

# The Name-taking Ceremonies for Ichikawa Danjuro and the Achievements of the Next Generation

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## The impact of the pandemic

From the beginning of 2022, the implementation of measures to control the spread of COVID-19 saw multiple reports of infections and close contacts at different theatres, leading to frequent performance suspensions and changes to casts and productions. During the August run of performances at the Kabuki-za, for example, the infection of several performers led to major and widely reported cast changes to *Tokaido dochu hizakurige Yajikita returns* (*Yajirobe and Kitahachi on the Tokaido Highway Returns*) and a new play, *Shinsengumi* (*The New Brigade*), based on the historical manga by legendary artist Tezuka Osamu. For the remainder of the year, the pandemic seemed to take one step backward for every step forward, but national restrictions gradually began to be eased, and in August, the Kabuki-za was able to return to virtually a full house. Since the Kabukiza Theatre Special Program on October 31, even the distinctive *kakegoe* calls from the back of the house were permitted to make a limited return.

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## Ichikawa Danjuro XIII's name-taking ceremony

Performances to mark Ichikawa Ebizo's succession to the most important name in Edo kabuki, Ichikawa Danjuro XIII Hakuen, finally began at the Kabuki-za in November and December. Originally, they had been scheduled to take place from May to June 2020 but were postponed due to the outbreak of the pandemic. Danjuro put in confident, graceful performances as Benkei in *Kanjincho* (*The Subscription List*) and Sukeroku in *Sukeroku yukari no edozakura* (*Sukeroku:*

*Flower of Edo*) in November. In December, he tackled Sukeroku once again, this time along with the *Oshimodoshi* (demon-queller, a traditional Ichikawa speciality) role in *Kyoganoko musume Dojoji* (*The Maiden at Dojoji Temple*). Audiences had the increasingly rare opportunity to watch him performing with actors from his own generation, with Matsumoto Koshiro as Togashi and Ichikawa Ennosuke as Yoshitsune in *Kanjincho* and Onoe Kikunosuke as Agemaki and Onoe Shoroku as Ikyu in November's *Sukeroku*. These performances did an excellent job of highlighting the talents of the next generation.

Danjuro's nine-year-old son, Ichikawa Shinnosuke VIII, appeared in *Uiro uri* (*The Medicine Peddler*) in November, as well as making his first (and the youngest ever) attempt at the role of Kumedera Danjo in *Kenuki* (*The Tweezers*) in December. Appearing alongside him, to the great delight of audiences, was his sister Ichikawa Botan.

### **Mature performances by veterans**

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It was also a great year for audiences to savour anew the brilliant skills of the veterans of the kabuki stage.

Onoe Kikugoro's performances as Raiko in *Tsuchigumo* (*The Earth Spider*) at the Kabuki-za in May and as Yoshitsune in act four of *Yoshitsune senbon zakura* (*Yoshitsune and the Thousand Cherry Trees*) at the National Theatre in October were both remarkable, fully satisfying examples of the richness of Kikugoro's art. He also brought splendour and dignity to his appearances in the leading male roles of Inuyama Dosetsu in *Nanso satomi hakkenden* (*The Saga of Eight Dogs*) at the National Theatre in January, and Kudo Suketsune in *Uiro uri* at the Kabuki-za in November.

Kataoka Nizaemon announced that he would be performing for the final time the role of Tomomori in the Shipping Office and Daimotsu Bay scenes of *Yoshitsune senbon zakura* at the Kabuki-za in February. Tomomori has long been one of Nizaemon's signature roles, one where he successfully fused the stylization of the puppet theatre with a tangible sense of reality. His portrayal of Kouchiyama in *Kumo ni magou Ueno no hatsuhana* (*The First Flowers of Ueno*) at the Kabuki-za in March was unfortunately interrupted by illness, but he brought a

clean lucidity of form and impressive power to the role. His Yuranosuke in act seven of *Kanadehon chushingura* (*The Treasury of Loyal Retainers*) at the same theatre in September was also distinctive.

Bando Tamasaburo played one of his signature roles at the Kabuki-za in June, the geisha Osono in *Furu amerika ni sode wa nurasaji* (*The Rains of America Will Never Dampen My Sleeves*). The combination of Tamasaburo's beauty, his exquisite delivery of the wordy dialogue, and guest appearances by many actors from Gekidan Shinpa (a troupe that specializes in early 1900s stage melodramas) made this a great success. In December he appeared as Agemaki in *Sukeroku* at the Kabuki-za. He looked as gracefully gorgeous and his dialogue was as accomplished as ever, but it was his portrayal of Agemaki's warm affection for Sukeroku's mother, Manko, that brought an additional dimension of emotional colour to his wonderful performance.

Nakamura Jakuemon demonstrated to the fullest his abilities, heady with brilliance and eroticism, in the roles of Shizuka Gozen in *Yoshitsune senbon zakura* in January, Princess Yuki in *Kinkakuji* (*The Golden Pavilion*) in May, and Okaru in act seven of *Kanadehon Chushingura* in September (all at the Kabuki-za). He is steadily gaining ground in these types of lead *onnagata* roles.

Nakamura Baigyoku's nomination as a Living National Treasure was confirmed, while Matsumoto Hakuo was awarded the Order of Culture. The chanter Takemoto Aodayu was awarded the Japan Art Academy Prize, making him the first Kabuki-za chanter to have been granted this honour.

## The work of the next generation

The generation of actors born in the 1970s has begun to pick up more leading roles, giving audiences a sense of this being a real moment of transition for kabuki.

The deep sense of emotional expressiveness and fullness that Ichikawa Ennosuke invested in his portrayals of Tadanobu in *Yoshitsune senbon zakura* in January and of Yoshitsune in *Kanjincho* in November, both at the Kabuki-za, was impressive. He also brought his talents to bear in the shortened versions of several plays that were created for the three shows per day format at the

Kabuki-za, performing in *Shin sangokushi Kan'u hen* (*The New Records of Three Kingdoms: The Volume about Guan Yu*) in March, *Tennichibo Ooka seidan* (*The Case of Tennichibo from The Judgments of Ooka*) in April, and *Toryu Oguri Hangan* (*The Modern Story of Oguri Hangan*) in July.

This year Onoe Kikunosuke provided a strong testament to his energy and commitment, performing in both the classics and new works. He demonstrated impressively solid technique in major roles from the puppet theatre repertoire, including his role of Moritsuna in *Moritsuna jinya* (*Moritsuna's Battlecamp*) in March at the National Theatre, and the three roles he played in *Yoshitsune senbon zakura* at the same theatre in October (his performance in these roles was cancelled at the start of the pandemic two year ago) He also showed off his accession to roles that his family have long excelled in, including Inaba Kozo in *Nezumi kozo Jirokichi* (*The Story of the Thief Nezumi Kozo Jirokichi*, Kabuki-za, February), the spider spirit in *Tsuchigumo* (Kabuki-za, May), and Sogoro in *Sakanaya Sogoro* (*Sogoro the Fishmonger*, Hakata-za, June). In July at the Kabuki-za, he performed in a revised version of *Kaze no tani Nausicaä* (*Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*), a new play first staged in 2019. September at the Kabuki-za saw the first memorial performance for Nakamura Kichiemon II, who passed away last year. The performances featured a well-received performance by Kikunosuke in *Fujito*, a play authored by Kichiemon under the name Matsu Kanshi. Kichiemon was also, of course, Kikunosuke's father-in-law.

Onoe Shoroku's acting is coming along in leaps and bounds, and this year he was awarded the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's New Faces Prize. He portrayed a handful of larger-than-life roles this year, including Matsunaga Daizen in *Kinkakuji* in May, Matsuomaru in *Kurumabiki* (*Pulling the Carriage Apart*) in June, Matsuomaru in *Terakoya* (*The Village School*) in September, all at the Kabuki-za. In October, he also produced and acted in *Arakawa Judayu*, a dramatization of one of the popular *koshaku* (oral tales) linked to *Kanadehon chushingura*. This production was awarded the Otani Takejiro Award for the unusual skill with which it adapted an oral narrative to the stage.

Matsumoto Koshiro put in an ingenious performance as Sakichi in *Arakawa*

*no Sakichi (Sakichi of Arakawa)* at the Kabuki-za in April. In August he attracted favourable notices as Aoki Sadajiro in the very infrequently performed *Ansei kibun Tsukuda no yorashi (Strange News in the Ansei Era: Night Storm at Tsukuda)*. His exchanges with Nakamura Kankuro as Kamiya Genzo succeeded in producing a very real sense of tension.

Nakamura Kankuro provided an excellent and invigorating performance as Lord Okura in *Ichijo Okura monogatari (The Tale of Ichijo Okura)* at the Kabuki-za in January. His Tennichibo in February at Theatre Cocoon was a masterpiece that perfectly captured the character's naivety and fearlessness. Kankuro also mounted performances by the Heisei Nakamura-za theatre in the grounds of Sensoji temple in Asakusa in October and November to mark the 180<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the theatre district of Saruwakamachi.

Nakamura Baishi put in some graceful performances, including his Kagaribi in *Moritsuna jinya* in March, and his Princess Sarashina in *Momijigari (Maple Viewing)* in July, both at the National Theatre. Equally striking was the rare sense of antiquity and generosity that he brought to the role of Taira no Koremori in the Sushi shop scene from *Yoshitsune senbon zakura* at the National Theatre in October.

Onoe Ukon and Bando Minosuke brought a youthful freshness to their portrayals of Benten Kozo and Nango Rikimaru in *Benten musume meo no shiranami (The Five Thieves)* at the Kabuki-za in May. They are definitely two young actors to keep an eye on. Minosuke also put in a strong showing as Umeomaru in *Kurumabiki* at the Kabuki-za in June. In the same play, Nakamura Kazutaro's Kamigata-style (the Kyoto and Osaka area) Sakuramaru left an equally strong impression. In June at the Kabuki-za, Ichikawa Somegoro's portrayal of the lead role of Tokugawa Nobuyasu (the son of the shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu) in *Nobuyasu* attracted much attention. While it only enjoyed a brief run, *Natsu matsuri Naniwa kagami (The Summer Festival in Osaka)* at the Shochiku-za in Osaka in September with Kataoka Ainosuke was well performed and overflowed with Kamigata atmosphere.

As the pandemic receded and audience confidence returned, many actors resumed mounting independent performances. Enthusiastic shows were put on

by Nakamura Tsurumatsu (June), Nakamura Kyozo and Nakamura Ichō (also June), Nakamura Takanosuke (July), Nakamura Baigyoku and his students (August), Onoe Ukon (August), and Kamimura Kichiya and his students (September). At the National Theatre in May, the venerable Zenshinza troupe staged *Kakitsubata iro mo edozome – Oroku to Gantetsu* (*Oroku and Gantetsu: Even the Irises are Dyed Edo Purple*) as a memorial for the 33<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the death of their founder, Kawarazaki Kunitaro V (1909-1990). It was the first performance of the play for 41 years.

### **The end of the road for *Engekikai*; rebuilding the National Theatre**

The monthly kabuki magazine *Engekikai* ceased publication with its April issue, published on March 3. The reasons given were its aging readership, the shift of the publishing industry towards digital, and lack of new readers.

Rebuilding plans for the National Theatre in Tokyo's Hanzōmon were published, and a series of farewell performances began in September. The theatre will close in late October 2023, with all three of its theatres earmarked for demolition. Construction of a new theatre building that will include a hotel and restaurants will then begin, with the theatres scheduled to reopen in autumn 2029. In the meantime, performances will continue at other venues around Tokyo, possibly including the New National Theatre and the National Noh Theatre.

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### **Obituaries**

Bando Takesaburo V passed away on June 17. An *onnagata* actor, he brought a rich flavour of Kamigata to his performances of middle-aged characters like Oen in *Fuingiri* (*The Courier for Hell*), or older women such as Oko in *Hikimado* (*A Diary of Two Butterflies in the Pleasure Quarters*). He also occasionally performed male roles, lending them a distinctive depth. Takesaburo played an important role in the revival of Kamigata kabuki, both through the revivals of older plays in his independent Bando Takesaburo no Kai productions and as a teacher at the Shochiku Kamigata Kabuki Academy.

On June 23 we also lost Sawamura Tanosuke VI. Tanosuke brought a dignified art to his portrayals of female characters including Koman in *Sanemori*

*monogatari* (*The Tale of Sanemori*) and Sakae Gozen in *Meiboku Sendai hagi* (*The Precious Incense and Autumn Flowers of Sendai*). The scope of his art was broad, and he excelled in both *sewamono* (contemporary life plays) wife roles like Ohama in *Sakanaya Sogoro* and old woman roles including Nagisa in *Kokusenya Gassen* (*The Battles of Coxinga*). He was also valued for his skill in performing Edo *wagoto* roles, including the clerk Chushichi in *Kamiyui Shinza* (*Shinza The Barber*) and Soga no Juro in *Ya no ne* (*Sharpening the Arrow*). For many years he trained upcoming actors at the National Theatre's Kabuki Actor Training Programme and was recognized for his efforts by being named a Living National Treasure in 2002. Tanosuke was also known as a fan of sumo wrestling, serving as a member of the Yokozuna Deliberation Committee, the lay body that recommends wrestlers to sumo's highest rank.

On January 19, Kineya Jogu, the *nagauta* shamisen player and leader of the Kikugoro Troupe's musical ensemble, passed away.

### **Yanai, Kenji**

Following a period at the National Theatre, he currently teaches at Meiji University. He holds a doctorate in literature and specializes in the history of Japanese performing arts with a focus on kabuki. His books include *Meiji kiwamono kabuki: Sora tobu godaime Kikugoro* (*Sensational Meiji-period Kabuki: Kikugoro V Flying Through the Air*, Hakuuisha Publishing), *Chabudaigaeshi no kabuki nyumon* (*An Introduction to Kabuki Shocking Enough to Overturn the Dinner Table*, Shinchosha Publishing). He regularly reviews kabuki for The Tokyo Shimbun newspaper.

(Translation: Alan Cummings)