

JAPANESE AMBASSADOR ITO EXCLUSIVELY FOR ADN

"Argjiro" Brings Yamamoto Noh Theater to Tirana

Ambassador Ito's revelations: "During the theater performance and at the workshops that will be organized in the coming days, the Noh masks exhibited were all handcrafted by my late father, who dedicated his entire life to this art, making masks for more than 30 years"



Actor of Yamamoto Noh theatre

BY GENC MLOJA
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The Albanian public opinion will have the opportunity to get acquainted with Noh tradition which is one of the most famous traditional Japanese performing arts being also part of UNESCO heritage. Albanian Daily News has talked with Japanese Ambassador Makoto Ito to learn something more on Yamamoto Noh Theater from Osaka, which will perform at the Cultural Center of Albanian Orthodox church in Tirana on Sunday 6th of October, 2019.

"Noh is one of the most famous traditional Japanese performing arts, that together with Kabuki and Kyogen, consist in traditional music and dance. Noh has a very long history dating back approximately 650 years ago and is officially considered the world's most ancient mask drama that still exists in its original form," said Ambassador Ito. This event, which is part of "Where Europe meets Asia" being the 13th edition of the international Festival the "Musical Encounters between the Two Worlds", has been made possible by the cooperation which started when the French-Albanian Association "Argjiro" contacted the EU Japan Fest representative Mr. Kogi for the first time. The Ambassador was kind enough to share with Albanian Daily News something personal with regard to

Noh which, as he said, is an important part of his legacy as well. Mr. Ito's revelations is the following: "During the theater performance and at the workshops that will be organized in the coming days, the Noh masks exhibited have all been handcrafted by my late father, who dedicated his entire life to this art, making masks for more than 30 years."

"I hope that our Albanian friends will enjoy the excellent Noh performance, and understand a little bit more about the mysterious world of Noh," said Japanese Ambassador Makoto Ito in the interview which follows:

- "Where Europe meets Asia" is the 13th edition of the international Festival the "Musical Encounters between the Two Worlds". How has been made possible this collaboration with Japanese Embassy and the organizer of the Festival to bring the Yamamoto Noh Theater from Osaka to Albania?

- The beginning of the cooperation started when the French-Albanian Association "Argjiro" contacted for the first time the EU Japan Fest representative Mr. Kogi.

Both organizations agreed on the need to bring more aspects of Japan's traditions and culture to Albania, and this led to this Noh performance that

we are organizing on Sunday, 6th of October 2019. I want to thank the staff of "Argjiro" Association for their initiative and hard work, as much of what is being organized is mainly due to their efforts. This year's 13th edition of the "Musical Encounters between Two Worlds Festival" is not only supported by our Embassy but also by the City of Osaka, Japan Foundation and many other Japanese companies.

- The public will see Noh Theater from Japan for the first time in Albania. NOH tradition is part of the intangible heritage of UNESCO. Could you, please, say a few words about the value and importance of NOH theatre and its significance in Japan?

- Noh is one of the most famous traditional Japanese performing arts, that together with Kabuki and Kyogen, consist in traditional music and dance. Noh has a very long history dating back approximately 650 years ago and is officially considered the world's most ancient mask drama that still exists in its original form. Noh embodies as its basis Japan's spiritual and cultural essence, and has been able to cross national borders and appeal to a broader international audience. For this reason, the Noh culture is being carefully preserved in Japan from generation to gen-

eration. In a sense, Noh is an important part of my legacy as well, because during the theater performance and at the workshops that will be organized in the coming days, the Noh masks exhibited were all handcrafted by my late father, who dedicated his entire life to this art, making masks for more than 30 years.

I hope that our Albanian friends will enjoy the excellent Noh performance, and understand a little bit more about the mysterious world of Noh.

- Will you continue with "Cultural diplomacy" by promoting the Japanese culture in Albania? Which is the current level of cooperation at the cultural and educational level among the two countries?

- Cultural diplomacy is one of the main pillars of Japan's diplomatic activities. In Albania the Embassy has been working towards strengthening cooperation with the Albanian respective authorities and introducing the Japanese culture here. This year we started a new scheme of Grant Assistance for Cultural Grassroots Projects aiming to promote cultural cooperation between the two countries. In this frame we brought performers from various fields such as Taiko (Traditional Japanese Drum), when we invited the Munedaiko Group at the Cloud Festival in Tirana and Korca "Japan Culture Day" in May

or classic musicians such as world renowned violinist Ms. Mayu Kishima. Sometimes it is difficult to understand a culture that is different from yours. For this reason it is very important to be able to feel and touch the foreign culture in order to better understand its meaning. Both our countries, Japan and Albania, have a very long history and rich traditions. I am very confident that we can understand each other better through culture. Cultural diversity can be considered as a backbone for the development of a country. In Albania, for example, there is a growing interest in preserving and promoting the Albanian culture and nature, not only as part of your cultural heritage and a source of pride for your people, but also as an asset that can be effectively utilized for tourism, to develop the socio-economic environment of the residents in the surrounding areas.

- Mr. Ambassador, which are your plans for the future?

- I want to introduce not only the traditional aspects of the Japanese culture to Albania, but also the contemporary Japanese culture, as well. I want my Albanian friends to have access to the Japanese pop culture, movies, animations and especially contemporary architecture and literature. Our Embassy has already taken some small steps forward in this aspect, donating Japanese television programs such as documentaries and animations to RTSH, and we are thinking on further extending this type of cooperation with other Albanian televisions. In addition, we are planning to extend the grant for the Albanian cultural institutions.

- How does this help for the people-to-people exchanges despite the geographic distance between Albania and Japan?

- Nowadays, we can communicate with each other and exchange information, opinions and make cultural exchanges almost immediately through the internet, making us think that it is unnecessary to physically visit another country or a different place. However, it is very important to be able to see another country, touch and feel their culture and talk to the people.