

Spring Season

PERFORMING ARTS

2025

26



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Japan Society presents **Kinoshita Kabuki's *Kanjincho***

Thursday, January 8 at 7:30 pm
—Followed by an opening night reception

Friday, January 9 at 7:30 pm
—Followed by an Artist Q&A

Saturday, January 10 at 7:30 pm

Sunday, January 11 at 2:30 pm

Kinoshita Kabuki's *Kanjincho* is supported by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan, Japan Arts Council; and subsidized by JLOX+, with funding from The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan.



Presented in partnership with Under the Radar Festival® / utrfest.org



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Major support is generously provided by Doug and Teresa Peterson, Howard Gilman Foundation, and Jun Makihara and Megumi Oka. Endowment support is provided by the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Endowment Fund, John and Miyoko Davey Foundation, and a leadership gift from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation.



Program support is provided by The Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation and Hisamitsu America, Inc.

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A heartfelt thank you to all who contributed in honor of Yoko Shioya's 20th anniversary and ensure the continued success of the Performing Arts Program, including Donald Allison and Sumiko Ito, The Capital Group Companies, Inc., The Globus Family, Cheryl Henson, Merit E. Janow, Eri Kakuta, Paula S. Lawrence, Makioka Foundation, Naoto Nakagawa, Hiroko Onoyama, Pamela Perlman, Doug and Teresa Peterson, Richard and Momona Royce, Mr. and Mrs. Motoatsu Sakurai, Shuhei Sato, Lyndley and Samuel Schwab, Shiseido Americas, Robin B. and Jeffrey Stern, Lance Stuart, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Nancy and Joe Walker, and Alex York.

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ARTISTIC DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Happy New Year! I am very happy to start 2026 with the North American debut of *Kanjincho* by Kinoshita Kabuki, one of the most talked-about contemporary theater groups in Japan in recent years.

Kabuki is well-known as a unique form of Japanese traditional theater, globally recognized through distinctive elements such as lavish costumes, hyperbolic makeup and an exaggerated acting style, all of which make kabuki a “spectacle.” However, this way of referring to kabuki omits a critical element of kabuki as a theater art: drama! As Yuichi Kinoshita, founder and leader of the company Kinoshita Kabuki, explains in his program note, contemporary Japanese theater artists have broadly missed the rich potential for “cooking” this particular ingredient of kabuki.

Many kabuki plays borrow stories from material found in noh, kyogen and folktales, or from fictionalized accounts of historical incidents. And, if I may say that the essence of kabuki lies in “exaggeration” (in facial expressions, gestures, vocal projection, movement, costuming and makeup), then exaggeration is also central to kabuki plots: “Loyalty”—blind devotion within the feudal system; or “Revenge”—pursued at the cost of one’s life; or “Love”—so profound it leads to suicide. These themes, while already present in many original materials, are often simply overemphasized. As such, the feudal Japan-centric plots alone might not always suit the complex palettes and individualism of a contemporary audience. (Side note: in the years immediately following WWII, the General Headquarters, or GHQ, under General MacArthur censored and even banned kabuki, believing it would be an obstruction to GHQ policies on promoting individualism and democracy within Japan.)

However, Kinoshita Kabuki triumphantly proves that even the most authentic kabuki play born of Japan’s feudal society can offer important messages for our current era: that pure loyalty and trust can touch a human’s heart; that the moved heart leads a man to disobey his authority’s merciless orders; and that the souls of enemies can still resonate warmly with each other—through this contemporary production of *Kanjincho*. We intrinsically absorb those messages, lurking here within sleek visuals, modern colloquial language and pop-culture elements immediately familiar to us today. I want to say once more: We are very happy to present Kinoshita Kabuki’s *Kanjincho* in this uncertain world today.

Last but not least, I also want to express my happiness to once again be a part of New York’s signature performing arts festival, Under the Radar.



Yoko Shioya
Artistic Director

Kanjincho

Conceived by Yuichi Kinoshita

Creation and Dramaturgy: Yuichi Kinoshita
Direction and Stage Design: Kunio Sugihara

Performed by Kinoshita Kabuki

CAST

Benkei (Musashibo Benkei): Lee V
Yoshitsune (Minamoto-no Kuro Houhan Yoshitsune): Noemi Takayama
Togashi (Togashi-no Saemon): Ryotaro Sakaguchi
Hitachi (Hitachibo Kaison) / Guard Okano: Yasuhiro Okano
Kamei Rokuro / Guard Kameshima: Kazunori Kameshima
Kataoka Hachiro / Guard Shigeoka: Hiroshi Shigeoka
Suruga Jiro / Ogaki the Sword Carrier: Yuya Ogaki

STAFF

Original Music: Taichi Kaneko
Lighting Design: Masayoshi Takada, Arisa Nagasaka, Naruya Sugimoto
Sound Design: Daisuke Hoshino, Chiharu Tokida
Costume Design: Haruki Okamura
Choreographer: Wataru Kitao
Rap Instructor: Shunya Itabashi
Singing Instructor: Tono
Kabuki Music (narimono) Instructor: Denichiro Tanaka
Assistant Dramaturg: Takatoshi Inagaki
Assistant Director: Minami Suzuki
Assistant Stage Manager: Kayoko Yamazoe
Stage Manager: Nobuaki Oshika
English Subtitling: Chris Gregory
Production: Miho Kobayashi, Keiko Nagata

Performed in Japanese with English subtitles.

Please note: The opening scene of this production utilizes a prop/ herbal (tobacco-less) cigarette for dramatic effect. If you have respiratory sensitivities, please be advised.

Performance runtime is approximately 80 minutes.

ARTIST'S NOTE

Couldn't kabuki, a traditional Japanese performing art, be transformed into contemporary theater—just as Shakespeare's works and Greek tragedies have been frequently reinterpreted and presented in modern styles, or new productions of classic opera are constantly being attempted? With this thought in mind, I founded Kinoshita Kabuki in 2006. It may surprise you, but in Japan, such attempts to reinterpret traditional performing arts as contemporary theater are still limited to a very small number of examples.

When Kinoshita Kabuki rehearses, we always begin by completely copying the acting style of traditional kabuki. We thoroughly internalize classical forms, including the original intonation of the lines and the way the body moves, so that it becomes a foundation. From this foundation, we translate the classical lines into modern Japanese and add new direction and staging.

In Japan, the kabuki play *Kanjincho* is a very well-known piece. Our version of *Kanjincho*, performed in modern language and modern clothing, may look quite different from traditional kabuki performed in the classical style. In reality, however, many elements of our production, such as the overall story and the order of the content and specific lines of dialogue, remain extremely faithful to the original kabuki play. And yet, our interpretation of this story and the themes we aim to address incorporate our modern insights, grounded in a thorough understanding of the original work.

We have reinterpreted *Kanjincho* as a story about “borders.” Looking internationally, we are currently witnessing conflicts between nations and religions, along with senseless human slaughter each day. Referring to such a world simply as “divided” sounds far too mild. Unfortunately, in Japan, too, short-sighted xenophobia has started to gain support. Similar things can be seen in *Kanjincho*: the story unfolds at a “checkpoint,” a borderline that divides countries and separates life and death, where enemies and allies, master and servants and past and present intersect and clash. However, it is also a story where those in conflict find a new path beyond fighting.

I sincerely hope that this performance will provide a small yet invaluable opportunity for everyone to reflect on the meaning of “coexistence.”

Yuichi Kinoshita
Founder, Kinoshita Kabuki
January 2026

ABOUT KABUKI AND *KANJINCHO*

Kabuki is a form of traditional Japanese theater that originated in the early Edo period (1603-1868) as entertainment for the common people (as opposed to nobility). By the 18th century, kabuki had developed into a codified dramatic art, characterized by its distinctive acting style, dance and live music. Known for its unique spectacle incorporating exaggerated makeup and gestures, lavish costumes and acrobatic movement by chorus performers, this stylized theater form, with its 400-year history, is now designated a “Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity” by UNESCO.

Many kabuki plays address themes of loyalty, love, honor and revenge through the lenses of religious and philosophical elements tied to Buddhism or Confucianism. These plays draw heavily on material from other traditional performing arts as well, including noh, kyogen and bunraku puppet theaters, as well as on fictionalized accounts of factual historical events. Usually, kabuki stories are categorized into three types: *jidai-mono* (history plays about nobility / samurai), *sewa-mono* (domestic dramas centered on the lives of townspeople), and *shosa-goto* (dance pieces). More than 300 of these classical plays have survived as performance repertoire and continue to be actively performed today.

Among these surviving plays, *Kanjincho* (*The Subscription List*) remains one of the most popular and well-known kabuki stories in the present day. Based on the noh play *Ataka*, *Kanjincho* was first performed in 1702 and, in 1840, was revised by Ichikawa Danjuro VII (1791-1859) into the version most regularly performed today.

Kinoshita Kabuki's *Kanjincho* premiered in its current form in 2016 in Matsumoto City. It was then restaged in Kanagawa Arts Theatre in Yokohama and The Centre Pompidou in Paris (as a part of the city-wide festival, *Japonismes*) in 2018, and Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre in 2023. This program at Japan Society is *Kanjincho*'s North American premiere.

KANJINCHO'S HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND SYNOPSIS

Kanjincho is based on a historical incident in late 12th century Japan, when Minamoto-no Yoritomo of the Genji clan was in the final phase of establishing his Kamakura shogunate by cleaning up the “mess” within his own clan. Although General Yoshitsune, Yoritomo's half-brother, was attributed with defeating the Genji clan's primary foe, he was regarded with suspicion and jealousy by his

brother, who issued nationwide orders for his capture. Pursued by Yoritomo, Yoshitsune and his retainers—including Benkei, who was renowned for his strength and loyalty—became fugitives, fleeing for their lives to escape Yoritomo’s domain.

Synopsis: The story of *Kanjincho* begins as Yoshitsune and his party, disguised as *yamabushi* (mountain priests) prepare to pass through the checkpoint barrier at Ataka, where they will be beyond Yoritomo’s reach. However, Yoritomo’s men are already at the checkpoint, guarding the barrier and waiting to capture Yoshitsune. Since the leader of Yoritomo’s men, Togashi, has already received information that the fugitives are hiding as *yamabushi*, he immediately suspects the identity of Yoshitsune’s party and demands that they prove they are genuine priests by showing their *kanjincho*, a subscription list with the names of those who have donated to the major temple in Nara.

Benkei, who pretends to be the leader of the group, pulls out a blank scroll and acts as if he is reading a real *kanjincho*. Although Togashi catches a glimpse of the blank page, he is so impressed by Benkei’s bravado that he pretends not to have seen through their ruse. After a tense repartee between the two men, Togashi concedes to let the party pass through the barrier—however, at the last moment, another guard recognizes Yoshitsune. In a desperate move to save his life, Benkei beats his master as if he were a disobedient follower.

Togashi, deeply moved by Benkei’s extreme loyalty and recognizing the depth of the party’s devotion, pretends that he has been fooled and allows them to pass. Even more, Togashi apologizes for his “discourtesy” and offers sake; in return, Benkei performs a dance. While everyone enjoys the revelry, Yoshitsune escapes from the scene. Togashi is aware that his own life will be forfeit for letting Yoshitsune go.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Yuichi Kinoshita (creator and dramaturg) is the founder, leader, script writer and dramaturg of the Kyoto-based company Kinoshita Kabuki. Kinoshita was born in 1985 in Wakayama Prefecture, Japan. When he was in elementary school, he was shocked by the brilliance of *kamigata rakugo* (a form of traditional Japanese sit-down solo comedy in the Kansai / Western Japanese dialect) performance and began practicing *rakugo* on his own. Subsequently, Kinoshita went on to expand his interests in Japan’s traditional performing arts as well as simultaneously learning about contemporary performing arts. In 2006, Kinoshita

founded the theater company Kinoshita Kabuki, in which he oversees dramaturgy on productions of Japanese classic theater repertoire. Signature productions include *Musume Dojoji*, *Kurozuka*, *Tokaido Yotsuya Kaidan*, *The Love Suicides at Amijima*, *Yoshitsune Senbon-zakura—Tokaiya* and *Daimotsunoura* sections and *Sesshu Gappou ga Tsuji*. In 2015, the company’s revival of *San'nin Kichisa Kuruwa no Hatsugai* was nominated for the Yomiuri Theatre Awards’ Best Production of the First Half of 2015. For his work on *Kanjincho*, presented in 2016, Kinoshita received the Agency for Cultural Affairs Arts Festival’s New Artist Award. He also received the 38th Kyoto Prefecture Cultural Award Encouragement Prize in 2019. Outside of his own company, he is active in a wide range of projects related to traditional performing arts through writing and giving lectures, as well as serving as a dramaturg for productions including the Shibuya Cocoon Kabuki production of *Kirare no Yosa* (2018). He was a recipient of Japan Arts Council’s 2017 Arts and Culture Special Encouragement Program award. Since 2024, Kinoshita has served as the leading Artistic Director of Matsumoto Performing Arts Centre. (<https://kinoshita-kabuki.org/>)

Kunio Sugihara (director and stage designer) is a theater director, stage designer and founder of the company KUNIO. Born in 1982, Sugihara studied at the Department of Film and Performing Arts at Kyoto University of the Arts, and graduated with a Masters in Art Design Studies. In 2004, he founded the theater production company KUNIO as a platform for himself to direct various theater works. Notable works produced by the company include KUNIO15 *The Greeks* (2019), edited and translated by John Barton and Kenneth Cavander; KUNIO11 *Hamlet* (2014), written by William Shakespeare; KUNIO09 *Angels in America — Part 1: Millennium Approaches, Part 2: Perestroika* — (2011), written by Tony Kushner; KUNIO14 *Mizu no Eki* (2019); and KUNIO10 *Sarachi* (2012 and 2021), where Sugihara vividly revived the masterpiece written by his mentor Shogo Ota. With Kinoshita Kabuki, he has directed ten productions, including *Sannin Kichisa Kuruwa no Hatsugai*, which was nominated for the Yomiuri Drama Award, *Kurozuka* and *Tokaido Yotsuya Kaidan*. His previous directorial works span a wide range of genres, from kabuki theater and Greek tragedy to contemporary theater, including *Shin Suikoden* (2023), written by Kensuke Yokouchi and presented at the Kabuki-za Theatre, *Pandra’s Bell* (2022), written by Hideki Noda and *Blood Wedding* (2022), written by Federico Garcia Lorca. Recently, he has expanded his directing activities into other genres, such the Sanrio Puroland’s 35th Anniversary “The Quest of Wonders Parade” and Gaetano Donizetti’s opera *L’elisir d’amore*. (<https://kunio.me>)

Lee V (Benkei) is a comedian and actor born in 1975, originally hailing from the United States. His notable works in theater and television include Kinoshita

Kabuki's *Kanjincho* and the NHK television drama series *Massan* (as an English teacher) and *Come Come Everybody* (as a film director). Program narration credits include KTV's *SHINPUU2* and *Shibaitaroka Japan*, Sun TV's *Katsutamadon*, Osaka Broadcasting's *Shin - Shiawase Kazoku Gekijo*, FM Hirakata's *Japanese Language Course for Foreigners* and NHK World's *J-Trip Plan* and *Kansai Deeper* (as reporter and narrator). Narration credits for TV commercials and promotional videos include work with the following companies: Panasonic, O.M. Corporation, Daihatsu, Sankei Express News, Kanaflex, Yamahisa Pet Food, Sharp, HIS, Kobe Steel, Sumitomo Heavy Industries, Imabari Shipbuilding, Rohm, Osaka Gakuin University (Japanese & English) and for various English language learning materials.
(<https://kinoshita-kabuki.org/2016/07/12/4314>)

Noemi Takayama (Yoshitsune) was born in 1977 in Tokyo. She began her professional career as a dancer at the show pub Roppongi Kingyo before expanding into acting for stage and film. Her recent stage credits include *Eisei Rhythm & Vacuum* in 2021, *Senko Banashi* in 2022 and *Nora – or a Doll's House* in 2024. She also appeared in the NHK BS Premium television drama series *Yappari Oshii Keiji* in 2021 and the feature film *Blue Hour* in 2019. With Kinoshita Kabuki, she has performed in *Tokaido Yotsuya Kaidan* in 2013, *Kanjincho* in 2016, 2018, 2023 and 2026 and *Sannin Kichisa Kuruwa no Hatsugai* in 2024.
(<https://kinoshita-kabuki.org/2016/07/07/4231>)

Ryotaro Sakaguchi (Togashi) was born in 1990 in Hyogo Prefecture. Among his television credits, the most notable are the A24 & Apple TV original drama series *Sunny* as Takumi and Fuji TV's *Billion x School* as Nobuo Mizoguchi. Film credits include *Honeko Akabane's Bodyguards* as Tokiki Chisaka (2024) and *Secret: A Hidden Score* as Shinnosuke Hirose (2024). His most recent stage credits include Kinoshita Kabuki's *Sannin Kichisa Kuruwa no Hatsugai* (2024) and *Kanjincho* (2023, 2026), both directed by Kunio Sugihara. He has also written a serial essay entitled "Kyo-mo, cha-butai no ue de odoru" ("Today, too, I'll be dancing on the stage").
(<https://www.cubeinc.co.jp/archives/artist/sakaguchiryotaro>)

Yasuhiro Okano (Hitachi / Guard Okano) was born in 1981 in Kanagawa Prefecture. He graduated from Nihon University College of Art, Department of Theater. He is a member of the Mrs.fictions theater company and has appeared in all of their productions. He has also acted across multiple genres of theater with companies including InnocentSphere, KUNIO, Seinen-dan Rinku Yashago, Rorie and Kinoshita Kabuki. In addition to his work as an actor, he is a poet and writer,

winning the Poetry Slam Japan 2015 with his original work and reaching the semi-finals at the Poetry Slam World Cup held in France.
(<https://www.mrsfictions.com/intro.html>)

Kazunori Kameshima (Kamei Rokuro / Guard Kameshima) was born in 1986 in Tokyo. He has been a member of the theater company LOLO since its founding in 2009. Primarily a stage actor, he has also acted in various films and commercials. He has appeared in the Kinoshita Kabuki productions of *Kanjincho* and *Tokaido Yotsuya Kaidan*.
(<http://loloweb.jp/kazunorikameshima/>)

Hiroshi Shigeoka (Kataoka Hachiro / Guard Shigeoka) was born in Kitakyushu City, Fukuoka Prefecture. He is a member of the Seinendan Theatre Company and is mainly active as a stage actor. His recent credits include Gekidan Ampersand's *Toomaki ni Miteru*, written and directed by Kei Ando and Gekidan Futsu's *Byoshitsu*, written and directed by Mai Ishiguro. He also appeared in the film *Angry Squad: The Civil Servant and the Seven Swindlers*, directed by Shinichiro Ueda.
(<https://letre.co.jp/artist/shigeoka/>)

Yuya Ogaki (Suruga Jiro / Ogaki the Sword Carrier) was born in 1988 in Gunma Prefecture. He graduated from Meiji University with a major in theater. He first performed in *angura* theater as a college student. Since then, he has been active as a stage and theater performer, including notable performances in the theater company Mamagoto's *Our Planet* (2015), Kinoshita Kabuki's *Kanjincho* (2023, 2026) and Paradox Teisu's *Zubezuda – Koya yori Sora e*. Recently, he has also been expanding into singing work and immersive theater.
(<https://poeplus.jp/talents/yuya-ogaki/>)

ABOUT THE COMPANY

Kinoshita Kabuki is a contemporary theater company based in Kyoto, Japan, founded in 2006 by Yuichi Kinoshita. Led by Kinoshita's own passion for and knowledge of classical kabuki, the company endeavors to reawaken interest in this traditional art among modern audiences. With this aim in mind, the company sets out to stage kabuki works in unconventional ways, adapting scripts with sharp colloquial language, incorporating pop culture and utilizing classic themes to grapple with current societal issues, all while remaining deeply grounded in the original work. To approach kabuki from a variety of perspectives, Kinoshita Kabuki invites an external theater director for each production and features a different

cast. After receiving accolades throughout Europe and East Asia, this production of *Kanjicho* at Japan Society marks Kinoshita Kabuki's North American debut.

ABOUT UNDER THE RADAR

Under the Radar Festival Founding Director: Mark Russell
Festival Co-Directors: Meropi Peponides & Kaneza Schaal
Festival Producer: ArKtype / Thomas O. Kriegsmann & Sami Pyne

For over two decades, the Under the Radar Theater Festival has brought bold, risk-taking work to New York City, celebrating groundbreaking theater and performance from around the world and just down the street. Produced in collaboration with dozens of venues at a selection of historic and emerging theaters across New York City, the festival showcases innovative multidisciplinary artists whose work speaks powerfully to the present moment. Under the Radar's influence sets a cultural standard that resonates through the artistic landscape far further and beyond our January schedule. In coordination with Festival founder and Director Mark Russell, Producers Thomas O. Kriegsmann and Sami Pyne of ArKtype and with the addition of this year's highly-esteemed Co-Creative Directors Meropi Peponides and Kaneza Schaal, UTR is positioned to continue to capitalize on the Festival's rich history and expand on a tradition of trailblazing new direction. The 21st edition of UTR will run from January 7-25, 2026 presenting over 32 productions at 24 partner organizations across the city. Find out more at utrifest.org.

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