



# Hitomiza Otome Bunraku

2024.5.17 Fri. 19:30

2024.5.18 Sat. 14:30

2024.5.19 Sun. 14:30

Weiwuying Playhouse

Duration is 130 minutes with a 20-minute intermission..

Performed in Japanese with Mandarin and English surtitles.

Suitable for age 12+.



National Kaohsiung  
CENTER FOR THE ARTS

WEI WUYING

衛武堂 國家藝術文化中心  
國家表演藝術中心 National Performing Arts Center

## What is Bunraku?

Bunraku, a traditional Japanese puppet theater, originated approximately 400 years ago during Japan's Edo period (1603 – 1868). It evolved from the chanted narrative art of "joruri"\* combined with puppetry to form "ningyo joruri." This art form is characterized by the rich collaboration of the "trinity": the narrator (tayu), the shamisen player, and the puppeteers. The puppeteers execute complex movements, while the tayu brings characters to life with distinctive voices, conveying their emotions and driving the story forward. Shamisen players not only provide musical accompaniment but also enhance the narrative, guiding the audience through the emotional and dramatic arcs of the performance. Despite facing several declines over the centuries, Bunraku has enjoyed a resurgence and is celebrated alongside Kabuki and Noh as one of the three major traditional Japanese performing arts.

In 1684, the renowned joruri performer TAKEMOTO Gidayu made a name for himself in Osaka with his unique "Gidayu" narrative style. He established the puppet troupe "Takemoto-za" and, together with the famed playwright CHIKAMATSU Monzaemon, produced numerous influential works, heralding a new era for joruri. Over the years, various ningyo joruri theaters have come and gone. In the early 19th century, Uemura Bunrakuken's "Bunraku-za" in Osaka led to a revival of Bunraku. This theater became the exclusive venue for Bunraku performances, leading to the term "Bunraku" gradually replacing "ningyo joruri" as the official name of this art form.

Traditional Bunraku employs three puppeteers to animate a single puppet. The "ashi zukai" (feet puppeteer) controls the puppet's feet. The "hidari zukai" (left puppeteer) uses his right hand to manipulate the puppet's left arm. The "omo zukai" (lead puppeteer) is responsible for the right arm and the head. While the two assisting puppeteers wear black robes and masks to blend into the background, the lead puppeteer is visible only in highlight scenes, adorned in a family-crested kimono and hakama. Historically, all puppeteers were male, but the Meiji period (1868 – 1912) saw the rise of female Gidayu performers, known as "onna Gidayu," marking a significant evolution in this traditional art form.

Otome Bunraku is a modern variation of traditional Bunraku, distinguished by its unique approach: a single female puppeteer manipulates a puppet that is almost her size. She attaches the puppet's upper body to her waist and secures its feet with clamps on her knees. Strings tied to each side of her hairdo control the puppet's head, enabling synchronized movements. This innovative method introduces fresh expressions to

Bunraku and elegantly displays the seamless and nuanced interaction between the performer and the puppet, bringing both to life on stage with delicate emotion and grace.

\*Joruri - a type of Japanese folk music that involves narrative performance accompanied by the shamisen. The singing style used in puppet theater is known as "Gidayu-bushi," where "bushi" denotes the melody or style of singing.

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## **Program**

### **■ Ninin Sanbaso**

Puppeteer | Yuki MURAMATSU, Haruka TAGAWA  
Narrator and Shamisen Player | Recording audio (1999)

Sanbaso is the name of the character. This show has been performed in Japan, an agricultural land since ancient times, as a prayer for good harvest. It became the common cherished root of Japanese traditional performing arts such as puppet theater, Noh, Kabuki, and Kagura. Today, Sanbaso is performed in celebrations and opening ceremonies as well. In this puppet show, two Sanbasos of different personalities appear.

### **■ Introduction | Structure of a Puppet and How to Manipulate**

### **■ Keisei Awa no Naruto: Junreiuta no dan**

Puppeteer | Sachiko MATSUMOTO, Aya SUZUKI  
Narrator | Koshikou TAKEMOTO  
Shamisen Player | Komaji TSURUZAWA

In the city of Osaka lived a couple, Oyumi and Jurobei. Once Jurobei was a samurai, but

for 5 years he had disguised himself as a thief in search of the stolen treasure of his local lord. One day, a pilgrim girl stopped by their house. She was traveling alone, looking for her parents who were separated from her when she was very young. Oyumi recognized that the girl was their own daughter they left in the hometown. Oyumi held herself back from telling the truth because thieves could be captured at any time. Hardening her heart, Oyumi sent the girl back home. This popular play depicts heartbreaking love between a mother and her daughter.

----- Intermission -----

### ■ Zoho Oeyama Shutendoji: Modoribashi no dan

Puppeteer | Sachiko MATSUMOTO, Naomi KAMENO

Narrator | Tosako TAKEMOTO, Koshikou TAKEMOTO

Shamisen Player | Tsugahana TSURUZAWA, Komaji TSURUZAWA

During the Heian period, people feared that a demon appeared every night at the Modoribashi bridge on the outskirts of Kyoto, the capital. Then the imperial court ordered the warriors to exterminate the demons. Watanabe no Tsuna the Brave met a beautiful girl one night on the Modoribashi bridge. He was to walk her home, but when he saw her reflection on the river, he found that the girl was a demon. The girl tried to seduce Tsuna, while Tsuna was pretending he was unaware of her real character. Finally, Tsuna revealed the girl's identity, the girl showed herself as a demon, and they went into a fierce battle. The highlight is the tactics and fighting between Tsuna and the demon girl.

## Team Introduction | Hitomiza Otome Bunraku

In 1967, the members of theater group Hitomiza studied with KIRITAKE Chieko, a working Otome Bunraku puppeteer who, in the following year, founded Hitomiza Otome Bunraku and organized its debut performance. The group has performed in Japan, Europe, Asia, and the United States. They are also committed to promoting this traditional art form among youngsters in their home base, Kawasaki City. Hitomiza Otome Bunraku has given annual performances since 2010. In 2018, they were categorized as a cultural property of Kawasaki City, and in 2019 they received the Matsuo Performing Arts Awards Special Prize.

### Artistic and Production Team

Company : Hitomiza Otome Bunraku

Puppeteer : Sachiko MATSUMOTO, Naomi KAMENO, Yuki MURAMATSU, Aya SUZUKI, Haruka TAGAWA

Narrator : Tosako TAKEMOTO, Koshikou TAKEMOTO

Shamisen Player : Komaji TSURUZAWA, Tsugahana TSURUZAWA

Stage Manager : Takashi AOKI

Lighting Designer : Masayuki TOMIYAMA

Company Manager : Chiemi TSUKADA, Tsuyoshi IKEUCHI

Production Company : Foundation Modern Puppet Center

Sponsored by :  公益財団法人  
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Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association



Cultural Development Partner :  陳啓川先生文教基金會  
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