

Asian Arts & Culture Program Series



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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WHAT: Awaji Puppet Theater

WHEN: Saturday, February 28, 2009 at 8:00 pm

WHERE: UMass Bowker Auditorium

TICKETS: Fine Arts Center Box Office 545-2511/ 1-800-999-UMAS

“...designated ‘Intangible Folk Asset’ by the Japanese government!”

Join us for a rare concert by the **Awaji Puppet Theater** on **Saturday, February 28 at 8:00** in **Bowker Auditorium** at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. These exquisitely costumed puppets will perform excerpts from classic Japanese drama accompanied by live music on the Samisen (three stringed lute) with recitation and narration in the true Japanese theater tradition. Other items include traditional dances that highlight the incredible skills of the puppeteers. The Asian Arts & Culture Program is proud to present the celebrated artists of the **Awaji Puppet Theater Company** in performance with residency activities. The UMass performance is one of only seven sites on the Awaji Puppet Theater’s North American tour and presents a singular opportunity to see a truly unique Japanese art form! For tickets: Call **1-800-999-UMAS** or **413-545-2511** or online: **fineartscenter.com**.

In Japan, puppets are considered a form of high art that has been enjoyed by adult audiences for hundreds of years. This ancient art form began on the island of Awaji which became renowned for using puppets as a theatrical medium

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used for staging drama. It has a recorded history of over 500 years and was so popular that the Awaji name was synonymous with puppetry. The puppets range from 2 ½ to 4 or 5 feet tall, weigh about 10 – 22 pounds and require 3 puppeteers hooded in black kuroko to work each puppet with both strength and subtlety to move the puppets through the range of delicate emotions expressed in these plays. The three puppeteers become one vital force in the puppet and draw their breath simultaneously, as one breathing life, this enable the soul of the puppet to come to life on the stage. Historically, Puppet artists from the Awaji Island were famous throughout Japan for their ritual expertise. Unlike, other puppetry companies that performed in physical theater structures, the Awaji puppetry artists were traveling troupes. Much like a traveling circus, the Awaji puppet troupes created their performance space wherever they went. Currently, the Awaji Puppet Theater is one of four traditional folk puppet companies in Japan, active year-round.

In their first visit to UMass Amherst, Awaji will entertain audiences with excerpts from famous play **Hidakagawa Iriaizakura** and **The Miracle of Tsubosaka** as well as **Ebisu Dance**. The intricate program highlights the Awaji puppet's elaborate theatre sets and props, and the highly refined mechanisms that manipulate the facial expressions of the puppets along with live music and chanting transporting audiences back in time in Japanese culture. Don't miss this rare opportunity! Performed in Japanese with English subtitles.

Please see our website at: www.fineartscenter.com/asian for additional information including a complete schedule of film screenings, events, locations, times and ticket prices. Tickets available online: www.fineartscenter.com or by calling 1-800-999-UMAS or 413-545-2511.

Downloadable high resolution photos and electronic versions of press releases for performance events are available at: <http://www.umass.edu/fac/asian/press.html>.

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