

National Bunraku Theatre
April BUNRAKU performance, 2026

Date: Saturday, April 4 - Sunday, April 26, 2026 *No performance on Apr. 10 & 20

Sugawara Denju Tenarai Kagami

(Sugawara and the Secrets of Calligraphy)

Under the reign of Emperor Daigo, Sugawara no Michizane (Kanshōjō in the play), a distinguished scholar and the Minister of the Right, is framed by Fujiwara no Shihei, the Minister of the Left, who made a false accusation that Kanshōjō was plotting to make his adopted daughter Princess Kariya the Empress and have Prince Tokiyo, a younger brother of the emperor, ascend to the crown. Meanwhile, Shirokurō, a farmer in Satamura Village in Kawachi Province (now Moriguchi City, Osaka Prefecture) — the territories of Kanshōjō — has triplet sons: Umeōmaru, Matsuōmaru and Sakuramaru, who serve Kanshōjō, Fujiwara no Shihei and Prince Tokiyo, respectively, as footmen.

Part 1

Sakuramaru arranges a tryst for his master, Prince Tokiyo, and Kanshōjō's adopted daughter Princess Kariya; however, it ends up in Kanshōjō's downfall. Today's performance begins with the scene "**Michiyuki Kotoba no Amaikai (Travel Scene: Converting Things to Sweet Words)**" — in which Sakuramaru, who is disguised as a candy peddler, protects Prince Tokiyo and Princess Kariya.

This is followed by "**Kurumabiki (The Fight Over the Carriage)**" in which Umeōmaru and Sakuramaru attack the ox-drawn carriage carrying Shihei, who deposed Kanshōjō. Umeōmaru and Sakuramaru face off against Matsuōmaru, then Shihei appears. This is a scene filled with beauty and style.

In commemoration of his 70th birthday, Shirokurō, father of the three brothers, receives the name of Shiratayū from Kanshōjō. The wives of the brothers get together at the celebratory banquet. However, the political turmoil casts a shadow on even such an occasion. In "**Chasen Zake (Celebrating with Sake on a Tea Whisk)**" and subsequent scenes, the tragic death of Sakuramaru and the ensuing grief of his family, including his elderly, affectionate father Shiratayū, will move the audience to tears.

Part 2

In "**Kita Saga (The Refuge of Kanshōjō's Wife in Kita Saga)**," the dark shadow of Shihei looms large over Kita Saga (Ukyō Ward, Kyoto City) where Kanshōjō's wife lives in hiding.

At Seryō no Sato (Sakyō Ward, Kyoto City), Takebe Genzō and his wife Tonami operate a *terakoya* (village school), hiding Kanshōjō's son Kanshūsai; one day, they welcome a new student. Meanwhile, Shihei's interrogation extends even to Genzō, who is ordered to cut Kanshūsai's head off, with Matsuōmaru, who can recognize Kanshūsai, as the person in charge of inspecting the head. So, what's going on and what's going to happen next...? The scenes "**Terairi (The New Student)**" and "**Terakoya (The Village School)**" are both full of unmissable highlights — such as the inner turmoil of Genzō and Tonami, the tense atmosphere of the *kubi-jikken* (inspection of the severed heads) and the mournful "*iroha-okuri*" — a scene known for its distinguished melody.

Part 3

Ninin Kamuro (The Little Girls in the Pleasure Quarters)

Two *kamuros* (child attendants of a courtesan), who are close friends spend a balmy spring day together, enjoying battledore and shuttlecock and ball bouncing. The charm and innocent appearance of the little girls are depicted against a backdrop of the beautiful scenery of the pleasure quarters.

Hiragana Seisui (The Rise and Fall of the Genji Clan)

Kajiwara Genta Kagesue is disowned by his father after losing in the Battle of Vanguard at the Ujigawa River. Despite the situation, he attempts to hurry to the Battle of Ichinotani, but to no avail because his armor has already been pawned. Hoping to see Genta's wish fulfilled, the courtesan Umegae, Genta's sweetheart who once served the Kajiwara family as chambermaid Chidori, chants an invocation single-mindedly. Then a miracle happens...

The humorous scene "**Tsuji Hōin (The Fortune Teller)**" is about unusual incidents unfolding at Genta's hiding place Kashima no Sato (Nishiyodogawa Ward, Osaka City). The scene "**Kanzaki Ageya (The Teahouse at Kanzaki)**," set in the pleasure quarters at Kanzaki (Amagasaki City, Hyogo Prefecture), depicts the lamentations of tragic women, a quarrel between lovers and the passion of Umegae, who is attached to Genta. Next is "**Okuzashiki (The Innermost Room)**," tale's grand finale that reveals how the miracle occurred. We invite you to enjoy this wonderful performance — the charms of Japan's Ningyō Jōruri performing arts are highlighted in each and every scene.

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