

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 29, 1998

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JAPANESE PERFORMING ARTS FESTIVAL

TO COMPLEMENT MAJOR EXHIBITION, "EDO: ART IN JAPAN 1615-1868,"

AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART THIS FALL AND WINTER

WASHINGTON, D.C. - "Edo Festival 1998," a performing arts festival featuring a broad variety of traditional Japanese art forms from firemen acrobats to kabuki actors, will take place in and around the National Gallery of Art in November to complement the major exhibition Edo: Art in Japan 1615 - 1868, on view November 15, 1998, through February 15, 1999. During the Edo period, performing arts were part of the daily life of citizens who enjoyed popular street and festival performances given regularly by artists. The performing arts festival at the National Gallery will show the continuity of these art forms, as well as give visitors to the Gallery the opportunity to experience an aspect of life that began almost four hundred years ago in Japan. All events are open to the public free of charge.

The Edo Festival has been made possible by The Circle of the National Gallery of Art, the Fund for the International Exchange of Art, and The Japan Foundation.

The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, the Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan, and The Japan Foundation.

-more-

edo performing arts festival...page 2

The exhibition is made possible by NTT.

It is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities. All Nippon Airways has contributed essential in-kind support.

JAPANESE KITES (IKANOBORI) AND AN EDO KITE FLYING DAY ON THE MALL, INCLUDING KITE BATTLES (TAKO GASSEN)

Wednesday, November 4, through Monday, November 9

Kite masters demonstrate kite making during public hours

East Building atrium

Saturday, November 7 (weather permitting)

(Rain date: Sunday, November 8)

**Edo Kite Flying Day on the Mall, between 3rd and 4th Streets, NW,
including Kite Battles**

Noon - 2 p.m.

Tuesday, November 10

**Raising of the largest kite, over the East Building main staircase
10 a.m.**

Japanese kites are among the most spectacular in size and color in the world, particularly those developed during the Edo period. Kite flying was a popular pastime then, and has remained so throughout Japan. Popularly known today as "tako," kites are regarded as symbols of good luck and interpreted as having religious significance on festival occasions, as prayers for good fortune raised before the gods.

At the National Gallery, master kite makers working in complete view of the public, will construct and decorate large, colorful kites in the form of a human image. Kites such as these, known as Yakko Dako, were popular during the Edo period because their comical human form poked fun at low-ranking samurai (or yakko), who often bullied the townspeople.

-more-

edo performing arts festival...page 3

The National Gallery has also commissioned other brilliantly colored, large kites -- including a dragon, a crane, and a demon -- to be suspended in the East Building near the entrance of the exhibition. One exceptionally large kite (approximately twenty-eight by fourteen feet) will welcome visitors to the exhibition itself. This giant kite will be raised in the East Building atrium on November 10 at approximately 10:10 a.m. The kites and master kite makers are courtesy of the Kite Museum of Tokyo.

The Edo Kite Flying Day on the Mall will include two opposing teams led by skilled Japanese kite battlers trying to sever the strings of each other's kites in mid-air. Such activities have long attracted an enthusiastic following in Japan.

FESTIVAL DANCERS (MATSURI BAYASHI)

**Friday, November 13; Saturday, November 14; and Sunday, November 15
11 a.m. and 2:30 p.m.
East Building atrium**

The festival dance company Yanagiya, founded in 1630, has featured nineteen generations performing Shinto dances (kagura) at village festivals throughout Japan. Three generations of dancers in the current company will officially open Edo: Art in Japan 1615-1868 on Sunday, November 15. The performance will include a colorful lion dance in which the performer wears a gilded, carved wooden lion's head with a sweeping, white mane. Dressed in figured gold silk brocade, the "Lion" represents the presence of the gods in a traditional dance ceremony that has been performed as a blessing at the start of religious festivals in Japan since ancient times.

The troupe will also perform feats of juggling and acrobatics, another aspect of

edo performing arts festival...page 4

traditional Japanese festivals.

TAIKO DRUMMERS

**Saturday, November 14, and Sunday, November 15
11:30 a.m. and 3 p.m.
East Building atrium**

Taiko drummers have represented an active and vital part of Japanese cultural history since the sixth and seventh centuries. The professional troupe, OEDO SUKEROKU TAIKO, which will be at the National Gallery, is named after the Edo capital and Sukeroku, the dashing hero of a famous kabuki play in which a chivalrous commoner defeats a samurai to win a courtesan's favor.

Taiko drums continue to be traditionally used in religious festivals in Japan, including the Obon festival in August, when performances are held in memory of the dead in order to send ancestors' spirits back to the Other World. These beautifully polished wooden drums, some weighing hundreds of pounds, are hand-carved from a single tree trunk by one of the handful of skilled craftsmen still able to make them. Drummers, dressed in half-length jackets and headbands, leap into the air flailing their wooden batons and using their whole body weight to produce the incredible booming sound that feels as if it could move mountains. During the Edo period, the boundaries of rural villages were determined by the farthest distance at which the thundering sound of the giant taiko drums could still be heard.

The leader of the troupe, Kobayashi Seido, founded his group in 1959 as the

edo performing arts festival...page 5

first to focus on drums-only performances, a style that has been emulated by many other troupes since then. His group remains the most faithful to Edo tradition.

STREET PERFORMANCE (MACHI KADO NO GEINO)

Sunday, November 15, noon and 2 p.m.

Monday, November 16, 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.

Tuesday, November 17, 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.

Wednesday, November 18, 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.

East Building atrium

Street performance (machi kado no geino) was part of what brought the streets of Edo to life in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A handful of dedicated performers carry on these traditions today, and one of the best is Tatsuno Tai. Known by his stage name, Tsukudagawa Enya, he is the leader of the OEDO Performance Troupe.

Performances will include **bamboo screen juggling** (tama sudare) and "**toad oil vendor**" **sword tricks** (gama no abura uri) used by itinerant medicine peddlers in the Edo period to sell their wares. "Toad oil" (similar to Tiger Balm), widely believed to heal wounds, was something no samurai swordsman of the Edo period would be without.

FLOWER ARRANGEMENT (IKEBANA)

Thursday, November 19, 10:30 a.m.

Friday, November 20, 10:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m.

Saturday, November 21, 10:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m.

Sunday, November 22, 10:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m.

East Building atrium

Kitajima Yokou, a licensed master of the Sogetsu School of Ikebana, or flower

edo performing arts festival...page 6

arrangement, will demonstrate both the Edo tradition and his own dynamic style of ikebana. His arrangements will be on display throughout the main floor of the East Building.

Ikebana began to develop as an art form when the custom of placing flowers on altars was brought to Japan by Chinese Buddhist monks in the sixth century. Ikebana is practiced today by millions in Japan and throughout the world. Flowers have a special meaning for the Japanese, for whom the art of ikebana is both a personal discipline and a reminder of the beauty of nature.

FIREMEN ACROBATS (HASHIGONORI)

Friday, November 20, 11:30 a.m. and 3 p.m.

Saturday, November 21, 11:30 a.m. and 3 p.m.

Sunday, November 22, 12:30 pm and 3 p.m.

East Building atrium

The firefighters' association, Edo Shobo Kinen Kai, preserves the traditions of the town fire brigades and municipal fire companies of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Japan, when wood and paper houses made fires a constant threat. Forty firemen in traditional garb, some with full-body tattoos, will perform dramatic and unusual acrobatics atop twenty-two-foot-high bamboo ladders. They will demonstrate Dezomeshiki, a Japanese New Year's ceremony to ensure fire safety in the coming year, with ceremonial processions, chanted firemen's work songs, livery coats, and company standards.

edo performing arts festival...page 7

KABUKI BACKSTAGE ** Passes required.

**Friday, November 20; Saturday, November 21; and Sunday, November 22;
8 p.m., East Building Large Auditorium**

East Building doors open at 6 p.m.

Passes entitle holder to view the exhibition beginning at 6 p.m.

Doors to the auditorium open at 7 p.m. First-come, first-seated.

Leonard Pronko, the first American to be admitted to the National Training Program at the National Theatre in Tokyo, and the prominent Japanese actor, Takao Tomono, will introduce techniques and traditions of kabuki theater, the most popular form of stage entertainment in Edo Japan. In view of the audience they will apply makeup and don costumes as they describe the history and aesthetics of this flamboyant Japanese theater form.

After demonstrating fundamental movements and explaining words and gestures from the famous kabuki play "Benkei at the Gojo Bridge," they will perform the fight dance, which culminates the play.

JAPANESE DANCE (NIHON BUYO) ** Passes required.

**Friday, November 27; Saturday, November 28; and Sunday, November 29;
8 p.m., East Building Large Auditorium**

East Building doors open at 6 p.m.

Passes entitle holder to view the Edo exhibition beginning at 6 p.m.

Doors to the auditorium open at 7 p.m. First-come, first-seated.

This solo dance form evolved from dances performed in kabuki theatre, which began in the early Edo period. Later, when women were banned from kabuki theatre, they continued to dance in the private parties held in exclusive teahouses. These performers, known as geisha (literally "performers"), were accomplished musicians,

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performing arts festival...page 8

storytellers, and dancers, who developed a unique tradition of Japanese dance based on some of the techniques and movements of kabuki. By the end of the Edo period, these sophisticated dance forms were formalized into various schools of dance under the general category known today as Nihon Buyo.

Two traditional Nihon Buyo dances will be performed in the popular style of the Edo period by Yamashita Michiko and Heidi Durning, dressed in elaborate kimono, with traditional hairstyles and make-up. In "Wisteria Maiden," a young girl becomes one with the spirit of flowers, and in "Asazuma Boat," courtesans are carried by boat to greet visitors to Asazuma Harbor.

**** HOW TO OBTAIN ADVANCE PASSES**

Advance passes for "Kabuki Backstage" and "Japanese Dance (Nihon Buyo)" can be obtained free of charge at the National Gallery of Art, East Building pass desk at Fourth Street and Constitution Avenue, N.W. beginning November 1 during public hours, Monday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., and Sunday, 11 a.m.-6 p.m. There is a limit of four passes per person per event.

Advance passes may also be obtained at all Washington metro area Ticketmaster locations and Hecht's stores for a service charge of \$2.00 per pass and through TicketMaster PhoneCharge for a \$2.75 service fee per pass and a \$1.25 handling fee per order. To order through TicketMaster, call one of the following

numbers:	Washington, DC	(202) 432-SEAT
	Baltimore, MD	(410) 481-SEAT
	Northern Virginia	(703) 573-SEAT
	Nationwide toll-free	(800) 551-SEAT (outside of areas listed above)

-more-

edo performing arts festival...page 9

Passes for the performances also entitle holders to view the Edo exhibition beginning at 6 p.m. when doors to the East Building open. Auditorium doors open at 7 p.m. for performances at 8 p.m. First-come, first-served.

GENERAL INFORMATION

For more information on these events, please call (202) 737-4215 or check the Gallery's website at <http://www.nga.gov>. for the latest information as programs are subject to change.

The National Gallery of Art, located on the National Mall at 4th Street and Constitution Avenue, is open Monday through Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sunday, from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission is free. For general information, call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176 or visit the National Gallery of Art's Web site at www.nga.gov.

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