

Smithsonian Associates class—Description

Dr. Linda Ehrlich

JAPANESE TRADITIONAL THEATRE

Japanese traditional theatre offers living art forms that stretch back to the 14th century and are still vibrant today. We will look at the masked *Noh* theatre from medieval times, and its accompanying *Kyōgen* comic theatre. Then we'll move on to the Tokugawa/Edo period for an introduction to the boisterous *Kabuki* theatre (with live actors) and *Bunraku* puppet theatre. These theatrical forms are among the oldest continuous performance traditions in the world.

At the close of the class we'll move briefly past traditional theatre to the *Shingeki* (literally “new drama”) forms inspired by Western stage plays, and the *Butoh* dance-theatre form of artists like Tanaka Min, Eiko and Koma, and others.

Expect to see beautiful costumes, evocative masks, and a strong gestural language. Japanese traditional theatre is a living tradition that tells stories which are both distant and familiar. We will discuss the transmission of traditional conventions from generation to generation, as well as examples of innovation and renewal. Japanese traditional theatre has inspired a host of Western artists, including William Butler Yeats, Berthold Brecht, and Julie Taymor, among others.

With Japanese traditional theatre, we enter into a world colored by mythology, history, romance, and spiritual exploration.

Dr. Linda Ehrlich has written extensively about Japanese theatre and film. Her Ph.D. is from the Department of Theatre at the University of Hawaii, with a specialization in Asian theatre and film studies. Her mentor, James Brandon, was one of the founders of the study of Asian Theatre in the West. She has been a guest speaker for Theatre Nohgaku. Dr. Ehrlich has taught at Duke University, Case Western Reserve University, and on two Semester at Sea voyages.