



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

**CONTACT:** Sue McFarland, 413-577-2486 ([aacp@acad.umass.edu](mailto:aacp@acad.umass.edu))  
**WHAT:** **RAKUGO: Comical Tales from Japan with storyteller Motoko & musician Masayo Ishigure on Koto and Shamisen**  
**WHEN:** Wednesday, October 7  
**TIME:** 7:30 PM  
**WHERE:** Bowker Auditorium

*Rakugo: Comical Tales from Japan*, featuring Japanese storyteller Motoko and musician Masayo Ishigure on the koto and shamisen, visits the **University of Massachusetts Amherst Bowker Auditorium on Wednesday, October 7, with a 7:30 p.m.** curtain time. Reserved tickets start at \$20 & Five College students and Youth (seventeen and under) are only \$10. Tickets can be purchased online at [fineartscenter.com](http://fineartscenter.com) or by calling the Fine Arts Center box office at 1-800-999-UMAS or 413-545-2511. The box office is open Monday through Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Two acclaimed Japanese women performers join forces to offer an evening filled with music, humor, charm, and elegance. Award-winning storyteller Motoko shares hilarious and poignant tales from Rakugo, a Japanese storytelling tradition that originated in the late 17th century in the Kamigata region (Kyoto and Osaka) and Edo (present day Tokyo). Her accompanist, musical virtuoso Masayo Ishigure plays the three-stringed shamisen and koto. They will be joined by guest performer Elizabeth Reian Bennett, on the shakuhachi, a Japanese flute.

Clad in kimono and armed only with a fan and a hand towel as props, Rakugo entertainers performed solo and regaled townsfolk in the streets, banquet rooms, salons, and little theaters (yose) of Japan. Their tales were about everyday lives of the Edo-period (1603-1868), when samurai warriors, merchants, priests, farmers, and laborers populated the cities in a relative harmony. Most Rakugo tales end with “ochi”, a verbal or physical gag that brings the audience back to reality in satisfied laughter.

Motoko grew up in Osaka, Japan, listening to Kamigata Rakugo of Katsura Beicho (1925-2015) and Katsura Shijaku (1939-1999). A graduate of the International Christian University in Tokyo. Since 1993, Motoko has performed storytelling and mime professionally in schools, libraries, museums, universities and festivals across the U.S. She has appeared on the PBS series *Mr. Roger’s Neighborhood* and in 2003 toured Miyazaki, Japan, as part of the CarnegieKids Project, sponsored by Carnegie Hall.

Musician Masayo Ishigure began playing the koto and jiuta shamisen at the age of five in Gifu, Japan, and has created an extensive multi-faceted career that continues to stretch the limits of the

koto while maintaining a strong grasp of the tradition. Ms. Ishigure has performed at Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall-Weill Recital Hall, BAM, and Symphony Space. She has been a guest artist with the symphony orchestras of San Diego, New Haven, Seattle and Hartford. In 2005, Ms. Ishigure was a recording artist alongside Yitzhak Perlman and Yo-Yo Ma on the Grammy Award-Winning soundtrack by John Williams from the movie *Memoirs of a Geisha*. Elizabeth Reian Bennett is the first woman to play professionally as a Grand Master of the shakuhachi, the Japanese flute.

**The Fine Arts Center's Asian Arts & Culture Program is sponsored by the Pioneer Valley Hotel Group. Event sponsors are Berkshire Gas and the Massachusetts Cultural Council.**

**High resolution images are available at: <https://fac.umass.edu/Online/PressImages>  
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