

Fri 29 Jun 2018
Hall One 7.30pm

The Sublime Illusions of Mugen Noh

Masaki Umano
shite main role actor

Jiichi Asami
Jitai chant

Yukihiro Isso
nohkan flute

Mitsuhiro Kakihara
otsuzumi hip drum

Kyosuke Tanabe
kotsuzimi shoulder drum

Kiyoshi Yoshitani
taiko stick drum

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 a *shite* actor, solo chant and four Noh musicians performing some of the finest instrumental and dance sections from the classical Noh repertoires, as well as highlight from the masterpiece of Mugen Noh, *Izutsu* ('The Well Curb') by Zeami which is drawn from the tenth-century 'Tale of Ise' (*Ise monogatari*), Lady Izutsu who was waiting for her adulterous husband to return home, appears as a ghost on the stage, wearing her husband's garment, and looks into the old well, searching for his reflection in the water.

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

THE PROGRAMME & NOTES

PART I

Sanbaso: Suzu-no-dan (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).

Ranbyoshi Kyu-no-mai (Dance Music from *Dōjōji*)

This is an arrangement based on the well-known play *Dōjōji* (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.

Itchō Kakitsubata

Itchō Kakitsubata refers to a special recital performance of a section of a noh play by one singer and one drummer. Here, the drummer will be the *taiko* stick drum. The scene being sung is from the play *Kakitsubata*, The Iris, in which a traveling priest visits Yatsushashi, known for a poem by classical poet Ariwara no Narihira who wrote about its beautiful irises which are now in bloom. A woman appears to the priest and reveals herself to be the spirit of the irises and dances recalling Narihira's visit. The scene sung here is the very last segment of the play.

Chant: Jiichi Asami

Sagariha

Sagariha is a kind of processional entrance music, usually used in the second half of a piece for a dignified character or group of characters. Performed by all four instruments, the melody is the noh version of *gagaku* orchestral music used in the imperial court.

In noh, it is generally used in a play featuring a story based in China. The flute melody is matched with the drum rhythms.

Bibyōn 'Haunting Beauty' (by Yukohiro Issō)

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.

INTERVAL – 20 MINUTES

PART II

Sokuryutekiha

Composed by Yukihiro Issō in 1980's, this piece suggests the entrance of an evil or vengeful spirit that dances wildly. While classical Noh features instrumental rhythms based on eight-beat phrases, here Issō varies the rhythmic structure which gives the piece a unique liveliness and power.

Han-noh Izutsu

A *han-noh* means literally 'half-noh' in which the second part of a play is performed in full costume by itself without the first part of the play. The play performed here is *Izutsu*, 'The Well Curb', which features the ghost of the wife of the classical poet Ariwara no Narihira, also mentioned in *Kakitsubata* above. In the story, she tells of her difficult relationship with Narihira, from them playing together as children by the well curb. The second half features the dance of the spirit wearing the robes of Narihira. The climax of the piece comes when she looks at her reflection in the well and thinks she is seeing Narihira.

Izutsu is in the style of a *mugen* play where the character of the second half is in fact the spirit of someone from this place from long ago. The term *mugen* suggests 'dream' and the second half of such a play suggest that the travelling monk performed by *waki* (secondary actor) is actually seeing the character in a dream.

Dance: Masaki Umano Chant: Jiichi Asami
Narration: Laura Sampson

Programme note and translation by Professor Richard Emmert / Akiko Yanagisawa

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PERFORMERS

Masaki Umano (*shite* main role actor)

Born in 1965 in Kyoto, Masaki Umano is a prominent actor of the Tessenkai group of the Kanze school. Umano 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. Umano has been designated an Important Intangible Cultural Asset by the Japanese government.

Jiichi Asami (chant)

Jiichi is a renowned Noh actor of the Kanze School. He studied under his father, Masataka Asami, and the late Tetsunojo Kanze VIII. He is active in overseas performances, new and revived Noh works, and collaborations with other arts forms including films. He has a performance base in Yoyogi Noh theatre, the only outdoor Noh theatre in Tokyo. He 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. issoyukihiro.com

Kyosuke Tanabe (*kotsuzumi* shoulder drum)

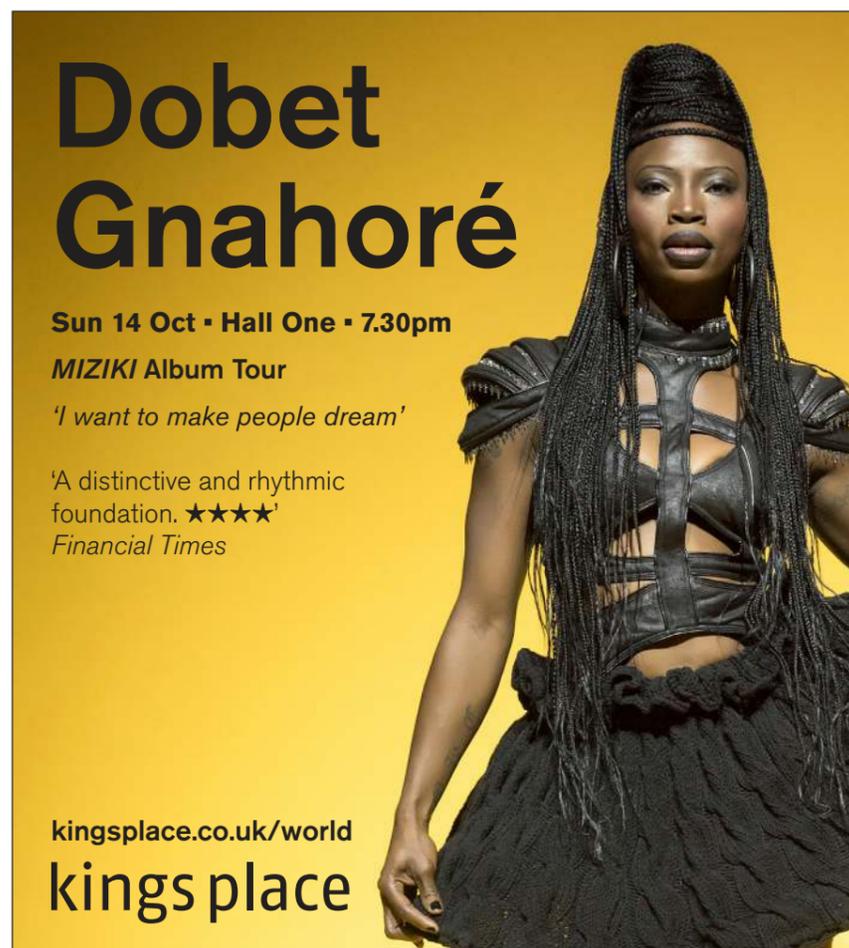
Born in Nigata city in 1980, Kyosuke is acclaimed as a highly talented young Kotsuzumi player. He was trained in the National Noh Theatre and studies under Genjiro Okura, the Grand Master of the Okura School of Kotsuzumi. Tanabe has performed major pieces including *Ran*, *Okina*, *Dojoji*, and *Shishi*.

Mitsuhiro Kakahara (*otsuzumi* hip drum)

Born in 1972, Mitsuhiro studied the *otsuzumi* from his father, Takashi Kakahara, 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.

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.



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Noh Reimagined
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90 York Way
London
N1 9AG
020 7520 1490

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