

Announcement

MIKAGE PROJECT, ITO Kashitaro and CHAI to Headline Overseas Performances Celebrating 50 Years of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation

Forging ties through music: Inspiring the generation to shape the next 50 years

The Japan Foundation (JF) will proudly commemorate the 50th anniversary of ASEAN-Japan friendship and cooperation by sending artists from three distinct musical genres — traditional Japanese music, anime songs, and rock — to six ASEAN countries. Through these performances and cultural exchange events, the aim is to strengthen ties and foster enduring relationships of trust between both regions.

Japan's music scene has evolved over time, from music played on traditional Japanese instruments, to Japanese rock that has been popular since the 1970s and has continued to develop its own unique style, to anime songs that resonate with today's youth. While showcasing this musical diversity and richness, the performers, through interactions in each country, will inspire the generation that will shape the next 50 years in Japan and ASEAN member countries, conveying new realizations and the power to create the future, and encouraging them to forge deeper, lasting ties.

MIKAGE PROJECT, a group of musicians who compose and arrange *minyo* folk songs of various regions with a contemporary sensibility using instruments such as the *shakuhachi*, *shamisen*, and *koto* to introduce the allure of these melodies in Japan and abroad, is scheduled for performances in Thailand and Malaysia. **ITO Kashitaro**, a singer-songwriter and anime song singer acclaimed for his unparalleled vocal talent and widely followed by young social media users, will perform in the Philippines and Vietnam. The dynamic all-female band **CHAI**, known for embodying a "NEO Kawaii" motto through their music and which continues to shock listeners with their remarkable songwriting sense and overwhelming performances, will make appearances in Laos and Cambodia.

Beyond their scheduled performances, these artists will also hold workshops and mini-concerts at local schools and children's facilities in each of the host countries.



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■ Description of the project

Thailand and Malaysia

Title of Project: MIKAGE PROJECT ASEAN TOUR 2023 in Thailand with Rasmee Isan Soul

MIKAGE PROJECT ASEAN TOUR 2023 in Malaysia with Asmidar

Project Schedule: 3:30 p.m. on Friday, October 20, 2023 (Mahasarakham, Thailand)

6:00 p.m. on Sunday, October 22, 2023 (Bangkok, Thailand)

8:30 p.m. on Tuesday, October 24, 2023 (Shah Alam, Malaysia)

8:00 p.m. on Wednesday, October 25, 2023 (Petaling Jaya, Malaysia)

Venue: Mahasarakham University (Mahasarakham, Thailand)

LIDO CONNECT (Bangkok, Thailand)

Universiti Teknologi MARA(Shah Alam, Malaysia)

Petaling Jaya Performing Arts Centre (PJPAC) (Petaling Jaya, Malaysia)

Performer: MIKAGE PROJECT

Philippines and Vietnam

Title of Project: Ito Kashitaro ASEAN Tour 2023 in the Philippines and Vietnam

Project Schedule: 6:00 p.m. on Friday, October 27, 2023 (Manila, Philippines)

3:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. on Sunday, October 29, 2023 (Hanoi, Vietnam)

Venues: Brooklyn Warehouse (Manila, Philippines)

National Youth Theater (Hanoi, Vietnam)

Performer: ITO Kashitaro

Laos and Cambodia

Title of Project: CHAI “NEO KAWAII NIGHT in Laos and Cambodia”

Project Schedule: 7:00 p.m. on Friday, December 8, 2023 (Vientiane, Laos)

5:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. on Sunday, December 10, 2023 (Phnom Penh, Cambodia)

Venue: Lao National Cultural Hall (Vientiane, Laos)

Factory Phnom Penh Flex Space (Phnom Penh, Cambodia)

Performer: CHAI

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■ Artist Profiles

MIKAGE PROJECT

Formed in December 2020, MIKAGE PROJECT is a group of musicians who compose and arrange *minyo* folk songs of various regions with a contemporary sensibility, promoting their allure within Japan and abroad.

“MIKAGE” refers to the soul or spirit of gods and buddhas. The group’s foundational principle is to preserve the sonic spirits of our predecessors for future generations through folk songs from around the world. MIKAGE PROJECT consists of three talented members, each of whom has

explored the potential of traditional Japanese instruments: SATO Kouki (shakuhachi, shinobue, ohayashi, percussion instruments), ASANO Sho (Tsugaru shamisen, vocals), and HONMA Takashi (25-string koto). Each member began learning their respective instrument under family tutelage from a young age and has achieved distinction in both domestic and international competitions. Attracting attention for superb instrumental techniques and a style incorporating a broad range of musical genres, MIKAGE PROJECT appeared on NHK’s *Minyo Damashii*, a TV program about folk songs, less than a year after the group’s formation. They released their first EP, *MIKAGE PROJECT*, in April 2021, followed by their second EP, *NEO BUSHI*, in May 2022, and their third EP, *KeHaRe*, in May 2023. With their unparalleled, refined sensibilities and harmonies, they are carving out a new niche for folk songs and drawing significant attention from the music industry.



ITO Kashitaro



Having started his singing career on video platforms, ITO Kashitaro became a sensation, often referred to as an unparalleled vocal talent. To date, his videos have amassed over 150 million views. His social media presence is considerable, boasting 710,000 followers and 300,000 official friends on LINE, making him a highly revered artist among younger netizens and social media users. After his major debut, he transitioned to creating original compositions and blossomed as a singer-songwriter, releasing three

albums: *Ichii Senshin*, *Niritsu Haihan*, and *Niten Ichiryu*.

In spring 2018, he penned his debut novel *Katei Kyoshitsu*. In 2020, he released his first single *Kioku no Hakobune* (the ending theme for the anime *Deca-Dence*) and his first collected essays *Bokutachi ni Niau Sekai* (The World that Suits Us), published by KADOKAWA. These ventures showcased his prowess as a “singer-songwriter-novelist.” Since then, he has consistently released anime theme songs, including

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Shinjiro no Kakumei (ending theme for *Deep Insanity: The Lost Child*), *Silent Minority* (opening theme for *Trapped in a Dating Sim: The World of Otome Games Is Tough for Mobs*), *Hinata no Kuni* and *Neko Neko Biyori* (theme songs for *Nights with a Cat*), and *Vita Philosophica* (ending theme for *My Happy Marriage*). In February 2022, he launched his first best-of album *Sanzen Sekai*, continuing his streak of having four consecutive albums ranked in the Oricon Top 10 chart.

From 2021 onward, he has been voicing the character Hikage Toma in the HIPHOP media mix project *Paradox Live*. While his primary activities revolve around singing, music production, and streaming, ITO Kashitaro's endeavors span songwriting/music production for other musicians, voice acting, writing, and being a DJ and radio host, truly exemplifying his multifaceted talents. Interestingly, he refrains from showing his face in the media, using a fox mask as his trademark.

CHAI

Formed by the “miracle twins” Mana and Kana, along with the incredibly powerful rhythm section composed of Yuuki and Yuna, this band is known as the “NEO – New Exciting Onna (Woman) Band.”

Asserting that everyone has their own version of “cute,” CHAI introduced a new concept of *kawaii* (cute) called “NEO Kawaii.”

CHAI embodies this message in their music in a pop fashion, and has garnered sympathy and support from a wide range of generations, transcending gender, age, and nationality.

Their 2017 debut album *PINK* swept various music charts and was also praised by many celebrities beyond the music industry. In 2018, they made their debut in both the U.S. and the U.K., embarked on four U.S. tours, two U.K. tours, and an Asia tour. In 2019, they released their second album *PUNK* and successfully concluded their first world tour, spanning the U.S., Europe, and Japan. In 2020, they signed with the popular U.S. indie label Sub Pop Records. By 2022, they had completed their fifth North American tour and performed at major festivals in Australia and Central and South America, establishing themselves as a highly regarded artist internationally in recent years. They plan to release their fourth full album *CHAI* in September 2023.



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