

krannert center
**YOUTH
SERIES**
2013-2014



COLLEGE OF FINE + APPLIED ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

INSIDE

ABOUT MU	2
FOR TEACHERS	2
ACTIVITIES + RESOURCES	3-7

MU

The magical journey of a lonely hero and a Japanese mermaid

WRITTEN BY BRENDA WONG AOKI,
WITH MUSIC BY MARK IZU AND
CHOREOGRAPHY BY KIMI OKADA

TH OCTOBER 4, 2013, 10AM
FR OCTOBER 5, 2013, 10AM
COLWELL PLAYHOUSE
APPROXIMATELY 75 MINUTES

CAMPAIGN FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

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MU

MISAHO & RICHARD BERLIN
MASAKO TAKAYASU IN LOVING
MEMORY OF WAKO TAKAYASU
ANONYMOUS

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Krannert Center
500 S. Goodwin Ave.
Urbana, IL 61801

KrannertCenter.com
217/333-6700
youth.KrannertCenter.com



ON STAGE

Brenda Wong Aoki,
storyteller and performer

Musicians: Mark Izu, Masaru
Koga, Janet Koike, Shoko
Hikage, Yumi Ishihara,
Akira Tana

Dancers: Kai Kane Aoki Izu (KK),
Marina Fukushima (Mermaid),
Dalmacio Payomo, Joseph
Hernandez, and Celine Alwyn-
Parker

THE STORY OF MU

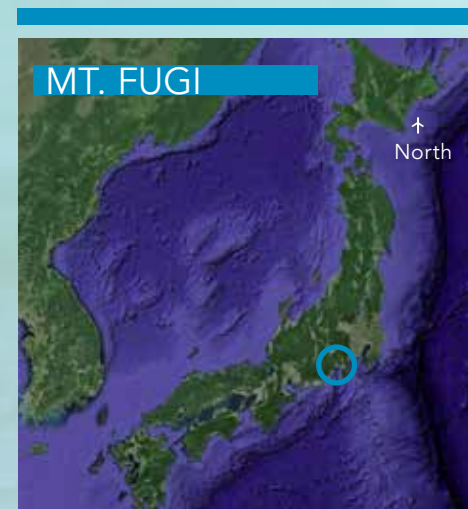
MU is the tale of a lonely young man who is walking along the streets of San Francisco, deep into the music on his mobile device, when he is suddenly pulled into the ocean. He saves a beautiful mermaid and is rewarded with a journey to the Palace of the Dragon Queen at the bottom of the sea. But poison from the Land Above threatens her kingdom and the young man must fight this or the mermaid will die. The young man learns that all is connected—there is only one ocean and one world.

The hero's journey is brought to life by an extraordinary ensemble of dancers and musicians. Music by Mark Izu blends Asian instruments including the sho, shakuhachi, koto, and taiko with the double bass, saxophone, drums, and flute. Izu studied ancient Japanese court instruments for more than thirty years and is known for his inventive blending of Western jazz and Asian instruments. Choreographer Kimi Okada has created a dance-scape that includes hip hop, modern, and Japanese classical movement. Beaver Bauer's costumes bring the story to life against the mysterious underwater pyramids of Yonaguni, Japan, the setting for the music and dance drama.

FOR TEACHERS

Rooted in the traditions of Japanese theatre, MU flourishes in the fertile intersections of many cultures. We hope you and your students will be inspired to explore the multiple points of connection to curriculum areas in the arts, cultural studies, and environmental studies.

**"I WANTED TO DO A WORK
ABOUT THE SEA, ABOUT
TAKING A MOMENT TO SEE
THE MAGIC THAT IS ALL
AROUND US."**



GEOGRAPHY: Japan is an archipelago, do you know what that means? Continue reading to learn more.



THE IDEA FOR MU BEGAN WITH THE WATERS OF MT. FUJI

In 2007, Mark, KK and I were living at the foot of Mt. Fuji while doing research on a U.S.-Japan Creative Artist Fellowship. People would come to visit us bringing empty gallon jugs, sheepishly asking if they could fill them up with our water. We learned later that the water at Mt. Fuji had a reputation for magical and medicinal powers. Those of you who follow my work know that I am fascinated with water, mermaids, and the moon. Even at Mt. Fuji, it was all about the water!

During that same period, on a visit to the Aoki ancestral home, my research assistant got very excited about large, black round stones that

were pitted with age and looked like ancient bowling balls to me. I learned that they were *maru ishi gami* (literally, round stone deities) left perhaps from the Jomon era, symbolizing fertility, protection and the oneness of all living things. That is also about the time that we learned about the stone formations that may be ancient pyramid structures below the waters around Yonaguni Island.

Those waters hold mysteries for me. I have always been fascinated by the tale of Urashima Taro and his journey to the Land of the Dragon King. Legend says that the land of the Dragon King and the sea in that area is called the Dragon's Triangle and has many attributes of the Bermuda Triangle. Drawing on the theme of female power, I have set this work in a place I call the Land of the Dragon Queen.

Finally, like the exquisite spiral of a seashell, my life continues to spiral in cycles. It was my *kanreki* this year; I turned 60 and that is a big deal if you are Japanese. It means that you have completed five cycles of the 12-animal zodiac and are ready to begin a new cycle. Mark, KK and I have been traveling performers for 20 years now—ever since KK was born. Our son is now a young man, going to Stanford. He is beginning his own journey without us. I wanted to do one more piece with our little family and this is happening because our precious artist friends and colleagues have all joined in to help us. I wanted to do a work about the sea, about taking a moment to see the magic that is all around us. I wanted to do a work letting people know that nobody is really lost, and nobody is alone in the world. We just haven't completed the journey. We have forgotten than even a speck of sand is part of the beach, part of the earth, part of the universe. — Brenda

MU INSPIRATIONS

THE MAMMALIAN DIVING REFLEX, which optimizes respiration, is triggered by facial contact with cold water. The human heart rate slows down ten to twenty-five percent, reducing the need for bloodstream oxygen.

JOMON CULTURE (13,000 B.C.E. – 300 B.C.E.) This prehistoric period in Japan is known for having produced some of the world's earliest pottery. Jomon means "cord marks," after the way cords were pressed into the surface of wet clay. "Dogu" are strong, robust humanoid figures made of clay during the Jomon period that may represent goddesses.

MAGATAMA, an ancient bead-like ornament that entered Japan from Korea around the third or fourth century A.D. Its shape has been said to symbolize an animal tusk, connoting good luck in hunting; the Korean diagram representing a woman's womb suggesting fertility; and the Taoist symbol representing the indivisible whole of yin and yang. In *MU* it can also be thought of as the embryo of a mermaid.

KAI is the word in Japanese for "ocean" or "sea" and it is also the name we gave our son Kai Kane, suggested by a shaman in Hawaii when his birth faced complications. KK has grown into a strong dancer and, inexplicably, sea animals have always come to him when we are at the beach.

THE DRAGON KINGDOM in *MU* is imagined to be in the vicinity of the "Ryukyu" islands (nine dragons) independent kingdom, now the Okinawa archipelago. Yonaguni is situated in the waters off Okinawa. The "Dragon's Triangle," also known as the "Devils' Sea," is a Pacific region which is drawn into the tale of *MU*. Ships have been known to disappear

in the area. It is a volcanically active area. Popular legends that date back centuries tell of dragons that lived off the coast of Japan, disrupting its waters.

URASHIMA TARO is an ancient Japanese folktale in which a kind fisherman rescues a turtle and is rewarded with a visit to the underwater palace of the Dragon God. The fisherman stays three days, but when he returns to his home, 300 years have gone by.

GEOGRAPHY: Can you name the four oceans of the earth? Read on to find the answer.



海



GEOGRAPHY: Look on a world map or globe and you'll see the Atlantic, Pacific, Indian, and Arctic Oceans. What happens when you try to find a boundary between one ocean and another?

DIVE INTO THE MUSIC

What is the sound of sea horses waltzing? Of a young hero falling in love with a beautiful mermaid? Of his underwater clash against the cloudy pollutants with an army of red-tipped worms? Unlike the soundtracks of movies, which are ultra real and in which sounds are enhanced so that the effects are scarier and bigger—it doesn't sound real, but you understand what it is—the score for *MU*, written by Emmy-award winning composer Mark Izu, lifts off from his handwritten graphic notation, a melding of his love of jazz and ancient Japanese music, and the live improvisation of musicians who have worked together for years.

"The ensemble performance only happens once," he says. "It's an incredible ensemble of musicians and instruments so we want to use them and let the audience hear these sounds and imagine the ocean. Then you're in an imaginary state all night." Onstage, six musicians play more than a dozen instruments. These include Izu playing the sho, an ancient Japanese court instrument that has 17 pipes and 15 reeds, and requires strong lungs to produce its haunting, atonal notes. The score also calls for three types of Japanese drum, a 13- and 17-string koto, the shakuhachi bamboo flute and four Western instruments: the double bass, trap drums, saxophone and flute. Percussive sounds emit from a thumb piano, a beaded gourd, a Chinese opera gong filled with ball bearings and handcrafted drum mallets which, when rubbed on drums and koto strings, create a sad cry that strikes Izu as the sound of a whale crying. In addition to being an acclaimed performer and composer and the pioneer of Asian Jazz, Izu has devoted more than 30 years to studying the sho and sheng, reed instruments

QUESTION: How do the dance, music, and words work together to tell the story of KK's journey?

"IT IS A RARE OPPORTUNITY TO HEAR SHO MUSIC PLAYED LIVE BECAUSE SO FEW PEOPLE HAVE STUDIED THE INSTRUMENT."



used in gagaku, the Japanese court music tradition that was introduced into Japan from China and Korea in the 7th century.

Izu studied gagaku under Togi Suenobu, a Japanese court musician who began training when he was seven years old. Togi was born into a family that had been part of the gagaku lineage for 1,400 years within Japan's Imperial Household, but he left Japan in order to teach it in the United States, where Izu studied with him from the mid-1970s. It is a rare opportunity to hear sho music played live because so few people have studied the instrument. The fact that Izu melds his mastery of the form with other instruments on a Western stage is doubly special.

The soundscapes of *MU* create ambient moods but also act as voices for characters. An African thumb piano that had been his mother's has untuned keys that make a buzzing sound. "When you hear that instrument, that's the mermaid," he said.

"THE SOUNDSCAPES OF MU CREATE AMBIENT MOODS BUT ALSO ACT AS VOICES FOR CHARACTERS."



"It's her voice. It's not necessarily harmonious and beautiful but it's atonal. It fits the different moods of a mermaid." A sweet love lament is played in a flute and koto arrangement, which evokes a siren's harp. When the young boy is sent to help save the ocean, okero drums that are tightened by rope and carried on the body suggest a martial mission. The conflict between the haves and the have-nots is underlined by the driving rhythm of the large taiko festival drums played by Janet Koike and Yumi Ishihara and punctuated by the polka-like beat that rips from Masaru Koga's alto sax. Voice is another instrument, used as a "human beat box" when Akira Tana makes DJ-like popping sounds with his mouth into the microphone. "It's like a drum machine, but you do it with your voice," Izu says. Virtuoso koto musician Shoko Hikage, who also is trained in Japanese ritual music and folk ballads, does a rap in Akita dialect with Tana's beat box.



GEOGRAPHY: What is an archipelago? Sometimes called an island group or chain, archipelagoes such as Japan are a cluster or collection of islands. Most archipelagoes are made of oceanic islands, formed by volcanoes erupting from the ocean floor. Usually it takes millions of years for the passive lava flows to rise above the surface of the ocean. Until then these formations are called seamounts.



ONE WORLD, ONE OCEAN

In *MU*, KK has to help fight human pollution in order to save the undersea world. Listed here are three different kinds of pollution caused by human activity. Choose one of these problems to investigate—find out the story of how the pollution came to be, and what we can do to clean it up. When you have your information, share it with your classmates in conversation, make a poster, or perform your own theatrical work to tell the story.

The Great Pacific Garbage Patch is a swirling mass of just that—garbage—caught in ocean currents with nowhere to go. Colorful bits of plastic often fool sea animals into thinking a tasty meal is near, but instead these bits often make animals ill. See how one artist in Oregon brought her community together to transform beach garbage into sculptures with a powerful message about our oceans. <http://ocean.si.edu/washed-ashore-beach-trash-ocean-art>

The deepest point on our planet is located in the Pacific Ocean, in the Mariana Trench, seven miles beneath sea level.

The longest mountain range on earth lies 8,000 feet beneath the surface of the Atlantic Ocean.

One of the largest creatures on the planet, the Blue Whale, feeds on one of the smallest: krill.

Have you heard of the Dead Zone? It's an area in the Gulf of Mexico where few creatures can survive due to a lack of oxygen. The ocean may seem far away from central Illinois, but take another look and you'll find we're a lot closer than you think. Find out what connects all of us in Illinois to the Gulf of Mexico.

In May of 2011 a massive earthquake and tsunami destroyed many communities along the eastern coast of Japan. The Fukushima Prefecture was especially hard-hit with a nuclear power plant disaster when emergency systems were knocked out by the tsunami. More than two years later contaminated radioactive groundwater is now heading toward the Pacific Ocean.

Want to find out more? Head to <http://education.nationalgeographic.com> for a vast collection of stories, images, games, videos and more about the interconnected life on our planet.

Explore the ocean depths through Google Earth Ocean: <http://www.google.com/earth/explore/showcase/ocean.html>

Get the inside scoop on the science of ocean exploration with the Ocean Explorer web site hosted by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration: <http://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov>.



LOCAL CONNECTIONS



KRANNERT ART MUSEUM

Expand your students' exposure to Japanese culture through the special collections of the Giertz Education Center: *Japanese Culture: as seen through Ukiyo-e*. The traveling exhibition showcases seventeen *Ukiyo-e* (screen paintings and woodblock prints from the Edo period), along with posters, books, and other hands-on resources. The exhibition is available for elementary and middle school educators striving to immerse students in several aspects of Japanese culture. Explore Jomon pottery in the Tea Ceremony & Ceramics kit, traditional instruments and theatre in the Performing Arts kit, or learn about ikebana, origami, or calligraphy.

Teachers may borrow individual units of the exhibition, or they can request it for a five-week period. Reservations are taken up to one-year in advance. For more information contact Virginia Erickson, Giertz Education Center Coordinator at verickso@illinois.edu or by phone at (217) 333-8218. Search the collection online through <http://kam.illinois.edu/education/giertz.html>.

JAPAN HOUSE



Immerse yourself in Japanese culture at the Japan House Fall Open House on Saturday, September 21st from 10am-4pm. Presentations and tours are free and open to all.

At 11am and 2pm, learn about Sashiko, the Japanese quilting practice that dates back to the 17th century. The history of this fabric art, traditional Japanese patterns, and examples uniting this Japanese style with the American quilting tradition will be explored. You can also enjoy the beauty of the gardens with a tour by Jim Bier, the designer, donor and caretaker of the Japan House gardens at 1:00 pm and 3:00 pm. <http://japanhouse.art.illinois.edu>.

THE URBANA FREE LIBRARY



Krannert Center has partnered with the Urbana Free Library to help expand your students' Youth Series experience. The Urbana Free Library has placed materials that relate to MU on display, and librarians are prepared to help your students immerse themselves in the wide-ranging subject areas that are covered by the production. These resources will be available approximately two weeks before through two weeks following the performance.

The Urbana Free Library is located at 210 West Green Street in Urbana, directly west of Lincoln Square Village. Hours of operation: Monday-Thursday 9am-9pm; Friday-Saturday 9am-6pm; Sunday 1pm-5pm.

Don't forget that you can always visit the library online: <http://www.urbanafreelibrary.org>.

THE CHAMPAIGN PUBLIC LIBRARY



The Champaign Public Library has joined with Krannert Center to augment your students' Youth Series experience. On a visit to the library, you will find materials that relate to MU on display, and staff members will be ready to assist you and your students with the diverse subject areas they will encounter through the production. These resources will be available approximately two weeks before through two weeks following the performance.

Hours of operation: Monday-Friday 9am-9pm; Saturday 9am-6pm; Sunday 1pm-6pm. <http://champaign.org>