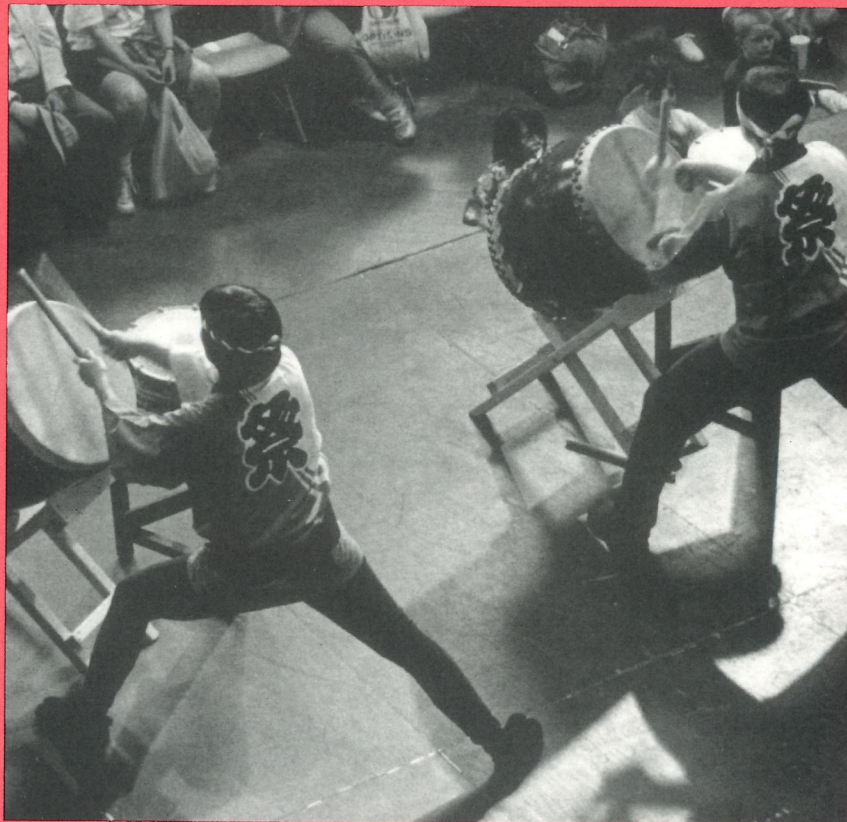




ASIAN FESTIVALS OF  
WASHINGTON STATE

## Seattle Cherry Blossom & Japanese Cultural Festival



Jack Straw Productions • Ethnic Heritage Council • Washington State Arts Commission

# Asian Festivals of Washington State

## The Japanese Cherry Blossom Festival of Seattle

Joan Rabinowitz,  
Editor

### *Cherry Blossoms*

They blossom, and then  
we gaze, and then the blooms  
scatter, and then...

### *The Little Valley in Spring*

A mountain stream:  
even the stones make songs -  
wild cherry trees.

### *Mii Temple*

Blossoms go  
and again it's quiet  
at Onjo.

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**Midori Kono Thiel**, a painter and printmaker, holds a BA and MA in Fine Arts from the University of California, Berkeley. Currently, she serves as Director of Nippon Kan Heritage Association's Japanese Performing Arts Series.

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# A Collaborative Project: Honor Our Ethnic Communities

THE ASIAN FESTIVALS OF Washington State project was made possible through the collaborative work of leaders in the Hmong, Indian and Japanese-American communities, and the Ethnic Heritage Council, Jack Straw Productions, and the Washington State Arts Commission. The events included in this project were Hmong New Year, the Indian Diwali Festival of Lights and the Japanese Cherry Blossom Festival.

## The Festivals

The Hmong Association of Washington has produced a Hmong New Year celebration every year since 1976 with over 1000 Hmong people attending each of the last three years. In Laos, the New Year was an important community harvest festival, marked by singing, dancing, feasting, and courtship games. In the USA, it has taken on additional significance, functioning as a celebration of the survival and renewal of the arts and culture of a refugee people making the transition to a new cultural context. The Hmong Association states, "We wanted to build a stronger social life together in this country, so together we formed an association to help newcomers and to keep communication going between us."

*Diwali, the Festival of Lights*, is one of the most widely celebrated festivals in India. It is celebrated throughout India, not only as a religious festival but as a social event, as well. For many, it is a celebration of the time that Rama and Sita returned to their kingdom after fourteen years of exile. For students, it is a time to pay tribute to Sharada, the goddess of wisdom and learning. It is also a harvest festival. In the Seattle area, the celebration is hosted annually by the India Association of Western Washington as well as other Indian community organizations. Like the Hmong New Year Celebration, the festival enables the community to maintain important links with its homeland.



The advertising banner for local merchants at the Nippon Kan Theatre (Photo from Special Collections Division University of Washington Libraries).

The Seattle Cherry Blossom & Japanese Cultural Festival has been the principal community event of Washington's Japanese-Americans. An annual event since 1975, it has grown to be one of the larger ethnic festivals in Seattle. A traditional dancer who has received several awards, Tazue Sasaki and her husband, Yutaka, along with artist and musician, Midori Kono Thiel, have helped produce Cherry Blossom and other Japanese cultural events, for nearly two decades.

## The Organizations

The Ethnic Heritage Council was founded in 1979 and is dedicated to the preservation of the diverse ethnic communities of the Pacific Northwest. EHC provides opportunities for exposure, performance, visibility and education to the hundreds of ethnic organizations that make up its membership. The Asian Festival project represents the kind of work EHC does throughout the year with a broad spectrum of Northwest ethnic communities.

The Washington State Arts Commission is a state agency dedicated to the improvement and preservation of

the arts and strives to make art of the highest quality available to all citizens through a combination of grant programs and services. The Folk Arts Program helps preserve, present, and protect the traditional arts of the many diverse cultures among the state's citizenry.

Jack Straw Productions (JSP) is a nonprofit organization that promotes and facilitates the creation and distribution of art and ideas through audio media. Its goals are to produce high quality, innovative and diverse arts, cultural and public affairs programming; to identify, encourage and support emerging audio artists; to make its facilities and personnel available to independent radio producers, noncommercial radio stations, musicians, and other artists using audio creatively in their work; and to serve as an educational organization involved with youth and others interested in audio art and production. For over 30 years, JSP has fostered cultural heritage through education, artist support services and radio productions.

JSP has been directly involved in the research, writing and editing of these booklets, and also produced radio documentaries on each of the festivals for public radio.

# Traditional Artists in our Midst:

## Asian Festivals of Washington State

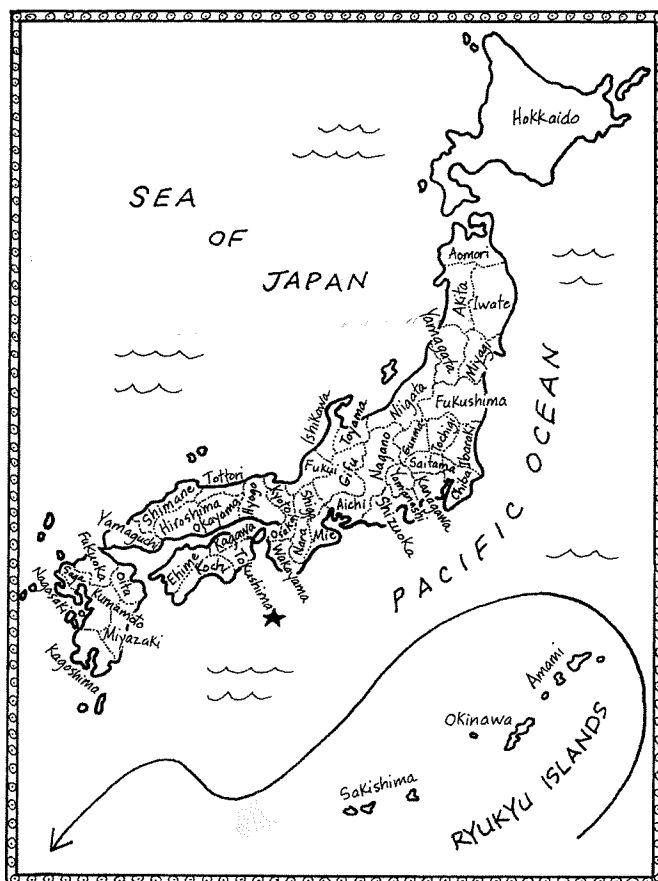
### *The Project*

The Asian Festivals of Washington booklets are the result of a project that sought to encourage traditional arts presentation and documentation in the Northwest. Three Asian community events in the Northwest - Hmong New Year, Japanese Cherry Blossom and Indian Diwali - provided the focus for exploring how cultural identity is at once preserved and continually evolves within Asian communities.

The project emphasized the value of recognizing and highlighting traditional art and artists at important community events, informing the public about their work and recognizing their importance within a community. This kind of acknowledgment encourages an ethnic community to value what these artists represent, stimulating pride in one's own heritage and promoting overall growth in the traditional arts.

In addition to encouraging traditional arts presentation and the work of traditional artists, this project also reflected the ways in which *festival* celebrations serve to unify members of an ethnic community by rekindling each individual's sense of cultural identity through traditional and even nontraditional means. Indeed, none of these events was purely traditional. Contemporary forms of expression such as popular music at evening dances, modern painting, and even commercial art were common. Each group of festival organizers chose to showcase that which, in its view, represents the essence of that community's still living cultural expressions while integrating elements of the larger American cultural context.

Aside from all being Asian, the three communities involved in this project and their respective festivals are not particularly alike. All three events, however, hold special significance for those who attend and participate in linking "homeland" to the adopted land. The art forms featured at all of these events give expression to the individual emotions that each member of that ethnic community inevitably feels. Traditional, community-connected arts hold a power and importance stemming from this emotional connection, particularly within the context of a society that presents challenges to holding onto one's heritage and maintaining a cohesive sense of community.



Map Illustration by Barbara Scholen

### *Asian Festivals of Washington State Booklets*

Each of these booklets includes historical information about a particular Northwest Asian community, about each community's most important annual festival and about the related traditional art forms and artists. While they offer some basic information concerning traditional visual and performing art and artists within these communities, there are many more artists and traditional art forms that could have been included. The booklets represent just one step in the process of comprehensively identifying and highlighting the role of traditional arts in these communities.

We encourage readers to look beyond the information presented here and to discover more about the cultures that surround us, through direct personal involvement. We hope the booklets are useful for educators within and outside these particular ethnic communities and that they serve to encourage an ongoing process of learning about, presenting and documenting community-based art forms.

# A Community: Japanese-Americans in the Pacific Northwest

by Midori Thiel

**MOST IMMIGRANTS FROM JAPAN** came between 1868 to 1920, first to Hawaii, then California in 1868, and then Washington in 1880.

In the United States and Canada people of Japanese ancestry call themselves Issei (first generation), Nisei (second generation), and Sansei (third generation). The Issei are the immigrants from Japan. In Hawaii, there are fourth, fifth, and sixth generations. In the Pacific Northwest, the fourth generation is beginning.

How and why did Japanese cross the Pacific to the Pacific Northwest? It was not an easy life. Some came by chance. Many young men came for adventure, to study, to work to pay family debts, and for greater freedom. In 1833 three Japanese fisherman were washed ashore in the Queen Charlotte Islands near British Columbia after their ship foundered in the North Pacific. Native Americans took them in for a year, before a Hudson Bay Company ship took them to London, then an American ship tried unsuccessfully to return them to Japan. At that time the Japanese government turned back all who attempted to enter their country, including efforts by their own citizens. Through efforts of such men as Manjiro, a young fisherman who in 1842 accompanied his rescuer, Captain Whitfield, to Hawaii around the Cape of Good Hope up South America to New Bedford, Massachusetts, the Bakufu government of Japan became more receptive to opening their country to the West. The arrival of Commodore Perry in 1853 with his American naval ship was the defining moment. From 1865 to 1885 the Japanese government sent 446 students to the United States to go to Harvard, Rutgers, Yale, Cornell, Princeton and Annapolis to learn western thought and technology.

In 1868 the first Japanese contract laborers arrived in Hawaii at the request of sugar plantation owners, and in 1869 Japanese went to California. In the Northwest a few Japanese first came to live in the 1870s. Although 20 Japanese came to work in the saw mills at Port Blakeley in 1883, the late 1880s and 1890s saw the emergence of a real Japanese community. Many came to work for the Northern Pacific Railway, or saw mills, or leased land as farmers. It was a hard life in the new country but as families were established and children were born, many Japanese began to think of the



*Two girls enjoy an afternoon at a local festival (Photo from Special Collections Division University of Washington Libraries).*

Pacific Northwest as home. They established stores, schools, churches, temples, and hotels. Their children learned English in the public schools in Seattle, Tacoma, Bainbridge Island, and in remote towns of Idaho, Montana, and Oregon.

Kojuro Fujii came from Hiroshima Prefecture in 1894 with his son Chojuro, who worked on farms to save money, then leased a hotel. Yoshito Fujii, his brother, came to help while going to the University of Washington, and later started a hotel. The Fujii family is still in Seattle, successful in many fields. Yoshito Fujii passed away in his 90s in 1995.

Most of the pioneer Japanese came to the Northwest



*An Ikebana competition at an internment camp (Photo from Special Collections Division UW Libraries).*

between the late 1890s and up to 1920. In 1921 the United States passed the Alien Land Law preventing Asian immigrants from owning or leasing land. In 1924 the Immigration Act of 1924 cut off immigration until the Walther-McCarran Act of 1952 made Asians once again able to immigrate to the United States. At the same time thousands of Japanese-born who had lived in the United States for most of their life became eligible for citizenship for the first time.

Before that, persons of Japanese ancestry, citizens or not, suffered the shock of December 7, 1941, when the Japanese military ordered the bombing of Pearl Harbor in Honolulu, Hawaii. Reeling from this unbelievable news, the Issei and Nissei on the Pacific coast were evacuated from the West Coast by order of the Executive Order 9066. Residents were given less than a week to dispose of homes, businesses, land, furniture, and belongings, except what they could carry by hand. Beginning with people on Bainbridge Island, thousands of men, women and children were taken to camps in the desert, behind barbed wire. Many lost all they had. The thriving Nihonmachi, the Japanese community in Pioneer Square and what is now the International District of Seattle, was broken up. To prove their loyalty to America, many young men volunteered to serve in the 442nd Regimental Combat team of the United States Army. Others volunteered in Military Intelligence in the Pacific, serving with honor, while their families remained behind barbed wire. There their families remained until the end of World War II. When they were released, some returned to their homes if they still existed, others went East to start all over again.

Many families came back to the Pacific Northwest

to face hostility and discrimination. At first jobs were nonexistent, but the insistence on education for the Nissei in spite of lack of opportunities paid dividends. When opportunities opened up, they were ready. Today the Nissei and Sansei work in every occupational field. The Nissei, some of whom lived until 109 years old, have contributed much to the development of the Pacific Northwest. Even in the camps, there were classes in the Japanese arts. Ayame Tsutakawa remembers her classes in Japanese dance, music of koto, and Ikebana taught by Issei. Others taught sumi painting and crafts at a critical time to rebuild shattered hopes. In the International District of Seattle, the Moriguchi family worked to build up Uwajimaya, the Japanese American supermarket which is like a living museum of Japanese and Asian foods.

To survive in America, not knowing the customs or language, and often discriminated against, the Issei formed community associations like the Kenjin Kai. The Kenjin Kai were like social clubs or social welfare. If someone needed help, you first turned to your Kenjin Kai or your church. In the Kenjin Kai New Year events, people had a chance to sing the old songs or to see traditional dance or music performed. These programs still continue to this day.

Nippon Kan Heritage Association has a special place in the community at the Nippon Kan Theatre, producing on-going concerts of traditional Japanese performing arts. Other community events include the Bon Odori festival, the Seattle Cherry Blossom, and Japanese Cultural Festival.

Through events like these, the Japanese community has survived and kept up its traditions.

# Sakura Matsuri: The Cherry Blossom Festival

by Midori Thiel

JAPAN IS OFTEN CALLED the land of flowers.

From ancient times the people of Japan have celebrated the Cherry Blossom Festival as O-hanami: Flower Viewing. Although many beautiful flowers are depicted in song, paintings

mark the change of seasons. Later in the Kamakura period (late 12th-14th c.) the warriors always considered the cherry blossoms the symbol of a life lived fully, no matter how short, and the ritual of cherry blossoms continued.

Flower viewing in the Edo period

to May, the excitement mounts. Millions of visitors travel to famous temples, gardens and scenic spots. Dance and music concerts feature the cherry blossom and celebrate spring with poetry competitions, calligraphy exhibits, and paintings that depict the viewing season. Picnics are also planned under the flowers by schools, companies and families to celebrate the short fleeting bloom of this popular symbol of Japan.

When Japanese people immigrated to the United States in the late 19th century, they planted the flowering cherry trees wherever they lived. In 1912, the Japanese government sent thousands of cherry trees to Washington D.C. which were planted all around the Washington Tidal Basin. This gesture of friendship between the two countries began the first Sakura Matsuri or Cherry Blossom Festival in the United States. Other Cherry Blossom festivals are held throughout the country in Macon, Georgia; Tuscaloosa, Alabama; Detroit, Michigan; San Francisco, California; and Brooklyn, New York. It is obviously a symbolic event that brings countries and people together.

Seattle's Cherry Blossom Festival began when one thousand Cherry trees were sent by the Japanese government. The trees were planted along Lake Washington Boulevard and Seward Park. The Seattle area is fortunate in the abundance of Japanese cherry trees it has in the parks and other public places. The Seattle Center, the Arboretum, the Japanese Garden, the University of Washington, Woodland Park, and the Seattle Buddhist Church Wysteria Plaza also have Japanese cherry trees. Arthur Lee Jacobs' "Trees of Seattle," tells you exactly where they are. You can have your own O-hanami (flower viewing) and then join the crowd at the Seattle Cherry Blossom & Japanese Cultural Festival.



*A local Taiko group performs to a crowd at the Cherry Blossom festival (Photo by Dean Wong).*

and even kimono patterns, flower viewing has always meant the beautiful flowering cherry tree. In the eighth century and earlier, the Japanese offered prayers while under the flowering cherry trees in a special ritual for the fertility of the earth. The Hitachinokuni Fudoki, an eighth century guide to famous places, describes singing and dancing among the flowers after climbing Mount Tsukuba. During the Heian period the imperial court held a banquet on the day of O-hanami to

(17th-19th c.) became a popular secular event among the common people, with much dancing, singing and drinking of sake. And today Japanese radio and television announce the Sakura Zensen or Cherry Blossom front, allowing revelers to travel from region to region, following the blooming trees. Usually, the Cherry Blossom front begins in Okinawa in the south in March. Then it sweeps northward in April and finally reaches Hokkaido in May. With more than 50 varieties blooming from March



# Seattle Cherry Blossom & Japanese Cultural Festival:

A New Tradition

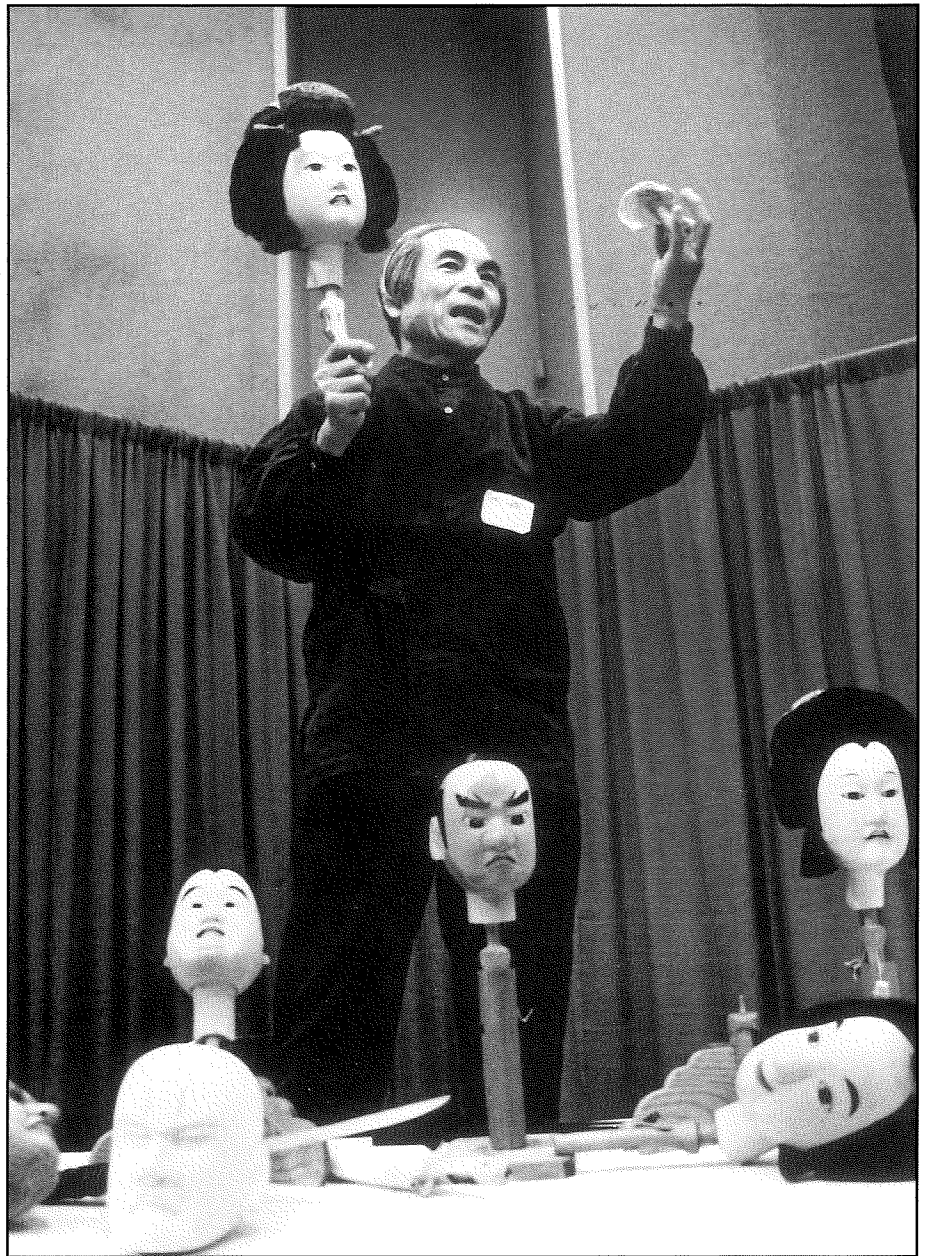
by Joan Rabinowitz

**FIFTY PIGEONS WERE RELEASED** above two newly planted cherry trees to mark the opening of the 20th Seattle Cherry Blossom Festival. For three days, Japanese dancers, puppeteers, sword makers, and other performers and artists presented traditional and contemporary arts of Japan to over 30,000 people. The annual festival began in 1976, when the late Prime Minister Takeo Miki and the Japanese government gave Seattle a gift of one thousand cherry trees to celebrate the U.S. Bicentennial. The gift was also a personal thank you from the Prime Minister for the time that he had spent in Seattle as a student, when he developed close ties with the city.

Many of the thousand trees were planted around Seward Park and Lake Washington Boulevard. This became the site of Seattle's first Cherry Blossom event. "Receiving that gift, the people in Seattle wanted to express some kind of return to this favor, to thank the Japanese government and Prime Minister Miki," Yutaka Sasaki, former festival chair recalled. "So, a small group of people got together to do a little ceremony. The first ceremony was held at Seward Park."

Mrs. Mitsuko Ito (Hanayagi Yosono) danced at Seattle's first Cherry Blossom "festival" and has been at almost every festival since then. "It was very quiet, not really like a festival. There was a small stage set up outside, about eight feet wide. It was hard to dance outside. The wind was blowing and my fan blew away. There were not many people, some from the Japanese community and some people who were interested in Japanese culture."

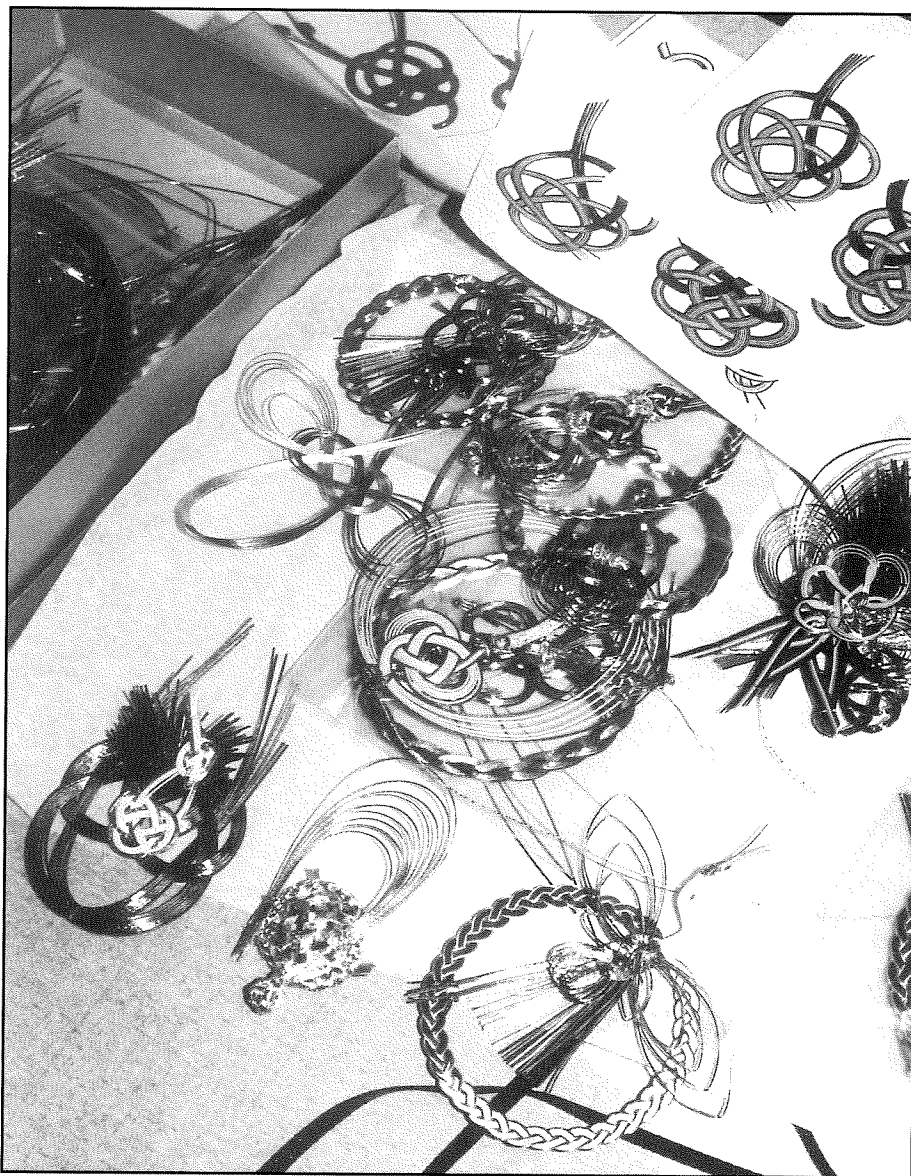
"It was not a big affair," Yutaka explained. "Just a few local dignitaries got together outdoors to celebrate. That was a very humble beginning in 1976. We consider that was the very first Seattle Cherry B - I don't think it had any name at the time. The following year, in 1977, as a kind of anniversary, they did another ceremony." Holding the event outside during spring in Seattle proved to be a problem. "It rained," Yutaka said. "People felt the



*Puppet master Minosuke Oe demonstrates his Awa puppets at Cherry Blossom (Photo by Dean Wong).*

need to do something; to find a better location. So, the initiative was made to move to the Seattle Center."

"Which to me, was very significant," Yutaka continued. "Because, the Seattle Center is a real gathering place for Seattle people. Instead of having the festival in a place like the International District or Japan Town, to keep it to just the Japanese community, we moved into the Seattle Center where the majority of the citizens of Seattle



*Mizuhiki Zaiku, decorative string art, made by Haruko Shimizu, a Cherry Blossom Festival participant (Photo by Midori Kono Thiel).*

gather. So, it was very open to the public, a very nice place to show Japanese culture to a wider audience."

Tazue and Yutaka Sasaki became involved in the Cherry Blossom Festival during its first year at the Seattle Center in 1978 when Tazue's organization, Fujima School of Dance, was invited to participate.

"The Consul General at that time was Mr. Uchida," said Tazue Sasaki, current festival chair. "Japan-America Society was heavily involved in the event," her husband Yutaka continued. They pretty much

put this festival together. It evolved as their special event for the year." One of the founding members was Will Pascal. David Enroth was chair of the Japan-America Society's special event committee. Another person who was instrumental was Dr. Richard McKinnon. "He was the one who first contacted Tazue and me," Yutaka said. "We met in Chinatown to talk about bringing performers from Japan." The Japan-America Society approached the Japanese government for funding assistance. In 1980, they received a grant from the Japanese Government which helped

provide funding for the Cherry Blossom Festival to continue. From the very beginning, Seattle's Cherry Blossom Festival was produced and attended by both Japanese and the general public. "We carry that tradition to today," said Yutaka. "This is not a community festival. We try to share our culture with the general public.

And yet, for the Seattle Japanese community, it is still the time when different parts of the Japanese community come together in spite of differences or competition, to produce a single event. "This is probably the only event in this community that every organization related to Japan, business-wise or culture-wise, all participate," Yutaka said. "Cherry Blossom Festival is the one place everybody has a chance to get together, and try to accomplish the same goals."

The Cherry Blossom Festival is a totally volunteer production, including over 300 volunteers and participants. "It's interesting," Yutaka said. "This size of festival, probably most other organizations have some professional level administration. I try to keep this volunteerism alive. Having the volunteers feel you create a handmade thing, yourself. It's not somebody you hire. Just done by you. It's quite different. Even most of the board of directors take some part. They go out there, sell raffle tickets, go to the festival site and pound nails. That kind of participation. That's what Cherry Blossom is trying to do, now it's twenty years. Human relation or understanding really has to be based in individual people."

# 20th Annual Seattle Cherry Blossom & Japanese Cultural Festival: A Cultural Tour and Celebration of Japan and the Japanese American Community

**THE 20TH ANNUAL SEATTLE**  
Cherry Blossom & Japanese Cultural Festival's theme was Regional Japan: Tokushima/Shikoku Island.

This region was featured in honor of Prime Minister Miki, who was born in Tokushima Prefecture, and is considered the founder of Seattle's Cherry Blossom Festival. Performers and artists from this region were brought to the festival to perform throughout the weekend along side Washington state performers and visual artists. "We decided to invite the Awa Odori group, which originated in Tokushima prefecture," Yutaka Sasaki explained. Prime Minister Miki really liked Awa Odori dance. He thought it was one of the best dances in the nation and called it Japan's samba. The first Awa Odori dance troupe visited Seattle in 1982, and came again in 1989. So, this year, our 20th anniversary, we invited the same dance troupe."

Shikoku Island is the smallest of the four major lands in Japan. The name means "four countries," and consists of four



*Japanese dancers enjoy the Awa Odori folk dance at the Cherry Blossom Festival.*

prefectures: Kagawa, Tokushima, Ehime, and Kochi. Shikoku is sparsely populated with high mountains. The Seto Ohashi Bridge, the world's longest highway/railway bridge built in 1988, connects the Shikoku Island to the mainland and is helping to accelerate the island's growth.

Artists from Tokushima and Kagawa were featured guests of the festival. In addition to the Awa Odori dancers and musicians, the festival featured a Miki exhibit and Tokushima exhibit consisting of Awa puppet heads and costumes, children's art and Tarai Udon (noodle) making. Tarai Udon, a part of Tokushima life, was prepared by master noodle makers Akihiro Sakano and Katsuo Katayama

Also featured at the festival was Shizuo Okawahara, his son Makoto, and his group from Kagawa, who demonstrated the art of making Tsutsugaki, hand-dyed banners.

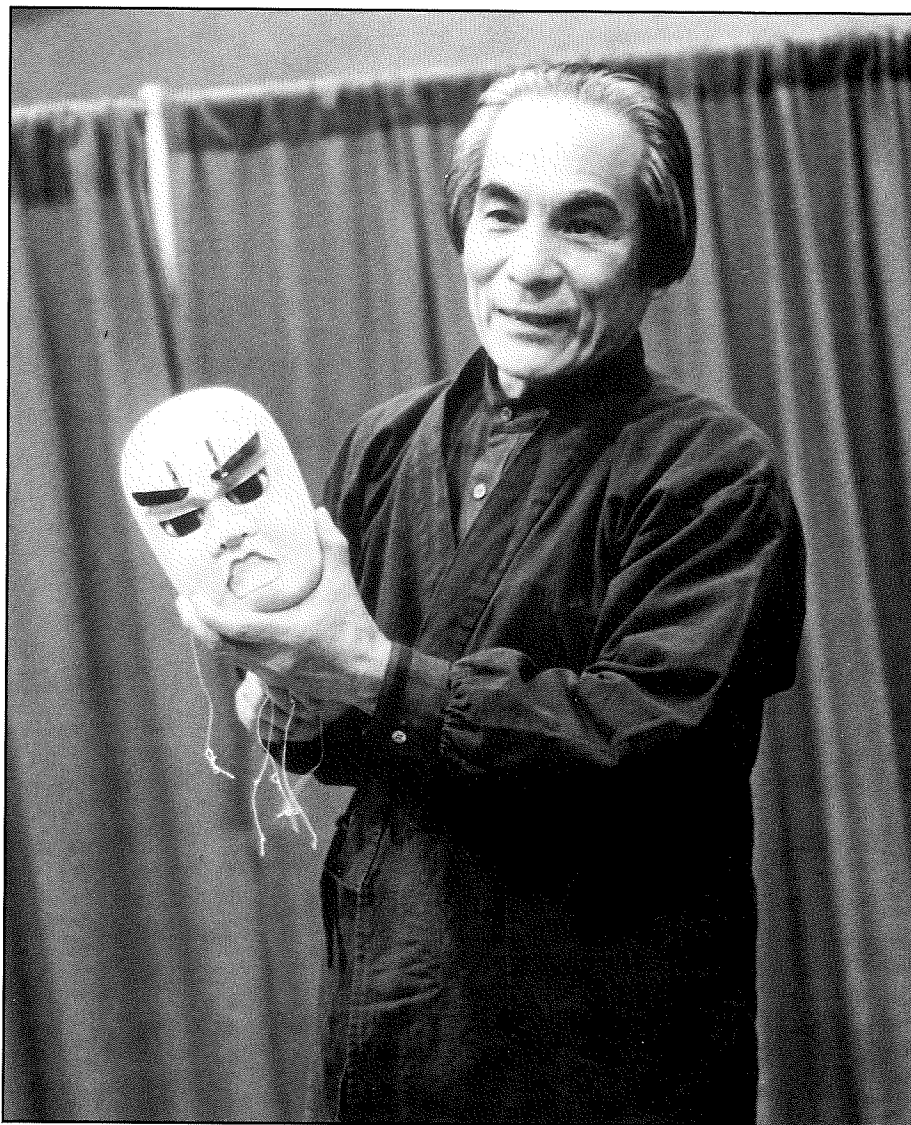
### The Miki Exhibit

The late Prime Minister Takeo Miki of Japan is often seen as the real founder of the Seattle Cherry Blossom & Japanese Cultural Festival. Though he and his family's life was taken up with the responsibilities of government, art was an enduring influence. Madame Miki and the late Prime Minister are well respected artists in their own right, as well as being well known benefactors to the arts in general.

In addition to the Awa Odori dance group, Madame Miki presented an exhibit of calligraphy representing three generations of the Miki family, together with a photo display. This exhibit served as a memorial to the man whose ambition was not limited to leadership in government. He has left an enduring stamp on the culture of Japan, and the Festival here



*Mrs. Mutsuko Miki, an acclaimed potter, is the wife of the late Prime Minister of Japan, Takeo Miki.*



*Awa puppet leader Minosuke Oe at Cherry Blossom Festival  
(Photo by Dean Wong).*

is part of his lasting legacy.

Madame Miki is also an acclaimed potter who has taught at the University of Puget Sound.

### **Awa Odori**

When the Tokushima Castle was completed about 1586, in the Tensho Era, Iyemasa, founder of the Hachisuka Clan allowed the people to do anything they wanted in complete freedom for a few days. Released from the strict social codes of that era, people in the castle town danced for joy.

This story is the most popular explanation of the origin of the 400 year old Awa dance. The local lord encouraged Awa dancing to stimulate the local economy but from time to time he was forced to regulate the dance to keep people from getting carried away. However, the energy of the people never

weakened, and they have continued this traditional dance.

In 1946 the Bon dance in Tokushima was officially named "Awa Odori" by Koroh Hayashi (1887-1965), Tokushima City's first designated Human Cultural Treasure. Bon is a Buddhist festival to honor the souls of ancestors. Since 1966, the Awa dance has been held in August.

The Shamisen was originally the main instrument to accompany Awa dancing but the instrument is difficult to hear, so other instruments were added. The present musical accompaniment includes shamisen, three types of drums, gong and flute.

In Seattle, a new dance group was formed in honor of the 20th annual Festival. The Seattle Cherry Blossom Awa Dance Group is composed of local people interested in learning Awa Odori

and sharing it with others in the community. Tsutomu Kurokawa, who first came to Seattle with the Awa Odori group in 1989, taught the group. "I would like to see the Awa Odori group firmly established in this city," Kurokawa said, "so that it will continue after I have left. Mrs. Miki is donating instruments to the Seattle group. In Tokushima, everybody can dance. They grow up watching others dance." Hanayagi Yosono (Mrs. Mitsuko Ito), Seattle dance teacher, danced with the new group at the festival. "This was my first time to dance awa odori. Awa odori is different," she said. "The timing's different. I like it."

### **Mr. Minosuke Oe: Awa Joruri Ningyo - Art of Awa Puppet**

Japanese puppetry is recorded as early as the Heian Period. It was introduced into Awaji, formerly one of the Tokushima Prefecture islands, as well. Hachisuka Iyemasa, Awa leader during the 15th-16th century encouraged the art which spread throughout Japan. The awa puppet first appeared in Osaka in 1684 and by the early Meiji period there were as many as 74 puppet theaters documented. After World War II, only doll makers survived. Production diminished and only two professional groups have a complete repertoire now. Awa puppet theatre in Osaka eventually evolved as Bunraku and flourished.

Awa and Bunraku puppet makers are located in Tokushima. The elder leader of the puppet makers and Tokushima's cultural treasure, Mr. Minosuke Oe, is continuing the tradition and was instrumental in helping resurrect puppet making after the war. His goal is to get the puppets on stage, not static like those displayed in museums. Mr. Kenji Tada is one of the younger generation puppet makers who visited the festival as an Awa dancer.

Minosuke Oe has been making puppets for over thirty years. "It takes about a month to a month and a half to complete a puppet," he explained. "It takes more time to make a man than a woman- there are more mechanisms for men." Oe is referring to the various devises which allow the puppeteer to change the puppet's expressions. "If I pull the string, the eyes will close. If the character is angry or mad, you pull the strings for the eyebrows and the mouth at the same time, and it will show he is

angry. The house maid can stick her tongue out when the master isn't looking and the wife character can have horns that come out."

**Shizuo Okawahara:  
Tsutsugaki - large hand-dyed banners**

A special treat at the festival was the return of Shizuo Okawahara and his son Makoto, who are masters in the art of "tsutsugaki" textile dyeing. They are the 6th and 7th generations of a family that has operated a dye business for nearly 300 years in the city of Takamatsu on the island of Shikoku. Shizuo learned the trade from his father. Today his son Makoto, a graduate of a prestigious art college in Kyoto, contributes a modern sensibility to his family and this vital tradition.

The Okawahara workshop is located on a narrow and busy street in downtown Takamatsu. They design and create bold and colorful banners for shops, shrines, temples, fishing boats and festivals. They also design and dye futon covers, happi coats and other items ordered for special occasions. They employ a number of different dyeing techniques and are particularly famous for their work using the method called "tsutsugaki." In this technique, a design is traced on the fabric with thin lines of rice paste that are squeezed out of a cone shaped applicator. The rice paste serves as a dye resist. Dye is rubbed onto the fabric which is then immersed in the dye. Numerous repetitions of this process were used to create most of the work on display at the festival.

The Okawaharas are particularly famous for the colorful "shishi mai yutan" the large colorful cloth that is used for the lion dance. Since Shizuko Okawahara's first visit in 1979 teaching "tsutsugaki" at the University of Washington, he has spread knowledge of his technique to Hawaii and has been on NHK public television.

Okawahara practices his calligraphy daily by hanging paper in the hallway in his home and writing each morning. He finds that it is difficult to do calligraphy unless he does it daily. "Calligraphy has to come from your own heart," he explains. Okawahara practices in an unusual way. As he writes, he sings shigin (right), a way of singing Chinese poems read in Japanese. He sang and brushed on large paper the following Li Po poem at the Cherry Blossom Festival in Seattle.



*Haruko Shimizu displays her intricate Mizuhiki Zaiku, decorative string art, at the Cherry Blossom Festival (Photo by Midori Kono Thiel).*

*Leaving the castle of Hakute*

*Glowing in the early morning clouds*

*I have to make a boat trip in a day*

*As far as Koreo, hundred of miles away.*

*With monkees incessantly chattering*

*On either side of the bank.*

*My little boat is going through the valleys*

*Surrounded by massive mountains.*



*Madame Hakudo Aya Sakoda leads the Kyoto Todo Kai.*

### Performing Arts in Washington State

In addition to performances by visiting artists from Tokushima, the Festival featured performances of Japanese music and dance by performers living in Seattle.

**Madme Kuniko Takamura**, director of Seattle Miyagi Kai, was granted the title Dai Shihan for her work in carrying on the music of Michio Miyagi, her teacher. She is a graduate of the Tokyo University of Arts and directs the largest koto ensemble in the Pacific Northwest. Madame Takamura and her ensemble have performed at major events in the Pacific Northwest including the Spokane World's Fair.

**Madame Hakudo Aya Sakoda** leads the Kyoto Todo Kai, Seattle Chapter. She continues to preserve the jiuta tradition of Kyoto, with a centuries old unique flavor of koto and shamisen. Born in Seattle, Madame Sakoda began her musical training in Japan as a child. She received her teaching degree from Michiko Tsuda, present headmaster of Kyoto Todo Kai in Japan. Since 1967, Madame Sakoda and the Seattle chapter have presented yearly recitals and performed regularly in community events.

**Madame Yosono Hanayagi** (Mitsuko Ito), director of Tokiwa Kai, began the study of classical

dance in Yokohama, Japan, at the age of twelve. She received her professional title from Hanayagi Juyo. Hanayagi Yosono has taught in Seattle for over 25 years with students also in Tacoma, Bremerton, Port Orchard, and Vancouver, B.C. She performed at the Spokane World's Fair, Whitman College, Montana State University, regularly at our Festival, and other cultural events throughout the Pacific Northwest.

**Madame Fujimine Fujima** (Tazue Kiyono Sasaki) and the Fujima Fukimine Dance Ensemble perform frequently throughout the Pacific Northwest and Canada. She has been teaching for over 30 years and is the 1994 recipient of the Governor's Heritage Award. She is nisei and has produced natori for both dance and Nagauta Shamisen. From the age of three she received training from pioneer issei teacher Fukuko Yamamura, then studied under Fujiko Fujima, a Japan cultural treasure.

### Visual Arts in Washington State

#### **Madame Hosoe Kodama: Ikebana artist**

Among the many artists recognized at the 20th annual Cherry Blossom & Japanese Cultural Festival, Madame Hosoe Kodama is considered a special pioneer and treasure who has preserved the twin arts of Ikebana, the art of flower arranging, and Chado, the art of tea ceremony.

She is a true pioneer in bringing the arts and culture of Japan to America, and making it part of the fabric of Northwest life. Madame Kodama was born in Meiji 27, (1895) over 100 years ago into a family steeped in tradition. She was born in Yamaguchi prefecture and raised in Wakayama, where her mother was headmaster of Ryusei Ikenobo. In Taisho 3, (1915) she



*Tatsuhiko Konno: The sword polisher (Photo by Midori Kono Thiel).*



*Tatsuhiko Konno is only one of four Japanese sword polishers in the United States (Photo by Midori Kono Thiel).*

became a direct student of the grandmaster of Ikebana, and advanced over the years to the highest rank. Later, she went to Victoria, Canada to study English then to Japan and in 1941 came to Seattle.

In Seattle she taught many who became teachers of Ikebana, and became head of Ikebana in Washington in 1965. She has been awarded the 6th Order of the Sacred Treasure by the Japanese government and has been recognized by city and state leaders in the Northwest.

Looking back she says "One thing I hope the new generation never forgets - the hard work and perseverance through the hard times of those pioneers in America. I intend to keep on striving!" Looking and acting many decades younger than she is, Madame Kodama is an inspiration to others. This remarkable teacher has spread the love of flowers and the arts of Japan in ever widening circles.

#### **Haruko Shimizu: Mizuhiki Zaiku- Decorative paper-string art**

Mizuhiki decorative ties are seen on gifts or money envelopes - red and white, gold and silver - these beautiful elaborately twisted ties for weddings and special occasions

like engagement ceremonies, New Year decorations, and Girl's Day Festivals. They are also seen in stark black and white ties on funeral offerings, or in black and silver. Whatever the occasion Mizuhiki sets the tone of the occasion, marking it as distinctively Japanese.

From about 607 AD, Mizuhiki appeared in Japan for use in Imperial court rituals. It may have received its name from the dyed string looping like a flowing river. Especially in Heian times (1000-1200 AD), the wirelike string was dyed blue, purple and yellow, resembling flowers floating downstream. During the Muromachi period, mizuhiki came into more popular use with Chinese motifs like Shoochikubai (pine, bamboo, plum) or tsurukame, tortoise and crane motifs.

Haruko Shimizu's fascination with mizuhiki abegan in 1934. She went to Japan to do research, all the while trying to twist and turn the string into traditional patterns. What began as a hobby turned into a determination to preserve the tradition and teach others the art. She has taught since 1984. "I want as many as possible to learn, so I teach teachers, 10 each day and they teach classes. I've gone to New York and other cities also. I've been asked to Asian events at the Bon Marche and Nordstrom," said Shimizu. "I was so fortunate to meet the mizuhiki Sekijima Noboru of Nagano prefecture, in 1993. Nagano is the center of mizuhiki manufacture from early times and Sekijima Sensei has transformed this craft into an art form. Now 40-50 busloads at a time come to the craft museum to visit. Although Sekijima sensei limits his workshops to five minute demonstrations, when he heard of my work in mizuhiki he invited me to Japan for special lessons every day. I was so amazed by the possibilities of new forms and by his generous help. I want people to recognize that this is art, not a disposable craft."

#### **Tatsuhiko Konno: The sword polisher**

Tatsuhiko Konno is one of four polishers of Japanese swords in the United States and the only one who also makes decorative fittings and stands for swords. In Japan, a craftsman is trained to make one type of accessory but Konno sensei does it all. As a child he saw the family swords and armour displayed and also began learning kendo with bamboo swords to learn the form and discipline of martial arts.

"One thing led to another and when I graduated from high school, I was given an old sword. I began to study about sword polishing and was fortunate to meet a swordmaker and patron of a famous swordmaker," explained Konno. "He taught me to polish and bring out the beautiful patterns on the blade, but I never expected to become a professional. I also trained in Iaido, the art of sword drawing."

Konno sensei attends dealer auctions all over the US and brings back swords to polish and restore. He also teaches "kendo" and "iaido" at Meadowbrook Community Center and other locations in the Seattle area.

# Fujima Fujimine:

## The World of Traditional Japanese Dance

by Joan Rabinowitz

**TAZUE KIYONO SASAKI, DRESSED** in a kimono, kneels on a cushion. Her hands, gentle but strong, guide her students in the art of Japanese dance.

Buyo, traditional Japanese dance, has been alive in Seattle since the early 1900's. Dance filled a strong emotional need for new immigrants from Japan. It was performed by members of the Japanese community to help them keep a link with their homeland. Today, dancing continues to play an important role in the local Japanese community.

Japanese dance has always been a source of great enjoyment for Tazue Sasaki. "I had a friend who learned dance," Tazue recalled. "I accompanied her on several occasions. It looked liked fun. So, I wanted to learn too. So, here I am." Tazue was the only musician or dancer in her family. "My father played the shakuhachi for his enjoyment. That's about it."

Although for Tazue, dancing is a great pleasure, she also has always worked very hard at it. Tazue studied both shamisen and dance with Yamamura Fukuko. "During those days, you practically went to lessons every day. Even week-ends. You go to school. Then after school, you go to lessons. Then home. So, home was like going back to sleep, starting the routine, every day. That went on for many years. I started when I was four for dance and six for shamisen."

After studying for many years with Yamamura-sensei in Seattle, Tazue wanted to venture outward to Japan. "O-sho-san, (that's what I call Yamamura-sensei) introduced me to Fujima Fujiko in Tokyo. So, I took lessons from her. She also introduced me to the Kineya side, the shamisen side. I took lessons under Kineya Ezo and Kineya Shojiro."

Tazue teaches dance and shamisen in her home on Beacon Hill. "It's one on one. You show the student the movement and the student follows you. There's a lot of control or discipline the



*Tazue Kiyono Sasaki, known professionally as Fujimia Fujimine, is a long-time community leader and artist.*

student learns, not only in the movements, but in etiquette, that type of thing. Not only in the dance lesson, but in one's attitude toward learning, and towards this art."

Tazue sits on a cushion on the floor. She encourages her students with graceful hand gestures and comments, mostly in Japanese. "Hai, mite. Make your ink. Start to write. Mite, look. Enter. Sleeves. Ashiodashite."

"The movements of the hands are to help enhance the memory," Tazue explains. "There is a way to project the

feeling of the dance. I'd like the student to get part of that from themselves, rather than me telling them. But, part of that verbal whatever I'm saying, is to help them understand what they're supposed to project."

Tazue Kiyono Sasaki, known professionally as Fujimia Fujimine, has been teaching and leading her dance ensemble for over 30 years. She is the recipient of the 1994 Governor's Heritage Award. Tazue Sasaki was also the chair of the 1995 Seattle Cherry Blossom Festival.



# Seattle Kokon Taiko: Rhythm, Movement & Spirit

by Joan Rabinowitz

"ICHI, NI, SAN, SHI, GO, ROKU; ICHI, NI, SAN, SHI, go, roku," a musician counts off as Seattle Kokon Taiko prepares for a rehearsal, warming up for the strenuous physical as well as mental work of Japanese drum performance. "A big focus is to warm up every part of our body we can. Starting with our heads and our necks, all the way down to our feet," long-time taiko player Bill Blauvelt explained. "Unlike Western drumming, we play with our entire body."

Seattle Kokon Taiko rehearses at Nisei Vets Hall, located on the edge of Seattle's International District. The musicians need a large space like this to handle the sounds of their drums. "One of the biggest obstacles for a taiko group, is to find a place to practice. It's so loud, and it causes a lot of vibration," Bill explained. "The whole building tends to shake."

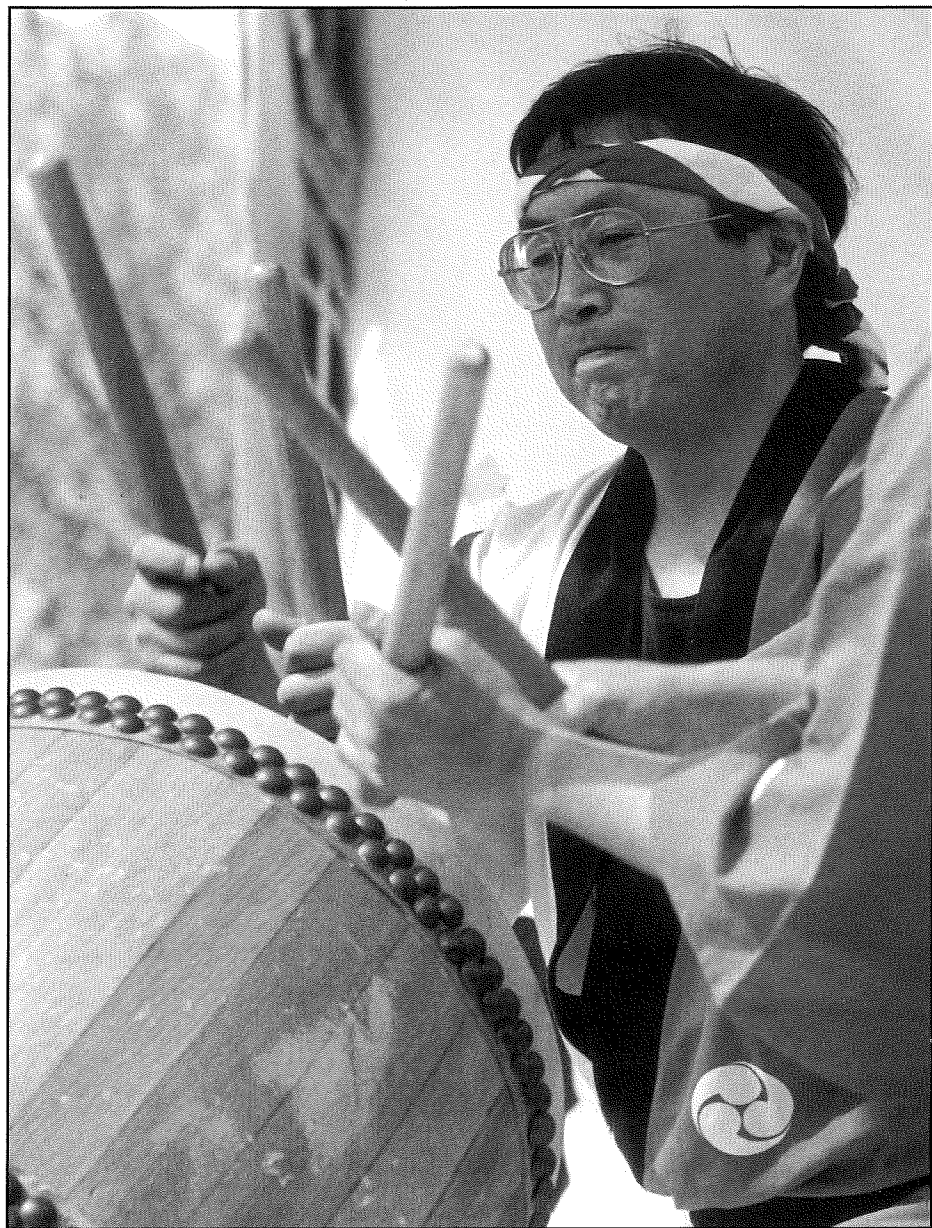
There are about a dozen musicians in the current version of Seattle Kokon Taiko, an ensemble that is a combination of two previous groups, Seattle Taiko and Kokon Taiko. Seattle's first taiko group was started in 1980 by Sue Taoka. For the first year, the group played on old tires until they could make some drums. "The first drums that we made weren't very good, actually," Bill laughed. "We just got wine barrels and cut them down and then stretched rawhide over them and nailed it down." Later, the group worked with expert drum makers, like Mark Miyoshi, a master taiko maker in California, to get more high quality drums.

The group relied on Sue's expertise to get them started. She had previously played with a taiko group in Denver, and studied with Sensei Seichi Tanaka. "There's only actually one real taiko teacher in the United States, Sensei Seichi Tanaka, from San Francisco," Bill explained. "He actually started the whole taiko movement in this country, in the late '60's. She learned from him, and she taught us what she knew." The group studied directly with Sensei Tanaka several times, in Vancouver as well as in Seattle.

When Tanaka, who was born in Japan, first came to the United States, he was disappointed to find that there

was no real Taiko here, other than one person beating the drum to keep time during the O-Bon Festivals. So, he returned to Japan and began studying.

"He started going around and learning from different taiko masters," Bill explained. And then he came back to the U.S. and started a Taiko school. "He took what he had learned from Japan, and added his own influences," Bill continued. Including martial arts and jazz. This was the beginning of a uniquely Asian-American form of taiko playing.



*A member of the Seattle Kokon Taiko gives a rigorous performance at the Cherry Blossom Festival (Photo by Dean Wong).*



*Seattle Kokon Taiko give the audience a thunderous show at the Cherry Blossom Festival (Photo by Dean Wong).*

Taiko soon became a symbol of identity for Japanese-Americans. Although Tanaka was from Japan, most of the people who formed the groups in the U.S. were third generation Japanese-Americans. "They saw it as a way of connecting with the culture of their grandparents, but also they saw the possibility in it of creating something new," Bill explained. "When people think of Asian-Americans, they think of foreigners essentially. And so, culturally, when they think of Asian-Americans, they think of stuff that comes from Asia or from Japan, like flower arranging or dancing. And with taiko, it's no longer just a Japanese expression, it's specifically, uniquely Japanese-American because of the style that evolved out of it. Because it's a combination of rhythms and style from Japan with rhythms and experiences here. There's a lot of jazz mixed in, Latin music, all kinds of other ethnic music, as well as the more popular forms like rock."

Many of the taiko groups in the

U.S. started through the Buddhist temples or churches. "We don't come out of that particular tradition," Bill explained. "The big thing, especially for us, is rural, village life. That's where a lot of our inspiration comes from. People originally played taiko to give thanks for a good harvest or a good catch." One of the songs Seattle Kokon Taiko plays, from the Suwa region in Japan, is called "Suwa Ikazuchi" or "Thunder Drum." "During times of drought," Bill explained, "people would try to imitate the sound of thunder to appease the gods and try to get them to make it rain by imitating the sound of thunder."

Seattle Kokon Taiko's other pieces come from a variety of sources; from Sensei Tanaka, from other groups, and new pieces they compose themselves. "When we first started, we didn't know anything about writing those kind of pieces, so we borrowed from other groups. And, eventually we got to the point where we started writing our own."

Composing is a collaborative process for Seattle Kokon Taiko. "Sometimes, someone will come in with just a concept or a rhythm," Bill explained. "And from there, we build on it. It's like, folk music, I guess, anywhere. You take sounds from nature. You take what's around you."

When the group first began, they played primarily within the Japanese or Asian-American community for street fairs, festivals, and in nursing homes. "There are a lot of people in wheel chairs," Harriet Kashiwada, another long-time taiko player, explained. "Just to see their faces light up, it was wonderful. Unfortunately, a lot of the first generation Japanese are passing away." "It's something

they can remember from their childhood," Bill continued. "It's always interesting when you make that connection, because a lot of us don't speak Japanese and a lot of the first generation don't speak English very well. I used to practice with my drum out in the yard when I lived in this section of town that was pretty much Japanese-American, and this older lady used to come out and watch me play. And, we couldn't talk to each other really, but she'd come over and start applauding, and just hold my hand. I wasn't really doing anything great, I was just pounding on the thing. There's a connection you can make without having to actually speak."

Seattle Kokon Taiko now also plays for the general public of all ages, for artistic events like Folklife or Bumbershoot, as well as for political events such as remembrances of Hiroshima and the concentration camps. Seattle Kokon Taiko also regularly performs at the Cherry Blossom Festival.

# Japanese Resource Guide:

## Asian Festivals of Washington State

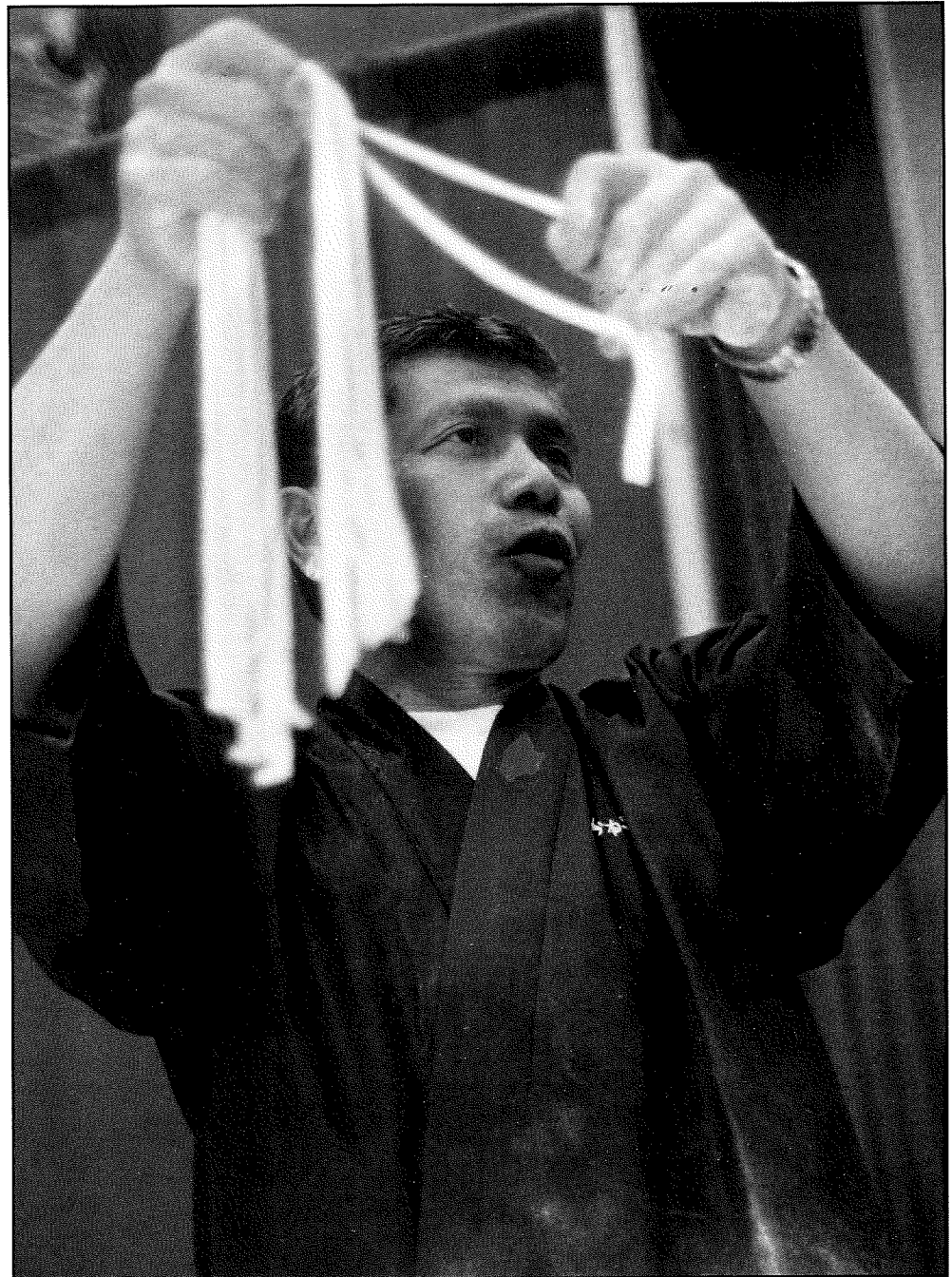
**Bainbridge Island  
Japanese-American Com-  
munity**  
1298 Grow Ave. NW  
Bainbridge Island, WA  
98110  
(206) 842-4772  
Contact: Frank Y. Kitamoto,  
DDS, President  
(206) 842-4772

**Columbia Basin Buddhist  
Sanga**  
10473 Road 4 SE  
Moses Lake, WA 98837  
(509) 765-3737  
Contact: Joe Tokunaga  
Japanese-American Bud-  
dhist fellowship organiza-  
tion.

**Consulate General of  
Japan**  
Two Union Square  
601 Union Street, Suite 500  
Seattle, WA 98101  
(206) 682-9107  
Contact: Masaki Saito,  
Consul General

**East Asia Library**  
University of Washington  
Libraries, Gowen Hall  
MS: DO-27  
Seattle, WA 98195  
(206) 543-4496  
Contact: Min-Chih Chou,  
Director  
A branch of the University  
of Washington library  
system.

**Fertile Ground**  
505 Boylston Ave. E., Suite  
111  
Seattle, WA 98102



*Traditional noodle-making (Photo by Dean Wong)*

(206) 324-5124  
Contact: Aiko Kobawashi  
An alliance of Asian and Pacific American artists.

**Ikebana Enshu School**

11025 Dean Court SW  
Tacoma, WA 98498  
(206) 582-9008  
Contact: Reiko Mihara, President  
Founded to promote mutual understanding and friendship between Japan and other countries through Ikebana, the art of Japanese floral arrangement and other arts of Japan.

**Ikebana International - Seattle Chapter 19**

5503 NE 58th St.  
Seattle, WA 98105  
(206) 522-6363  
Contact: Wilma Morgan, President  
Dedicated to friendship through flowers through the promotion and appreciation of Ikebana, the art of Japanese floral arrangement.

**Japan Shumy & Culture Society**

1724 S.Hanford  
Seattle, WA 98144  
(206) 329-8769  
Contact: Sayoko Boole  
Weekly meetings, dance lessons and performances.

**Japan-America Society of the State of Washington**

1800 9th Ave., Suite 1550  
Seattle, WA 98101-1322  
(206) 623-1900  
Contact: Susan Mochizuki, Executive Director  
The society promotes mutual understanding and friendship between the peoples of Japan and Washington state by providing a forum for the exchange of ideas and information.

**Japanese American Citizens League (JACL)  
Olympia Chapter**

PO Box 851  
Olympia, WA 98507-0851  
(360) 491-7875  
A social and cultural organization that fosters American democracy, promotes active participation in civic and national life, and secures justice and equal opportunities for Americans of Japanese ancestry, as well as for all people.

**Japanese Cultural Center**

4000 W. Randolph Road  
Spokane, WA 99204  
(509) 328-2971  
Contact: Michiko Takaoka, Director  
A resource center to provide Spokane/Coeur d'Alene area with materials and understanding related to Japan and Japan-U.S. trade and relations.

**Kabuki Academy**

4806 86th Ave. Court West  
Tacoma, WA 98467  
(206) 564-6081  
Contact: Mary Ohno, President  
Mary Ohno teaches Japanese traditional dance and shamisen music (3-stringed instrument).

**Matsuri Taiko**

11606 54th Ave. S.  
Seattle, WA 98178  
(206) 723-9358  
Contact: Joyce Shimizu, Manager  
A youth group sponsored by the Seattle Betsuin Buddhist Temple that performs at various festivals throughout the Northwest.

**Nippon Kan Heritage Association**

PO Box 3346  
Seattle, WA 98114  
(206) 633-2017  
Contact: Midori Kono Thiel, Artistic Director  
Help preserve the Nippon Kan Theatre; supports and produces programs of Japanese traditional music and dance masters of the Northwest and Japan.

**Northwest Asian American Theater**

409 7th Ave. S.  
Seattle, WA 98104  
(206) 340-1445  
Contact: Judith Nihei  
A nonprofit theatre company dedicated to developing and promoting Asian American theatre artists: playwrights, actors, designers, performers, administrators, technicians.

**Seattle Cherry Blossom  
& Japanese Cultural Festival**

PO Box 9055  
Seattle, WA 98109-0055  
(206) 993-3999  
Contact: Yutaka Sasaki  
Organizing committee for the annual festival at Seattle Center in April.

**Seattle Kokon Taiko**

3214 24th Ave. S.  
 Seattle, WA 98144  
 (206) 725-1676

Contact: Stan Shikuma, Steering Committee Member  
 An Asian American drum ensemble that blends the traditional rhythms of Japan with those of the Asian American experience.

**Seattle Miyagi-Kai**

1825 S. King St.  
 Seattle, WA 98144  
 (206) 325-9285

Contact: Marcia Takamura  
 Japanese Koto ensemble.

**Shizuoka Club**

614 NW 3rd St.  
 Renton, WA 98055  
 (206) 228-0721

Contact: Frances Iwasaki, president  
 A social organization of people from Shizuoka, Japan.

**Shumi Performers**

1724 S. Hanford St.  
 Seattle, WA 98144  
 (206) 329-8769

Contact: Sayoko Boole, President  
 Dance group that performs traditional Japanese folkdances; part of Japan Culture Society.

**Urasenke Foundation****- Seattle Chapter**

1910 37th Pl. E.  
 Seattle, WA 98112  
 (206) 324-1483

Contact: Bonnie Mitchell, Director  
 Promotes appreciation of Japanese culture through the chado, the way of tea. Demonstrations of chado are given at the Seattle Art Museum and the Seattle Japanese Garden.

**Wing Luke Asian Museum**

407-7th Ave. S.  
 Seattle, WA 98104  
 (206) 623-5124

Contact: Ron Chew, Director  
 The only pan-Asian museum in the United States. Exhibits cover Asian American cultures and histories.

For further information on the Asian Festivals of Washington State project, the radio documentaries, or to order booklets, please contact:

Jack Straw Productions  
 4261 Roosevelt Way N.E.  
 Seattle, WA 98105  
 (206) 634-0919  
 e-mail: joan@sonarchy.org

Ethnic Heritage Council  
 305 Harrison St., Suite 326  
 Seattle, WA 98109  
 (206) 443-1410

Washington State Arts Commission  
 234 E. Eighth St.  
 Olympia, WA 98504  
 (360) 753-3860