



Department  
of Drama &  
Theatre

# The Japanese Nô Stage at Royal Holloway, University of London

Expanding knowledge of Japanese culture in the UK and beyond



ROYAL  
HOLLOWAY  
UNIVERSITY  
OF LONDON

## Royal Holloway's Nô tradition

Royal Holloway's founder, Thomas Holloway (1800-1883), was a self-made multi-millionaire who made his fortune in patent medicines. Since Queen Victoria presided over the grand opening of Royal Holloway on 30 June 1886, the College has continued to grow in size and status to become one of the top research-led institutions in the country. By virtue of its merger with Bedford College in 1985, Royal Holloway is the fifth oldest university in England.

### Why is Nô so important?

Nô is a Japanese traditional performance art, which emerged in the 14th century. It is one of the oldest continuing performance forms in the world.

Designated a form of 'Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity' by UNESCO in 2008, Nô is a unique art in world drama, startlingly poetic, ritualistic, lyrical and refined. Nô plays draw upon classical Japanese literature and poetry to narrate the stories of famous warriors, ghosts, gods and demons.

With a performance aesthetic that references both Shintô and Zen Buddhism, Nô incorporates the deepest aspects of traditional Japanese culture into its art.

Renowned for its restrained aesthetic, Nô is a performance form of great grandeur. Accompanied by highly atmospheric music, Nô actors bring their characters to life with the aid of splendidly decorated masks, costumes and props. The study of Nô has bridged cultures and suggested new possibilities for Western performance.

### The Handa Nô Stage

The Handa Nô Stage, built according to traditional design, was a gift to Royal Holloway in 1991 from the Japan Festival Committee and Mitsubishi Motors Corporation. The handsome exterior decoration of the Nô studio, and extension of the Nô auditorium, was made possible in 1999 by a generous donation from Haruhisa Handa – a Japanese patron of the Arts.



### Drama at Royal Holloway

The Department was established in 1978 and, top-rated for the quality of its teaching and research, is one of the largest Drama departments in the UK.



# The significance of Nô to Royal Holloway

Nô has been taught in the Department of Drama & Theatre at Royal Holloway for more than 30 years.

Our students have the rare opportunity to study the practice of Nô on an authentic stage, which has increased their understanding of drama, and opened their eyes to new theatrical ideas.

In order to better understand Nô, students study the history, religion and aesthetic ideas underpinning Japanese culture. The presence of Nô on the curriculum at Royal Holloway has cultivated a greater understanding of Japanese culture and society amongst its students.



In August 2014, the Nô Training Project UK (NTPUK) – the first annual Nô training programme in Europe – took place at Royal Holloway. Established in 2011, NTPUK is a unique three-week intensive workshop, with daily classes in Nô movement, chant and music. NTPUK participants come from across the UK and Europe to attend, and many return each year to increase their skills.

In 2014, the Nô actor Akira Matsui, designated an Important Intangible Cultural Asset by the Japanese government in 1998, contributes to the teaching of NTPUK for the first time. Royal Holloway has its own Nô group, which meets every two weeks throughout the year to practice performance. Staff, students and members of the public participate.

Through generous donations from private individuals, the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation and The Japan Foundation, we currently hold:

- four performance-quality Nô masks
- two pieces of performance-quality costume
- one performance-quality fan and a number of practice fans.

The library also has a collection of some 150 books in English, and a further 90 books in Japanese.

Dr Poh-Sim Plowright, who dedicated her life to researching Nô, was responsible for bringing the stage to Royal Holloway in 1991. Up until her retirement in 2005, Plowright introduced thousands of British students to this distinctive form of Japanese theatre, offering them unique insights into Japanese culture and its influence on Western performance.

Dr Ashley Thorpe joined the Department of Drama & Theatre in September 2013. He has studied Nô since 1999, and first taught Nô to students at the University of Reading. He established the Nô Training Project UK (NTPUK) at Reading in 2011, the first annual Nô training programme in Europe, led by the Nô Professor Richard Emmert.



# The future of Nô at Royal Holloway

We want to enhance the UK and Europe's understanding of Japanese culture by improving our facilities, and enhancing our collection of Nô materials.

We have three key aims:

- Raise funds for a new building for the Nô stage.  
This will enable the Nô stage itself to be raised to its correct height, and its pitched roof to be extended across the entirety of the stage.
- Establish the Japanese Nô Resource Centre at Royal Holloway in order to increase the understanding of Japanese culture in the UK and in Europe.
- Invest in, and increase access to, our Nô resources.

We need your help.

There are a variety of ways in which you can get involved, ranging from helping us to buy more practice fans and masks, to sponsoring performances and providing the crucial funds required to complete the theatre building.

To thank you for your generous support, we can offer a range of exclusive benefits including membership of one of our wonderful supporters' circles, invitations to special events, shared publicity, bespoke corporate events and even naming rights.

To find out more about the important role you can play in completing and sustaining the only professional Nô theatre in Europe, and contributing to a deeper and ongoing understanding of Japanese culture, please get in touch.

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