

The Asian Arts & Culture Program at UMass Amherst Fine Arts Center

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WHAT: Japanese Shomyo Buddhist Chants & Shirabyoshi Songs
WHEN: Tuesday, September 23
TIME: 7:30 p.m.
WHERE: Bowker Auditorium, UMass Amherst

"The experience of transcending music through the human voice" Shomyo chanter Sakurai, Makiko

The Asian Arts & Culture Program at UMass Fine Arts Center is delighted to host the multi-faceted musician and singer Makiko Sakurai from Japan in concert and residency activities in the Five Colleges. Ms. Sakurai will present a concert of her adaptations of the Japanese **Shomyo** Buddhist chants as well as perform ancient songs known as **Shirabyoshi** on September 23rd at 7:30PM at Bowker Auditorium. General Admission tickets are available through the box office by calling 1-800-999-UMAS or 413-545-2115 or online at: fineartscenter.com.

As a songwriter, a vocalist of the Tendai Ohara chanting and a singer of Shirabyoshi ancient songs, Sakurai has studied Shomyo chanting (Heian period 781-1192 AD) associated with the Tendai sect of Buddhism and the Ryu-teki (a flute used in Gagaku orchestra) from master Sukeyasu Shiba over a long period of time. She is a music graduate of Osaka University of Arts, where she majored in piano and composition receiving her masters from the Tokyo College of Music.

One of the oldest living forms of vocal music, **shomyo** is believed to have originated in India before traveling along the Silk Road and eventually entering Japan in the 6th century, where it has been practiced ever since. The act of chanting **shomyo** was introduced as a method of salvation, an ascetic practice to be performed by believers themselves. Shomyo is broken into two styles of which- *Ryokyoku* sutra chants are difficult to understand while the *Rikkyoku* chants are easy to remember and understand. The latter style allowed for the development of the musical compositions by repeating the sutra text phrases, adding a melody and tempo. Sakurai has adapted **shomyo** for contemporary settings in collaboration with Japanese composers Mamoru Fujieda and Ayuo and her vocals appear on two of their CDs "The Night Chant" and "Izutsu,".

Shirabyōshi songs based on Buddhist prayers were usually slow and rhythmic, with deep meaning to the words. ***Shirabyoshi*** dancers of the Imperial court during Japan's Heian period (12th century) wore a man's attire- complete with a tall hat, red robes and a sword and painted their face white. They sang for nobility and at Imperial court ceremonies accompanied by drum and the flute. Their songs also included poems of nature to convey meanings of circumstances in their lives.

Ms. Sakurai is not only a master of traditional Japanese music genre but has been adventurous in her study of world music from Jewish to Peruvian to the music of the Native Americans. She has also performed works for American composers, Peter Garland and Carl Stone.

Presented in collaboration with Smith College East Asia program & UMass Amherst
Department of Asian Languages and Literatures

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