

National Bunraku Theatre
New Year BUNRAKU performance, 2026

Date: Saturday, January 3 - Tuesday, January 27, 2026 *No performance on Jan. 9 & 19

Part 1

Kotobuki Shiki Sanbasō (Ceremonial Sanbasō)

This piece, adapted from the special Noh play “Okina,” consists of three elements: A gallant dance by Senzai; a solemn dance by Okina in prayer for universal peace and national tranquility; and a dynamic dance by a pair of Sanbasō, who perform to the accompaniment of brilliant shamisen music while praying for a bumper crop. With this opening piece, National Bunraku Theatre celebrates the New Year of 2026.

Sesshū Gappō ga Tsuji (The Tale of Tamate Gozen)

Having married into the Takayasu family as a second wife, Tamate Gozen starts an affair with her stepson Shuntokumaru. At the hermitage of her father Gappō, Tamate makes advances to Shuntokumaru, trying to make him her own. Furious at the outrageous misconduct of his daughter, Gappō draws a sword and stabs her. Surrounded by her grieving family, fatally wounded Tamate makes a shocking confession in a dying whisper.

The true intention and motherly affection of Tamate, infatuated by illicit love, and the gut-wrenching heartfelt scream of Gappō, a scrupulous father who stabs his daughter for ethical reasons — what unfolds is a tragedy in which the strong emotions of the two characters collide with each other.

Part 2

Shin Usuyuki Monogatari (The New Tale of Princess Usuyuki)

Based on kana-zōshi (an old story book in kana), “The Tale of Princess Usuyuki,” this adaptation depicts the dilemma between duty and humanity originating from the crisis of a young couple embroiled in a power struggle among Kamakura Shōgun families.

Under the full-bloom cherry blossoms at Kiyomizu-dera Temple in Kyoto, Sonobe Hyōe’s son Saemon and Saisaki Iganokami’s daughter Princess Usuyuki fall in love. At the time, however, the chief retainers of their families were devising a scheme to choose a blacksmith who forges the swords to be offered to the Shōgun families. For the sake of the attempt to bring down the Sonobe and Saisaki families, the retainers take advantage of the romantic relationship of Saemon and Princess Usuyuki, falsely accusing them of treason. Their families are crushed with grief. Then comes the highlight of the drama: In a bid to save their children’s lives, the parents make a striking decision. Parent-child love, noble resolve and determination of the warriors — an unexpected story, which develops behind the characters’ real intentions, touches the audience. Please note that this long-awaited masterpiece is being performed for the first time in 28 years.

Part 3

Tsubosaka Kannon Reigenki

(The Miracle at Tsubosaka Kannon Temple)

Known as the temple enshrining Kannon (the Goddess of Mercy), Tsubosaka-dera Temple (formally named Minamihokkeji Temple, in the town of Takatori in Nara Prefecture) is widely known as a place of worship for those who seek divine power to cure eye diseases. Based on a miraculous tale related to this time-honored temple, this piece expresses the love of a devout man and wife.

Osato is living a frugal life with her blind husband Sawaichi. She devotes herself to Sawaichi, who sometimes experiences difficult emotions due to his hardship. One day, they head for Tsubosaka Temple nestled deep in the mountains, in an attempt to beg for mercy from the goddess Kannon whom they worship. This is a painful yet heartwarming story of a devoted couple supporting each other through their complementary mental weaknesses and marital love.

Renjishi (The Lion Dance)

The setting is Mt. Seiryō in China, covered in a riotous profusion of peony flowers. Featuring the father lion, who mercilessly pushes his cub into the bottom of a ravine in the rugged mountains in order to make him a brave lion, the mother lion, who worries about her cub being pushed off the cliff; and the little lion cub, who struggles to climb up the ravine supported by the love of his parents — this high-spirited Lion Dance is performed in a majestic, gorgeous stage setting representing Mt. Seiryō. National Bunraku Theatre is presenting this performance for the first time in 20 years.

Learn more about BUNRAKU

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

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—Guidance for Japanese Puppet Theatre Appreciation—

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