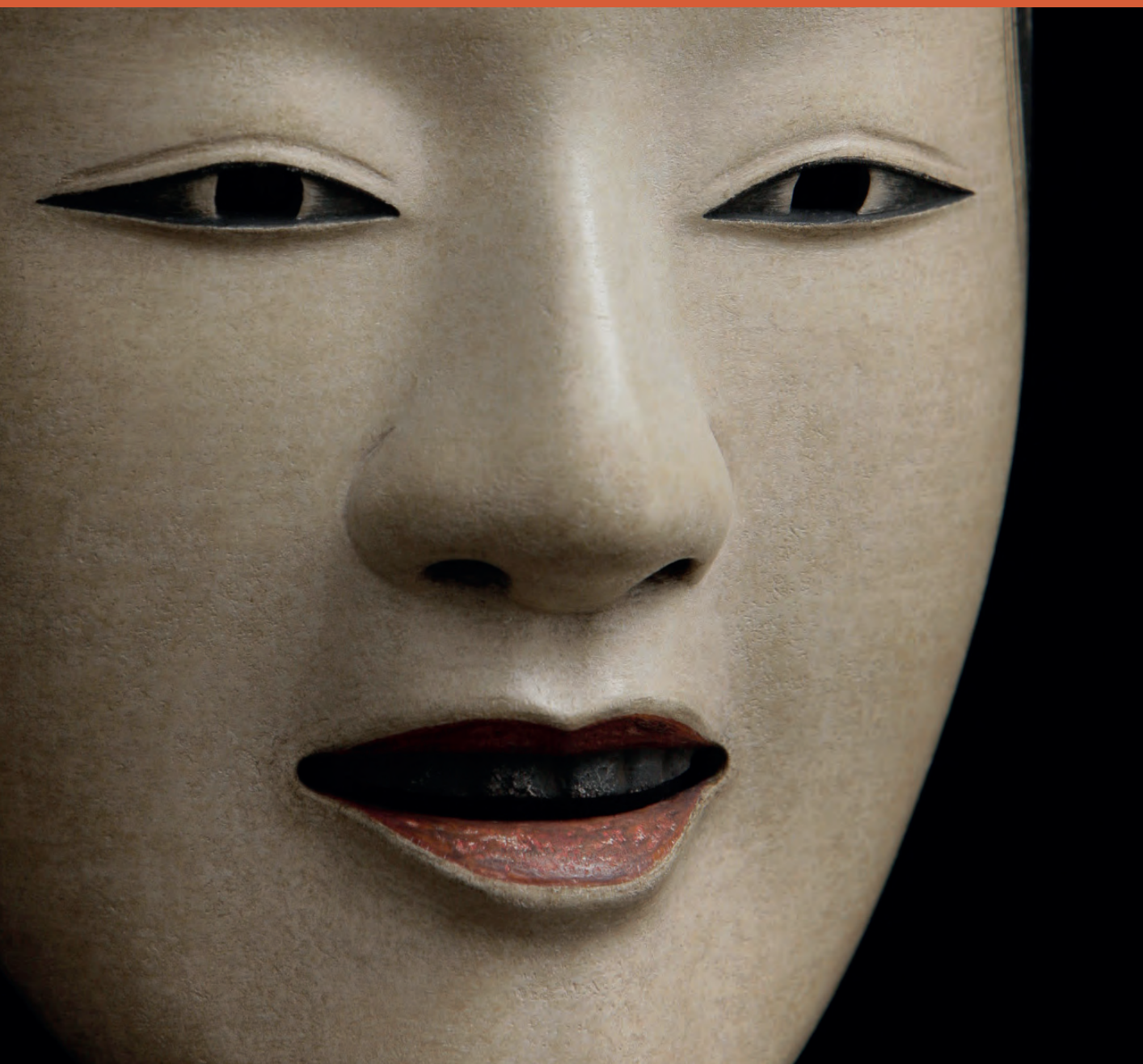


# Noh time like the present...

## A Tribute to Akira Matsui

24, 25 February 2017

LSO St Luke's  
London





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Trade and Industry, Government of Japan
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## 松井彬さんへのメッセージ

日本を代表する能楽師松井彬さんの「ロンドン記念公演」に数多くのファンの皆様方をお迎えできることを心からうれしく思います。

能は14世紀後半に誕生して以来、日本固有の風土や人々の生活文化を背景としながら、国を代表する伝統芸能として発展の歩みを続け、今や国境を越えてその価値を認められる存在となりました。2001年にユネスコ「人類の口承及び無形遺産の傑作の宣言」(無形文化遺産)が創設されると、能は最初の対象案件19件のひとつとして選ばれ、更に2015年7にはギリシャの古代劇場エピダウロスでの公演が盛大に行われました。この間、松井さんは能楽の魅力を世界中に伝える活動を精力的に展開し、近年はロンドン大学ロイヤルホロウェイ校で教鞭を執り、2016年に名誉博士号を授与されました。

2020年に東京オリンピック・パラリンピックを迎える折、日本政府では我が国が有する文化芸術資源の世界への発信を強化しています。この度の公演を通じて、日本の歴史に形作られた能楽が西洋文化と交差し、新たな芸術へと昇華した姿を是非ご覧ください。

2017年2月24日

せこう ひろしげ

経済産業大臣 世耕 弘成

## In Honour of Akira Matsui

I am pleased to learn of the London performances of 'Noh time like the present... A Tribute to Akira Matsui,' as are the many fans of noh and of Mr. Matsui who represents the best of Japan's noh traditional performers.

Noh, since its inception in the latter half of the 14th century, has developed as a traditional stage art which has Japan's spiritual and cultural essence as its basis, and yet now has crossed national borders to appeal to a broader international audience. In 2001, UNESCO issued its Proclamation of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in which noh was chosen in the first group of 19 masterpieces. Since then, noh has been performed in numerous international venues including such places as the magnificent July 2015 performance at the ancient Greek theatre at Epidaurus. Meanwhile, Mr. Matsui has also energetically imparted the appeal of noh with numerous workshops, performances and collaborations. This has led to his being awarded an honorary doctorate in July 2016 from Royal Holloway, University of London for his many international activities.

With the approach of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, the Japanese government has strengthened its resolve to introduce Japan's cultural arts to the world. With this London performance, I look forward to the art of noh, with its formation in the cultural milieu of Japan, intersecting with Western classical arts to create a new perspective and appreciation for both artistic worlds.

**Hiroshige Seko**  
Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry  
Government of Japan

# Introduction

This tribute to Akira Matsui celebrates his outstanding contribution to Japanese classical noh theatre, not only in Japan, but also throughout the world. Considering that this is his 70th birthday year as well as the fact that this past summer he was awarded an honorary doctorate at Royal Holloway, University of London, it seems fitting that a performance featuring him should be held here in London.

Mr. Matsui, though not from a traditional noh family in Japan, grew up in Wakayama near the city of Osaka and first appeared on the noh stage as a child actor when he was eight years old. Thereafter, he was given numerous chances to take child roles, which eventually led to him being invited to Tokyo to become a live-in disciple of Kita Minoru, one of the leading actors in the post-war noh world as well as the eventual school head of the Kita School, one of the five main-role stylistic schools of noh. He spent the next ten years studying intensively the dance and music, as well as memorizing the classical texts associated with noh.

Mr. Matsui often mentions that when he was about to finish high school in Tokyo, while continuing his strict training, he spoke to Minoru-sensei about continuing on to university. Minoru-sensei replied that although he himself had never gone to university, he had never felt out of place when in the company of those who were highly educated in universities, because he too had become highly educated through his classical training in noh. Mr. Matsui consequently never attended university but has taught at numerous universities throughout the world.

Mr. Matsui returned to Wakayama in his early twenties, where he took on many private students and performed. Meanwhile he travelled back and forth to Tokyo, where he also had students and appeared regularly in Kita School performances. In 1972, he went abroad to Canada and the US with a cultural exchange group from Wakayama, and thereafter he began to be invited back to teach and perform. Several of the tributes included in this booklet tell of his many activities abroad that grew throughout the late 1970s.

Dr. Ashley Thorpe of Royal Holloway wrote the following in the citation awarding Mr. Matsui an honorary doctorate: "...his considerable achievements in bringing noh to the world extend beyond training and instruction. Innovation in noh is typically considered to take place within the form, but Matsui has undertaken quite radical interventions to proactively investigate the intercultural possibilities of noh. He has worked as a performer, director, playwright and choreographer alongside some of the most distinguished theatre directors, including Eugenio Barba and Chen Shi-zheng. His intercultural work has been exceptionally varied, including adaptations of Shakespeare, newly written English-language noh plays, as well as the creation of new and unexpected dance fusions."

Artists such as Akira Matsui see the word 'challenge' not as an obstacle, but as an exciting possibility. They provide inspiration to others who seek to collaborate and share artistic endeavours internationally.

In this special tribute programme we hope to highlight the universality, contemporary relevance, flexibility and innovative qualities of classical art forms. We will also draw out and illustrate the dramatic, vocal, musical, dance, poetic text, and the use of the mask in the art of noh. We hope to demonstrate how Western classical opera, theatre, music and dance can embrace and work with other cultural classical art forms as a celebration of cultural difference.

**Unanico Group, Jannette Cheong, Richard Emmert**

In accordance with the requirements of Islington Council persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any gangway. The taking of photographs and the use of recording equipment are strictly forbidden without formal consent from LSO St Luke's.

Please make sure that digital watch alarms and mobile phones are switched off during the performance.

LSO St Luke's is a no-smoking building. No eating or drinking is allowed in the auditorium.

No cameras, tape recorders or other recording equipment may be taken into the hall.



# Programme

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## Welcome & Introduction

Welcome: Paul Laikin, Unanico Group

Opening address: Minister Shinichi Iida, Japanese Embassy

Introduction: Richard Emmert

**24, 25**  
**February**  
**2017**  
**LSO**  
**St Luke's**

## Rockaby

by Samuel Beckett

Performed by Akira Matsui, Hugh Quarshie

Rockaby is presented by special arrangement with Samuel French Ltd

## Noh Hayashi

Richard Emmert (noh flute), Eitaro Okura (otsuzumi), Kayu Omura (kotsuzumi)

## Noh meets Bach

Extracts from three classical noh plays sung by Akira Matsui combined with Bach's Unaccompanied Cello Suite No.1 played by Lucia Capellaro

## INTERVAL (15 minutes)

## Opposites-InVerse

A new noh-inspired work by Jannette Cheong

Performed and Choreographed by Akira Matsui & Peter Leung

Composed and Directed by Richard Emmert

Singers: Piran Legg (Baritone), Meili Li (Countertenor)

Hayashi: Richard Emmert (noh flute), Eitaro Okura (otsuzumi drum), Kayu Omura (kotsuzumi drum)

# Rockaby

by  
**Samuel Beckett**

Directed and danced by Akira Matsui,  
with the 'Voice' by Hugh Quarshie


*(Original Direction by Jonah Salz for the Noho  
Theatre Group)*

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*Rockaby* is a fifteen-minute solo play, written in English in 1980, premiered in 1981 by Billie Whitelaw, directed by Alan Schneider. In the original play a Woman, seated in a rocking chair, is rocked gently into that dark eternal night by her own Voice. At the end of each of the first three of four sections the Woman echoes the Voice, "Time she stopped." The rocker comes to a stop, and after a pause, she utters her only word of dialogue, "More." After the fourth section, the Voice echoes "rock her off" as her head drops to the side, resigned to death.

In this version, directed and danced by Akira Matsui, the 'Voice' will be performed by Hugh Quarshie. The woman is found in the rocking chair at the beginning of the play and when the Voice begins, the actors appear to have a metaphysical presence - entirely possible with noh - reflecting the original monodrama, but as a stylized interpretation of Beckett's play - 'a moving monodrama fusing poetry, ritual, and drama'.

(See Jonah Salz's further background notes to past performances on page 47.)



Akira Matsui in a 2011 performance of *Rockaby* in Japanese at the Oe Noh Theatre in Kyoto. Directed by Jonah Salz for Noho Theatre Group. Photograph by Muranaka Osamu

## Noh Hayashi

The noh hayashi consists of one flute and three drums, though certain plays in the noh repertory use only two drums, which is the case for our ensemble here. In traditional noh, it is the relationship between instruments and the chant that drives the performance and creates its characteristic intensity. Most notable to Western ears is the use of voice calls (*kakegoe*) by the drummers.

Within a noh play there are musical sections that are purely instrumental. These include music for entrances and exits, as well instrumental dance music.

The piece performed here is purely for concert purposes and combines several instrumental pieces from noh. It begins with a solo noh flute piece, called *nanori-bue*, used for a special type of entrance music. Next, the drums are featured in a free-rhythmic *ashirai* piece that might be used for either entrances or a short circling dance. Third is the piece *kakeri*, which is a short action dance featuring two quick tempo changes suggesting the unbalanced state of the dancer.

Finally, there is *kakko*, music for a light, buoyant dance of a performer dancing with a small barrel drum.

## Noh meets Bach

Akira Matsui has collaborated with classical, jazz and Asian traditional musicians. In each, Matsui maintains a strict adherence to noh traditional techniques while performing with a non-noh performer.

*Noh Meets Bach* is a musical collaboration between the powerful vocal style of noh and Western classical music, here three movements from *Bach's Unaccompanied Cello Suite No. 1*. The vocal text is in Japanese and comprises short excerpts from three different pieces in the classical noh repertory. The first is from *Yamamba (The Mountain Crone)*—a story of a dancer from the capital, famous for portraying the mountain crone, meets the real old woman of the hills on a trip through the mountains. The second is from *Hibariyama (Mt. Skylark)*—a story of a Minister who banishes his daughter to the high mountains due to a slanderous rumour, but is later reconciled with her. The third is from *Funabenkei (Benkei on the Boat)*—the story of the great general Yoshitsune and his retainer Benkei as they quell the evil spirit of Tomomori that attacks them as they cross the Inland Sea by boat.

Akira Matsui's vocal choices, however, are based more on musical considerations rather than story content. The *Yamamba* selection is sung in a free-rhythmic dynamic singing style, *Hibariyama* is in a matched-rhythmic poetic segment sung in the melodic style, and *Funabenkei* is sung in a matched-rhythmic dynamic style.

# OPPOSITES INVERSE

Written by **Jannette Cheong** Composition and Direction by **Richard Emmert**

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## CAST

### **Dance/Choreography**

**Akira Matsui, Peter Leung**

### **Hayashi Instrumentalists**

**Richard Emmert (noh flute)**

**Eitaro Okura (otsuzumi)**

**Kayu Omura (kotsuzumi)**

### **Singers**

**Piran Legg (Baritone)**

**Meili Li (Countertenor)**

### **Noh Masks**

**Hideta Kitazawa**

### **Stage Assistants**

**John Oglevee**

**Satoko Shibata**

## Introduction

*Opposites-InVerse* uses elements from classical noh theatre, including poetic structures, vocal and instrumental music, and the movement of a noh masked performer. The vocal elements, however, are sung in an operatic style and the movement is a combination of contemporary ballet and the intense grounded quality of noh.

As collaboration, the intent is for all performers to stay true to their own practice, yet cross boundaries to create a new work combining their different disciplines and styles.

The piece reflects the opposites and differences in life that affect us all. It is in three parts, the choreography reflecting:

1. differences that oppose each other, presented here by a father and son unable to reconcile,
2. differences that attract each other, presented as young lovers, and
3. differences that find a balance, presented here as an acceptance of one another and themselves.

These cycles of change may seem more apparent in the natural world, but humanity also repeats such cycles time and again.

The work aims to provide food for thought about such patterns of change and what influences them.

# OPPOSITES

Our world is like an open (unfinished) book - the beginning, middle and ending of our story debated and explored by philosophers, scientists and artists alike.

The phenomenon of opposites is an intrinsic part of our story construct. We prove and disprove notions about life and existence – how we perceive, experience, understand and respond to our world. Something positive may also have a negative effect and vice versa.

Opposites challenge human behaviour, relationships and emotions. We are capable of arrogance and humility, greed and benevolence, love and hate – or even co-existing with contrary emotions - and less can mean more.

And our learning changes over time – subjectivity becomes more objective – allowing new and different perspectives, choices and decisions.

In philosophy, we debate good and evil, right and wrong, justice and crime, even behind the ‘veil of ignorance’.

We learn from opposites. Sometimes from learning ‘what went right’, or the consequence of ‘what went wrong’ – destruction so often quicker than reconstruction.

Opposites are a measure – they help us moderate, compare and change our thinking, perceptions or behaviour, and ‘generally’ prevent us from going too far. Situations do not have to get worse before they get better.

Our world depends on the forces of action and reaction, equal and opposite they balance. Just as ‘the metric’ - ‘proximity and separation’ - is the fundamental of ‘existence’, including human existence.

Generations of families, the *mikros kosmos* of human society, are often in opposition – parallel universes, the consequences of which may last more than a lifetime. Each generation’s present is the past of the next generation; creating a new trajectory into the future, with all its unknown positive and negative relationships, circumstances and consequences.

Despite the uncertainty of what lies ahead, there is no greater gift from one generation to another than to pass on what it knows. It is this sharing and shared learning, and our ability to collaborate that makes us human - an intrinsic part of our evolution.

For, when everything is the same, nothing exists.

Melting snowflakes, order and chaos, life and death - eternal cycle - patterns of change...

**Jannette Cheong**

## Special Tribute & Dedication

I am grateful to all those who have contributed to the soul of this work, friends, mentors and especially the collaborating artists. I shall be ever grateful for their inspiration and wisdom.

Opposites-InVerse is dedicated to my sister, Dianna, and to my great friend and teacher, Dika Eckersley - their love, beauty and lives are at its heart.

# Opposites-InVerse

## Libretto

### ***Shidai (music)***

#### ***Shidai (song)***

Life and death, melting snowflakes  
Patterns of change  
Melting snowflakes, Life and death  
Patterns of change  
Space, time, opaque paradigms  
Order and chaos

#### ***Jitori***

Life and death, melting snowflakes  
Patterns of change  
Space, time, opaque paradigms  
Order and chaos

### **PART ONE**

#### ***Nanori (Kotoba)***

We see before us two figures, a father and son, like the old and young, or the racially different, they are in Opposition - troubled by their expectations. Familial ties untied - between fathers, sons, mothers or daughters - parallel universes of conflict and love. A natural chaos of co-existence. Where dreams and reality collide, and rights and wrongs remain inconclusive.

#### ***Sashi***

Existence in ebb and flow  
Chaos from order  
Autumn leaves predictably fall  
Not one will escape  
As the nights grow long and cold  
Autumn's colours stir  
Their beauty masking their fate  
Light and energy  
Conspire, defining Autumn's end  
Some fight hard to stay  
But each leaf must find its path

#### ***Sageuta***

Flowing in one direction  
Like melting snowflakes  
Time's precious arrows released  
But where will they fall

#### ***Ageuta***

Separate, and yet entwined  
Trapped in space and time  
Separate, and yet entwined  
Trapped in space and time  
Will the moon ever escape  
Earth's motherly pull?

As dark clouds pass without end  
Unanswered questions  
Lost in the shadows of time  
Separate leaves falling  
Lost in the shadows of time  
Separate leaves fall

### ***Dance of Opposition***

#### ***Chunoriji***

Deep snow lying dormant  
In high mountains  
Strong sun, ceaseless rain  
Drown expectations  
Thunder comes  
From darkened skies  
Angry rivers overflow  
Wreaking chaos  
Rivers racing to the sea  
Dreams and reality  
Collide  
Rights and wrongs  
Inconclusive  
Fallen leaves carried  
By raging waters  
To the end  
Opposing forces -  
Order destroyed  
By the chaos in life  
As well as in death

### **PART TWO**

#### ***Nanori***

We see before us Opposites attracted like the twin forces of night and day - they are like one - unable to break free. One the inevitable of the other - as life with death... Imperfection feeding perfection. Love - the soul of the unloved. A symbiosis of opposites destined to remain together - drawing strength from each other.

#### ***Kuri***

I wanted to take you  
To the place I knew so well  
I wanted to take you  
To the depth of my soul  
You would see what my eyes saw  
Know what my heart felt  
Know what my heart feels

**Sashi**

Space - more than a void  
 Time - more than lifelines moving  
 In one direction  
 Were we opposite charges  
 Unable to break free  
 From our fatal attraction?  
 Unable to break free

**Kuse**

The soul of humanity  
 Only half-blinded  
 By negative emotions  
 The twin forces  
 Of night and day  
 One the reflection of the other  
 Their magnetic pull defies  
 Conflict and love  
 The veil of shame  
 Clouding judgement  
 The veil of ignorance  
 Never ending  
 What is lost  
 Is not gained  
 Searching,  
 Searching,  
 Searching  
 Destinations that elude us

**Dance of Attraction****Uta**

Our symbiosis complete  
 Resolutions found, energised  
 Like spring flowers in the rain  
 Shedding winter's sleep  
 Insects stealing nature's nectar  
 Giving life in return  
 Nature giving life in return

**PART THREE****Nanori**

We see before us you and me - Opposites  
 in Balance in a world dependent on the  
 forces of action and reaction. Action  
 and reaction, equal and opposite they  
 balance, like proximity and separation  
 they are fundamental to our existence. But  
 when such forces no longer exist - when  
 everything is the same - nothing exists...  
 melting snowflakes.. life's eternal cycle -  
 patterns of change.

**Ageuta**

The forces of action  
 And reaction  
 (repeats)  
 Action and reaction  
 Action and reaction  
 Action and reaction  
 Action and reaction  
 Equal and opposite  
 They balance  
 I touch, you feel  
 You think I know  
 You think, I know

Action and reaction  
 Action and reaction  
 (repeats)

We did not see  
 The clouds billowing  
 Once more  
 Once more - clouds billow,  
 Once more  
 Once more clouds billow  
 They drift and open

**Dance of Balance****Noriji**

I awake and you are gone  
 Waking, you are gone  
 A broken wave upon the shore  
 Waves break upon our shores  
 Upon our shores waves will break..

**Uta**

My eyes close, my world widens  
 I do not sleep here  
 I sleep deep within myself  
 A deep sleep within  
 Everything will be the same  
 Nothing will exist  
 Life and death  
 Melting snowflakes  
 Eternal cycle  
 Life and death  
 Snowflakes melting  
 Eternally  
 Patterns of change

**Jannette Cheong**





# Collaborating Artists

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Top Left: **Akira Matsui**  
Photograph by David  
Surtasky

**Akira Matsui** is a master actor-teacher of the Kita School of classical noh. Born in 1946 in Wakayama, south of Osaka, at the age of 7 he began studying noh and took on numerous child roles. At age 12, he went to Tokyo to become a “live-in apprentice” to Kita Minoru, the 15th generation head of the Kita School. Matsui returned to his hometown at age 21 where he is now based. He has been active for 45 years teaching and performing in over 25 countries, offering master classes at universities and collaborating with performers in Asia, Europe and the Americas. In 1998, he was designated an Important Intangible Cultural Asset by the Japanese government. He has been awarded the main cultural prizes from the Wakayama Prefectural and City governments. In July 2016, he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from Royal Holloway, University of London.

**Richard Emmert** is professor of Asian performance at Musashino University, Tokyo and a certified Kita school noh instructor. Born in the USA, he has studied, taught and performed classical noh drama in Japan since 1973, and led a Noh Training Project in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania (US) for 20 years. He directs Noh Training Projects in Tokyo, and in the UK (Royal Holloway, University of London). He co-authored (with Monica Bethe) Noh Performance Guides, and is working on a complete series of noh play summaries for the National Noh Theatre. Emmert has led noh performance projects around the world and composed/directed/performed in eleven English noh plays, including Jannette Cheong’s *Pagoda* (2009, 2011). He is founder and artistic director of Theatre Nohgaku, dedicated to performing noh in English.

Left: **Akira Matsui** and **Masanobu Oshima** dress main actor **Kinuo Oshima** for *Pagoda* noh (2009)

Right: **Richard Emmert** gives a demonstration workshop performance to school children as part of the ‘Getting to noh’ educational programme attached to *Pagoda*. (2009)

Photographs by Clive  
Barda







**Jannette Cheong** Born in the UK, began her career as a higher education teacher and then as one of HM Inspectors. She subsequently organised many successful international education and creative arts collaborations for more than 20 years. She now works as a poet, writer/ designer and curator. She was the first British person to write an English language noh play (*Pagoda*) using traditional noh techniques in collaboration with Richard Emmett, the Oshima Theatre and Theatre Nohgaku. *Pagoda* was premiered at the Southbank Centre, London, in 2009 and toured to Dublin, Oxford and Paris. In 2011 it opened at the National Noh Theatre in Tokyo and toured to Kyoto, Beijing and Hong Kong. Related activities included collaboration with theatres, universities, schools, museums and festivals. In 2009 (London) and 2015 (Shanghai) she facilitated International Performing Arts Fora. She also curated the 2012 exhibition of celebrated photographer Clive Barda.



**Peter Leung** trained at the Royal Ballet School, London. Born in the UK he has danced and been a choreographer with Dutch National Ballet, the Bayerisches Staatsballett, Munich and Le Ballet de l'Opéra de Lyon for the last 15 years. He is also a creative director of House of Makers, focusing on live performance.

As a choreographer he has created work for Dutch National Ballet, Origen Cultural Festival, Van Gogh and Boijmans Van Beuningen Museums, Rotterdam Kunsthall. In 2009 he created his debut work for Dutch National Ballet, *The Table, Outside and the Grey Room* (Amsterdam), and *Flying Lesson & Eat me, Drink me*, (Seoul Arts Centre, 2011). Other works for Dutch National Ballet include *Surface* (2014), *A Man and a Woman* (2014), and for the Origen Festival Cultural (*New Skin* 2013, *Journey* 2014, *Causality* 2015). His TV, film and museums work includes: *Pearls*, a film installation for The Lakenhal Museum, a solo Portrait for the world summit 'Women in the World', the film *Personal Space* for Dutch Public Television, and duet *Unreality* (2015) programmed by Dansmakers and Ostade Theater, Amsterdam.

Top Right:  
**Peter Leung** performing  
*Bella Figura* by Jiri Kylian  
at Le Ballet de l'Opéra  
de Lyon.



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**Hugh Quarshie** is a Ghanaian-British actor of stage and screen. His film appearances include *The Dogs of War*, *Highlander*, *Star Wars - The Phantom Menace* and *The Murder of Stephen Lawrence*. He is an Associate Artist of the Royal Shakespeare Company, having most recently played the title role in their 2015 production of *Othello*. He is probably best known for his long-running role as Ric Griffin in the BBC's award-winning medical drama series, *Holby City*. Hugh performs in *Rockaby* by Samuel Beckett, as the 'Voice' who interacts with the solo old woman character.

**Lucia Capellaro** graduating with a 1st class BMus (Hons), Birmingham Conservatoire, now studies with Jonathan Manson, Professor at the Royal Academy of Music and works as a freelance cello, baroque cello and viola da gamba musician performing with the Barber Opera Company, Musical & the Amicable Society, Sherborne Festival Orchestra, Corelli Orchestra, the Linnaeus Ensemble, and the Nero String, and Ines, Quartets. She has a passion for both contemporary and early music work, and recently formed the collective Consort Pléon to create a setting for aspiring musicians to perform early music on period instruments. Lucia also mentors over 40 students.

**Eitaro Okura** is an *otsuzumi* hip drummer, the 17th generation noh musician in a line descending from Okura Shichizaemon. He studied with his father, Okura Mitsutada, as well as with Yasufuku Tatsuo, a Living National Treasure of *otsuzumi*. He first performed on the noh stage at six years of age and now performs regularly in professional performances throughout the Tokyo area. He performed in the Theatre Nohgaku tour of *At the Hawk's Well*, as well as the 2005 Theatre of Yugen tour of *Moon of the Scarlet Plums* and 2009 and 2011 joint Oshima Theatre and Theatre Nohgaku productions of *Pagoda*.





**Kayu Omura** is a *kotsuzumi* shoulder drum player of the Ko School of drumming. Daughter of Kita school noh actor, Sadamu Omura, she was exposed to noh from a very young age, and began taking *kotsuzumi* lesson in high school. She entered the noh department of Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music and majored in *kotsuzumi* drumming, graduating in 2009. In addition to performing and teaching noh in the Tokyo area, she has performed with several ensembles which employ a number of different traditional Japanese instruments.



**Li Meili** is China's only Western-trained countertenor. He studied film & TV at Beijing University and then with Michael Chance (Royal Academy of Music), and Yvonne Kerry (Guildhall School of Music & Drama). He has performed internationally since 2011, and as a soloist in over 30 concerts. In opera his roles include: *the Cherub* (cover), *Figaro Gets a Divorce* (Welsh National Opera 2016); the title role, *The Waiter's Revenge* (Birmingham Opera 2015); the Ferryman, *The Last Seed* (Tête-à-Tête Opera, King's Place 2015); Nireno *Guilio Cesare* (Concertbouw 2015); Astron in Tippett's *The Ice Breaker* (Birmingham Opera 2015); Shepherd/Hope (cover), Spirit, Chorus, *L'Orpheo* (GSMD, Royal Opera House 2015); Oberon, *Midsummer Night's Dream*; Nerone, *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*, Voix d'Ete (Municipal Theatre, Fontainebleau 2014); Fox/Coachman in Jonathan Dove's *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, and the title role in Dove's *the Little Green Swallow* (2014).

**Piran Legg** (baritone) studied history at the University of Kent. He is a Masters graduate of the Guildhall Opera Course and completed his Artists Diploma in 2016. His opera performances include the title role in *Owen Wingrave* (Guildhall); Schaunard in *La Boheme* (Cadogan Hall); Giorgio Germont in *La Traviata* (Clonter Opera); King Erysichthon in the premiere of Edward Rushton's *Cicadas* with the LSO; and for workshOPERA the roles of Crow in *Boys of Paradise* and Eric Satie in *Seven Velvet Suits*. His other contemporary projects include recording a CD of new songs, inspired by London in collaboration with Song in the City. On the concert platform he has been baritone soloist in Handel's *Messiah* at Amiens Cathedral and in Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast* at Canterbury Cathedral, and has performed the role of Danieli in Wagner's *Das Liebesverbot* with the Chelsea Opera Group.



the genius of

AKIRA  
MATSUI





In his long and varied career, Matsui has worked with dozens of directors, theatre, dance and music professionals, and university professors, not to mention the hundreds of students who have taken his workshops and audience members who have seen his lecture-demonstrations and performances.

The following tributes are from a few of his collaborators, some of whom he has known for over four decades. Their brief individual stories give us an extraordinary picture not only of Matsui's diverse activities but of his engaging personality, as well as the joy and respect that these collaborators feel by having worked with him.



## Richard Emmert

In November 1973, the course of my life changed when I began to take noh lessons from Akira Matsui.

I had already studied in Japan for a year as a foreign student learning about Japanese culture. It was by chance that soon into my second stay in Japan, I met Akira Matsui and decided to study noh with him. I never expected to still be doing it 43 years later. An early memory of lessons with Matsui is hearing his deeply resonant chant voice. I wondered at first what was vibrating in the room, and finally realized it was Matsui himself.

At the time, Matsui was teaching in his hometown of Wakayama, but for ten days a month would teach in Tokyo and stay at his small apartment. If I was his last lesson of the day, we would often have dinner together. I was able to ask all sorts of questions about noh, which there was never time for in the lesson itself.

Soon after, I was accepted for graduate school and decided to find an apartment in central Tokyo. Matsui suggested that we share an apartment, with him paying what he already paid for his small apartment. This allowed me to have a larger apartment and also take care of his things. The plan sounded great to me and in March 1974 we made the move.

Two-thirds of the month, the apartment was strictly mine. During the other one-third while Matsui was in Tokyo, it was like I had become his *uchideshi* live-in disciple. I was able to ask even more questions: how did the noh world work, who were the important actors, what was his training, and many many more.

As I improved in ability and knowledge, Matsui invited me to take on important roles. I danced my first full noh in one of his recitals; I interpreted for him in workshops held abroad; we participated in projects in Australia, India, the USA, Canada, UK, Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Poland and Italy. We drank more beer than I would have done by myself; we argued, we laughed, and we always talked more about noh.

Akira Matsui brought me into his noh world and I have been extremely fortunate because of it!

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**Akira Matsui**  
*At his home studio*  
 Photographs by  
 Jannette Cheong

**Akira Matsui with  
Eugenio Barba**

Photograph courtesy of  
ODIN THEATRET  
ARCHIVES ISTA:  
INTERNATIONAL  
SCHOOL OF THEATRE  
ANTHROPOLOGY. 14th  
International Session -  
Krzyzowa & Wrocław,  
Poland 2005  
Photograph: Thomas  
Hotod



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**Eugenio  
Barba**

*Founder & Director,  
Odin Theatre;  
Founder,  
International School  
of Theatre  
Anthropology*

Richard Emmert spoke to me about Akira Matsui at our meetings in Tokyo in the 80s. Only many years later did I succeed in attracting him to ISTA, the International School of Theatre Anthropology. It was the year 2000, in Bielefeld, Germany.

Akira didn't speak. The communication in English passed through Jonah Salz who, patiently, put into Japanese my explanation about the architecture of the working day, the finality of the various sections of comparative research and the corresponding practical demonstrations. Akira didn't raise any objection. He listened to Jonah's translation without asking a question or requesting the least explanation. I spoke at length introducing the "research tradition" in ISTA. Jonah translated and Akira looked at me in silence.

I never succeeded in discovering how knowledgeable he was about the language of Shakespeare. I saw him often conversing with foreigners without the presence of Jonah. At times it happened I made a joke and, to my surprise, Jonah's laughter was preceded by that of Akira. No doubt Akira was pulling my leg.

In *Ur-Hamlet*, I changed his role from one day to another: he was no longer the ghost of Hamlet's father, but the Spirit of the Plague that infiltrates the Castle of Elsinore and murders its inhabitants. As if it was the most normal thing in the world, Akira immediately went to work.

It seemed as if he was synchronised with the discontinuous waves of my thought. Actors of this type don't grow on trees.

Besides his silence, what I remember most is Akira's power on stage.



**Chen Shi-Zheng**

Director of  
Theatre, Film and  
Opera

I had the honor of working with Akira Matsui for a project called *Forgiveness* produced by the Asia Society of New York in 2000. My intention was to bring together Japanese, Korean and Chinese artists, seeking reconciliation of their past, in order to move forward into the future.

Akira-san taught me the beauty of compassion. Working with him made me appreciate not only his artistry as a noh master, but his sense of humanity.

I also enjoyed drinking saké with him and I have always wished that I could drink again with him. Akira-san, during your auspicious 70th birthday year, I wish you the best of health and happiness, and I hope that we can work together again in the near future.

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**Paddy  
Cunneen**

Composer,  
Theatre Director  
and Playwright

Matsui sensei is a noh genius. There's no other way to put it. His movement onstage is pure physical poetry.

For this reason I sought him out and was lucky enough to be able to work with him for two days in 2014, developing ideas for a new play. The story is set in Ireland and features an old man who sits beside a lake. I want to explore noh techniques as a way of portraying him.

Overcoming a few minor translation difficulties, Matsui sensei immediately grasps the essence of the story, and especially the nature of the old man. Suddenly his own neat and graceful movements are gone, and he becomes steady and deliberate. I watch him walk slowly across imaginary Irish fields to a corner of the room that was our lake. He sits down, surveys the landscape ruefully, then, transforming his walking cane into a fishing rod, he casts into the water. All done without cliché and so compelling to watch, I begin to think my own text might be redundant.

For two days we explore key moments in the story. I see the old man row across the lake, and then almost drown in it - dancing a slow motion struggle under the water. Then, he beats back a raging stallion with a fishing rod, and chops down a tree using a cane as a chainsaw.

Next up he suggests we try some Irish music. "Irish music" he says "is perfect for noh."

And so it proves.

Or rather... And so he proves.

He glides around the floor to a slow air from *The Chieftains*. It all fits so beautifully you'd think the flute and *bodhrán* were a *nohkan* and *kotsuzumi*. He makes you wonder if County Monaghan might actually be some province of 14th century Japan.

Matsui sensei has the astonishing ability to blend his craft with any other theatre form - and reveal everything about both. So then... In the pub afterwards, he demonstrates his vast repertoire of songs from Broadway musicals.

Of course he does!

Akira Matsui (right) with participants in the Noh Training Project Bloomsburg, August 2013. Elizabeth Dowd is third row, center. Photograph by David Surtasky



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**Elizabeth Dowd**  
 Bloomsburg  
 Theatre  
 Ensemble  
 Member,  
 Noh Training  
 Project  
 Bloomsburg  
 Producing  
 Director,  
 Theatre Nohgaku  
 Founding Member

In September 2002, Theatre Nohgaku embarked upon its first performance tour, W.B. Yeats' *At the Hawk's Well*. The tour was amazing on many levels. Not only was it Theatre Nohgaku's test run to see if there was an audience for our theatrical experiment to share the beauty of noh in English, noh *shite* actor Akira Matsui had graciously agreed to perform with us in the role of the Hawk. His mesmerizing dance was the highlight of the performance, ensuring that audiences got to witness the power of noh when performed by someone who had trained over a lifetime.

On the night we performed at Williams College in Williamstown, MA, it was my turn to play Cuchulain. Armed with the curved wooden blade of the *naginata*, Cuchulain had a brief battle with the Hawk. To my horror, when I made my sweeping cut, I misjudged my distance and caught Matsui sensei's ankle. I cannot express the thoughts that raced through my head, but here's a glimpse: "This man is an Intangible Cultural Asset, a professional noh actor whose artistry is rooted in his feet—and I've just wounded him. Is he bleeding? Should I stop? No, there's an audience, he's onto the next movement, just keep going. Focus!" All this in a split second! It was not until we were offstage that I was able to ask how he was. As we rearranged ourselves for the curtain call (unknown in noh performance) I apologized profusely. Not only did Matsui sensei wave it off as though it were nothing, he insisted that I go after him in the line – in essence, elevating my role where the most significant performers bow last. It was a stunning lesson to me. I had long been inspired and dazzled by Matsui sensei's sublime artistry. I was honored that he was willing to risk his reputation by performing with our dedicated fledgling company. But in that moment, I understood the depth of his generosity and the deep humility that permeates every aspect of a noh performer's relationship to his art.

Like so many lessons I have been blessed to receive as Matsui sensei's student, I understood the concept, but the depth of its meaning is the work of a lifetime. I am honored to have this opportunity to join the many people across the world who celebrate Akira Matsui. His artistry is rivaled only by his generosity of spirit. *Domo arigato gozaimashita, sensei.*

**Kazuhiro Inoue**  
Photographer,  
Photo-journalist

Does Akira Matsui dance noh with his brain (in Japanese, also pronounced “nō”)? Or does he dance with his body? He has an animal-like speed that is quiet and delicate. It sometimes seems to have the precision of a robot.

As a photographer, I have on several occasions had the chance to travel with Matsui-san abroad for his performances and have sensed that he was dancing in order to “show the soul of Japan.”

Matsui frequently performs in collaborations with dancers from throughout the world as well as with contemporary musicians and artists, and so from my perspective as a Japanese, he often seems like a foreign non-Japanese. At a post-performance party, he never seems to be hesitant to speak with foreigners for the first time, and he quickly makes friends with them.

It also seems that whatever country he visits and with whomever he performs, he is always trying to understand that country and performer, and in that context, he tries with all his power to demonstrate the appeal of noh and of Japan, and it is that which I try to capture when taking his photo.

Akira Matsui is an artist of traditional noh who truly demonstrates the beauty of Japanese performance.

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Akira Matsui walking  
with Korean *kagok*/  
*pansori* singer  
Kwon-Soon Kang  
at The Bellagio Center  
at Lake Como, Italy in  
November 1995.  
Photograph by Kazuhiro  
Inoue

**Hirano Kunio**  
*Pianist*

As a close friend of Akira Matsui, I am extremely delighted and proud that he has received an honorary doctorate from Royal Holloway, University of London. The first time I was introduced to him, I was told that he was a noh actor and frankly, I was afraid he would be a difficult person. But that concern proved to be completely unfounded. Matsui-san has absolutely no sense of self-importance, but rather is always good-humoured and amiable, and we quickly became close friends.

Matsui-san and I have collaborated together five times with him dancing and me playing piano, and these performances have all been highly praised by those who come to my concerts. Meanwhile, I have stood watch as he continues to actively perform in Japan and abroad. More than anything, I hope that he bears in mind that his health is his wealth, and I pray that his career of performing will continue for many more years to come.

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**David Hughes**  
*Retired Head,  
Department of  
Music, SOAS  
University of  
London  
Research Associate,  
Japan Research  
Centre*

My memories of Matsui Akira Sensei (now Dr. Akira Matsui) began a quarter-century ago, via our mutual connections with Richard Emmert. In 1991 I was Head of Music at SOAS, University of London. My main research interests were Japanese folk music and the musics of Indonesia and Thailand, but I'd taken lessons in noh at Tokyo University of the Arts from 1978 to 1980. Rick, a fellow American, was there studying at the same time and has since become one of the leading figures on the contemporary international noh scene. In 1991 I had the pleasure and honour of hosting a two-month community workshop at SOAS, taught by Rick and his Kita-school teacher and master - a certain Matsui Sensei.

What a joy it was to welcome Akira to SOAS and London! Around thirty people, including many UK-based Japanese, learned so much from him, from dance to posture to costume to noh etiquette. This culminated in our performance, with Akira and Rick, of the *kiri* of *Funa-Benkei* and *Matsukaze*, an excellent pair of contrasting pieces. And of course Akira performed as well.

Since that launchpad, Akira has returned to the UK several times to teach and perform, at SOAS, Royal Holloway (RHUL) and several other places. These visits resulted in the formation of the SOAS Noh Group, which has now merged into the University of London Noh Society.

Aside from traditional noh, Akira has also performed contemporary versions, sometimes accompanied by a jazz ensemble or other non-Japanese musics. This too has broadened our awareness of the possibilities for noh in the age of globalization.

So, from one 70-year-old to another: Akira Sensei, *arigatou*, *omedetou* and *kanpai!*





**Martha B. Johnson**  
 Co-Artistic  
 Director,  
*Full Circle*  
 Theater  
 Company,  
 Professor  
 Emerita  
 Augsburg  
 College,  
 Minneapolis

I first met Akira Matsui 34 years ago - that meeting and our work together changed my theatrical life. While living in Minneapolis, I was close to finishing my Ph.D. dissertation in theater at UW-Madison. My topic was a reexamination of the mask and masked acting of ancient Greece informed by the living masked acting traditions of Japanese *noh*. Most of my work had been completed under my long-time mentor, A.C. Scott, with input from N.G.L. Hammond and others. My new advisor, Phil Zarrilli, suggested that I interview visiting artist, Akira Matsui, before doing my final revisions. Mr. Matsui graciously agreed to these interviews.

After three days of extraordinary interviews, I realized that many of my assumptions about masked acting, based to a large extent upon European/American concepts and practices of masks in Western actor training, were incorrect in terms of *noh* and possibly of ancient tragic performance. It became clear that I needed to rewrite my dissertation, but my mixed feelings of gratitude and discouragement were secondary to experiencing the enormous force of Akira's amazing artistry in the rehearsals I attended at the time.

I put my dissertation aside and invited him to come direct for our Minneapolis company, 21st Street Players. He ended up writing, directing, and choreographing two pieces for us: *Hoichi* (1983), commissioned by and performed at Walker Art Center, and his version of *Rashomon* (1985). Those years of working with Akira changed my world and views of theater forever. And when I completed my dissertation in 1984, I gratefully felt how clearly indebted this study was to the richness of my work with this extraordinary theater artist.

I went on to teach and direct plays at Augsburg College in Minneapolis for 26 years, and to co-found Mu Performing Arts, now one of the largest Asian American theater companies in the U.S. Two years ago I stepped away from Augsburg and Mu to co-found a new theater company, Full Circle Theater.

## Don Kenny

Translator,  
Kyogen performer

Akira Matsui was introduced to me by a cousin of his in 1969. In 1974, he participated in my theatre piece *Alice in the Land of the Correct Place* as the Demented Butterfly, wearing a Hanae Mori dress. In 1975, he served as choreographer for my production of an original English noh play based on the life of St. Francis.

In the late 1970s, Akira toured the United States with my Kenny & Ogawa Kyogen Players, during which he performed a dance from St. Francis, alongside our Kyogen in English. I think that this was one of his first ever visits to the States, at which time he fell totally in love with America, and the rest is history.

Akira has a jolly disposition and is one of the most skillful and expressive noh actors I have ever seen. I wish to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt congratulations on his being awarded an honorary degree.

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## Jin Hi Kim

Composer/  
Komungo player  
Visiting Assistant  
Professor, Music  
Department  
Wesleyan  
University

Congratulations to Mr. Akira Matsui in this his 70th birthday year.

I first met Akira at the National Noh Theater in Tokyo through Richard Emmert during my Asian Cultural Council fellowship to Japan in 1993.

As a composer/performer, I came upon the idea to create a cross-cultural pan-Asian mask dance performance in collaboration with mask dancers, singers and drummers from different countries of Asia. I invited Richard Emmert to choreograph and co-direct the project with me. Soon after, Akira Matsui came to the National Gugak Center for Korean Traditional Performing Arts in Seoul and did a jam session with Kang Kwon Soon (a *kagok* singer), Lee Jong Ho (a mask dancer) and Choi Jong-Sil (a *janggo* drummer). Akira was so liberal and free in his creativity going far beyond cultural boundaries and traditions. His improvisation was an inspiration to me!

The Japan Society in New York commissioned the new work for their 90th anniversary. In 1996, some of the members of our team became artists- in-residence at the Bellagio Center in Italy to develop the project. At the final formal dinner, Akira put on an Indonesian costume while the others exchanged traditional costumes between Japan, Korea, India and Indonesia. That scene was so entertaining.

As a result, in 1997 we performed a 90-minute cross-cultural mask dance drama, *Dragon Bond Rite*, which featured a cast of 14 musicians and dancers from India, Indonesia, Korea, Japan, Tuva and the U.S. This was performed at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, the Japan Society in New York, the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, and the Festival of Asian Arts in Hong Kong.

Akira masterfully improvised with Indian *kudiattam* dancer Margi Madhu to my *komungo* performance. He also danced in a mixed drum quartet with an Indonesian *topeng* dancer and a Korean *talchum* dancer. He was so exquisite as he seamlessly merged with various cultures. He clearly is a master who can easily perform with other Asian ancient theater dance and music forms, yet maintain a contemporary sensibility.

**Akira Matsui** (right) dances with dancers from India, Indonesia and Korea in Dragon Bond Rite, conceived and composed by Jin Hi Kim, 1997. Photograph by Kazuhiro Inoue.



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**Akira Matsui** (right) dances with *kudiattam* dancer Margi Madhu from India in Dragon Bond Rite, conceived and composed by Jin Hi Kim, 1997. Photograph by Kazuhiro Inoue.





It is with great joy that I learnt an honorary doctorate had been bestowed on Akira Matsui-sensei by Royal Holloway, University of London. I rejoice in hearing this news as do many people in Poland. They include the growing community of admirers of Japanese performing arts and in particular the lovers of noh theatre. The fact that the circle of noh fans in Poland has been steadily growing is to a great extent the result of Master Matsui's enthusiasm in spreading both the knowledge necessary to fully enjoy noh performance and in his teaching of noh performing techniques.

It all started in the 90's with a number of Matsui-sensei's noh performances staged in Warsaw which were later followed by a series of workshops. With the help of a group of devoted students, these workshops soon developed into an amateur noh theatre training group named Ryokurankai (literally 'Green Chrysanthemum Association') established in 2009.

Under Matsui-sensei's guidance, participants in the workshops learned and practiced the *kamae* basic posture, the *hakobi* walking style, the *shimai* dances, the *kata* movement patterns, the *jiutai* chorus singing and other techniques. The workshops would usually be crowned with a public demonstration presented by all participants. What's more, over the past several years, the Polish public could on several occasions enjoy watching noh performances presented by professional artists representing different noh schools from Japan who were assisted on stage by young Polish members of the Ryokurankai training group.

Apart from Matsui-sensei's accomplishments as a master-actor and teacher, it has been his warm and friendly attitude towards the participants of the workshops as well as his wonderful sense of humor that keeps drawing new students eager to participate in those lessons.

Let me express my heartfelt congratulations to Master Akira Matsui on the occasion of the London 'Noh time like the present...' performances in celebration of his long career and of his receiving an honorary doctorate from Royal Holloway, University of London. And in addition, I wish to extend warm words of appreciation to Royal Holloway for bestowing this honorable title on Master Akira Matsui. Matsui-sensei, *o-medetō gozaimasu!*

**Henryk Lipszyc**  
Professor Emeritus,  
Japanese Studies  
Oriental  
Department,  
University of  
Warsaw,  
Former  
Ambassador of  
Poland to Japan

Left: Photo 1:  
Akira Matsui as the angel  
in *Hagoromo* in a  
performance at the  
University of Warsaw in  
2013 organized by the  
Ryokurankai. The *taiko* is  
played by Matsui's son  
Shunsuke.

Left: Photo 2  
Akira Matsui as the  
angel in *Hagoromo* in  
a performance at the  
University of Warsaw in  
2013 organized by and  
performed with members  
of the Ryokurankai.

Left: Photo 3  
Akira Matsui as the  
demon in *Kurozuka* in a  
performance at Teatr na  
Woli in Warsaw in 2011  
organized by and  
performed with the  
Ryokurankai. The priest  
is performed by Jacob  
Karpoluk.

Left: Photo 4  
Akira Matsui as the shrine  
priestess in *Makiginu* in  
a performance at Teatr  
na Woli in Warsaw in  
2011 organized by and  
performed with the  
Ryokurankai. The man  
from the capital is played  
by Yoko Karpoluk Fujii.



Top Left: Allan Marett (in front) with Richard Emmert & Akira Matsui holding Allan's daughter Lucy. Camping north of Sydney, September 1984.

Top right: Akira Matsui as Wisdom King Fudo Myoo in Allan Marett's English noh play *Oppenheimer*, Sydney, Australia, October 2015.

Bottom: Akira Matsui as Wisdom King Fudo Myoo with John Oglevee as Robert Oppenheimer's ghost in *Oppenheimer*, Sydney, Australia, October 2015.



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**Allan Marett**  
Professor Emeritus  
(Musicology),  
University of Sydney

I have been privileged to work with Akira Matsui on a number of occasions over the course of my 30-year career at the University of Sydney. What he brought to each of our projects was not just a mastery of the ancient tradition of noh, but also an extraordinary generosity in working with colleagues and students, an openness to innovation, and a deep commitment to the dissemination of noh throughout the world.

In 1984 he and Richard Emmert conducted a 10-week workshop for students of Music, Performance Studies and Japanese Studies at Sydney University. This project culminated in performances of *Kiyotsune* (in Japanese) and a noh-based realisation of W.B. Yeats's *At the Hawk's Well* (in English), in which Mr Matsui danced the main role of the Hawk. During that visit we began collaborating on a new English-language noh play, *Eliza*, which formed the focus for a second 8-week workshop at Sydney University in 1989 and was subsequently performed in Tokyo at the Umewaka Noh Theatre in 1990. For both the 1984 and 1989 projects, Mr Matsui not only worked with Mr Emmert in teaching and directing students, but also allowed students the privilege of wearing costumes and masks from his valuable collection.

Our next collaboration had to wait more than two decades as each of us—Matsui, Emmert and myself—pursued other projects, but in 2014 we began to work together to create and perform a new play, *Oppenheimer*, for which I had written the text and Richard Emmert the music.

*Oppenheimer* was performed in Sydney in 2015 by a combination of artists associated with Theatre Nohgaku and a locally trained chorus. Mr Matsui directed the performance, lent costumes and masks, worked with Mr Emmert and me in shaping the text, music and movement, and performed the role of Fudo Myō-ō.

My association with Akira Matsui has been one of the delights of my life, which has been made so much richer from knowing and working with him. I know that I am not alone in this, and that artists, teachers and students throughout the world owe a great debt to him for so generously and openly sharing with us the great tradition of noh.



Akira Matsui  
giving a demonstration  
at Smith College.  
Winter 1979



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**Mutsuko  
Minegishi**  
*Aikido Instructor,  
Guam Aikikai*

It was more than 40 years ago that I met Akira Matsui at Amherst College in Massachusetts. He was on tour of the US with a kyogen group, and I was a Fulbright exchange lecturer teaching Japanese at Smith and Amherst Colleges. When I first spoke with him, I was captivated by his open and cheerful personality. It struck me that he seemed better fitted to be a kyogen actor than a noh actor.

I soon decided that I wanted to invite him to Smith College to give some noh classes, so I approached the Dean of Smith College and obtained approval to have him teach a credit course for one semester in the Dance Department in winter-spring 1979. He selected a section of the classical noh play *Hagoromo* and taught students the movement patterns and the chant. At the end of the semester, we gave a performance with costumes that I handmade myself. From beginning to end, the course was exciting, educational and artistic, and students and faculty alike were fascinated by his enthusiastic work.

I also wrote to many colleges and universities on the East Coast that offered Japanese language or East Asian Studies courses. There were many replies, and as a result we visited various campuses including Colby College in Maine, State University of New York at Albany, and a private dance studio in New York City, among others. At each place he gave workshops and performances that were all received with great interest.

Soon after returning to Japan, Akira Matsui began receiving invitations to teach at a variety of colleges and universities in the United States and Canada, and later in Europe as well. He is a true pioneer of the noh theater on the international stage.

I am proud and honored to send my heartfelt congratulations for his lifelong contribution and dedication to noh as well as his great achievements and success in spreading this Japanese traditional art.

I remember well when I first met Akira Matsui in 1999. He was already quite known in theatre circles in Europe, and we met at the time of his presentations of the noh play *Aoi-no-Ue* which had been organized in Warsaw. I had just come back from my first posting in the Polish Embassy in Japan, and I had a chance to talk with him at length.

It just happened that I was at that time working on the publication of my translation of Zeami's *Kakyo* and other treatises, and we were in need of some noh illustrations. I had some calligraphy by the late Hideo Kanze, but no photos. I asked Akira Matsui if he could help me in this and he readily agreed, presenting me with the superb pictures taken during *Aoi-no-Ue*.

Mr. Matsui came to Poland again in 2004 to lead the 14th ISTA (International School of Theatre Anthropology) Session for young actors, but at that time I was stationed again in the Polish Embassy in Tokyo. He came again in 2006, and though I was still in Japan, I heard of the interest generated in his performance in Beckett's *Rockaby*, in which he appeared with the great Polish actress Irena Jun - a colleague of the famous Polish theatre director Jerzy Grotowski.

But then finally, when I became the Polish ambassador to Japan in 2009, I saw Mr. Matsui perform on the Kita Noh Stage in Meguro, Tokyo. I remember thinking what a great actor he was! I brought along a young embassy staff member to the performance, and for her it was the first time to watch noh. She fell in love with noh on that day, thanks no doubt to Akira Matsui's art.

After the performance that day I had a chance to speak with Mr. Matsui and mentioned to him that I was curious to read the noh plays of the Kita School which had been written on themes from the Gospel. He immediately said he would find the texts for me. Later he presented me with the texts of *Fukkatsu* (Resurrection) and *Shito Pauro* (Apostle Paul). Though I have not yet translated these into Polish, I definitely plan to do so one day. I owe it to Akira Matsui!

**Jadwiga Rodowicz**

*Former Ambassador of Poland to Japan,  
Noh Scholar and Playwright,  
Instructor at the Warsaw Theater Academy*

**Jonah Salz**  
Director,  
Noho Theatre Group

The cast party for Noho's Dec 1981 production of *At the Hawk's Well* was a boisterous affair. Guest actors from The Don Kenny Kyogen Players, Rick Emmert, a full noh ensemble, and 20 actors and stage crew, Japanese and foreign, gathered at an izakaya restaurant for celebratory drinks. As a 25 year-old director and producer, I was in a good mood, for I felt that I had accomplished something special—directing both the first English-language noh play, Yeats' *At the Hawk's Well*, and the premiere of Beckett's *Act Without Words I* on a noh stage, in two sold-out productions in Kyoto and Osaka. With mugs of beer and cups of sake, we toasted our inarguable success.

Then musical director Richard Emmert introduced a friend, a seemingly solicitous man who spoke in a rapid rush of words. But instead of expected kudos, he launched into a critique of the many decisions I'd made as a director—costuming, staging, and music. Eventually, I grew irritated—"If you're so unhappy with the direction, why don't you get involved next time?!"

That quietly aggressive critic was Akira Matsui, noh master of the Kita school. He eventually collaborated with me for more than thirty years on various Noho Theatre productions, seeing them as opportunities to perform with international artists in Japan that he otherwise could attempt only overseas. He played the Hawk in my 1985 revival, using a stage name and mask so that he wouldn't be criticized by conservative members of the noh world; by 1990, in Emmert's re-direction of the play, he could use his own name. He experimented outside his comfort zone. In *Ophelia* (1989), he sat facing a mirror in full mask and costume while the audience entered, then came to startling life with candle in hand to revive the ghosts in the family graveyard. He played the ghost of Emily in *Our Town: Back to the Future* (1986), masked but in a dress. In *Eastern Mirror* (2004), he danced unmasked in formal kimono to electronic music. His *Rockaby*, developed over two decades, allowed for vulgar elements to seep into the elegant formal patina.

Although he has performed for even longer with Emmert and done countless inter-genre dance and theatre performances, Matsui says he enjoys working with me because my relative ignorance of noh conventions allows him to go beyond the expected. Unexpected and contrarian

views seem to be Matsui's default mode. When offering workshops, such as at Eugenio Barba's ISTA gatherings, I think most attendees are surprised when this diminutive and soft-spoken man begins to sing or dance. Suddenly the stage is filled with sound and spectacle, an onstage metamorphosis from a meek Japanese man to a charismatic god.

At lecture-demonstrations given at American and British universities and theatres in the 1980s and 90s, his charm and humor were always in evidence. He would first show the triangle, circle, and zigzag floor-patterns that comprised most noh dances. Then he would show how they could be combined to express abstract emotions—humming Memory from *Cats*! But my favorite section was the finale. We would ask a hosting professor or producer to provide a secret piece of music. After listening to the three or four minute piece only once, Akira would select a mask and fan from those he'd brought with him, then instantly create a dance perfectly matching the feeling of the melody and even dramatic arc of the story. This was the once-only magic of Zeami's *hana*, a party trick created before the eyes of appreciative spectators. Spectators were convinced in an instant: noh was not an anachronistic museum piece, but a refined toolbox of techniques that could be employed to express a variety of abstract and concrete subject matter and emotion.

In three decades of collaboration, Matsui hasn't changed from that genial partier constantly attuned to the mood of the room and interested in confounding all the individuals in it. I have come to admire his chameleon-like transformations: backstage tyrant to his costumers and wig-fitters (especially his son Shunsuke); onstage elegant and serene god; at parties, humble and curious guest. "Is this a contradiction with your image of 'noh actor'?" he seems to say. "Get over it!"

Photo:  
Akira Matsui in a 2011  
performance of *Rockaby*  
in Japanese at the Oe  
Noh Theatre in Kyoto.  
Directed by Jonah Salz  
for Noho Theatre Group.  
Photograph by Muranaka  
Osamu





Akira Matsui performing an extended version of a dance section from *Ophelia* with NTPUK members Ashley Thorpe, Richard Emmert and Laura Sampson. On the Handa Noh Stage, July 2016.



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### **Ashley Thorpe**

*Senior Lecturer,  
Department of  
Drama, Theatre  
& Dance  
Royal Holloway  
University of  
London,  
Programme  
Director,  
Noh Training  
Project UK*

I first had the pleasure of working with Akira Matsui in 2014, when he came to work on the Noh Training Project UK, which had just moved to Royal Holloway. My first impression of him was of seriousness but not austerity, of passion, and of generosity. Even though I had only known him for a few days, he was more than happy to assist in a performance to raise awareness of the Handa Noh Stage that we have at Royal Holloway. As I have got to know him a little better, I consider that this special combination of artistic seriousness and generosity of spirit is a life force that has enabled Matsui to lead such a distinguished career. Matsui has guest taught at various university departments around the world, including at institutions in the USA, UK, across Europe, Asia, and Australasia, as well as at Royal Holloway, University of London, in the UK for the last three summers.

Matsui's considerable achievements in bringing noh to the world are, in my opinion, unique. Innovation in noh is typically considered to take place within the form, but Matsui has undertaken quite radical interventions to proactively investigate the intercultural possibilities of noh. He has worked as a performer, director, playwright, and choreographer alongside some of the most distinguished theatre directors, including Eugenio Barba and Chen Shizheng. His intercultural work has been exceptionally varied, taking in adaptations of Shakespeare, newly written English-language noh plays, as well as the creation of new and unexpected dance fusions. A performance in Buenos Aires that combined noh dance with tango offers a good example of this.

It felt right that Royal Holloway – one of the few Universities outside of Japan to be equipped with a noh stage – should recognise Matsui's international achievements in noh, and that is why I recommended him for an honorary doctorate. But, on a personal level, I also wanted to reflect Matsui's intuitive and immediate generosity of spirit back to him, and I was delighted when the award was bestowed upon him in July 2016, the auspicious year that Matsui turned 70. I believe that actions speak louder than words, and I hope that the award of an honorary doctorate expresses something of my admiration and respect for Matsui and his work.

The curtain call after *Bedhaya Hagoromo* with the Sultan of Yogyakarta at the Pagelaran Keraton Yogyakarta. Dec. 2014. From left, Richard Emmert, His Majesty Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono X and Governor of Yogyakarta, Queen Consort GKR Hemas, Didik Nini Thowok, Akira Matsui, Alex Dea (American performer of Javanese music).



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I have worked with Akira Matsui Sensei on three major projects. The first was when we performed together as members of Teater Cahaya in an international, intercultural collaboration of our dance-drama *Siddhartha*. We met several times in Indonesia (Yogyakarta, Solo and Bali) from 2000 for intensive rehearsals that culminated in performances in Kuala Lumpur in 2002. I saw at that time that the power of Akira Sensei's performance was very strong and influential in creating the success of our collaboration.

More recently, in both 2014 and 2015, he has come to Yogyakarta, first to perform in *Bedhaya Hagoromo*, my collaboration between Javanese and noh dancers and musicians in celebration of my 60th birthday, and then again to perform a short noh piece in the programme called *The Legends* as a part of Asian Pacific Performing Arts Networking (APPAN) featuring performers from throughout Asia.

From when I first came to know Akira Sensei, I have felt his warmth and humor as a person as well as his seriousness as an artist. He is an excellent emissary of traditional noh drama. I respect him deeply as my senior and fellow Asian performing artist, and I delight in his humble and down-to-earth personality. He is truly an important friend.

### **Didik Nini Thowok**

*Indonesian (Central Javanese) Dancer,  
Comedian, Mask Performer*

In 1982, Phil Zarrilli, of the Theater Department at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, invited Akira Matsui to direct a student performance of *Funa Benkei*. I was then in the Department of East Asian Languages. Having translated quite a few noh plays, I assumed when I heard of the project that my role would be to translate the play for the production, but I soon learned that in Michigan Mr. Matsui had staged *Funa Benkei* in the original Japanese. He kindly humored me and agreed to stage the play this time in English.

Not having studied *utai*, I could never have produced a performable translation on my own. Hour after hour Mr. Matsui patiently demonstrated, phrase by phrase, the required vocal pattern, while I adjusted my English to fit it. Matching English to the original in the sung passages was a welcome challenge that I enjoyed meeting, and doing so taught me a lot. What I could not do was match English length and bulk to the *kotoba* passages of the original. The *waki* speeches use far more syllables than normal English would, or even could, to convey the same narrative meaning. I gave up on those.

In the theater I enjoyed understanding, for the first time, all the words of a noh play performed on stage, and I thank Mr. Matsui for having made that possible. Only thirty years later did I enjoy a comparable pleasure while watching *Hanjo* at the Tokyo Kanze Kaikan. I did not need my *utaibon*. The beautiful words were just as clear as the exquisite brocade of the *shite* actor's costume. When the two merged, I perceived directly the gorgeous weave of language.

### Royall Tyler

*Australian National University (Retired),  
Translator of The Tale of Genji, The Tale of  
the Heike and Japanese Nō Dramas among  
other works*



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**Bonnie C. Wade**  
*Professor of Music,  
University of  
California, Berkeley*

In the spring semester of 1997, the University of California, Berkeley was privileged to enjoy and learn from the presence of Matsui sensei for a very special time—a multi-departmental semester-long adventure devoted to the noh drama: graduate courses on noh taught by Arthur Thornhill (University of Hawaii) in the Department of East Asian Languages and Culture, a lecture course on music of the noh taught by Richard Emmert in the Department of Music, and a performance course taught by Emmert in the Department of Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies through which the capstone of the semester would be presented a production of *Funabenkei*, in Japanese by student performers coached by Emmert with direction by Guest Artist Matsui Akira.

The memories of Matsui sensei through his residency are rich - his consultations about casting of the inexperienced students whose personalities he quickly intuited, his persistent coaching of the movements and gestures of the performers, his close attention to staging in the Durham Studio Theater, his oversight of the donning of the gorgeous robes that he had brought. At every moment everyone was aware of his mastery and artistic sensibilities; at every moment, he was everywhere. Including one extraordinarily brightly starlit night, on the roof of the home that Richard Emmert had rented for the term, from which the gathered company could enjoy together an incredible view of the entire San Francisco Bay Area.

That we should have such a moment with you was entirely special. So, for all you shared with us, Matsui Akira sensei, thank you so very, very much.



Phillip Zarrilli  
Emeritus Professor  
of Performance  
Practice, Exeter  
University, UK  
Artistic Director,  
The Llanarth Group,  
Wales, UK

In 1982, funded by a grant from The Japan Foundation initiated by Farley Richmond at Michigan State and with assistance from Phillip Zarrilli as Director of the Asian-Experimental Theatre Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Akira Matsui was guest artist for two productions of *Funa Benkei*—one at UW Madison in a chant-able English language translation by Royall Tyler, and the second in Japanese at Michigan State. In addition to *Funa Benkei*, both performances also included a modern noh drama in performance with choreography by Akira Matsui.

The Asian-Experimental Theatre Program at UW-Madison was founded by A.C. Scott in 1963. In addition to the ongoing daily pre-performative training in Asian martial arts which provided the foundation training for BAs and MFAs, Scott's model for the program was to invite specialists in specific forms of traditional Asian performance genres—noh, Beijing opera, kathakali dance-drama, etc.—to work with students in the program on a production. During Matsui-san's residence in 1982, he was a masterly guide for all of us involved in daily training for and work on the performances of *Funa Benkei* and Catherine Tyler's modern noh play, *Parting Reeds*, at Madison. As necessary for any traditional technique-based training, Matsui-san's guidance and teaching were exacting. His openness to the students provided a welcoming invitation into the world of noh—an experience that provided this group of students with a remarkable insight into noh, as well as an in-depth experience on which their own future performance work could build.

Interviewed for an article in The Capital Times of 01 May 1982, Matsui-san explained in translation by Royall Tyler his response to working with acting/dance students:

"I find it easier to teach Americans than it is to teach Japanese...There are two different ways to learn this art in Japan. The way I learned—and the way most learn—is from a very early age. Real professionals learn early and they must work very hard. Then there are those who learn later in life, who do it as a hobby. They come (to rehearsals) if they feel like it and they just do not work as hard... When I am working with them, American students are usually up against it. Because of the deadline, they work very hard at it and most of them look upon it as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. In the UW-Madison production, two women performers shared the role of the warrior—"a very masculine figure... That's fine with me. The way that I teach (women) is no different (from men)."

It was such an immense honor and pleasure to co-host Matsui-san during this specific period of his teaching in the US, and for my students at the time, it was indeed a once-in-a-lifetime-opportunity!

Thank you, Matsui-san!!!!

Akira Matsui directing students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1982 as reported in the university newspaper.



*Pagoda* (2011) at the National Noh Theatre, Tokyo. with Kinue Oshima as Meilin, Teruhisa Oshima as the son, and Jubilith Moore, as the Traveller. Photograph by Sohta Kitazawa



# What is noh?

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## History

Noh developed into its present form during the 14th and 15th centuries under the leadership of the distinguished performer-playwrights Kannami and his son Zeami. Zeami, in particular, wrote numerous plays that are still performed in today's classical repertory of some 250 plays. He also wrote a number of once secret works which explain the aesthetic principles governing noh and give details on how the art should be composed, acted, directed, taught, and produced. Noh flourished during Zeami's time under the patronage of the military shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu.

Later during the Edo period (1603-1868), noh became the official performance art of the military government. Feudal military lords throughout the country supported their own troupes and many studied and performed the art themselves. With the societal reforms of the Meiji period (1868-1912), noh lost its governmental patronage and was left to fend for itself. Although it nearly died out, enough performers regrouped, found private sponsors, and began teaching the art to amateurs so that it slowly began to flourish again. Today, noh has the popularity of many classical performance forms throughout the world. Yet its supporters are enthusiastic and its professional performers are highly trained and extremely busy performing and teaching throughout the country. There are today approximately 1,500 professional performers who make their living largely through performing and teaching noh.

## Types of Plays

There are five categories of noh plays. In order, these feature gods, warriors, beautiful women, miscellaneous (notably mad-women or present-time) figures, and supernatural beings. During the Edo period, a full day's programme consisted of the ritual piece *Okina-Sanbaso* followed by one play from each category in the above order. One Kyogen play would be presented between each noh. Of the five categories, the women plays are the slowest in tempo but the most poetic, and of the highest level in expressing *yugen*, an aesthetic term suggesting quiet elegance and grace, and subtle and fleeting beauty.

## Characters

The main character of a noh play is called the *shite* (pronounced sh'tay) who sometimes appears with a companion character(s) called *tsure*.

In many plays, the *shite* appears in the first half as an ordinary person, departs, then appears in the second half in its true form as the ghost of a famous person of long ago. They are traditionally performed by the same actor. The secondary actor is called, the *waki*, often a travelling priest. Their questioning of the main character is important in developing the story line. They often appear with companion *wakitsure*. An interlude actor called *ai* or *ai-kyogen* also often appears as a local person who gives further background to the *waki*, and thus to the audience, to understand the situation of the *shite*.







Top left:  
Meilin mask, carved by  
Hideta Kitazawa in 2009  
for *Pagoda*. Photograph  
by Sohta Kitazawa



Top right:  
Hideta Kitazawa, mask  
maker at work.  
Photograph by Sohta  
Kitazawa

Bottom left:  
Kinue Oshima and  
Richard Emmert  
demonstrate the  
Kotsuzumi and noh flute  
to UK School children in  
2009. Photograph by  
Clive Barda

Bottom right:  
Akira Matsui practising in  
his home studio.  
Photograph by Jannette  
Cheong



## Masks

Makeup is not used in noh. Rather, delicately carved masks are often used by the *shite* main character and/or the *tsure* attendant. Masks are considered objects of superb beauty as well as a powerful means of expression. In general, any character being portrayed which is not a middle-aged man living in the present will wear a mask. Therefore all characters portraying women and old men wear masks as well as supernatural beings such as ghosts, deities, demons, and divine beasts. In general, masks either have a more or less neutral expression, or portray a very strong emotion. The former, in fact, allows the mask a variety of expressions with the play of light and shadow on it as the actor changes slightly the tilt of the mask. Even in roles in which an actor does not wear a mask, the sense of a masked face is evident. This is called *hitamen*, literally 'direct mask'. For this, the actor does not use his face for realistic expression, but rather for mask-like expression. The *waki* or accompanying *wakitsure* never wear masks as they are meant to be middle-aged (generally, men) living in the present-time of the play.

## Movement

A performance of noh is not a performance of realistic theatre. Rather, its movement is highly stylized and prescribed. While some gestures have specific meaning, others serve as an abstract aesthetic expression to convey the emotions of the main character. All of noh can be described as dance. Sometimes there is very little movement as dramatic tension is built mainly through narration.

At other times there is strong, vigorous movement. Movement takes place sometimes to the singing of the chorus or sometimes to purely instrumental music. In general, deliberateness, brevity, suppression and abstraction are important features of noh movement.

## Instrumentalists

Instrumentalists known as *hayashi* sit at the back of the stage. They comprise a transverse flute (*nohkan*), an hourglass-shaped drum held at the shoulder (*kotsuzumi*), a slightly larger hourglass-shaped drum placed on the lap (*okawa* or *otsuzumi*), and a barrel-shaped drum placed on a small floor stand and played with two sticks (*taiko*). The rhythms and

melody of these instruments follow highly prescribed systems. One particularly unique feature is the use of drum calls (*kakegoe*), the shouts or cries of the drummers which serve as signals between the drummers as well as between the drummers and singers. These drum calls also add an important element to the sound texture of the performance, creating the mood and with the chant, establishing the tempo.

### Chorus

A chorus called *jiutai*, usually consisting of eight persons, sits at the side of the stage, functioning to narrate the background, and the story and its mood. It also sometimes describes the character's thoughts and emotions or even sings lines for the characters.

### Costumes

Costumes in noh are elaborate, with dyed silk and intricate embroidery. The costumes reveal the type of character being portrayed and follow prescribed conventions as to their use. Still, there is much variety. The design, the color combinations, richness of texture, and strength of form give noh its visual impact. All characters, whether rich or poor, young or old, male or female, are beautifully costumed. The costuming process is complex. Rather than the actor putting on his own costume, two or three costumers are needed to sculpt the costume on the actor.

### Stage

The main part of the stage used in noh is a curtain-less square with a bridgeway leading to it from backstage. At the end of the bridgeway there is a hanging curtain that swings up and back allowing the characters to enter and exit. Stages were traditionally outside and covered with a long sloping roof. From the late 19th century, they have been mainly moved indoors. These inside stages are open on two sides in a kind of semi-theater-in-the-round. There is no attempt at designing a realistic stage set. Rather, only symbolic stage properties are used.

The pine tree painted on the back wall of the stage represents the tree through which noh was, by legend, passed down from heaven to mankind. In Japanese culture, the evergreen pine has come to be an important symbol of longevity and unchanging steadfastness.

### Space and time

In general, the use of space and time is not portrayed realistically. Rather, there is a freedom of portrayal that requires the audience to use their imaginations.

Characters take only a few steps and through their song or that of the chorus, the audience knows that they have travelled a great distance. Two characters may appear on the stage nearly side-by-side, but again the audience comes to understand that they are not yet in each other's presence. While this may be confusing for the first time viewer, for many people who come to understand these and other conventions, noh creates a much more powerful theatrical expression than realistic theatre.

### Richard Emmert

*A version of this text originally appeared in the Kiyotsune and Pagoda Programme (2009)*

Kinue Oshima as Meilin in *Pagoda* (2009)  
Photograph by Clive Barda







## Rockaby (1980) by Samuel Beckett

Rockaby is a fifteen-minute solo play, written in English in 1980, premiered in 1981 by Billie Whitelaw, directed by Alan Schneider. A Woman, seated in a rocking chair, is rocked gently into that dark night by her own Voice, heard on tape. The rocker's unusual footrest and curved arms create the sense of a cradle, and a coffin, rocking her into the eternal night. The resonances with noh are apparent: the body is immobile, covered in a fancy costume with only the constrained face and hands. The face is in heavy make-up, frozen, mask-like throughout. The monodrama, performed by a single, seated actor to a "choral" accompaniment, seems to follow a noh structure of increasing intensity before a final coda.

The Noho Theatre Group premiered Rockaby in Japan in 1982, and at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival (in Japanese). In Noho's first version, the Woman sat on a stool, moving her arms and tilting her face to simulate movement. Later, we used a real rocker, with the actor standing midway to dance a final expression of lost hope. Finally, when Matsui took over the role in 1991, we used a bamboo frame, wrapped in white cloth as per typical noh properties. He began the play offstage, "summoned" by the chant-like words of the Voice, then danced in reaction to the words.

Matsui has varied his costume for the role of Woman over the years. Sometimes he wears an everyday kimono, with movements more quotidian than noh. On a noh stage he normally wears a full,

colorful costume, a last hurrah for a well-born lady now losing her mind. When another noh actor portrayed the Woman for Noho, he chose an old woman mask and grey kimono, interpreting the "prematurely old" original stage direction literally. In the Billie Whitelaw original, she wears a gaudy, sequined dress and girlish hat, grey hair askew. However, Matsui feels that this is a memory-play, so that the Woman should be seen at the peak of her beauty and radiance, revealing her decline in the course of the play, on-stage.

Matsui has taken this play with him wherever he tours, performing it in English, Japanese, Spanish, German, Russian, and Polish. Although more conservative spectators have questioned the intentional ugliness of some of his forms that are non-noh-like—holding a pillar, splaying his fingers and legs, tilting his head forward and to the side—most spectators have found his stylized interpretation of Beckett's play a moving monodrama fusing poetry, ritual, and drama.

**Jonah Salz**

Akira Matsui in a 2011 performance of *Rockaby* in Japanese at the Oe Noh Theatre in Kyoto. Directed by Jonah Salz for Noho Theatre Group. Photograph by Muranaka Osamu

# Tradition and change in noh

Richard Emmert

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Many people seem to believe that noh is a monolithic tradition that hasn't changed in its 650-year history. Noh, indeed, has a long history and its strict traditions have been passed down largely through families, from father to son, generation after generation. Many noh families can still trace their ancestors back to the 14th and 15th centuries and further.

However, researchers have evidence that many aspects of noh have undergone transformations since its development largely into its present structure during the 14th and 15th centuries. These include the length/time of performances (performances of 600 years ago are thought to have been about two-thirds the time they take today), the shape of the stage, the development in quality of the costumes, the change in the structure of the noh flute, and the development of the dynamic singing style (all probably from 450-500 years ago), the use of a theatre building to house the stage (140 years ago), and the appearance of professional female performers (the last 100 years or so) to name several prominent transformations.

Smaller changes also constantly take place. No two performers are alike even from the same family. Noh has considerable freedom of expression while performing within implied parameters. That freedom of interpretation clearly results, not in a static tradition, but in a living and breathing one.

In terms of plays, the present classical repertory numbers around 250. Yet over

the last 650 years there have been over 3000 noh plays written and one presumes many of these have been performed. That said, the number of new (*shinsaku*) plays dropped considerably during the Meiji period (1868~1912) and through to the 1980s. With only a few exceptions, new plays, if created at all, tended to be made by only the most prominent noh performers. Similarly, there were revivals (*fukkyoku*) of earlier plays made during this time, but very few.

A catalyst for change in this regard was the opening of the National Noh Theatre (NNT) in 1983. Several years later, the NNT began creating revivals by small teams of scholars and actors. Often these pieces had merely a text or even just parts of texts from hundreds of years ago, so any revival required developing ideas for music, costume and staging—in essence they required the skills to create anew rather than the skills needed to maintain tradition.

In this way, more performers began to understand the importance of creation while maintaining tradition. Particularly, in the 1990s, many noh performers began creating and performing new pieces, and those numbers have continued to grow over the last two decades. That said, performance of traditional pieces still make up probably 99 percent of performances that take place in the noh world during the course of a year.

In addition, a few actors—Akira Matsui being one who stands out prominently—



have collaborated with non-noh performers. Mr. Matsui, for example, has collaborated with a variety of Western and Asian theatre, dance and music practitioners, both classical and modern. It seems that for the most part, these collaborations take place with the noh practitioners maintaining a strict adherence to noh traditional techniques while performing with non-noh performers. Other prominent performers from the noh world who have participated in such collaborations from the 1950s include brothers Hisao and Hideo Kanze, several generations of the Shigeyama kyogen group, and Mansaku Nomura, and his son Mansai Nomura from the 1990s, then Reijiro Tsumura from the 2000s, and musicians Shonosuke Okura from the 1980s and Yukihiro Issa from the 1990s. There certainly are others.

While it is difficult to refer to such collaborations as noh, clearly performers are using their noh skills in new and profound ways. Mr. Matsui has said that what he does in such collaborations is noh, although his non-noh collaborators are doing something else. However one might refer to these collaborations, the important point is that the noh performers in these collaborations are not attempting to be ballet dancers or Western actors or jazz musicians. Instead, they are using their traditional training in new performative circumstances.

Another strain of change in the noh world is the advent of English noh. While there are varying definitions of what makes an

English noh, it is clear that beginning with W.B. Yeats' *At the Hawk's Well* which he termed a noh play when it was first performed in 1916, there has been interest internationally in noh performance and various attempts to use noh or noh-like elements in English and other non-Japanese plays. There is also interest in this development within Japan as can be seen in the entry entitled "English Noh" in the third edition of the Japanese-language Noh-Kyogen Encyclopedia (*Noh-Kyogen Jiten*), as well as several paragraphs within the even more recent Nohgaku Encyclopedia (*Nohgaku Daijiten*).

Today's performance of *Opposites/InVerse* is in that vein of English noh. Jannette Cheong as author and myself as composer are collaborating for a second time after working on the strictly English noh play *Pagoda* performed by Theatre Nohgaku and the Oshima Noh Theatre and toured in London, Dublin, Oxford and Paris in 2009 and in Tokyo, Kyoto, Beijing and Hong Kong in 2011. This time, considering the ballet dancer and the opera singers, *Opposites/InVerse* would be more properly labeled a noh-influenced dance-drama rather than a strict noh play. It was Jannette's wish to use opera singers and a contemporary dancer with the idea of creating a true collaboration between Western and noh elements. Of course, it could easily be a more strictly English noh in a future iteration. Hopefully its beauty will be apparent in either.

Above: Richard Emmert performs as *shite* in *Kiyotsune* (2005), as *tsure* in *Kiyosune* (2009), and as *shite* in *Pine Barrens* (2006)

'An image exists of noh as a rigid form that cannot be altered in even the minutest ways. However, noh can be changed in multiple and various ways to the performer's creative disposition. Because of the freedom within the performance of noh, it continues even today to draw in audiences and speak to their hearts.'

Professor  
Mario Yokomichi  
Foremost 20th century  
scholar of noh

# My need to noh

Hugh Quarshie

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Maybe it's because I'm an African that I love trying on other cultures; for by so doing, I can perhaps console myself that I am not in thrall to any one culture, that despite centuries of colonial domination, I can pick and choose between them.

Maybe it's because I'm an African that I understand how notional nation-states really are, coming from a continent where countries were created by the stroke of a pen, and controlled by the sword or rather the Maxim gun held by ruthless Europeans. No, not countries but states which are still struggling to become nations and find a national identity.

Maybe it's because I'm an African that, I admit, I may have been too easily impressed by the bold assertions of imperial cultures that their values were 'universal'. And maybe it's because I'm an African that I have felt the need to challenge those assertions, to determine for myself what is truly universal and what is culturally specific, what is truly liberating and what is actually limiting, restrictive and even parochial.

The young actor might learn the conventions of performance by watching other great actors perform, just as a young artist might copy the Old Masters. But eventually, the artist will move beyond those conventions of seeing and thinking. The mature artist will come to question the claims of 'universality' made on behalf of great cultural icons.

Shakespeare has long been the icon, the monolith of English literature and theatre that casts a shadow over all other writers. His claim to 'universality' probably dates from Ben Jonson's eulogy that he "was not of an age but for all time..." It is the British Bardolator's proud boast that the Germans, of all people, speak of 'unser Shakespeare' ('our' Shakespeare). On a recent trip to Cáceres in Spain, I walked past the Gran Teatro and stood for a while looking at the large mural of Cervantes side by side with a mural of Shakespeare. (I cannot be sure if the classical Spanish playwrights Calderon, Tirso de Molina and Lope de Vega were represented because I have no idea what they look like...).



What this told me was not necessarily that Shakespeare is truly 'universal' but that the Germans, the Spanish, indeed the Europeans are truly international in their outlook in a way in which the British often aren't. What it told me was that if I looked beyond this monolith, I might find some cultural clothes that fit me better than the borrowed costumes of English-speaking culture.

I know little about Japanese culture and probably understand even less. I have yawned through kabuki, read a little Yukio Mishima, pored over the erotic art of Utamaro, puzzled over the dream-like animations of Studio Ghibli, eaten Sushi and drunk Japanese whiskey. But my 'knowledge' of Japanese culture is derived largely from the films of Akira Kurosawa. In a duel between samurai, there is no place for hesitancy and doubt. Every move, gesture and expression seems bold, purposeful and precise; thought and action seemed fused together. Watching a recording of Akira Matsui in performance, displaying his nimble and elegant artistry, only reinforced this impression. And this made the prospect of working with him irresistible: the chance to watch an artist interpret the spirals of doubt and repetition in Samuel Beckett's *Rockaby*, to grasp what seems intangible, to marry gesture to word, fusing opposites together. My instinct was that it would be precisely like watching an Old Master at work, chipping away at a marble slab to release the form lurking within. My hope was that it would be a reminder of the mission that underpins Art's only possible claim to 'universality': the mission to reaffirm and remind us of our shared humanity.

Above: **Akira Matsui** in a 2011 performance of *Rockaby* in Japanese at the Oe Noh Theatre in Kyoto. Directed by Jonah Salz for Noho Theatre Group. Photograph by Muranaka Osamu



# Getting to noh... more

## Educational activities

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The following programme of education activities have been organised and undertaken by the project team in collaboration with local partners:

### **16 February 2017**

#### **Performance workshop**

For East 15 Acting School World Performance students with Akira Matsui, Richard Emmert

### **17 February 2017**

#### **Lecture/demonstration**

Sainsbury Institute for Japanese Arts and Cultures with Hideta Kitazawa, Richard Emmert

### **18 February 2017**

#### **Performance workshop**

For Guildhall School of Music & Theatre Drama Students with Akira Matsui, Richard Emmert

### **20 February 2017**

#### **Seminar on Noh Theatre & Western Culture**

Open seminar at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama International experts debated the place of noh in today's globalised culture. This also featured a demonstration of noh techniques and innovation by Master noh actor Akira Matsui

# Hideta Kitazawa

**The Japan Foundation London worked with the 'Noh time like the present...' Project Team and local partners to bring maskmaker and Shinto Temple carver, Hideta Kitazawa, to the UK.**

Hideta chose to follow in his father's footsteps and became a second-generation woodcarving artist. In 1991, after graduating from the Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology with a major in Forestry Studies, he went on to begin intensive woodcarving studies with his father Ikkyou Kitazawa. Since then, he has been the recipient of a number of awards, including the 'Outstanding Young Artisan Award' for Tokyo in 1997, and the Yokohama, Noh Drama Theatre Director's Prize in 2003.

Hideta Kitazawa visited the UK from 16-25 February 2017 to provide a series of lectures/demonstration workshops on the making and role of Noh masks at the following locations:

**17 February**  
Sainsbury Institute for Japan  
Arts and Cultures, Norwich

**18-20 February**  
Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford

**21 February**  
Foyles Bookshop, London

**22 February**  
Durham University Oriental  
Museum

**23 February**  
East 15 Acting School (Drama  
Students only), Southend

**24 February**  
Dublin City University, Dublin

**Recent exhibitions and demonstrations include:**  
**2006**

- Asian Civilization Museum, Singapore

**2009**

- Victoria and Albert Museum, London;
- Oxford University, Pitt Rivers Museum;
- Maison de la Culture du Japon, Paris;
- Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas

**2011**

- Stanford University;
- Beijing University;
- International Arts Carnival, Hong Kong;
- International Conference, Bangalore

**2014**

- Wenzhou Special Education School, China

**2015**

- Display for the Permanent Collection of the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford University, Indonesia Solo International Ancient Mask Summit,
- Australia University of Technology, Sydney
- University of the Incarnate Word, Texas
- University of Ljubljana
- Vienna University

**2016**

- University of Hawaii
- University of California, Santa Cruz





# Learning with noh

## Jannette Cheong

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Above: Akira Matsui & Peter Leung, *Opposites-InVerse*, workshop July 2016

### Discovering patterns of change through performance art, especially noh

Extracting and exemplifying meaning from universal patterns of change, through performance art, especially noh, has been a surprisingly cathartic and deeply fascinating learning experience. This was also the case with the noh play *Pagoda* (2008, 2011), with its universal themes of migration and identity. *Opposites-InVerse*, premiered in this programme, is a more conceptual noh-fusion piece exploring opposites (see pages 12-13) through poetry and performance. In noh, characters can be alive, dead, mythical, human, non-human and possibly any configuration of these! Akira Matsui demonstrates this very clearly by using a noh mask and his body to represent an old man, a young woman, his performance partner (Peter), and himself in *Opposites-InVerse*. There are many different aspects of the opposites phenomenon to explore in life. In the piece we exemplify three (opposition, attraction and balance). However, this ability to transform is another fascinating 'opposite' phenomenon of our time - how we determine what is real or unreal... Imagination is a timeless human faculty, as powerfully conveyed through this minimalist 650 year-old art as it is today.

### Exploring how different genres might be combined with noh

Life is a multi-disciplinary experience. *Opposites-InVerse* has the intent of crossing disciplines to reflect this. This is both in the interpretation of opposites through the poetic structures of noh, and in bringing diverse genres together. The latter because that fusion embodies the soul of the piece. Richard Emmert, my collaborator for *Pagoda*, first explored noh melodies sung by opera vocalists at a workshop in 2015 with opera vocalists Meili Li, Piran Legg and Bethan Langford, which included Akira Matsui. This followed my shadowing of the new MA in Opera Making & Writing at the Guildhall School for a year; and it happened while we were exploring a cross-cultural animation film of *Pagoda* working with Unanico Group. It was as a consequence of this that we also considered the bringing together of contemporary dance and noh in discussion with Matsui and Peter Leung for *Opposites-InVerse*. We were particularly excited about this prospect after seeing what the artists could achieve together in another workshop held in July 2016. It was immensely inspiring to see artists, young and old, use their artistic abilities to cross apparent cultural and discipline divides with relative ease and great enthusiasm.



### The challenges of international collaboration...

It would be fair to say that performing arts are collaborative endeavours created out of a huge amount of hard work to find the right opportunities, situations and circumstances that can bring artists together. This is even more so for international collaborations which have several additional layers of complexity. They include not only linguistic and geographical challenges, but more importantly attitudes to cultural difference. Having been born international (of mixed heritage), I am immensely grateful that my life has also been enriched by 'being international'. This has come from the privilege of working with many people internationally, including Richard Emmert, Akira Matsui and all of our collaborating artists.

It is hard to say what comes first, the project or the people; the conditions (mentioned above) have to be right and both have to inspire those concerned enough to collaborate. Time, quality and costs are essential to successful projects, and we are all challenged by these! But three other elements come to mind: passion (for the art and to see something through), humility (to see the special talents in others), and a willingness to work hard at building the special relationships needed to cement everything together.

### Building special relationships

I am of the mind that it is this building of special relationships that is paramount. In the noh world only Akira Matsui could rise to the artistic challenge of combining a conceptual, complex 'East meets West' piece with contemporary ballet and opera vocals. *'Noh time like the present...'* is a tribute to Akira's special qualities, including his infectious positive approach to new work - as illustrated by the many tributes in this programme. We should also recognise the work of Richard Emmert. There are no conductors in the world of noh. The artistic discipline of all the performers and how they work together is central to the 'orchestration' of a noh play. But it seems to me that Rick has been pivotal in building the special relationships needed to develop new noh work internationally. As a composer, director, performer (actor/instrumentalist/singer) he has the depth of understanding that has cemented many new noh, and noh-fusion works. Working together with Akira and the company he founded (Theatre Nohgaku) they have developed so many special relationships and new collaborations; at least enough for two lifetimes! So my special thanks goes to Richard Emmert's teacher Akira Matsui for what he has taught my teacher, Richard Emmert... and what we continue to learn from both of them!

### Above: Pagoda noh group photograph, Paris 2009

Akira Matsui (second row, second from the left), Richard Emmert (front row, third from the left) Jannette Cheong (front row, fifth from the left).

# Acknowledgements

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Many people have helped to bring this production to fruition. Unanico Group, Jannette Cheong, Richard Emmert, and all of our collaborating artists, would like to thank the following people and organisations for the contributions they have made. Without their belief, vision, understanding and support we would not have been able to realise this special tribute to Akira Matsui:

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- Sainsbury Institute for Japanese Arts and Cultures
- Satoko Shibata
- SOAS Music Department, Dr David Hughes





# Noh Training Project 2017

Two intensive programmes in the chant, dance, and musical instruments of Japan's classical theatre

## Noh Training Project Tokyo

25 June - 14 July 2017

Kita Roppeita Memorial Noh Theatre, Tokyo, Japan

**Presented by the Kita School of Noh and Theatre Nohgaku**

Open to both beginners and experienced performers

### Programme Directors:

**Teruhisa Oshima** (Main role actor, Kita School)

**Richard Emmert** (Theatre Nohgaku Artistic Director, Professor, Musashino University)

**John Oglevee** (Theatre Nohgaku Development Director)

### Instructors:

Members of the Kita School and Noh Performers Association

For details see:

<http://www.theatrenohgaku.org/>

## Noh Training Project UK

19 August - 1 September 2017

Handa Noh Stage, Royal Holloway, University of London

**Presented by Royal Holloway, University of London and Noh Training Project UK**

### Programme Director:

**Dr. Ashley Thorpe** (Senior Lecturer, Theatre Studies, Royal Holloway)

### Head Instructor:

**Richard Emmert** (Artistic Director, Theatre Nohgaku, Professor, Musashino University)

### Guest Master Instructor:

**Akira Matsui** (Main role actor, Kita School)

### Programme Manager:

**Laura Sampson**

For details see:

<http://nohtrainingprojectuk.org/>

19-20 August

First-time Taster (weekend only)

19-25 August

Full First-time Introduction

19 Aug-1 Sept

Full Intensive

23 Aug-1 Sept

Returnees





