

Spring
Season

PERFORMING ARTS

2023

24





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Japan Society presents

HAMLET | TOILET

Wednesday, January 10, 7:30 pm

— Followed by an opening night reception

Friday, January 12, 7:30 pm

— Followed by an artist Q&A

Saturday, January 13 at 2:30 & 7:30 pm

Presented in partnership with

Under the Radar Festival / utrfest.org



Support for the international travel of Yu Murai and Theater Company Kaimaku Pennant Race for *HAMLET | TOILET* is provided by The Japan Foundation. Product support is generously provided by TOTO USA, INC.



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The season is made possible by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council and the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature.



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ARTISTIC DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Happy New Year! Welcome to Japan Society's 2024 Winter/Spring performing arts season!

I am pleased to begin the new year with the triumphant return of Yu Murai and his company, Kaimaku Pennant Race (KPR). Looking back on the time when we presented their previous work, *Ashita no Ma-Joe: Rocky Macbeth*, in May 2019, I remember needing a bit of courage to invite that production due to a potential financial challenge for its limited audience capacity. I saw its premiere in Tokyo in 2017 in a super small space with a capacity of 70 seats, surrounding a boxing ring set at the center of the theater. To adapt this distinctive setting to our theater, we also created a boxing ring in the center of the stage, with audience seats on the stage. We could place only 60 seats... However, the challenge was rewarded with many "wows," praises, and great reviews.

Thanks to those terrific reactions, I felt comfortable inviting KPR back to NYC despite the odd timing that required committing to their newest piece before I saw it, as the premiere of *HAMLET | TOILET* was only last September. As an artistic director who has created programming for each season only after seeing live performances, I have to say that it was a rare procedure. But I knew *HAMLET | TOILET* would be funny and crazy, and I trusted Murai to pay serious respect to Shakespeare's masterpiece to compose his own unique play on *Hamlet*. I also trusted his direction and his company's wacky energy to deliver it to the audience. Besides, "toilet," addressed as the central theme of *HAMLET | TOILET*, is one of the representatives of the uniqueness of contemporary Japanese culture (as I mentioned in *The New York Times* article). Then, in September last year in Tokyo, I found that I was right.

I thought the piece would be the perfect fit for the most significant and courageous international experimental theater festival and the New York theater community's pride, Under the Radar, with which we have continued to collaborate in the past decade. I am so glad that our relationship with the festival continues, and I want to thank Mark Russell for keeping the festival going.

Dear audience, I hope you will enjoy this encounter with *HAMLET | TOILET*, as I did last September in Tokyo.



Yoko Shioya
Artistic Director

Theater Company Kaimaku Pennant Race's

HAMLET | TOILET

Written and directed by Yu Murai

New York City Premiere

Hamlet: Takuro Takasaki

Ophelia, Claudius, Horatio: G.K. Masayuki

Patient, Laertes, Marcellus: Yuki Matsuo

Music: TSUTCHIE (SHAKKAZOMBIE)

Choreographer: Shinnosuke Motoyama

Video Designer & Operator: Takashi Kawasaki

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DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Locked in the bathroom, I was frightened by the thundering sound of the door.

Do not get in the way.

Grumblingly excreting words, scribbling them on the wall, looking to the right, to the left, to the back, to the front, I realized that I was alone at the end, after being swayed by myself.

—This small room is the whole world—.

Then, who knocked on the door of the world? “Is there someone inside?” or “Is there someone outside?” I don’t know.

When the excreted words lose their whereabouts, continue to wander, word after word after word, and they reach the end of the world, what on earth are those words that lead to silence saying to me?

— Yu Murai

ABOUT THE COMPANY

Kaimaku Pennant Race (KPR), founded in 2006, is a Tokyo-based theater company known for their off-the-wall theatre work inspired by Western masterpieces. They have achieved worldwide recognition through their in-demand repertoire pieces, such as *1969: A Space Odyssey? Oddity!*, *Romeo and Toilet* and *Ashita no Ma-Joe: Rocky Macbeth*, performed in France, Romania, Thailand, South Korea, the United States and their home country, Japan. In 2009, the company performed *Romeo and Toilet* in the New York International Fringe Festival, earning “Four Stars” from *Time Out New York* for its “fantastic combination of ingenious movement, surreal story lines and dynamic, startlingly disciplined performers.” Their remarkable sets have also caused quite a stir, with their notable set design of a large toilet created from 10,000 toilet paper rolls for *Romeo and Toilet*. Between 2015-2018, the company toured extensively abroad with *1969: A Space Odyssey? Oddity!*, performing in international theater festivals and venues, such as Festival Off d’Avignon (France), BABAL F.A.S.T. (Romania), Carthage Theatre Festival (Tunisia), ST-BOMB festival (South Korea), and Thong Lor Art Space (Thailand). The company’s original approach to physical comedy and Western adaptations has been hailed as “a real artistic experience” (*La Provence*, France). The company’s *Ashita no Ma-Joe: Rocky Macbeth* premiered at the Honda Gekijo in Shimokitazawa, Tokyo, in February 2017, and was presented by Japan Society in New York in May 2019, garnering rave reviews - “[Yu Murai is] among Japan’s most innovative contemporary playwright-directors” (*Asian Theatre Journal*, US). Their most recent work *HAMLET / TOILET* premiered at Komaba Agora Theater in Tokyo in September 2023.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Yu Murai (playwright/director) founded Kaimaku Pennant Race in 2006. Since KPR's inception, all of their productions are conceived, written and directed by Murai. With bold stage designs and witty dramas, Murai conveys his original and singular point of view through his highly choreographed directing style. Aside from KPR's activities, he has been commissioned to create larger-scale commercial theater productions such as *Fist of the North Star—Seiki Matsu Zako Densetsu*, based on a popular 1980s manga titled *Hokuto no Ken*, and *RICE on STAGE*, based on a recent TV anime. Recently, he has started conducting workshops, lectures and play readings to expose young actors to his quirky theater-making methodologies. Awards he has received include the Encouragement Award at the Toga Theater Competition, given by the Japan Performing Arts Foundation (2013); the Setagaya-ku Arts Award in the Performing Arts category (2014); and the Director Award at the 7th Sengawa Theater Competition (2016) among others. In 2021, Murai was in charge of directing the "After the Games" section of the closing ceremony of Tokyo 2020 Summer Paralympic Games.

Takuro Takasaki (actor) was born in Sapporo, Japan in 1979, and co-founded Kaimaku Pennant Race with Yu Murai in 2006 while they were both trainees at the theater company Yamanote Jijosha. He has appeared in all of KPR's productions to date since its foundation. In recent years, he has also performed as a contemporary dancer and in more conventional theater productions, such as with the group Mitsuwa Kai. His most recent credits include *1969: Space Odyssey? Oddity!* (World Tour, KPR), *Romeo and Toilet* (World Tour, KPR), *Kaji* (Mitsuwa Kai), *Yujo Yugiri* (Mitsuwa Kai), *From the Sea* (Festival Tokyo) and *King Lear*, *SADAHARU* (KPR). He was one of the three cast members of *Ashita no Ma-Joe: Rocky Macbeth* for its premiere in Tokyo in 2017 and at Japan Society in 2019. In 2021, he appeared in the closing ceremony of Tokyo 2020 Summer Paralympic Games.

G.K. Masayuki (actor) was born in Sendai, Japan in 1982, and joined Kaimaku Pennant Race in 2010 for its production of *Romeo and Toilet*. He has a universal appearance that allows him to play any role and a background in martial arts that enriches his unique mode of physical expression. His most recent credits

include *1969: Space Odyssey? Oddity!* (World Tour, KPR), *Romeo and Toilet* (World Tour, KPR), *Meimoku/Mirai* (Youngage Production), *Fist of the Northern Star—Seiki Matsu Zako Densetsu* (Theater G Russo) and *Chikyu ☆ Kudo Setsu* (Ryuzanji Company). He was one of the three cast members of *Ashita no Ma-Joe: Rocky Macbeth* for its premiere in Tokyo in 2017 and at Japan Society in 2019. In 2021, he appeared in the closing ceremony of Tokyo 2020 Summer Paralympic Games.

Yuki Matsuo (actor) was born in Yokohama, Japan in 1991, and spent part of his youth in Shanghai. He graduated from the Nippon University's College of Art, majoring in theater. He joined Kaimaku Pennant Race in 2015 for its production of *1969: Space Odyssey? Oddity!* which was presented at Festival Off d'Avignon. He also established his own theater company called Toyama no Haruka in 2014 and takes on directing their pieces. Theater Company Toyama no Haruka's most recent work was *Burn The House*, directed by Matsuo. He has also appeared in many KPR productions as an actor.

Japan Society Performing Arts' 2023-2024 season continues in January with:

TRADITIONAL & CONTEMPORARY DANCE

Nihon Buyo in the 21st Century From Kabuki Dance to Boléro

Wednesday, January 24, 7:30 pm

—Followed by a *Private Gathering for Artists and Members*

Thursday, January 25, 7:30 pm

—Followed by an artist Q&A

Friday, January 26, 7:30 pm

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Friday, January 26, 7:30 pm

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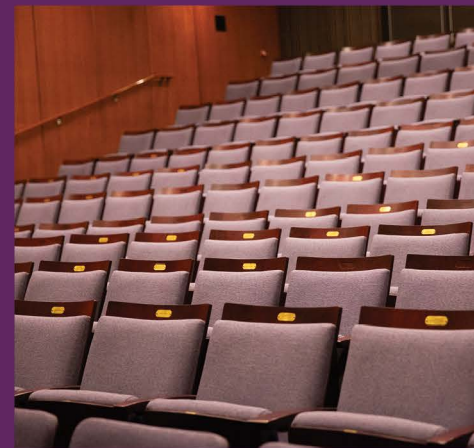
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