

Seiwa Bunraku (Kumamoto Prefecture), Kazunori Kumagai, and Ka-Na to Participate in the National Cherry Blossom Festival Opening

The Japan Foundation (JF) will send three groups of artists active in Japan and overseas to perform at the National Cherry Blossom Festival in Washington, D.C. , U.S.A.

At the opening ceremony, Seiwa Bunraku, designated as an Important Intangible Cultural Asset of Kumamoto Prefecture, will present a collaboration piece with the popular manga *ONE PIECE*. There will also be a singing performance by Ka-Na (Kana Uemura), known for the hit song "Fairy of the Bathroom," as well as a stage performance by Kazunori Kumagai, a world-renowned tap dancer. Through these diverse Japanese stage performances, we hope to promote a better understanding of Japan in the United States and increase interest in a wide range of Japanese cultural genres.



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National Cherry Blossom Festival Opening Performance

Project Schedule : March 22, 2025 (Saturday) 5:00 P.M.~6:30 P.M. (EDT)

Venue : Warner Theatre

Performer : Seiwa Bunraku, Kazunori Kumagai, Ka-Na and others

Organizer : National Cherry Blossom Festival, Inc.

Co-presenter : The Japan Foundation

Seiwa Bunraku Performance

Details will be announced on the Japan Foundation website at a later date.

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【Artist Profiles】

Seiwa Bunraku



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Seiwa Bunraku is the only remaining traditional puppetry organization in Kumamoto Prefecture, Japan. Seiwa Bunraku puppet theater began about 170 years ago in Seiwa Village, when local farmers learned from visiting members of the Awaji Puppet Troupe. In the 1960s, performance opportunities decreased due in part to the changing times, but with the designation of Seiwa Bunraku puppet theater as an Important Intangible Cultural Property of Kumamoto Prefecture in 1979, rural community development focusing on traditional puppet theater achieved the revival of the performing art, and Seiwa Bunrakukan was completed in 1992 as Kyushu's only traditional Japanese puppet theater.

Suspended tayu (chanters) and shamisen players returned in 1994. In addition to regularly scheduled and subscription performances at Seiwa Bunrakukan, performances have also been held throughout Japan and overseas.

On top of traditional pieces, Seiwa Bunraku also produces new performances that reflect the era. In 2021, when the world suffered under COVID-19, a new puppet play was presented: "Higo Amabie Koiutaibun (Strange Love Story of the Amabie of Higo Province)" produced by Kumamoto Prefectural Theater, a tale about Amabie, a legendary sea creature said to quell epidemics.

Kumamoto Prefecture was severely impacted by the 2016 earthquake. As part of the prefecture's reconstruction project, in 2022, a collaboration work titled *"Chopper, Embarking from the Winter Sakura"* was presented at the Kumamoto Prefectural Theater. The work was a collaboration between *ONE PIECE*, the popular manga by Eiichiro Oda, who is from Kumamoto, and Seiwa Bunraku. Since 2024, a remake of this performance, adapted for the Seiwa Bunrakukan, has been regularly staged there.

Seiwa Bunraku Official Website (<https://seiwabunraku.com/>)

Kazunori Kumagai

Tap dancer. He started tap dancing at age 15 and moved to the US at age 19. He was described as a "true tap artist" by the NY Times. In 2006, he was selected by Dance Magazine as one of the "25 dancers to watch in the world." He was selected as one of the "100 Japanese people respected by the world" by Newsweek magazine in 2019. He currently has two main bases in NY and Japan, and is expanding his activities to Europe, Asia, and other parts of the world. His unique and one-of-a-kind art is evolving every day, creating a new future for tap dance. He

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performed, choreographed, and composed music for the opening ceremony of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. In recent years, he performed traditional Ainu songs and collaborate with Amami-born singer Moto Chitose in 2022. In 2023, he performed a three-day show called "Tap into the Light," and was invited as a performer and instructor at tap festivals in Stockholm and Germany. In February 2024, he performed at Blue Note Tokyo with his band "K.K. Quintet", featuring singer Kaho Nakamura. In May, he returned to New York and performed with world-class tap dancers such as legendary bassist Alex Blake, singer and flutist Monday Michiru, and

Grammy-winning percussionist Keita Ogawa. In February 2025, he led "KAZUNORI KUMAGAI SEXTET feat. HIMI" to a successful concert at Blue Note Tokyo.

Kazunori Kumagai Official Website (<https://www.kazunorikumagai.com/>)

Ka-Na



Ka-Na (Kana Uemura) is a Gold record-selling singer, songwriter, and guitarist from Japan. She has enjoyed much success over the years with her music being featured on popular radio and TV stations across Japan as well as publishing an autobiography. She is best known for her song "Fairy of the Bathroom", an acoustic ballad about her grandmother, which became a #1 hit in 2010. That year she also won two Japan Record Awards: Best Song and Best Songwriter of the Year with her album "Pieces of Me". She credits Julie Andrews performance in The Sound of Music as her inspiration to write, sing, and play music. Since signing with King Records in 2005, Ka-Na, under the name of Kana Uemura, has released nine studio albums, thirteen singles, an English songs cover album, and 16 music videos.

Ka-Na moved to New York in late 2016 and has performed at Carnegie Hall, Club Bonafide, Rockwood Music Hall, Bitter End in NYC and Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. Ka-Na's new 7-song EP, "Happiness," featuring Steve Addabbo (Suzanne Vega, Shawn Colvin), Ari Hest and NY-based musicians, will be released on January 25, 2019.

Ka-Na Official Website (https://ka-na.us/en/home_e/)

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