

National Bunraku Theatre

Saturday, May 16, 2026

Special program: Carrying Tradition Forward — Traditional Japanese Dance & Music from the Kyoto-Osaka Region

“Carrying Tradition Forward” is a new series of special performances presented by the National Bunraku Theatre, showcasing traditional Japanese performance arts that have been handed down through generations for the present and into the future. For the first installment, we present traditional Japanese dance and music from the Kamigata (Kyoto-Osaka) region, where the National Bunraku Theatre is based. In the Kamigata region, a unique range of performance arts has been developed based on the local culture and the people’s sensibilities. In this first program, we present Jiuta, which evolved as the songs (uta) of the region (ji); Jiuta-mai dance, which is a type of dance performed to the accompaniment of Jiuta; and Kabuki dance, imbued with the distinctive charm of Kamigata. Enjoy the passionate stage performances of the artists, who inherit the essence of Kamigata while passing down the traditional arts to future generations.

In the “Jiuta Stories” section, we will feature a “Handayūmono” and a “Shigetayūmono” from the vast repertoire of Jiuta. Both pieces gained popularity during the Edo period as narrative music (Jōruri) but later fell into obscurity, being subsequently incorporated into Jiuta and preserved to this day. Since there are only a limited number of artists who can perform these pieces, this program is a truly rare opportunity to experience them.

In the “Jiuta-mai Dance and Kabuki Dance” section, we will present the Jiuta-mai dance classic “NEYA no ŌGI” and “NANIWAJŪNITSUKI” performed by the Umemoto and Yamamura schools of Kamigata-mai dance; the Kabuki dance “SOBAYA no MITSUMEN,” associated with the Wakayagi school; and finally, the masterpiece “SAGIMUSUME” by the Inoue school of Kyo-mai dance, passed down with its own unique staging style. Please look forward to this showcase of leading dancers from each school.

Handayūmono **HANAIKADA**

This is an old song that retains the essence of the Handayūbushi, beloved for its poignant and beautiful melodies. Based on a Kabuki play from the Genroku era, this piece sings about the journey of bringing a young child to Murotsu to reunite with the mother.

Shigetayūmono **CHIDORI**

This is the part where Chidori, a female diver, laments as she is left behind on an island, from the “Kikaigashima” scene of “Heike Nyogonoshima” (Shunkan), written by Chikamatsu Monzaemon. This is a masterpiece of Shigetayūmono, packed with the very essence of Jōruri.

Jiuta **NEYA no ŌGI**

The mai dance, developed primarily as a type of traditional Japanese art performed by geisha in Kyoto and Osaka, elegantly and delicately expresses different emotions as well as scenes from the four seasons. This graceful piece portrays the emotions of a woman.

Tokiwazu **SOBAYA no MITSUMEN**

Set in the Shinmachi Pleasure Quarters in Osaka, this heartwarming piece features a traveling soba vendor returning from Edo, who uses three masks to humorously dramatize a marital spat. This is accompanied by a lively, energetic dance.

Jiuta **NANIWAJŪNITSUKI**

This piece is a “Sakumono,” known for its humor within the Jiuta genre. The piece depicts the annual events in Naniwa (Osaka). The scenes and people from each season are portrayed with a lighthearted yet refined touch.

Nagauta **SAGIMUSUME**

This is a masterpiece of Kabuki dance in which a young woman, appearing to be the incarnation of a white heron, expresses the anguish of love and the torments of hell against a backdrop of snowy scenery. The Inoue school of Kyo-mai dance has inherited a unique staging style not found in other schools, so this performance is an exceptionally rare opportunity to witness it.