

April BUNRAKU performance, 2025

Date: Saturday, April 5 – Wednesday, April 30, 2025 *No performance on April 11 & 21

Time: Part 1 10:30-14:30 / Part 2 15:00-18:00 / Part 3 18:30-20:30 *End times are estimates and could vary.

Yoshitsune Senbon Zakura (Yoshitsune and One Thousand Cherry Trees)

Part 1

Act 1 Sentō Goshō (The Sentō Palace)

Minamoto no Yoshitsune has defeated the House of Taira, but has fallen out with his brother, Yoritomo, in Kamakura and is now unable to even meet with him. Hearing the news of the battle, the retired Emperor, Goshirakawa, gives Yoshitsune a treasured drum called Hatsune, but the Minister of the Left, Fujiwara no Tomokata, says there is a hidden meaning in the gift, which is to “beat” Yoritomo, a pun on “beating the drum”. Yoshitsune has no option but receive the drum to honour the imperial gift, but he promises never to beat the drum.

Horikawa Goshō (Yoshitsune’s Mansion)

In the house of Yoshitsune, Shizuka Gozen is dancing to console Yoshitsune’s wife, Kyō no Kimi. At this time, Yoritomo’s chief vassal, Kawagoe Tarō, visits the house and accuses Yoshitsune of opposing Yoritomo.

However, it transpires that Kyō no Kimi is actually the daughter of Kawagoe and that she became the wife of Yoshitsune from the House of Taira, into which she was adopted. She hopes to make peace between the Minamoto brothers, Yoshitsune and Yoritomo, so she commits suicide and is then beheaded by Kawagoe.

But then an army from Kamakura raises the battle cry in front of the house, which ends with Musashibō Benkei killing a general. It is now apparent that the brotherhood cannot find peace, and Yoshitsune leaves the house with some of his vassals.

Act 2 Fushimi Inari (The Fushimi Inari-Taisha Shrine)

As Yoshitsune arrives at Fushimi Inari-Taisha Shrine, Shizuka and Benkei catch up with him, and Yoshitsune gives Shizuka the Hatsune drum.

Their pursuer, Hayami no Tōda, tries to abduct Shizuka together with the drum, but Satō Tadanobu appears and rescues her. To honour his act, Yoshitsune bestows Tadanobu with the name of Minamoto no Kurō Yoshitsune as well as his armour and entrusts him to guard Shizuka.

Tokaiya-Daimotsu no Ura (The Shipping Agent at Daimotsu)

The group led by Yoshitsune is heading to Kyūshū, seeking to board a vessel at a boat inn called Tokaiya at Daimotsu no Ura in Amagasaki. They have waited for good weather and are ready to board the boat that leaves that night.

However, it turns out that the owner of Tokaiya, Ginpei, is actually Taira no Tomomori, a general from the House of Taira, who was defeated by Yoshitsune. Tomomori has taken the wet nurse Suke no Tsubone as his wife and has raised the Emperor Antoku disguised as his daughter, living in secrecy and waiting for an opportunity to kill Yoshitsune. To prepare for the decisive battle on the ocean that night, Tomomori grooms himself up and departs.

However, Tsubone and the Emperor Antoku soon hear the news of Tomomori’s defeat. Tsubone takes hold of the Emperor Antoku and tries to commit suicide by drowning herself, but they are saved by Yoshitsune.

Moribund Tomomori returns and asks Yoshitsune for a final battle. The Emperor Antoku offers Tomomori kind words of gratitude for his protection over the years. Tsubone then commits suicide, and Tomomori shoulders a heavy anchor and jumps into the ocean after entrusting the Emperor Antoku to the care of Yoshitsune.

Part 2

Act 3 Shiinoki (Gathering Nuts)

While continuing to travel in search of Taira no Koremori, Wakaba no Naishi and Rokudaigimi have a rest at a teahouse run by Kosen, the wife of an outlaw named Igami no Gonta. Following them around the teahouse, as Kokingo gathers sweet acorns to comfort young Rokudaigimi, Gonta tries to become acquainted with them. Gonta departs the scene but returns, stating that they took his belongings, and ends up extorting a large sum of money from them.

Kokingo Uchijini (Kokingo's Death)

Naishi and her son are now surrounded by their pursuers. Kokingo fights bravely, and makes it possible for them flee. Kokingo receives deep wounds and eventually dies.

Then, Gonta's father, Yazaemon, happens to walk past and beheads the dead Kokingo to take his head home.

Sushiya (The Sushi Shop)

Yazaemon, the owner of a *sushi* shop in Yoshino Shimoichi, bestows his own name Yasuke upon Koremori, the son of his benefactor Taira no Shigemori, and gives him shelter. Yazaemon's daughter, Osato, is in love with Yasuke and believes her father's words that they will be husband and wife tonight.

Yazaemon returns home while his disowned son, Gonta, is pressing his mother for money, which causes Gonta to hide after placing the money in an empty sushi barrel.

Yazaemon also uses an empty barrel to hide Kokingo's head, and tells Koremori that he needs to take refuge in Kami-ichi Village as his pursuers are drawing close.

Osato is happy as she goes to bed before Yasuke, now that she is alone with him. Then, Naishi and her son arrive asking for help, incidentally having a reunion with Koremori. Osato breaks down in tears now that she knows Yasuke is actually Koremori and that her love will never be fulfilled. However, knowing that their pursuers are close, she lets Koremori and his family escape.

Gonta rushes to let the Kamakura army know of the situation. Then, Koremori's pursuer, Kajiwara Kagetoki arrives, demanding to see Koremori's head. As Yazaemon is ready to show the substitute head he has prepared, Gonta shows up holding Koremori's head along with Naishi and Rokudaigimi bound with rope. Kajiwara gives Gonta a reward and departs the scene.

Now angry about what Gonta did, Yazaemon stabs him. Then, near death, Gonta explains that it was Kokingo's head that he gave to Kajiwara and that Naishi and Rokudaigimi were his wife and son. When he gives a whistle as a signal, Koremori's family appears in safety. Gonta passes away, surrounded by his family.

Part 3

Act 4 Michiyuki Hatsune no Tabi (The Travel on Mt. Yoshino)

Shizuka and Tadanobu are heading to Mount Yoshino as they believe Yoshitsune is there. The mountains are decorated with cherry blossoms in full bloom, and both of them recall Yoshitsune, with Shizuka beating the Hatsune drum and Tadanobu bringing out his master's armour.

Tadanobu turns the battle of Yashima over in his mind. The Taira Clan is in the ocean, and the Minamoto Clan is on the land. Thus, it happened that the contest of strength between Akushichibyōe Kagekiyo and Mionoya no Shirō became widely known as "Shikorobiki". Tadanobu's older brother, Tsuginobu, dies in the battle as he is pierced in the chest by the arrow shot by Noto no Kami Noritsune.

Shizuka and Tadanobu hold back their tears and encourage each other to hurry on their way ahead.

Kawatsura Hōgen Yakata (Kawatsura Hōgen's Mansion)

Yoshitsune is hiding in the house of Kawatsura Hōgen on Mount Yoshino, when Satō Tadanobu comes to visit the house. Yoshitsune asks him about Shizuka, whom he entrusted, but Tadanobu says that he doesn't know anything about her because he returned home immediately after the Battle of Yashima.

Then, the second Tadanobu appears along with Shizuka. Yoshitsune, now suspicious of the situation, asks Shizuka to beat the Hatsune drum and tries to determine what is going on.

Shizuka beats the drum, and Tadanobu appears as usual. When questioned by Shizuka, the fake Tadanobu confesses the whole story: the Hatsune drum is made from the skin of foxes that have lived for a thousand years, and who were actually his parents. After telling the truth, the Tadanobu-turned fox is reluctant to leave the drum that he honours with the thoughts of his parents. Seeing that, Yoshitsune decides to give him the drum. The fox is so ecstatic that he lets Yoshitsune know of the planned night attack on the house, and departs with the drum.

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