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**THE ART OF THE BENSHI 2024: WORLD TOUR JAPAN'S SILENT FILM  
NARRATORS  
TO RUN APRIL 5-26**

**Tour to Play Los Angeles at The United Theatre on Broadway on April 19 and at  
the  
Billy Wilder Theater at the Hammer Museum at UCLA on April 20 and 21**

**The Tour is Presented by the Yanai Initiative for Globalizing Japanese Humanities  
and the UCLA Film & Television Archive**

[Trailer](#)



**Feb. 1, 2024** – Los Angeles, CA – [\*The Art of the Benshi 2024 World Tour\*](#), presented by the Yanai Initiative for Globalizing Japanese Humanities and the UCLA Film & Television Archive, will run April 5 – 26, 2024. The tour will bring to life the mesmerizing artistry of *benshi* performance, encompassing 12 dates at six venues in five cities: New York, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Los Angeles and Tokyo.

Benshi, derived from "*katsudō benshi*" or "movie orator," were the captivating narrators of Japan's silent film era. With over 7,000 *benshi* at their peak, these artists not only introduced

films but also provided live narration, portraying characters and articulating the on-screen action, filling theaters and enthralling audiences.

Now, more than a century after it began, this art form returns, offering contemporary audiences a rare chance to immerse themselves in this enchanting cinematic tradition. Each program will include screenings of classic, newly restored, and rarely seen silent films from Japan and the United States. They will showcase the individual artistic interpretations of three different *benshi*, performing individually as well as together in the form known as *kowairo kakeai*, in which multiple *benshi* take on the roles of different characters—a style seen only once before in the US at the 2019 Art of the Benshi program at UCLA. Performances will be in Japanese with live music and English subtitles.

“*The Art of the Benshi 2024* tour will offer a unique theatrical experience that combines cinema and live performance that is rarely seen on this scale, even in Japan,” said Michael Emmerich, UCLA’s Tadashi Yanai Professor of Japanese Literature and director of the Yanai Initiative. “We are honored to be helping to introduce this vibrant, enthralling form to a broader audience, and we know people will walk out of these shows wanting to see more.”

Ichirō Kataoka, one of the most celebrated *benshi* working today, will be joined by Kumiko Ōmori and Hideyuki Yamashiro, along with a group of musicians performing both new and historical scores, for a series of five different silent film programs with a total of 18 different films across the tour.

The program includes an incredible, diverse selection of films, several newly restored, including the cult favorite *A Page of Madness* (*Kurutta ippēji*, 1926); the earliest surviving Japanese animated film *The Dull Sword* (*Namakura gatana*, 1917); classic films by Yasujiro Ozu, Kenji Mizoguchi, and Charlie Chaplin; and the recently discovered and restored *The Oath of the Sword*, which is the earliest known Asian American film production.

The following institutions have supported the tour by providing media, including the George Eastman Museum, the National Film Archive of Japan, the Okinawa Prefectural Museum & Art Museum, the Toy Film Museum, and the Tsubouchi Memorial Theater Museum, Waseda University.

### **Schedule**

April 5, 6, and 7

“BAM (Brooklyn Academy of Music)”, Brooklyn

April 12, 13, and 14

National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

April 16-17

Gene Siskel Film Center, Chicago

**April 19**

**The United Theatre on Broadway, Los Angeles**

**April 20 and 21**

**Billy Wilder Theater at the Hammer Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles**

April 26

Okuma Auditorium, Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan

For individual programs please visit [here](#).

### **Performers**

Mr. Ichirō Kataoka, Lead Benshi

Ms. Kumiko Ōmori, Benshi

Mr. Hideyuki Yamashiro, Benshi

Mr. Jōichi Yuasa, Conductor and Shamisen Player

Ms. Makiko Suzuki, Flute

Ms. Ryōko Kinoshita, Violin

Ms. Kisayo Katada, Drums

Ms. Kiisa Katada, Drums

Mr. Kaname Tambara, Piano

Ms. Makia Matsumura, Piano

### **About the Yanai Initiative**

The Yanai Initiative for Globalizing Japanese Humanities is a collaborative project of the University of California, Los Angeles, and Waseda University in Tokyo, established in 2014 to realize a sustainable, equitable, globally interconnected future for the Japanese humanities. Its activities range include the advancement of scholarship on Japanese, literature and the arts; support for literary translation; public programs on performance, film, design, music, art, food, and architecture; and the creation of digital educational content and smartphone apps.

For more information, please visit <http://yanai-initiative.ucla.edu>.

### **About the UCLA Film & Television Archive**

A division of UCLA Library, the Archive is internationally renowned for rescuing, preserving and showcasing moving image media and is dedicated to ensuring that the visual achievements of our time are available for information, education and enjoyment. The Archive has over 500,000 film and television holdings conserved in a state-of-the-art facility at the Packard Humanities Institute Stoa in Santa Clarita, CA, that is designed to hold materials ranging from nitrate film to digital video at all preservation standards. Many of the Archive's projects are screened at prestigious film events around the globe.

For more information please visit, <https://www.cinema.ucla.edu>.