

PRESS RELEASE

Performance to be held at Setagaya Public Theatre this fall

Sancha Shami: Music of the Shamisen

Seiji Tsurusawa x Hiroshi Sugimoto

A central goal of the Odawara Art Foundation is to explore Japan's traditional performing arts from a variety of angles, and present them to international audiences through live, world-class quality programs. This initiative began in 2011 with the Ningyo Joruri Bunraku (puppet theater) performance of *Sugimoto Bunraku: The Love Suicides at Sonezaki*, and since then the Foundation has staged a wide range of productions not only in Japan, but also in Europe, New York, Singapore, and elsewhere.

Now, we are proud to present *Sancha Shami: Music of the Shamisen*. For this performance, the venue has been transformed into a tea room with Hiroshi Sugimoto as tea ceremony master and host, welcoming the audience with exquisite artwork and classic pieces of music for the shamisen. Hiroshi Sugimoto first partnered with shamisen master Seiji Tsurusawa, a Living National Treasure, on *Sugimoto Bunraku: The Love Suicides at Sonezaki*, a bold new production that drew widespread acclaim, and the two have teamed up again for this project. The performance delights the eye as well with its backdrop of folding screens: Sugimoto's *Red and White Plum Blossoms Under Moonlight*, and Hasegawa Tohaku's *Willows of the Four Seasons*, painted some four centuries ago. We are confident that this multifaceted experience will be an opportunity to discover afresh the wonder of Japan's traditional arts.

Hiroshi Sugimoto's Thoughts on *Sancha Shami*

There is an old Japanese saying, "Willows are green, flowers are red." It describes the feeling of realizing the way things naturally are, or noticing something so obvious you never gave it conscious thought before. Coming face to face with the mystery of existence in this way is a crucial part of human life.

There is also a proverb, *Yanagi ni kaze* ("the wind blows the willow"), meaning that resistance is futile: the willow buffeted by the wind is unharmed because it is pliable and

unresisting. A poem from Edo senryu (haiku's more vernacular cousin) says something like "The willow is blown by the wind, even the winds it dislikes." When faced with something unpleasant, accept it and do not fight – one is reminded of the debate over interpretation of Japan's war-renouncing constitution, which has been in the news of late. Another senryu verse says, "The plum tree smells sweet, even to the person who snaps its branch off." Even broken off, a plum blossom wafts a sweet fragrance. Here one thinks of the state of Japanese culture in the postwar era.

In this performance, two folding screens depicting the plum and the willow are the backdrops for an enchanting performance of music of the shamisen. Savor its inimitable timbre. This is true luxury of a sort that is rare these days.

About Hiroshi Sugimoto

Born in Tokyo in 1948, Sugimoto has lived in NYC since 1974. Sugimoto has acquired an international reputation as a photographic artist and has exhibited his works in major art museums throughout the world. In 2008, he founded the New Material Research Laboratory, an architectural design office, and has carried out several commissions, beginning with the interior of the Izu Photo Museum in Shizuoka Prefecture and including the entrance space for oak omotesando, the Sahsya Kanetanaka café, and Isetan Salone (Tokyo Midtown). His recent written works include "Sense of Space" published by Magazine House, and "Origin of Art" by Shincho-sha. As a connoisseur of domestic and international antiquities and traditional theater arts, Sugimoto has led the direction of the sambaso production as well as Sugimoto Bunraku which toured to Rome, Madrid and Paris in 2013. A solo exhibition on Sugimoto is scheduled to open at Chiba City Museum of Art this fall. Sugimoto was awarded the 21st Praemium Imperiale in 2009, Medal with Purple Ribbon by the Japanese government in 2010, and conferred the Officier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (The Order of Arts and Letters) by the French government in 2013.

Performance

Title: Sancha Shami: Music of the Shamisen

Dates: Friday, October 23, 2015, 7:00pm

Saturday, October 24, 2015, 2:00pm

Sunday, October 25, 2015, 2:00pm

Venue: Setagaya Public Theatre (4-1-1 Taishido, Setagaya-ku, Tokyo)

Organized and produced by Odawara Art Foundation

Cooperated with Setagaya Arts Foundation / Setagaya Public Theatre

Sponsored by Setagaya City

In cooperation with London Gallery Ltd.

Supported by the Japan World Exposition 1970 Commemorative Fund

Space designed by Hiroshi Sugimoto (contemporary artist)

Supervised by Mihoko Nogawa (Scholar of traditional Japanese music)

Cast:

Rosetayu Toyotake (Narrator)

Seiji Tsurusawa (Shamisen player)

Seishiro Tsurusawa (Shamisen player)

Seiki Tsurusawa (Shamisen player)

Kantaro Tsurusawa (Shamisen player)

Participants for Tripartite Talk:

Seiko Ito (author / creator), Tomogoro Yamamura (traditional Japanese dancer) and Mihoko Nogawa appear on Oct 23

Kikunojo Onoe (traditional Japanese dancer), Hidetoshi Sakurai (musician; member of Magokoro Brothers) and Mihoko Nogawa appear on Oct 24

Hiroshi Sugimoto, Mari Hashimoto (writer / editor) and Mihoko Nogawa appear on Oct 25

Tickets

4,500 yen for seats on the 1st and 2nd floors / 4,000 yen for seats on the 3rd floor

*Tickets available for purchase from Saturday, July 25

4,200 yen for friends of SePT members (only during pre-sale period; 1st and 2nd floors)

*Tickets available for purchase from Friday, July 24

4,300 yen for Setagaya Arts Card holders (only during pre-sale period; 1st and 2nd floors)

*Tickets available for purchase from Thursday, July 23

Program

According to one etymology, the Japanese word *kiku* (聴く, to listen) comes from a homonym written with different kanji characters: 氣 (ki) 来 (ku), roughly “life energy” and “come” (Hio Keizan, *Enkyo zatsuwa*). The theory is that “sound, full of *life energy*, comes into the ears” when we listen. We turn our ears toward a sound, take its breath inside ourselves, immerse ourselves in a space vibrating with sound waves – to be sure, that is what we do when we really listen.

This event is dedicated to listening to the sounds of the shamisen and discovering, or

rediscovering, its beauty. The shamisen is thought to have made its way from the Ryukyu Islands (present-day Okinawa) to Japan in the 16th century, and over the ensuing centuries has been a constant companion to the human voice in story and song. There are many genres of shamisen music, each of which is characterized by a different timbre of both voice and instrument. This performance features the Gidayu-bushi style, from Osaka, originated in the late 17th century and is a form of Joruri narrative balladry, vividly depicting fictional worlds.

The performance is divided into three parts. The first features *teidan*, a three-way conversation, with different speakers appearing on different days and entertaining the audience with a lively repartee revolving around the shamisen. The second presents a music medley edited by Seiji Tsurusawa, a Living National Treasure. The last part features a piece titled *Sanjusangendo Munagi no Yurai* (commonly known as *Yanagi*, “Willow.”) with instrumentation and vocals like that of Bunraku puppet plays, but without performers. *Sanjusangendo Munagi no Yurai*, of which one dramatic section of the scene at Heitaro’s home will be performed, is an immortal classic of Joruri drama.

The venue’s interior was visually directed by Hiroshi Sugimoto. Gracing the stage are works of art including Sugimoto’s own folding screen *Red and White Plum Blossoms Under Moonlight*, shown for the first time in Tokyo, and Hasegawa Tohaku’s folding screen *Willows of Four Seasons*.

During the Edo Period (1603-1868), audience members were fortunate to shamisen music in the most luxurious of environments. Now, we invite you to the Setagaya Public Theatre in “Sancha” (nickname of the Sangenjaya district) to thrill to the sounds of the “Shami” (sen), luxuriating in both the sight and the sound of Sancha Shami.

1. Tripartite Talk:

Oct 23: Tomogoro Yamamura + Seiko Ito + Mihoko Nogawa

Oct 24: Kikunojo Onoe + Hidetoshi Sakurai + Mihoko Nogawa

Oct 25: Hiroshi Sugimoto + Mari Hashimoto + Mihoko Nogawa

2. Gidayu-bushi ballad: Shamisen medley collection edited by Seiji Tsurusawa and played by Seishiro Tsurusawa, Seiki Tsurusawa and Kantaro Tsurusawa

3. Gidayu-bushi ballad: *Sanjusangendo Munagi no Yurai* (commonly known as “Willow”) sung by Rosetayu Toyotake and played by Seiji Tsurusawa

Musical Highlights

©Joruri ballads derive their power from the mastery of narrator and shamisen player

To fully convey the mystique of Joruri, it is performed with only Dayu (singer/narrator) and shamisen player, without actors or puppet manipulators on stage.

▽Shamisen medley collection

This is a new medley collection edited by Seiji Tsurusawa especially for this performance.

With only the sound of shamisen, the audience will feel as if they can hear the voices of the narrators and see the movement of the puppets.

▽Gidayu-bushi ballad: *Sanjusangendo Munagi no Yurai* (commonly known as *Yanagi*, “Willow”), dramatic section of the scene at Heitaro’s home

Originating in Osaka, Gidayu-bushi was primarily performed in large theaters beginning when Takemoto Gidayu (1651-1714) opened Takemoto-za in the Dotonbori district and began performing in 1684. It was generally performed along with puppet plays. It is such enthralling music that in the past, fans of Bunraku puppet plays were wont to say, “I’m going to listen to Bunraku” rather than, “I’m going to see Bunraku.” This music will be showcased in this performance, which features only a Dayu (narrator) and shamisen player, without puppet performers.

The piece presented, a highly dramatic section of the scene at Heitaro’s home from *Sanjusangendo Munagi no Yurai* (commonly known as *Yanagi*, “Willow”), is based on the third act of the Bunraku play *Gion Nyogo Kokonoe Nishiki*, first performed at Toyotake-za in Osaka in 1760. Since 1821, the third act has commonly been performed by itself, and an abridged form is currently prevalent.

The three main characters are O-yanagi, the spirit of a willow who has married a human being; her husband, Heitaro; and their son, Midorimaru. Its tale of the sudden rending asunder of a family is among the greatest masterpieces of the genre. The performers are Toyotake Rosetayu (Dayu, Ningyo Joruri Bunraku-za) and Keeper of Intangible Cultural Heritage (Living National Treasure) Seiji Tsurusawa (Shamisen, Ningyo Joruri Bunraku-za). The art of a Dayu is said to be that of conveying human emotion, and he effortlessly shifts back and forth between joy, anger, sadness, and amusement as he speaks for various on-stage characters during Bunraku plays. Meanwhile, the art of a shamisen player is said to be setting the scene, conveying the tone of the story and the atmosphere of each scene. This pairing of these two consummate masters will immerse the audience in the true brilliance of Gidayu-bushi.

Visual Highlights

◎Folding screen masterpieces make the stage into a work of art in its own right

Hiroshi Sugimoto’s folding screen *Red and White Plum Blossoms Under Moonlight* will be

the backdrop for the Shamisen medley collection, and Hasegawa Tohaku's folding screen *Four Seasons of the Willow* for the Gidayu-bushi rendering of *Sanjusangendo Munagi no Yurai* (commonly known as *Yanagi*, "Willow").

▽ Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Red and White Plum Blossoms Under Moonlight* (2014), pair of two-part folding screens, each 156.1 × 172.2 cm (private collection)

A platinum palladium print of Sugimoto's photograph of the National Treasure *Red and White Plum Blossoms* by Ogata Korin. "If Korin is the day, Sugimoto is the night. The moon illuminates the flow of a river. The plum blossoms smelled sweet during the day, but they must be even more fragrant at night. As the eye is exposed to fewer stimuli, the sense of smell becomes keener. There is no loss of complexity when the picture becomes black and white—rather it expands in an entirely new direction" (from *Korin's Art: Korin and Modern Art*.) This is the Tokyo premiere of *Red and White Plum Blossoms Under Moonlight*, which was first exhibited in February 2015 at the MOA Museum of Art.



Photo: Sugimoto Studio

▽ Hasegawa Tohaku, *Four Seasons of the Willow*, pair of six-part folding screens, each 172 × 378 cm (collection of London Gallery)

A work by Hasegawa Tohaku (1539 – 1610), the renowned painter active in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Two folding screens depict four willow trees and a brushwood fence. The two trees on the right are shown in spring and summer, the two on the left in autumn and winter, and all together they form a time-lapse portrait of the cycle of the seasons.



Photo: Hiroshi Sugimoto / Courtesy of London Gallery