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Bunraku National Puppet Theatre of Japan Comes to Los Angeles

The internationally-acclaimed Bunraku: National Puppet Theatre of Japan, returns to the United States for the first time in nearly two decades with a full-length presentation of two classic masterworks *Oshichi's Burning Love* and *Miracle at the Tsubosaka Kannon Temple*.

The 32-member company of master puppeteers, musicians and narrators offers two dramatic tales of love, passion and devotion with visually spectacular sets, lavish costumes and breathtaking movement. The National Puppet Theatre will offer four performances at the Aratani / Japan America Theatre:

Thursday, October 18	8:00 p.m.
Friday, October 19	8:00 p.m.
Saturday, October 20	2:00 p.m.
Saturday, October 20	8:00 p.m.

In 2003, Bunraku was recognized as a "Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity" by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and is the only full-time, professional repertory puppet troupe in the country.

The tragic nature of love serves as a theme for the two pieces selected for the national tour that will visit Boston, Chicago, Urbana/Champaign, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Datemusume Koi no Higanoko or *Oshichi's Burning Love* was first performed in Osaka in 1773 and recounts the true story of sixteen-year-old Oshichi whose infatuation with a young priest leads her to arson.

The companion piece, *Tsubosaka Kannon Reigenki* or *Miracle at the Tsubosaka Kannon Temple* follows the story of Sawaichi and his devoted wife, Osato. Osato sneaks out of the house early each day to pray to the Goddess of Mercy, Kannon, at the local temple so that her blind husband's sight might be restored. Concerned that he is becoming an excessive

burden, Sawaichi decides to end his life so his wife can have a new beginning. When she realizes what her husband has done, Osato must choose between life and death.

Bunraku is often described as an art of threes, a combination of *joruri* ballad narration, *shamisen* instrumental music and *ningyo tsukai* puppet manipulation. Each of these art forms take years to master; culminating in the intersection of movement, words and music that is Bunraku. The awe inspiring unity achieved by three puppeteers working in unison - one for the right arm and head, one for the left arm and body, and one for the legs - will enchant any audience. Bunraku puppets weigh anywhere from ten to fifty pounds, and are capable of a full range of expressions through the manipulation of their eyes, eyebrows, and mouths, and the graceful movements found in their hands, arms, and legs.

Joruri, or ballad narration sets the scene and emotions of the characters. The narrator, or *tayu*, is responsible for all dialogue, ranging from suggestive whispers to rage, from bass to soprano, from melody to chatter. Upon reaching an emotional or dramatic crescendo the *tayu* may often rise to his knees and gesticulate, displaying the most valued attributes of stamina and expressiveness. Master *tayu* can be responsible for up to fourteen roles in a single scene.

Accompanying the action of the puppets are the notes of the *shamisen*, providing decoration for the words of the *tayu*, establishing atmosphere, and manipulating tension. The *shamisen* is said to add punctuation and italics to the voice of the piece, serving as a musical bridge for the movement of the puppets in pauses of narration.

The 2007 U.S. Tour of Bunraku: The National Puppet Theatre of Japan is made possible through the generous support of the Agency for Cultural Affairs (Bunka-cho), the Kansai Economic Federation (Kankeiren), the Osaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Japan-America Society of Osaka, The Japan Foundation, the United States - Japan Foundation, and Toyota Motor North America, Inc. Significant in-kind support is provided by Japan Airlines and American Airlines.

The Aratani/Japan America Theatre is located in the Little Tokyo district in downtown Los Angeles at 244 S. San Pedro St., Downtown. Convenient parking is available on San Pedro Street or Second Street.

To purchase tickets, or for more information call the Aratani / Japan America Theatre box office at (213) 680-3700 from noon to 5 pm, Monday through Saturday and Sundays only on performance days. Fax orders to (213) 680-1872 or send email inquiries to boxoffice@jaccc.org. For more information visit our website at: www.jaccc.org.

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