai* piece in which the flute pitch is raised in the second part of the dance.

Dance: **Masaki Umamo** Chant: **Yoshimasa Kanze**

[Programme notes by Richard Emmert]

[Photos provided by Yoshimasa Kanze]

PERFORMERS

Yoshimasa Kanze (*shite* main role actor)

A prominent actor of the Kanze school (one of the five schools of main role actors), Yoshimasa was born in 1970 in Tokyo, the eldest son of Yoshiyuki Kanze, the third-generation master of the Yara Kanze school of noh. Yoshimasa first performed on stage at the age of two, performed in his first full noh at the age of five, and as an adult has performed the main roles in numerous plays including *Sagi*, *Midare*, *Shakkyo* and *Sotoba Komachi*. Yoshimasa teaches in both Hosei University and Kogakkan University, as well as at the Practice Performing Arts School in Singapore. A graduate of Keio University, he has been designated an Important Intangible Cultural Asset by the Japanese government.

Masaki Umamo (*shite* main role actor)

Born in 1965 in Kyoto, Masaki Umamo is a prominent actor of the Tessenkai group of the Kanze school. Umamo first performed on stage at the age of three and performed his first noh at the age of seven. He has performed the lead *shite* role in numerous plays including *Midare*, *Shakkyo*, *Dojoji* and *Mochizuki*. A graduate of Tokyo University of Arts, he has performed with the Tessenkai in Germany, Ireland, United States, France, Poland and Greece. Umamo has been designated an Important Intangible Cultural Asset by the Japanese government.

Yukihiro Isso (*nohkan* flute)

Yukihiro is the eldest son of the late Yukimasa Isso, a prominent nohkan performer of the post-war era. Yukihiro debuted at the age of nine and has since performed in most of the plays in the classical repertory. Yukihiro also plays a variety Japanese and Western flutes, and has a deserved reputation for improvisation having performed with the likes of Cecil Taylor, Peter Brötzmann, John Zorn, as well as numerous Japanese musicians from non-noh genres. In addition, he has composed new pieces for the noh *hayashi* ensemble, several of which will be performed in the Kings' Place performances. Yukihiro has been designated an Important Intangible Cultural Asset by the Japanese government. (<http://issoyukihiro.com/>)

Mitsuhiro Kakiyama (*otsuzumi* hip drum)

Born in 1972, Mitsuhiro studied the *otsuzumi* from his father, Takashi Kakiyama, a prominent post-war noh performer of the Takayasu school of

drumming. Mitsuhiro first performed on stage at the age of seven. Today, he performs regularly in the Tokyo area and is passionate about training the younger generation of noh performers. Mitsuhiro is a graduate of Tokyo University of Arts and has been designated an Important Intangible Cultural Asset by the Japanese government.

Tatsushi Narita (*kotsuzumi* shoulder drum)

Born in 1964 in Kobe, Tatsushi studied *kotsuzumi* under Living National Treasure Hiroaki Sowa of the Ko school of drumming. Based mainly in Osaka, he has performed almost all of the important noh repertory. Tatsushi is passionate about promoting *kotsuzumi* to new audiences and has adopted innovative approaches to teaching and performing the *kotsuzumi*. He has frequently performed overseas, notably at the Metropolitan Museum, NY, the Athens Festival in Greece, and at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam. He has been designated an Important Intangible Cultural Asset by the Japanese government.

Kiyoshi Yoshitani (*taiko* stick drum)

Kiyoshi started performing *taiko* at the age of 11 as an apprentice to Soemon Komparu, the 22nd head of the Komparu school of drumming. Since 1995, Kiyoshi has performed professionally throughout Japan. Based in Fukuoka, he has taught noh to and collaborated with various musicians in Okinawa in southern Japan. He has frequently performed abroad, first performing in New York at the age of 20, and most recently in Sydney, Australia in a performance of English noh. He has been designated an Important Intangible Cultural Asset by the Japanese government.

Richard Emmert (noh teacher-performer, founder of Theatre Nohgaku)

Richard is a professor of Asian performance at Musashino University in Tokyo, a certified Kita school noh instructor, and the founder and director of Theatre Nohgaku, a company dedicated to performing noh in English. Richard directs the on-going Noh Training Project Tokyo and a summer intensive Noh Training Project UK at Royal Holloway, University of London. He has authored a series of books on noh for Tokyo's National Noh Theatre. Richard has directed noh projects throughout the world, has composed, directed, and performed in numerous English language noh plays, and has led performance tours of Theatre Nohgaku in the United States, Europe and Asia. (<http://www.theatrenohgaku.org/>) (<http://nohtrainingprojectuk.org/>)

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NOH REIMAGINED

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classical Japanese theatre

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90 York Way
London
N1 9AG
020 7520 1490

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