

“Kurokawa Noh” to Premier in Singapore
— Celebrating the 60th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations
between Singapore and Japan
with 500-Year-Old Sacred Tradition —



Commemorating the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Singapore (SJ60), the Japan Foundation (JF) will organize performances of Kurokawa Noh, originating from Tsuruoka City, Yamagata Prefecture and designated as an Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property of Japan. The performances will be featured at *A Tapestry of Sacred Music 2026*, a festival presented by Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, Singapore’s national performing arts center. This will be a rare opportunity for Kurokawa Noh to be presented as one of the featured performances in the festival that showcase sacred performing arts and religious music from around the world.

In addition to the performances, a lecture-demonstration will also be held at the Japan Creative Centre (JCC). The session will feature Prof. Lim Beng Choo, Head of the Japanese Studies Department at the National University of Singapore (NUS), renowned for her extensive knowledge of Japanese performing arts, including Noh. Through live demonstrations of the Noh performers, the lecture will explore the spiritual foundations and aesthetic qualities of Kurokawa Noh as a form of “shinji noh,” a sacred ritual performance rooted in local community traditions.



SINGAPORE - JAPAN
DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS
1966 - 2026

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We expect that these projects will further deepen cultural exchange between Japan and Singapore through the enduring appeal of Kurokawa Noh—preserved and passed down for over 500 years through the profound faith of local communities and their devotion to the Noh theatre.

This event will be carried out as part of “Partnership to Co-create a Future with the Next Generation: WA Project 2.0,” a comprehensive people-to-people exchange program aimed at promoting exchange and fostering members of the next generation in Japan and ASEAN.

【Kurokawa Noh Performance at Esplanade】

Schedule: : April 30, 2026 (Thu), 22:15 – Esplanade Concourse

Program: Shōjō

May 1, 2026 (Fri), 20:45 – Esplanade Concert Hall

Program: Hagoromo

(All times are local time. A pre-performance talk event is scheduled for May 1, 2026.)

Tickets: Free admission (Details will be announced on the official “A Tapestry of Sacred Music” website)

Presented by Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay

Organized by The Japan Foundation

In cooperation with Kurokawa Noh Preservation Society

Supported by Embassy of Japan in Singapore

【Lecture-Demonstration at JCC】

Date: Wednesday, April 29, 2026

Venue: Japan Creative Center (JCC)

Performer: Kurokawa Noh, Senior Performer

Program: Shimai “Naniwa”

Guest Speaker: Prof. Lim Beng Choo (Head of Japanese Studies, National University of Singapore)

Presented by Japan Creative Center

Organized by The Japan Foundation

In cooperation with Kurokawa Noh Preservation Society

Further details will be released shortly on JCC’s website and social media.

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Kurokawa Noh

Kurokawa Noh has been preserved and passed down by the *ujiko* (shrine parishioners) of Kasuga Shrine in Kurokawa, Tsuruoka City, Yamagata Prefecture, as a form of *Shinji Noh*—a sacred ritual performance dedicated to the deities.



While this lineage of Noh shares the same roots as the five main contemporary schools (Kanze, Hōshō, Komparu, Kongō, and Kita), following the Sarugaku Noh traditions perfected by Zeami, it does not belong to any specific school. Instead, it has maintained its own unique oral traditions, preserving ancient styles of performance and repertoire that are said to predate the modernization of the art form.

Although the exact origins of how Noh was introduced to the Kurokawa region remain a mystery, historical records from the early Edo period (1603-1868) already mention the presence of *Noh-dayu* (head masters) and the challenges of maintaining the tradition. Furthermore, the survival of Noh costumes woven during the Muromachi period (1336-1573) suggests that Kurokawa Noh was firmly established by at least the late 1500s.

The tradition is sustained by approximately 240 households of Kasuga Shrine parishioners, divided into two distinct troupes: the *Kami-za* and the *Shimo-za*. Each guild is led by a *Zachō* (guild head), who also serves as the head master. The scale of this folk performing art is extraordinary: there are approximately 150 performers—ranging from children to elders—including actors, musicians, and *Kyōgen* (comic theater) performers. Their collection includes 250 Noh masks, over 500 costumes, and a repertoire of more than 500 Noh plays and 50 *Kyōgen* plays.

For over 500 years, Kurokawa Noh has been protected and handed down through generations, overcoming numerous hardships thanks to the deep faith and devotion of the local people. On May 4, 1976, it was designated as a National Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property of Japan.

Today, in addition to performing ritual services and dedicatory performances at local festivals, the troupes also perform across Japan and internationally upon request through the Association for the Preservation of Kurokawa Noh.

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About The Japan Foundation

The Japan Foundation is an incorporated administrative agency that promotes arts and cultural exchange, Japanese-language education, and Japanese studies and global dialogue based on its mission of “cultivating friendship and ties between Japan and the world.”

It will conduct “Partnership to Co-create a Future with the Next Generation: WA Project 2.0,” a comprehensive people-to-people exchange project with ASEAN and other Asian countries to promote the mutual recognition of each country’s values in the fields of Japanese-language education, culture and the arts, Japanese studies, and global partnership programs, over a ten-year period beginning in 2024.

Centered around the NIHONGO Partners program and programs for two-way intellectual and cultural exchange, the project will endeavor to strengthen multifaceted networks of people and build strong, far-reaching relationships of trust between Japan and its Asian partners through sincere and open communication.

◆NIHONGO Partners Program

Teaching assistants and instructors of Japanese culture are dispatched to secondary educational institutions in Asia as partners to local Japanese-language teachers and their students.

◆Programs for Two-Way Intellectual and Cultural Exchange

These programs will cultivate strong bonds between people and foster members of the next generation to serve as bridges between different countries in the world by creating opportunities for collaboration built on mutual understanding.

Please visit the official website of “Partnership to Co-create a Future with the Next Generation: WA Project 2.0” (<https://asiawa.jpf.go.jp/>) for articles and videos about past initiatives.



JAPAN FOUNDATION
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