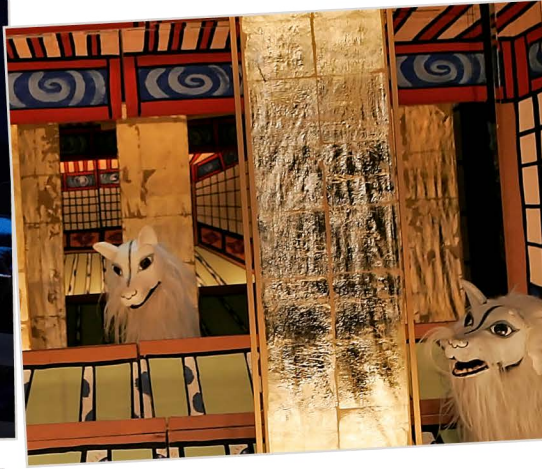


PERFORMING ARTS

2024

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Members at Japan Society enjoy exclusive benefits, invitations to special events and discounts on hundreds of performances, films, lectures and classes annually.

Japan Society presents

Shinnai Meets Puppetry: One Night in Winter & The Peony Lantern

Thursday, November 7 at 7:30 pm

Friday, November 8 at 5 & 7:30 pm

—7:30 pm performance followed by an artist Q&A

Saturday, November 9 at 2:30 & 7:30 pm

Ningyo! A Parade of Puppetry Series – Program #3

The *Ningyo! A Parade of Puppetry* Series is supported by The Jim Henson Foundation.



Shinnai Meets Puppetry is supported by Doug and Teresa Peterson and the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and New York State Legislature.



2024—2025 Performing Arts Season Support

The season is made possible by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.



Additional, major support is generously provided by Doug and Teresa Peterson, Howard Gilman Foundation, and Jun Makihara and Megumi Oka. Endowment support is provided by the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Endowment Fund, John and Miyoko Davey Foundation, and a leadership gift from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation.



Program support is also generously provided by The Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation; Hisamitsu America, Inc.; Akiko Mikumo; Hiroko Onoyama; Richard and Momona Royce; Dr. and Mrs. Carl F. Taeusch II; Dr. Jeanette C. Takamura; Nancy and Joe Walker; Estate of Alan M. Suhonen; and Performing Arts Circle members.

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All Nippon Airways Co., Ltd. is the official airline of the Japan Society Performing Arts Program. Yamaha is the official piano provider of Japan Society.



Japan Society programs are made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature.



ARTISTIC DIRECTOR'S NOTE

We are thrilled to present the third installment of the ongoing *Ningyo!* – *A Parade of Puppetry* series with a world premiere program of pieces from emerging NY-based artist Sachiyo Takahashi, collaborating with Rowan Magee and Emma Wiseman.

As you know, Japan Society, as a presenter, brings many performing arts productions from Japan onto its stage. At the same time, we are also committed to introducing local artists' work. Working with local artists brings us a different type of excitement and joy because it allows us to involve ourselves in a creative process, be a part of the New York artistic community, and closely watch the artists' evolution.

Working with Sachiyo is such a fine example. My first exposure to her work was in 2018 at a tiny black box venue with a 50-seat capacity. I was very impressed with what I saw, *SHEEP #1*, so I started talking with her and found her to be an intriguing artist. One day during the pandemic, I offered to present *SHEEP #1* at Japan Society (i.e., in a larger space) but requested that she expand the piece with a new version incorporating a different musician. The two versions of *SHEEP #1* at Japan Society drew a large audience despite COVID's lingering effect in 2022. That success led us to continue our conversation, resulting in today's world premiere: *The Peony Lantern* and *One Night in Winter*. We set four performances—an ambitious number. However, as all shows sold out six weeks before the opening, we added a fifth performance, which also sold out immediately. I would say the project has been quite successful so far.

Right now, what we are hoping is to reach further success—that each audience member will relish, enjoy and love this fantastic double bill. I believe we can achieve that success together.



Yoko Shioya
Artistic Director

Ningyo! A Parade of Puppetry Series – Program #3

Shinnai Meets Puppetry

Program

The Peony Lantern

One Night in Winter

Based on the original *shinnai-bushi* song-stories by Okamoto Bunya (1895-1996)

Concept and Direction: Sachiyo Takahashi

Co-creation: Sachiyo Takahashi, Rowan Magee, Emma Wiseman

Shinnai-bushi Storytelling: Okamoto Miya (a.k.a. Sachiyo Takahashi)

Puppetry: Rowan Magee and Emma Wiseman

Puppet Design: Emma Wiseman (*The Peony Lantern*) and Rowan Magee (*One Night in Winter*)

Screen Design and Building: Rowan Magee (*The Peony Lantern*)

Sound Design: Sachiyo Takahashi

Lighting Design: Tsubasa Kamei

Supervision: Okamoto Miyanosuke III

Dramaturgical Support: Nick Lehane, Andy Manjuck, Peter Eckersall, Helena Pennington

English Translation: Sachiyo Takahashi, Rowan Magee, Emma Wiseman, Helena Pennington, Madeleine Dauer. *Rancho* (*One Night in Winter*) excerpt translated by Alison Tokita

Production: Nekaa Lab / Sachiyo Takahashi

Performance runtime is 60 minutes without an intermission.

(Traditional Japanese performers' and musicians' stage names are listed in the family-given order. All others are listed in the given-family order.)

ARTIST'S NOTE

My journey with *shinnai-bushi*, one of many traditional forms of song-storytelling music accompanied by the shamisen instrument, began in the early 1990s. As a student in Japan, I was captivated by a diverse range of artistic expressions—spanning noh, bunraku, Bauhaus and the Russian avant-garde, along with the experimental works of John Cage and Laurie Anderson. A serendipitous visit to a small, timeworn hall in Tokyo unexpectedly changed my path. There, I had the privilege of witnessing Okamoto Bunya, then in his 90s, perform intimate vignettes of *shinnai-bushi*. His performance, characterized by its simplicity yet emotional depth, resonated deeply within me, revealing the enduring power of storytelling through the most modest of means.

In 1996, the year Bunya passed away, I left Japan. Since then, my life has taken me across Europe, Canada and the United States, where I continue to explore new forms of storytelling. Over the years, I developed a series of audio-visual narratives, combining my compositions with live manipulation of miniature objects, magnified by a projector—such as *SHEEP #1*, which Japan Society presented in 2021. Even as I experimented with unconventional forms, Bunya's *shinnai-bushi*, dedicated to the life of everyday people, remained a subtle yet constant influence on my creative path.

My early fascination led me to study *shinnai-bushi* under Bunya's successor, Okamoto Miyanosuke III. In 2019, I became an accredited master of the Okamoto School of *shinnai-bushi*, which sparked my desire to share this art form with audiences outside Japan. Thus, the *Shinnai Meets Puppetry* project was born. Each iteration of this project features a selected *shinnai-bushi* piece paired with a contemporary puppeteer to create a visual counterpart, blending the art of puppetry with this narrative tradition. NYC-based puppeteers Rowan Magee and Emma Wiseman have joined me on this journey, offering their unique interpretations and perspectives throughout the process.

While the pandemic slowed our progress, it deepened our connection with the material, giving us the space to reflect on the intersections of our diverse cultural backgrounds and the future we share as humanity. *Shinnai Meets Puppetry* has since evolved into a celebration of storytelling's ability to transcend time and culture. We invite you to relax and experience a

moment that quietly stirs the emotions. It is a true honor to premiere this work at Japan Society, where tradition and contemporary artistry intertwine. Through this performance, we hope audiences will rediscover the beauty and complexity of our shared cultural heritage.

—Sachiyo Takahashi

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The Peony Lantern (*Botan Dōrō* 牡丹燈籠) is a ghost love story originally from China, and became well-known in Japan in the early 20th century through its adaptation into *rakugo*. Inspired by the *rakugo* version, Okamoto Bunya reimagined it and created a *shinnai-bushi* adaptation of *The Peony Lantern* in 1948. It recounts the tale of Otsuyu, a beautiful young woman who falls hopelessly in love with the ronin Shinzaburo, only to die from the intensity of her passion. After her death, Otsuyu, accompanied by her loyal servant Oyone, returns each night to visit her beloved. However, this ghostly romance comes with a fatal price—any man who loves a ghost is doomed.

One Night in Winter (*Fuyu no Yobanashi* 冬の夜話) is an original *shinnai-bushi* creation by Okamoto Bunya in 1991. It takes place on a cold winter's night in the mountains where an elderly man, having lost both his wife and son, lives alone. His solitude is interrupted by a surprise visit from a magical and mischievous creature with the ability to shapeshift into just about anything — or anyone...

ABOUT SHINNAI-BUSHI AND OKAMOTO BUNYA

Shinnai-bushi is part of a tradition in Japanese performing arts of sung storytelling accompanied by shamisen music known as *yoruri*. During Japan's Edo period, many new styles of *yoruri* were created and developed for various theatrical and non-theatrical contexts. *Shinnai-bushi*, born in the 18th century as part of this trend, was perfected by Tsuruga Wakasanojo and his talented pupil Tsuruga Shinnai, from whom the genre takes its name.

From an early stage, *shinnai-bushi* became established predominantly as *su-joruri*, a performing style comprised only of storytelling with shamisen accompaniment, without theatrical elements such as puppets or dancers. Not restricted by the rhythm and structure of the dance, the most significant characteristic of *shinnai-bushi* is its prolonged *kudoki*, the *joruri* performance's climax where the protagonist's emotion is expressed through melancholic melodies that move fiercely up and down the vocal range. Since it developed in the urban metropolis of Edo, *shinnai-bushi* is considered a performing art embodying “*iki*,” a refined aesthetic of the merchant and craftsman classes in urban culture. In addition to salon-style performance, *shinnai-bushi* incorporated a strolling street performance style called *nagashi*, which had become especially popular in the pleasure quarters. The lyrical melodies of *shinnai-bushi* capture the sorrow of love and the subtleties of human nature, and ordinary people have appreciated them for centuries.

Among renowned *shinnai-bushi* storytellers in history, Okamoto Bunya (1895-1996), the 5th Grand Master of the Okamoto School, significantly contributed to the modernization and popularization of *shinnai-bushi*. In addition to preserving traditional pieces from the *shinnai-bushi* repertoire, Bunya created around 300 original compositions during his lifetime. He found inspiration in Japanese (and foreign) literature, poetry, folk stories and myths to create new *shinnai-bushi* repertoire that could represent the sentiments of modern people. His creations even included anti-war and leftist *shinnai-bushi*, which he made to protest war or to depict the life of the working class. Working with spirited choreographers/dancers, he also experimented with *shinnai buyo* (*shinnai* dance), preserving the unique musical characteristics of *shinnai-bushi* while incorporating visual “accompaniment” to realize the vivid stories of *shinnai-bushi* repertoire. He was also an established essayist, with many published books containing precious records of the aesthetics and lifestyle of a *shinnai-bushi* storyteller who lived through changing times. This year marks the 101st anniversary of the revival of the Okamoto school *shinnai-bushi* in 1923 by Okamoto Bunya and his mother, which had once ceased to exist.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Sachiyo Takahashi (Director and Musician) is a New York-based artist, composer and musician who creates storytelling through objects and sound. Composing sensory elements in a minimalist manner, she explores the border between narrative and abstraction to generate fables for the subconscious. Takahashi founded Nekaa Lab in 2006 together with other “lab members” (stuffed toys and tiny figurines). She produces performances, installations and writings while observing human nature from alternative perspectives. Takahashi's *Microscopic Live Cinema-Theatre*—unique performances projected from a miniature stage—has been appraised as a quirky yet imaginative merging between theatrical and cinematic experiences. Takahashi is also an accredited master of Okamoto School *shinnai-bushi*. Performing under the stage name Okamoto Miya, she has been introducing this art form overseas through her *Shinnai Meets Puppetry* series, collaborating with innovative puppeteers. Takahashi has presented her work both nationally and internationally, including performances at Prague Quadrennial, St. Ann's Warehouse, La MaMa, HERE and Japan Society, where she performed *SHEEP #1* in 2021. She is a proud recipient of multiple grants, such as the Jim Henson Foundation, NYSCA, Brooklyn Arts Council, New England Foundation for the Arts and Café Royal Cultural Foundation. Takahashi currently lives in Brooklyn, yet sometimes can be seen strolling the back alleys of Japan, where she originated. www.nekaa.org

Rowan Magee (Puppeteer) is a puppeteer, designer and director living in Flatbush, Brooklyn. He has worked as a puppeteer on international tours with Phantom Limb Company, Robin Frohardt, Nick Lehane and Dan Hurlin; in New York for Chris Green, Lake Simons and Spencer Lott; and on Broadway in *Angels in America* and *Life of Pi*. In 2019, Magee operated the titular reference puppet for the film *Clifford the Big Red Dog*. He has designed and built puppets and props for films, operas, plays and schools, and is a curator for the Object Movement Festival, a winter residency and spring showcase of experimental puppet artists in NYC. He made his Met Opera debut with *El Niño* in May 2024.

Emma Wiseman (Puppeteer) is an artist interested in puppets and objects. She has worked as a puppeteer, puppetry designer, consultant, teacher and

collaborator with individuals and organizations including Dan Hurlin, Robin Frohardt, Sachiyo Takahashi, Nick Lehane, Derek Fourdjour, Swoon, the Kennedy Center, CO/LAB Theater Group, Signature Theatre Center and the University of Rochester, among others. Wiseman's original work looks at relationships between humans and spaces/objects that are considered boring or mundane. She documents examples of particularly depressing plants in the built environment through the @sad._plants Instagram account. www.emmawiseman.me

Tsubasa Kamei (Lighting Designer) has served as one of the Resident Lighting Designers at Japan Society since 2012. He has worked for Voice 4 Vision Puppet Festival, The Plastic Bag Store in NYC, and SESI Bonecos do Mundo in Brazil. Tsubasa is also the Resident Lighting Designer/Technical Director for Ronald K. Brown/EVIDENCE, A Dance Company, and Technical Director for Gibney Company.

Support for the development of *Shinnai Meets Puppetry* was provided by The Jim Henson Foundation, The Jane Henson Foundation, NYSCA, New England Foundation for the Arts, Brooklyn Arts Council Brooklyn Empowered Fund, Five Myles and HERE Dream Music Puppetry.



The *Shinnai Meets Puppetry* team extends special thanks to the following individuals and organizations: Jim Freeman, Cheryl Henson, Ikuyo Takahashi, Hanne Tierney, the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Centre and the Henson Carriage House/Heather Henson.

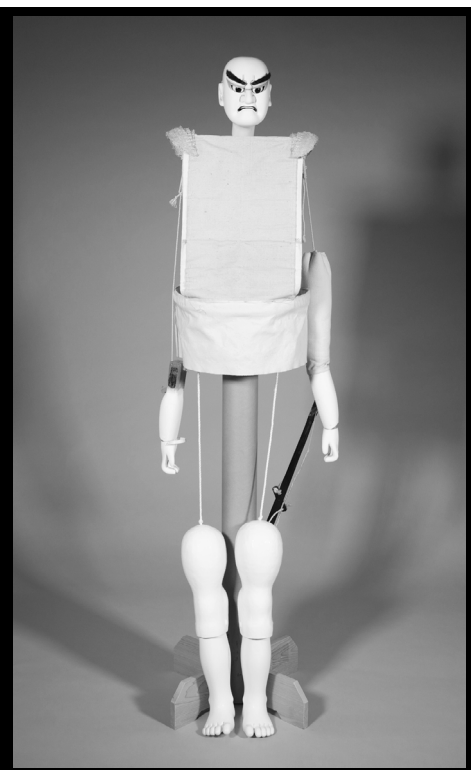
JAPAN SOCIETY GALLERY EXHIBITION

BUNRAKU BACKSTAGE

OCTOBER 4, 2024 – JANUARY 19, 2025



Alongside the live bunraku performances held at Japan Society this fall, *Bunraku Backstage* offers a rare glimpse behind the scenes of the theater. Showcasing actual working puppets, props, instruments, and costumes on loan from the National Bunraku Theatre, Osaka, this exhibition unveils the collaboration that goes into staging a bunraku production. Unexpected bunraku-inspired multimedia works by contemporary artists explore bunraku's ongoing inspiration and influence.



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For over 70 years, Japan Society's Performing Arts Program has enriched the arts in New York City, the U.S. and beyond through the presentation of artists whose works are formed or inspired by the arts and culture of Japan. Taking the mantle as head of Japan Society's Performing Arts Program in 2004, Yoko Shioya has carried this mission through the 21st century, programming over 200 events of the finest Japanese theater, dance, and music from the very traditional to the most cutting edge. Join us in celebrating Japan Society's Artistic Director Yoko Shioya's 20th anniversary and support the future of the Performing Arts Program! Your donation today will make tomorrow's unparalleled cultural experience possible.

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Yoko Shioya 20/20 Supporters as of 10/31/2024

A heartfelt thank you to those who have already contributed in honor of Yoko Shioya's 20th anniversary and to ensure the continued success of the Performing Arts Program!

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This list includes contributions received by October 31, 2024.

December 2024

Ningyo! A Parade of Puppetry Series culminates with:



SILENT FILM AND LIVE PERFORMANCE

The Benshi Tradition and the Silver Screen: A Japanese Puppetry Spin-Off

Thursday, Dec. 12 at 7:30 pm – *A Diary of Chuji's Travel*
— Followed by a *Private Gathering for Artists and Members*

Friday, Dec. 13 at 7:30 pm – *Chushingura*
— Followed by an artist Q&A

January 2025



CONTEMPORARY DANCE NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE

Contemporary Dance Festival: Japan & East Asia

Friday, January 10 at 7:30 pm
— Followed by an opening night reception

Saturday, January 11 at 7:30 pm
— Followed by an artist Q&A



CONTEMPORARY THEATER NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE

Shuji Terayama's Duke Bluebeard's Castle

Wednesday, January 15 at 7:30 pm
— Followed by an opening night reception

Thursday, January 16 at 7:30 pm
— Followed by an artist Q&A

Friday, January 17 at 7:30 pm

Saturday, January 18 at 7:30 pm

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