



Summer vacation BUNRAKU performance, 2025

Date: Saturday, July 19 – Tuesday, August 12, 2025 *No performance on Jul. 24 & Aug. 4 *Part1 on Jul. 25 is fully booked.

Time: Part 1 11:00-12:35 / Part 2 13:30-17:35 / Part 3 18:15-20:30 *End times are estimates and could vary.

Part 1

Saiyūki (Monkey: Journey to the West)

On the orders of Emperor Taizong of Tang (now China), the Buddhist monk Sanzō Hōshi heads for Tianzhu (now India) with the goal of bringing back holy Buddhist scriptures. On the way, the monk is joined by two disciples as his traveling companions: Son Gokū and Cho Hakkai.

By the shore of the Ryūsa River, they are attacked by a robber wearing a skull necklace and his followers. All of a sudden, however, the skeleton-wearing man becomes docile, having learned that the monk in front of him is actually Sanzō Hōshi, whom he had received a message about from Kannon Bodhisattva. He joins them in their travels to the West, under his real name of Sagojō.

Soon, the party draws near the desert. Now what they need is the Bashōsen (palm-leaf fan) in the hands of Rasetsujo, the wife of Gyūmaō. The fan can put out the fire on the Flaming Mountain, cooling down the intense heat. Son Gokū and his companions battle with Gyūmaō and Rasetsujo and are successful in obtaining the fan.

Finally, the party arrives at the Jetavana-vihara in Tianzhu. Impressed by Sanzō Hōshi's high ambitions and their long and hard pilgrimage, the Sakyamuni Buddha confers the holy scriptures on the traveling monk.

Introduction to Bunraku

Bunraku performers describe, in an easy-to-understand manners, their puppets on the stage.

Bunraku is a form of theatrical entertainment that the people of Osaka have enjoyed since the middle of Edo period (1603-1868). This section introduces its appeal.

Part 2

Ichinotani Futaba Gunki (Chronicles of the Battle of Ichinotani)

Sagami, the wife of the Genji warrior Kumagai no Jirō Naozane, arrives at his war camp, worried about her son Kojirō, who has gone into battle. There, Sagami is reunited with Fuji no Tsubone, a mother of the young Heike warrior Taira no Atsumori. Tsubone, who once saved Sagami's life and now demands that Sagami repay her debt to her by helping her kill Atsumori's murderer, Kumagai.

Tsubone attempts to slash Kumagai, who is returning to his camp, but he stops her and informs her about the situation in which he was forced to kill Atsumori due to the serious state of the war – knowing that he was the illegitimate child of the Cloistered Emperor Goshirakawa.

The Genji general Minamoto no Yoshitsune then arrives to inspect the decapitated head of Atsumori. Surprisingly, the severed head is not Atsumori, but that of Kumagai's son Kojirō, who was killed in place of Atsumori by his own father. Kumagai followed General Yoshitsune's secret order contained in a cryptic message on the wooden notice board: "He who steals a branch from this cherry tree will lose a finger." Yoshitsune repays his old favors to Midaroku, who is in fact a former Heike warrior, by entrusting Atsumori to his care. Meanwhile, Kumagai, who lost his son Kojirō, leaves the battlefield to become a monk.

Katsuragawa Renri no Shigarami

(The Love Suicide of Ohan and Chōemon at the Katsura River)

Chōemon, the owner of an *obi* (traditional kimono belt) shop, has had an intimate affair with Ohan, the 14-year-old daughter of the owner of the shop next door called Shinanoya. Chōemon's wife Okinu asks Chōkichi, an apprentice at Shinanoya, to pretend to be Ohan's lover.

Meanwhile, Chōemon's stepmother Otose and her son Gihei plot to take over the *obi* shop by falsely accusing Chōemon of stealing money and by exposing his affair with Ohan. Chōemon is saved from this difficult situation by his father Hansai's understanding and Okinu's help.

However, after seeing Ohan's last will and testament that she has left behind, Chōemon decides to join Ohan in committing suicide and leaves to chase her. They commit suicide by throwing themselves into the Katsura River.

Part 3

Welcome to BUNRAKU!

In commemoration of Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, Japan, the performers explain Bunraku with an English interpreter, especially for visitors from abroad. Bunraku is one of Japan's representative traditional performing arts and was designated an Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO in 2003.

Ise Ondo Koi no Netaba (The Mass Killing in the Ise Pleasure Quarters)

After getting back the fine heirloom sword Aoe Shimosaka, which had been stolen from the mansion of his ex-lord, Fukuoka Mitsugi has been searching for its certificate of authenticity. His lover Okon, a courtesan at the Aburaya brothel in the Ise Furuichi (now Ise City, Mie Prefecture) pleasure quarters, has been helping him with his search. She pretends that she no longer loves Mitsugi and that she has fallen for Tokushima Iwaji, who is the holder of the certificate. She goes so far as to have a wedding ceremony with Iwaji, thus succeeding in regaining the certificate. Not knowing her true intention, however, Mitsugi assumes that he was cheated on by her and leaves the Aburaya in a fit of rage.

Mitsugi comes back later, though, having noticed that he got the wrong sword. Suspecting that his Aoe Shimosaka was replaced with Iwaji's sword, Mitsugi begins to search for his. However, he is interrupted by Manno, the chief maid of the Aburaya. While Mitsugi is struggling with Manno, the sheath of the sword accidentally breaks and its blade injures her. Distraught, Mitsugi slashes at people standing by one after another — as if possessed by the mysterious power of the sword.

Then appears Okon, who reveals her real motive and hands over the sword certificate she has obtained for Mitsugi. Right after confirming that the sword in his hand is Aoe Shimosaka, Mitsugi sets off to the mansion of his ex-lord, taking the sword and certificate with him.

Kokaji (The Swordsmith)

On being ordered by the emperor to forge a sword, Kokaji Munechika, a swordsmith from Sanjō in Kyoto prays to the god Inari Myōjin to find a swordsmith as skilled as himself, with whom he can fulfill the task.

On his way home from the shrine, an old man appears on the path before Munechika. After instructing Munechika to set up an altar and pray to the local deity, Inari Myōjin, the man vanishes.

After Munechika dresses suitably and becomes absorbed in prayer, Inari Myōjin appears to him, and together they forge the sword.

Thus was the sacred sword “Kogitsunemaru” created, with two inscriptions—on the front, “Munechika,” and on the back, “Kogitsune” (little fox) denoting the deity (Inari Myōjin) who served as an apprentice swordsmith.

Learn more about BUNRAKU

Visit → <https://www2.ntj.jac.go.jp/unesco/bunraku/en/>

INVITATION TO BUNRAKU

—Guidance for Japanese Puppet Theatre Appreciation—

*This website is provided in Japanese / English / Simplified Chinese / Traditional Chinese / Korean / German / French / Spanish.

