

Biographies

Kanji Shimizu

(shite actor, Kanze School) is one of the most sought-after noh actors today. Born in 1953, he started noh training after graduating Waseda University. In 2019, performances of *Holly Mother in Nagasaki* written by a renowned scientist Tomio Tada and *Jacob's Well* written by a renowned Austrian art historian Diethard Leopold, were held in three cities across Europe.

Shimizu actively engages in interdisciplinary collaborations, including productions with contemporary theatre and dance, as well as joint performances with other traditional performing arts such as Okinawa's *Kumi Odori* and China's *Kunqu*.

In 2024, he was awarded the prestigious Kanze Hisao Award for his outstanding contributions to the development of noh theatre tradition. Shimizu is designated as an Important Intangible Cultural Property by the Japanese government.

Aidan O'Rourke

is a fiddle player, composer, curator, teacher and a leading figure in contemporary folk music. Raised in an Irish family in Argyll, he learned fiddle in the West Highland style and is known for pushing the boundaries of Scottish and Irish traditions. He co-founded the trailblazing trio Lau in 2006, winners of four BBC Folk Awards.

Over four decades, he has played with groups including Blazin' Fiddles, Atlantic Arc, and Kan, and collaborated with musicians like Kit Downes, Brighde Chaimbeul, and Sean Shibe. Aidan was named Musician of the Year at the 2014 BBC Folk Awards. His solo albums include *Sirius*, *365*, and *Iorram*, the latter being the score for the first Gaelic feature documentary.

As a composer, he has written for major ensembles and festivals across the UK and beyond. His ambitious project *365*—a tune written each day for a year—was widely acclaimed. In 2022, he curated *A Great Disordered Heart* for the Edinburgh International Festival, which included his film collaboration *The Ballad of a Great Disordered Heart*. In 2024, Aidan wrote *Qullaq*, the opening work for Nordic Music Days, Glasgow. It is scored for fiddle, Unuit musicians and Scottish Ensemble. That same year he was guest curator at Kings Place in London and received a Paul Hamlyn Award for Artists.

Brighde Chaimbeul (Breech-huh Campbell)

is a leading purveyor of celtic experimentalism and master of the Scottish smallpipes; a bellows-blown, mellower cousin to the famous Highland bagpipes. A native Gaelic speaker, Brighde roots her music in her language and culture. She rose to prominence as a prodigy of traditional music, but has since begun a journey to take the smallpipes into uncharted territory. She has devised a unique way of arranging for pipe music that emphasises the rich textural drones of the instrument; the constancy of sound that creates a trance-like atmosphere, played with enticing virtuosic liquidity. She draws inspiration from the world of interconnected piping traditions; her most recent album brings in influence from ambient, avant garde and electronic music.

Her mesmerising musicianship has won her many awards and media recognition, including BBC Young Folk Award, BBC Horizon Award, SAY Award nomination and a wide array of collaborators include Caroline Polachek, Colin Stetson, Gruff Rhys, Radie Peat.

Brighde's smallpipes are made by renowned makers Fin Moore and Hamish Moore.

Biographies

Kathleen Jamie

is a poet and essayist. Her poetry collections include *The Overhaul*, which won the 2012 Costa Poetry Prize, and *The Tree House*, which won the Forward prize.

Her non-fiction essays are collected in the three highly regarded books: *Findings*, *Sightlines*, and *Surfacing*, all regarded as important contributions to the 'new nature writing'. In 2024 she published *Cairn* – 'a view from the strange here-and-now', and *The Keelie Hawk*, a collection of poems in Scots.

Between 2010-20 Kathleen was Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Stirling, and from 2021-24 she served as Scotland's Makar, or National Poet. Kathleen's interests include archaeology, nature and environment, travel and art.

Gareth Matthey

is a writer, director, dramaturg, and translator, originally from the Wirral. A graduate of Cambridge University, Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, their work explores the cross cultural and queer potential of contemporary music theatre.

Recent and upcoming work includes *crypt_* (Munich Biennale, as librettist), *Theo in Between* (Carriageworks Theatre, BYMT, as bookwriter and lyricist), *Who is Molly Leigh?* (B Arts, as writer and co-director), *You Should (Should!) Be Dancing!* (REMIX Ensemble, Casa da Música in Porto, Portugal, as librettist – work awarded 2025 ISCM Young Composer Award), *Beauty and the Beast* (Jermyn Street Theatre, Foreign Affairs Theatre Translator Mentorship, as translator), *A Tale of the Sumida River / Sumidagawa* (Aldeburgh Festival, *Noh Reimagined* Festival, as co-writer) and many others.

Acknowledgements



Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan



Noh Reimagined 2025 is curated and produced by Akiko Yanagisawa, supported by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation with the cooperation of TESSENKAI Public Interest Incorporated Association



For years, *Noh Reimagined* has connected cultures, inspired creativity, and brought the timeless art of Noh to audiences across the UK and beyond. But now, the funding landscape poses a real risk to interrupting these groundbreaking events.



If you attended a Noh event at Kings Place and would like to find out how you can help these events continue to inspire, scan the black QR code to visit the crowdfunder campaign.

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(image) Gan Gokuraku

Matsukaze & Song of Rona Island

A classical masterpiece & the world premiere of a new work

Sat 29 Nov 2025
Hall One 7.30pm



KINGS PLACE

kingsplace.co.uk

Performers

MATSUKAZE:

Kanji Shimizu (Kanze School) *shite*

Takao Nishimura (Kanze School) *jiutai* (chorus)

Haruhiko Hasegawa (Kanze School) *jiutai* (chorus)

Satoshi Tsukitaku (Morita School) *nohkan* (Noh flute)

Naoya Toriyama (Kanze School) *kotsuzumi* (small hand drum)

Mitsuhiro Kakihara (Takayasu School) *otsuzumi* (large hand drum)

SONG OF RONA ISLAND:

also featuring the Noh performers from Matsukaze

Aidan O'Rourke fiddle (traveler)

Brighde Chaimbeul Scottish smallpipes

Kathleen Jamie author

Gareth Matthey dramaturg

Akiko Yanagisawa director/producer

Programme

Matsukaze 45'
by Zeami Motokiyo (c. 1363–1443)

INTERVAL 20 minutes

Song of Rona Island 45'
(a collaborative work inspired by Kathleen Jamie's essay *On Rona*)

Programme Notes

The noh plays written by Zeami (c.1363 – c.1443) had quite a different focus than those of Zenchiku, his son-in-law and the author of *Bashō*, the other play in this year's season. Zeami's company was based in Kyoto and had to compete with other noh troupes – and other types of entertainment – for patronage and audiences, so for him maintaining a competitive edge and playing to the crowd was much more important than the spiritual awakening through art practiced by Zenchiku. Zeami's plays are notable for their nuanced portrayals of the complexities of human psychology.

Matsukaze, which Zeami reworked from several sources (including a version by his father, Kan'ami 1333–84), is thus a very different play from Zenchiku's *Bashō*. It is a story of lost love with a satisfying emotional arc. This is mirrored by a dramatic musical climax which is quite different from the almost modernist state of unresolved musical tension that Zenchiku leaves his characters and audiences in. But the plays also have their similarities, including their focus on particular trees (plantain and pine), the moon, delusion, and gender play.

Programme Notes

Matsukaze begins with a monk arriving on the shores of Suma Bay (in present-day Kobe) and noticing a prominent pine tree. He learns from a villager that the tree memorialises two young sisters – named Matsukaze (Wind in the Pines) and Murasame (Rain Shower) – who worked salt-makers and had been lovers of the exiled aristocrat and poet Ariwara no Yukihira (818 – 893). Two salt-makers enter and sing of the difficulties of their trade, before the monk approaches them to ask for lodging. They soon identify themselves as the spirits of the sisters Matsukaze and Murasame, still in love with and longing for Yukihira. Yukihira's cloak and hat remain in their possession, and Matsukaze puts them on. Wearing her lover's clothes, she becomes convinced, despite her sister's protestations, that the pine tree on the shore is actually Yukihira. She dances an ecstatic dance for him, which is the climax of the play.

A Chinese Buddhist parable, well-known in mediaeval Japan, compares an unenlightened person's perspective of reality to thinking that the moon's reflection in water (whether it be water in a bucket or the sea) is the actual moon. (This is similar to Plato's allegory of the shadows on the wall of a cave.) Matsukaze, when she and her sister are introduced, uses this image several times: for example, she says that saltmakers 'scoop up the moon' from their buckets of brine, and that the sister's wagon of brine buckets is 'filled with the moon'. We know from this that it is Matsukaze (and not Murasame, who never in a solo utterance mentions the moon) who is deluded about the nature of reality. When the sisters reveal to the monk who they are and why their spirits remain on earth so many centuries after their deaths, it is Murasame who says that Yukihira has died, only for Matsukaze to interject that he may yet come again (the word *matsu* in Japanese means both the pine tree and waiting – in other words, to pine for someone or something).

This sets up the climax, where, driven to lunacy by her attachment to – obsessive love for – Yukihira and the place where they lived together, she dresses in his clothes and believes him to be a tree. Thus the play shows Matsukaze to be both deluded in the common way (not being enlightened to the truth of Buddhism) and also driven to obsessive delusion by romantic desire.

As in *Bashō*, we find at the climax a dramatisation of the idea that humans and plants are on a continuum, and the latter are not spiritually inferior – or even different – than the former. Matsukaze's delusion is not that human beings cannot manifest as trees, but in not accepting that Yukihira has left her. She clings to the totems of Yukihira's love – their three-year affair – even while acknowledging that they provide neither solace nor do they summon anything but memories. She puts them on as if that would bring her closer to him, just as she embraces the pine tree (*matsu*) which shares her name, not his. Does she believe that the pine tree is Yukihira, or perhaps that she has become Yukihira – that when she embraces the pine (*matsu*), Matsukaze-as-Yukihira is embracing Matsukaze? In noh, a product of ancient spiritual practices in dialogue with Indian Buddhism and Chinese art, all binaries and categories are ultimately transcended.

Matsukaze's final delusion is that the poem she believes was addressed to her, which the chorus sings in full while she dances the *chūnomai* – ending with the words 'if I hear that you are pining / I'll come right home' – was not written for her at all and references an entirely different part of the country. In fact, although Yukihira was a real person who really did write this poem, the story in *Matsukaze* has no known factual basis, and the two sisters are themselves completely fictional. Perhaps the entire play can be understood as a meditation on the difficulty of separating fact and fiction, delusion and reality, not just for the characters, but for audiences as well.

Programme Notes

Song of Rona Island

During my visits to the small Hebridean island of North Rona, what occupied my mind and my senses were the sky and sea, and the birds. I think, looking back, that some of the happiest moments of my life were spent on that island. Such a poignant place, well out in the Atlantic, sea on all sides, long abandoned by humans and left to the seals and birds. It was 'remote' but also on the front line, because aspects of climate change and rising ocean levels are played out in these places; the decline in sea-bird populations and the increase in storms and gales are felt there first. Such 'remotes' are the future as well as the past. Knowing that people had once lived on the island, hundreds of years ago, speaks to our times too. Which places will we be forced to abandon before the 21st Century is over?

But for all that, its elemental beauty stays with me. The sound of the waves and the wind, the birds' cries. Scanning the sea for a glimpse of a whale or dolphin. The bog cotton nodding in the breeze. These are things I love. And my companions! In such a place one has to know and trust one's companions, one is reliant on them. Thankfully, nothing went wrong on our visits, we required no assistance. Forty miles out in the Atlantic, with no boat, a medical emergency would have been horrific. (We had a satellite phone – unlike the occupants of hundreds of years ago. When disaster or disease struck them there was no way to call for help.)

The island's chapel with its tiny oratory, is 1200 years old and still standing. It is hugely evocative. To imagine early Christian monks sailing to the farthest islands, there to meditate on God and creation... these are the things I thought about on Rona, the things I wrote about. I thought about the few families who lived there, trying to win a living from its hard soil, until the place was finally abandoned. I thought time and the transience of all things – including myself.

What never entered my head, not in my wildest imaginings, was that my writings about Rona, its remoteness, its saints, its lost people and natural beauty would find their way to Japan! Not only that, but there would be cultural resonance. I have since come to learn that the Japanese tradition, especially the Noh tradition is rich with the same symbols: islands and abandonment, priest-saints, nature. A cross-over project would work! Of course Rona is and was part of Scotland's Gaelic-speaking culture, so to have Scottish music, and Gaelic-speaking musicians involved, completes the circle. I am just delighted. As I am with the script, which has been taken from my prose and transfigured into a Noh style, almost a haiku style. The poet in me warms to that! My heartfelt thanks go to those who have made this project happen, especially Akiko Yanagisawa, and Aidan O'Rourke who first made the connection.

One of the best things about being on Rona was the beachcombing. When we arrived, it was a joy to cross the hill and stroll over the flat, rocky, north-running peninsula called Fianuis, to see what the tides and winter storms had cast ashore. That was what I wanted to celebrate in my poem of that name:

Fianuis

*Well, friend, we're here again —
sauntering the last half-mile
to the land's frayed end
to find what's laid on for us,
strewn across the turf —
gull feathers, bleached shells,
a whole bull seal, bone-dry,
knackered from the rut
(we knock on his leathern head,
but no one's home).*

*Change, change —
that's what the terns scream
down at their seaward rocks;
fleet clouds and salt kiss —
everything else is provisional,
us and all our works.
I guess that's why we like it here:
listen — a brief lull,
a rock pipit's seed-small notes.*