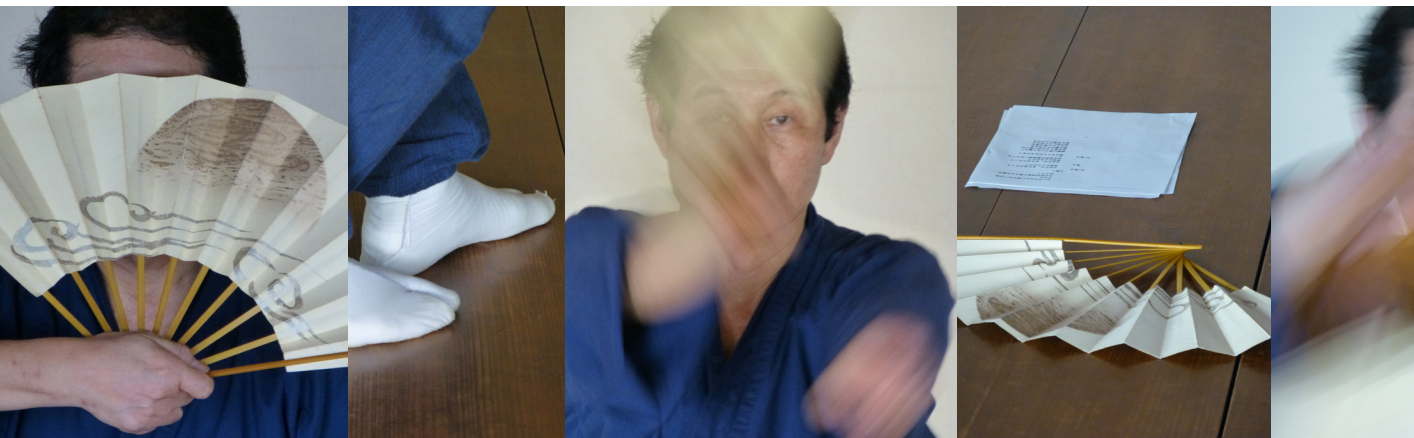




the genius of

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 number 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 Theatre
Archives ISTA:
International School of
Theatre Anthropology.
14th International Session
- Krzyzowa & Wroclaw,
Poland 2005
Photograph: Thomas
Hotod



**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.

**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



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 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.



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.

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

Top: **Martha B Johnson**
with Akira Matsui

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.

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.



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 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 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, workshop participants 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.



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.



Left & Right:
Akira Matsui giving a
demonstration at Smith
College. Winter 1979



**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 December 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.



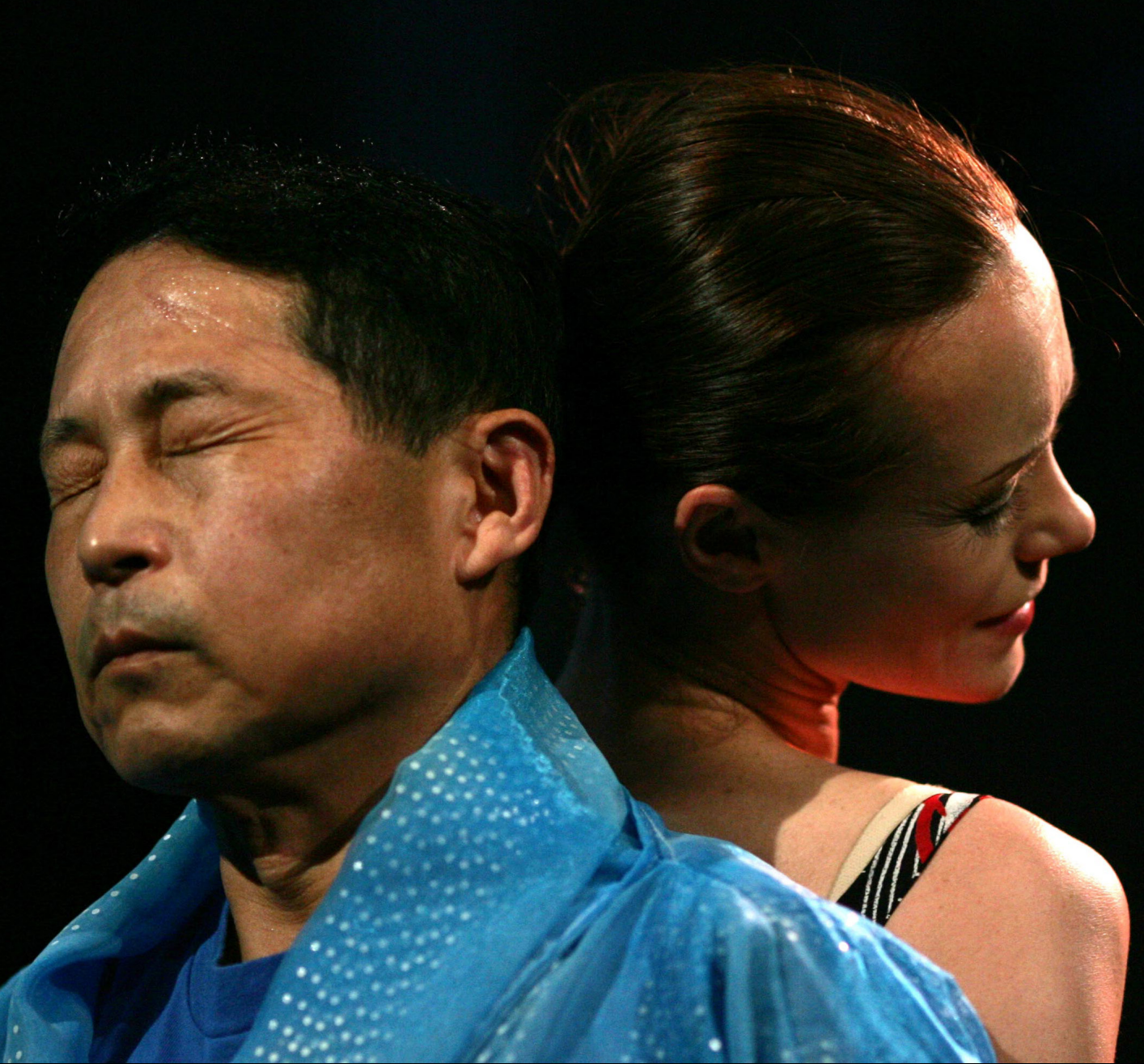
Ashley Thorpe

*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.



Axel Tangerding
Architect
Founder and
Director,
Meta Theatre
Munich

Akira Matsui sensei is a very special personality. I came to know of him in 1982 in the poster of a noh mask exhibition in Munich. Later, our paths began to cross quite often, as over the years I have invited him to Munich for many collaborations and experiments with my theatre company—Meta Theatre Munich. I was surprised at how open-minded he is as he actively has taken part in many different projects.

From first meeting him, he had my full respect as I knew that he was a classical noh master connected to the Kita Noh School based in Tokyo. Our friendship grew during my study stay in Japan, thanks to the Bunkacho Fellowship program. I saw Matsui sensei acting in performances at Negoro-dera Temple and at Nichizengu Shrine, both of which are in Matsui sensei's home prefecture of Wakayama. Both performances were extremely impressive!

In my notebook, I have found what he had told me: "I try to keep the noh as untouched as possible, but yet I try to perform noh in a different way, as it was never done before. I like to approach the noh with new possibilities of expression, and to confront the traditional style with new contexts."

Matsui sensei's creations are truly impressive, as he combines the means of noh—which are the reduction on the essence of acting, with new performance possibilities of experimental theatre.

I am more than grateful to Matsui sensei for joining with me to create a series of intercultural productions that have toured Europe and have been well received by enthusiastic audiences and a respectful press.

Matsui sensei, thank you so much for allowing the Meta Theatre team to experience practically what Zeami had written in his manuals in "The Transmission of the Flower of Acting Style."

And for you, Matsui sensei, I wish the essence of yūgen--beauty and gentleness!



Photo (left & bottom right): Akira Matsui performing with ballet dancer Yelena Pankova in *Strange Stories*, directed by Axel Tangerding, September 2008.

Photo (top right): Akira Matsui with members of the Meta Theatre Munich workshop, September 2015. Axel Tangerding is at the far right.



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*

Company for the production of *Funabenkei* at the Durham Studio Theater at the University of California, Berkeley. May 1997. Center: Akira Matsui, Bonnie Wade, Richard Emmert.



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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.

