

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
September 11, 2017



**KAGURA, BON ODORI & NIHON BUYO DANCE,  
BUNRAKU PUPPET COMPANY,  
WEDDING KIMONOS,  
SHOWCASE THE PERFORMING AND FOLK ARTS  
OF  
JAPAN**

**AN EVENING CELEBRATION OF  
JAPAN'S RICH CULTURAL TRADITIONS  
AT  
PETER NORTON SYMPHONY SPACE  
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2017**

NEW YORK, N.Y., Sept 11, 2017 – The enchanting dance styles of Iwami Kagura and Nihon Buyo, the world-acclaimed Bunraku puppet troupe and a display of wedding kimonos will be among the highlights of an evening celebration of Japanese performing arts and culture at Manhattan's Symphony Space on Saturday, Oct. 28, 2017.

The event will be produced by the New York-based Japan Performing Arts Inc., a cultural organization founded and led by Yuko Hamada, an acclaimed dancer and choreographer and native of Osaka. She presented her first show featuring dance and fashion in 2015.

Hamada, a New York-based instructor of Japanese traditional dance called Nihon Buyo or Nichibu, said her love of dance, kimono design and puppetry from her native land inspired her to give U.S. residents a deeper understanding of Japan's contributions to the arts.

**In addition, Hamada sees the importance of expanding to other countries the fan base of Japan's rich cultural heritage. Finding younger people to carry the tradition of its older and ancient art forms is becoming increasingly difficult, especially in rural areas as populations decline in rural areas.**

“These are Japanese traditions that have been passed down for at least 400 years,” Hamada said. “Those with day jobs -- regular local farmers, fishers, office workers -- have invested a lot of time and money to pass down these cultural traditions not to let them fade away from this world.”

In all, the performances will showcase the dance and the performing arts from Japan's Osaka, Akita and Shimane prefectures:

**Bunraku Puppetry Theater, An Osaka Tradition.** Bunraku, a centuries-old style of Japanese puppet theater, is very popular in Osaka. It has been designated by UNESCO as one of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Bunraku makes its return to New York after its debut in the city 25 years ago.

Bunraku is typically performed with puppets on a wide stage, accompanied by highly-expressive chanting by a *tayū*, an oral storyteller, *ningyōshi* or puppeteers and musician playing a *shimase*, a three-string instrument.

But in this special performance, only three puppeteers -- Kanichi Yoshida, Montake Kiritake and Tamahiko Yoshida – will perform.

Usually, the Bunraku performers do not interact with audiences, but before their segment, they will discuss Bunraku's 400-year-old techniques. They will explain how they work together to operate a 10-kilogram (22 pound), 17-meter long puppet. (The first puppeteer operates the body and right hand of the puppet, the second one operates the left hand, and the third member moves the legs).

**Iwami Kagura dance from Shimane.** Popular in the Shimane Prefecture, Kagura features 50 episodes from the Japanese mythology. Originally Kagura was a theatrical dance ritual of the Shinto religion held in November for celebrating the harvest, but it later became theatrical entertainment for the general public.

The show will present a chapter known as Orochi, the story of a legendary, divine figure who defeats giant monster serpents. In the tale's climax, 17-meter long serpents made of a specialty paper and bamboo appear onstage, the most prominent feature of Iwami Kagura. Orochi will be accompanied by live music played by a five-member ensemble from the New York area to capture the authenticity and spirit of Kagura performed in Shimane.

**Nishimonai Bon Odori dance from Akita.** This style of dance originates from Japan's Akita Prefecture, the first of Japan's Cultural Intangible Heritage folk performing arts. Bon Odori, with roots in Buddhist religious ritual, typically has been performed all over in Japan and often with audience participation.

Bon Odori is a unique dance tradition that the local residents have been passing down for generations. Every summer, around 100,000 tourists come to the Akita Prefecture to see the costumes and unique dances performed over three days.

After getting permission to teach authentic Bon Odori dancing, Hamada made several visits over a four-year period to the Akita Prefecture to study the dance styles.

**Kimono show.** The Kimono (which literally means ``a thing to wear'' in English), a traditional Japanese garment, has a 1,200-year of history. This segment of the show

will be both educational and entertainment in scope as it will showcase an array of one traditional bridal and eight formal kimonos along with a presentation about their history. At the midpoint of the show, the artists will demonstrate how to wear their Kimonos while they are dancing.

**Nihon Buyo (or Nichibu).** The second part of the show features Nihon Buyo, one of the major traditional Japanese dances with more than 200 branched out schools. Nihon Buyo was inspired by the movements in Kabuki and Noh and became established as a dance genre over the past 400 years. To better illustrate the uniqueness of these movements, ballet, a Western dance, will be performed to contrast it with Nihon Buyo.

“The movements of traditional dance in any country is a way of expressing its cultural values,” Hamada said. “For instance, with Western movements such as ballet, the energy that spirals inside of the body must move outward while in traditional Japanese movements, the energy tends to go inward.”

Hamada said 300 of the more than 750 seats will be offered for free to New York City public schools, community organizations, and charities.

**About Japan Performing Arts Inc.:** Founded by Hamada, JPA launched a free lecture series along with stage projects, beginning with The JPA Cultural Repertoire in 2015 at the Manhattan Movement Center.

#### **About Yuko Hamada**

Yuko Hamada is the founder and President of Japan Performing Arts, Inc. Yuko is also a Nichibu (or Nihon Buyo) dance choreographer/dancer. She used to be a member of Takarazuka Revue Company, a nationally well-known all-female theater in Japan. She graduated from the dramatic writing program of Tisch School of the Arts, New York University. She wrote, directed and produced three Off-off Broadway plays and received a lot of media coverage for her unique presentation of Japanese theater arts. Since the establishment of Japan Performing Arts, Inc., her pursuit of Japanese theater presentation has been ever evolving with wider range of venues, such as at the United Nations Headquarters, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Brooklyn Botanic Garden, etc. In 2015, Yuko established Kagura Preservation Society of New York to introduce the Chugoku region's performing arts and it had the debut performance in NYC during the first JPA Cultural Repertories in 2015.

DATE & TIME: Saturday, October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017 6:30 – 9 pm

PLACE: Peter Norton Symphony Space, 2537 Broadway at W. 95<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan.

TICKETS PRICE: **Adult** \$40 Full Price (on the show day), \$30 Advance  
**Students (high school & above)** \$25 Full Price (on the show day),  
\$18 Advance (student ID required: box office purchase only)  
**Child / Senior** \$25 Full Price (on the show day), \$18 Advance  
**Symphony Space Member** \$25  
**Group (15 or more)** \$25

TICKETS &

INFORMATION: **Online at:** [www.symphonyspace.org](http://www.symphonyspace.org)  
**By Phone:** (212.864.5400)  
**In Person:** at the Symphony Space Box office  
(open Tues-Sun from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.)

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