

Remarks by H.E. Mr. HAYASHI Hajime,
Ambassador of Japan to the UK,
at an Evening of Noh Theatre,
on 25th September 2024

Distinguished Guests,

Thank you all for joining an “Evening of Noh Theatre” at the Embassy of Japan. I am truly grateful for your presence this evening.

Taking this opportunity, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to our partners, especially, Ms Jannette Cheong, Noh Master Mr Akira Matsui, Professor Richard Emmert, Noh Mask Maker Mr Hideta Kitazawa, as well as all the performers and individuals involved in making this event possible.

As you may be aware, *Noh* is a traditional Japanese performing art with over 600 years of history, back to Muromachi period, Japan’s medieval period. *Noh* is said to be the world's oldest surviving form of theatre and it was the first traditional art from Japan to be inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list.

It is a unique art form that combines deep spirituality and beauty. Through its subtle movements, refined gestures, and distinctive music as well as poetic lyrics, *Noh* invites its audience into a world of mystery and elegance. The highly symbolic movements of *Noh* are said to express all elements of the universe. Even in silence, there is a flow of energy from the performer’s body, which audiences can appreciate.

Today, I would also like to draw your attention to the depth of Noh masks. Depending on the angle at which they are tilted, these masks can appear to convey a wide range of emotions—from smiling to crying, or from joy to anger—showcasing remarkable expressiveness.

At the same time, it is said that in order to accurately portray various emotions while allowing the audience to imagine and interpret them, a mask must neither have too much expression nor too little. This delicate balance highlights the immense skill and craftsmanship of Noh mask makers. I believe

it is this subtle yet powerful expressiveness that makes Noh masks so fascinating.

Noh has been passed down through generations and remains a reflection of the Japanese spirit and culture, something we hold with great pride. Through their work, our performers today build a bridge between our cultures, carrying this ancient tradition into the modern era.

There certainly are the people here in the UK who appreciate and express their high evaluation to *Noh*. Obviously, Benjamin Britten was one of them, who transformed an original *Noh* play, “Sumidagawa”, to his operatic work “Curlew River” in the middle of 1960s.

It is a great pleasure to be able to showcase this precious artform here at my embassy. Our performers today, have devoted themselves to the art of Noh, mastering its timeless craft both in Japan and the UK. Culture is an essential aspect of strengthening ties among nations and I hope that tonight’s event will further promote mutual understanding between Japan and the UK through culture.

I sincerely hope that today’s performance will allow you to experience the beauty of *Noh* and that it will further contribute to the cultural exchange between our two countries.

Now, I invite you to enjoy this evening of Noh Theatre.

Thank you very much.