

Musical Bridges Around the World Presents *Sakura: A Night in Japan & Hawaii*

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By AmberRose Ramos

April 10, 2016. *Sakura* was a performance that brought three of the finest traditional Japanese



Kaoru Watanabe flute in hand, starting off Together Alone; the first song of the performance

musicians together. Sponsored by a number of patrons, the event was free of charge for everyone in attendance at San Fernando Cathedral in downtown San Antonio. The bustling crowd steadily fell silent as Musical Bridges Around the World’s Director of Development Suhail Arastu introduced distinguished guests Kenny Endo, Sumie Kaneko, and Kaoru Watanabe, getting the audience pumped about what was to come. Masters of both the traditional and jazz aspects of music, the three artists were to announce their ties to both Japanese and Hawaiian backgrounds through sound.

Mr. Watanabe, a specialist in the art of fue (or Japanese flute), dazzled the audience with his dramatic entrance. The notes emanating from his flute called for the spectators to obey the melody. As the song carried on Mr. Kendo and Ms. Kaneko joined the conversation with flavors from the koto (a traditional Japanese stringed instrument) and the drum. Promises of a performance full of passion and energy rang through the air while the first song came to a close.

The third piece titled *Yume no Pahu* or **Dream Drum** (Yume being Japanese for dream and Pahu being Hawaiian for drum) welcomed a fusion of Japanese and Hawaiian statements. Through effortless captivation, Mr. Endo’s self-composed song was a booming tale of “a man who dreamt of a strange drum”. Ms. Kaneko then accompanied Mr. Endo and Mr. Watanabe on vocals. Her chords being nothing short of grandiose accurately relayed what the man was going through. The audience then reciprocated their intensity with a standing ovation.



Pictured from left to right: MBAW’s Director of Development Suhail Arastu, Sumie Kaneko, Kenny Endo, Kaoru Watanabe, MBAW’s Artistic Director Anya Grokhovski

The 4th song, also put together by Mr. Endo, is a familiar tune to those who are familiar with the folktale of the heron maiden. A tragic story of forbidden love, Heron Maiden is about a heron



Watanabe and Kaneko during Symmetrical Soundscapes

that was healed by a man and then transformed into a beautiful woman to later marry said man. However, the man was unable to provide for them financially so the maiden wove silk fabric that stemmed from her beautiful silken wings. But the deal was that she could only provide for them so long as the man never looked in on her weaving process. Unable to contain his curiosity, the man went against their agreement and the heron behind the maiden was revealed to him. The heron was then forced to leave her love and rejoin the other herons liker her. The Japanese version of this story, which resulted in the maiden’s disastrous death, was reasonably more dramatic. Endo, Watanabe, and Kaneko mimicked the story in a way that was enough to bring forth shivers down one’s spine.

Freeing the audience from the dark end of the maiden, the 5th piece transported everyone to a merry festival. The mood change caused feet to tap along to the **Symmetrical Soundscapes** of the festival drums.

After the festival was over, Mr. Watanabe talked about the next song that was to be played. Dedicated to his wife, **Shinobu** was a delicately mellow piece singing praise in her honor. Ripples of admiration echoed throughout the hall as the audience was taken on a journey of remembrance.

With all eyes glued to them, the trio decided to end the performance with a bang. Another composition by Mr. Endo, **Spirit Sounds/Miyake** paid tribute to the spirits within Mr. Endo’s drums. He told the audience that the drums made of real wood and cow hide were once living beings and their spirits carried on in an a way through the drums. With a heartfelt respect to their instruments, two of the three maestros (Endo and Watanabe) brought out new appreciation within the group surrounding them. Kenny Endo, Sumie Kaneko, and Kaoru Watanabe: three names that will be remembered by each and every awestruck person that left that night.



Endo setting the tempo for his composition Spirit Sounds/Miyake

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A little about the reporter:
AmberRose is a nature lover who enjoys learning about different cultures and languages. She has been studying Japanese for four years and plans to attend the University of Texas at Austin in the fall where she will major in Environmental Science and Asian Languages. She is currently serving as an intern for the Japan-America Society of San Antonio.