

A JCTEA initiative for the collaborative Taishu Engeki performance
with Kaishi Professional University (Niigata) interns

Reported by:

Japan Culture and Taishu Engeki Association
(General incorporated association)

■ Outline

Furumachi Engeijo Hall, a JCTEA member theatre (Chuo-ku, Niigata-shi), has been taking an initiative to provide opportunities for local university interns to experience theatrical performances in order to increase awareness of Taishu Engeki (Japanese pop theatre) and support regional revitalisation and community development. In December 2022, a Taishu Engeki performance was staged at Furumachi Engeijo Hall in collaboration with interns from Kaishi Professional University*.

■ Details

A Taishu Engeki collaborative performance with Kaishi Professional University (Niigata) interns: 'Meiwa Gijin-den (the story of a righteous man of the Meiwa era)'.

- Date: Sunday, 18 December 2022
- Venue: Furumachi Engeijo Hall
(Hall Manager: Tomoya Isumi, 6-967-2, Furumachi-dori, Chuo-ku, Niigata-shi, Niigata Prefecture)
- Participants: 6 interns (second-and-third-year Business Innovation Department students, Kaishi Professional University* (Niigata))
- Period: 25 September 2022 - 24 January 2023

* Kaishi Professional University:

<https://kaishi-pu.ac.jp/>

Opened in April 2022.

A vocational university headquartered in Niigata-shi.

Composed of Business Innovation Department, Information Department and Anime and Manga Department.

Approximately 300 students.



■ Background

As of 25 September, 2022, Furumachi Engeijo Hall, a Taishu Engeki theatre in Niigata-shi, Niigata Prefecture, had accepted six interns from Kaishi Professional University, a vocational university in Niigata. The Hall Manager, Tomoya Henmi, planned to organise a Taishu Engeki performance with interns in December and took action to carry out the plan. In preparing this Taishu Engeki performance with the interns, the Hall Manager wanted to produce a play related to the history of Niigata. The Niigata Meiwa Riot**, which took place during the Edo period, was chosen as the play.



■ The Production Process of the Play 'Meiwa Gijin-den':

None of the six intern students was familiar with the Niigata Meiwa Riot, so they started with historical research. The students gathered information via the Internet and other sources and, with the advice of the Hall Manager, compiled and deepened their understanding of the details and background of the Niigata Meiwa Riot.

** Niigata Meiwa Riot

In 1768, the townspeople resisted the clan administration in Niigata-machi, Echigo Province (current Niigata-shi, Niigata Prefecture), and managed to hold self-government for two months. The revolt was in response to the imprisonment of Tohshiro Wakui, a local merchant, who had helped the townspeople by arranging to indefinitely postpone the tax payment imposed by the Nagaoka clan's feudal load. The Nagaoka clan requested Tohshiro to turn himself in in exchange for rice. Upon this request, Tohshiro reported himself to the clan office and was imprisoned and punished by beheading. (Source: Wikipedia)

The script was written by Kazunori Watanabe, an active scriptwriter and director. The interns submitted a summary of their research on the Niigata Meiwa Riot and had discussions with Mr. Watanabe online. During the session, Mr. Watanabe asked the

students what they wanted to convey and what would happen if they shared the facts and their interpretation. The students deepened their thinking about the essence of communication of historical facts and the 'Niigata Meiwa Riot' through theatre. After two sessions with the students, Mr. Watanabe began working on the script, which was completed around mid-November.

© Interns' Comments

Our Experiences as Interns at the Furumachi Engeijo Hall:

'I was unsure as to how many young people might enjoy Taishu Engeki. But when I actually saw the stage, surprisingly the latest popular songs were used, and the plays included jokes and humour. It was completely different to how I imagined it would be. (21-year-old third year student)

'I used to think that Taishu Engeki was similar to Kabuki. But when I first saw it, I found it refreshing and interesting. It made a big impression on me. (20-year-old second year student)

'I've always been interested in the entertainment industry and applied for the Furumachi Engeijo Hall internship. I was worried because I was not good at either Chinese nor Japanese classic language, but when I saw the performance, I could understand enough through the expressions on the actors' faces, even if I couldn't understand the words. I felt it was not just for the old people, but for young people like ourselves. (20-year-old second year student)

'Initially I had the impression that it was not for the young audience. But after having seen it, I realised that I was wrong. It was jam packed with songs familiar to young people, lots of dancing and laughter! I got a different impression now. (20-year-old second year student)

'It was more interesting than I expected. It is great to see such a good performance for around 2,000 yen. I found it interesting to see how the sound was combined to enhance the scene. (20-year-old second year student)

Regarding the Production of the Play 'Meiwa Gijin-den':

'This was the first time I had heard about the Niigata Meiwa Riot. We researched the history on the internet, summarised the plot and submitted it to the scriptwriter, Mr. Watanabe. In response, he taught us invaluable things by asking us what it was that we wanted to convey and what our messages to the audience were. Since it was the first time we were involved in scriptwriting, it was difficult. (21-year-old third year student)

'I had heard about the Meiwa Riot, but this was the first time I learned the details. Mr. Watanabe, the scriptwriter, said it would be good to create originality. To create a more realistic effect, we discussed that it would be better to spend more time for the scenes in which the townspeople went to help Tohshiro. (20-year-old second year student)

'The scriptwriter, Watanabe challenged us by asking, "What messages do you want to communicate?" "What effects would you anticipate by telling those messages?". Sometimes we were unable to answer his questions. That's when we realised that we had not thought about it sufficiently. (20-year-old second year student)

■ 'Meiwa Gijin-den (the story of a righteous man of the Meiwa era)'

(Taishu Engeki performance at Furumachi Engeijo Hall on 18 December 2022)

- Special Guests: Tatsuya Kotonno, Hideo Umenoi
- Backstage Support: Ohga-za
- Written by Kazunori Watanabe

Cast:

Tohshiro Wakui:	Yohjiro Mitsuya
Sajibe'e Iwafune-ya:	Tatsuya Kotonno

Tasuke:	Ryotaro Kazami
No'emon Goga:	Kyosuke Hayashi
Ichibe'e Yagi-ya:	Nishiki Ryu
Oka'emon Imaizumi:	Hideo Umenoi
Chube'e Ishigaki:	Haruma Mitsuya
Tadakiyo Makino:	Kakeru Mitsuya

Special Appearance:

■ Tatsuya Kotono

Tatsuya is one of the popular Co-Leaders of the Hitomi Gekidan troupe.

The other Co-Leader is his elder brother, Kohtaro Hitomi.

■ Ohga-za

Ohga-za troupe's history can be traced back to the Mitsuya Gekidan troupe, formerly known as the Tokiwa Gekidan troupe established in the 1940s by the founder, Yohnosuke Tokiwa. In August 2022, Ryotaro Kazami of the Kazami Gekidan troupe joined to share the leadership with the then-leader, Yohjiro Mitsuya. To mark the occasion of having the dual leadership, the troupe was re-named as Ohga-za. Ohga-za's debut performance was at Yasuragi-no-yu Kawara-za Hall, Yasuda hot spring, Niigata Prefecture. The two Co-Leaders stand in exquisite contrast to each other and this unique combination is said to be the secret of their popularity.

[Leaflet](#) ↓↓

Shinpu Project Innovation #3

Sunday 18 December 2022

A Taishu Engeki Collaborative Performance with Kaishi Professional University (Niigata) Interns

A Play Entitled: 'Meiwa Gijin-den (the story of a righteous man of the Meiwa era)'

Written by Kazunori Watanabe

- The play will be followed by a dance show.



新風PROJECT革新 #3

12月18日(日)
新潟開志専門職大学インターン生と作る
大衆演劇公演

お芝居「明和義人伝」 脚本：渡辺和徳

※お芝居のあとに舞踊ショーがあります
 ※新潟市立白山小学校の生徒の有志の皆様が
 木遣りのパフォーマンスを披露予定(昼の部のみ)

特別出演 古都乃竜也・梅乃井秀男 **下座**：鳳翔座

公演時間
昼の部 12:00～15:00 (開場 11:00～)
夜の部 17:30～20:30 (開場 16:30～)

料金	大人(予約・座席料込)	2,000円
	小人(4歳～小学生/予約・座席料込)	1,000円
	ショー割(座席料込)	1,100円
	学生割(座席料込/受付にて身分証・学生証を提示)	1,100円
	前売り券(予約・座席料込)	1,900円

12/18(日)
 11:00～17:00
ミニ縁日開催

席ご予約 025-201-8201
 問い合わせ (受付時間 10時～18時)

古町演芸場 新潟県新潟市中央区古町通6-967-2

- Volunteers from Niigata Municipal Hakusan primary school pupils will perform 'Kiyari (workmen's chant for transporting a timber load)'. (Matinee only)

Special appearance actors: Tatsuya Kotono, Hideo Umenoi

Backstage support: Ohga-za

Matinee: 12:00 - 15:00 (open 11:00)

Soiree: 17:30 - 20:30 (open 16:30)

- Reserved seat for an adult: JPY2,000
- Reserved seat for a child (4 years old to primary school students): JPY1,000
- Discount ticket for a dance show only: JPY1,100

- Discount ticket for a student (Please present your student ID when you enter.):
JPY1,100

- Pre-sale: JPY1,900

Furumachi Engeijo Hall

6-967-2, Furumachi-dori, Chuo-ku, Niigata-shi

Phone: 0250201-8201

11:00 - 17:00: Mini fair (Fair stalls will be organised.)

■ Publicity Activities

While the interns produced the script, they also carried out publicity activities. Initially, they created a dedicated website and conducted web promotion activities using Twitter. Since they had already studied website creation and promotional initiatives within their university curriculum, this became a good opportunity to put their knowledge to practical use.

The website created by interns (<https://sites.google.com/view/meiwagijin/>)

Twitter 'Shinpu Project Innovation' (https://twitter.com/shinpu_project)

On the other hand, as for the non-internet promotion activities, interns planned to include the use of the community bulletin board (operated by Niigata City) to target a wide range of age groups of local residents. However, when they asked the relevant section of Niigata City government, it was found that the use of the bulletin board was restricted for events that would not generate revenue, and they had to abandon the idea. Despite their efforts to find other ways, they ended up running out of time.

The duration of time available to them was two and a half months, starting from 25 September 2022 until the performance date. Since they had limited time available to attend to practicalities, it became extremely challenging to do enough promotion within the time constraint.

■ On the Day of the Performance



'Today's performance: A play, "Meiwa Gijin-den", accompanied by a fair with food and game stalls. Please join us.'

It was snowing on the day of the performance, and despite the bitter cold weather, the interns stood in front of the theatre and called out to the passersby. 210 heat pads with handwritten messages by the interns were prepared and given out to each visitor, who was guided to be seated inside by the interns.



In the morning, about 50 people watched the play, 'Meiwa Gijin-den' at the Furumachi Engeijo Hall. There was another stage in the evening and a total of more than 100 people enjoyed the play.



© Audience Reaction

'I was glad to watch the play about local history. It was good to learn more about "Meiwa Gijin".' (45-year-old female)

'I was deeply moved by the play and thought that Niigata's current development was thanks to the dedication of great local people in the past. I hope that many people will see the play.' (44-year-old male)



■ Initiatives to Involve the Local Community

As for the special performance in collaboration with the interns, measures were taken to involve the local community to increase awareness of Taishu Engeki and the Furumachi Engeijo Hall.

© 'Kiyari (workmen's chant for transporting a timber load)' Performed by Niigata Municipal Hakusan Primary School Pupils



In order to involve the local community for the performance of the play, 'Meiwa Gijin-den' (based on the local history), a 'Kiyari' performance was given by pupils of a local primary school.

Kiyari has been performed at local festivals since the ancient times. Members of the Furumachi Hachiban-gumi unit, a local voluntary group, visited local primary schools to teach the tradition to future generations as part of their comprehensive learning programme. In order to celebrate the first performance of 'Meiwa Gijin-den' at the Furumachi Engeijo Hall, pupils from Hakusan primary school performed the 'Kiyari'.



© Mini Fair and Oden (fishcake and vegetable hotpot) Stalls



At the mini fair, there were game stalls including, 'target shootin' and 'ring toss' stalls.

The prizes, equipment and information pop-ups were prepared to set up the stalls. Although there was not much pedestrian traffic due to the bad weather, families with small children stopped by the stalls and enjoyed themselves. Pupils from Hakusan primary school and their families also enjoyed the mini fair.



Oden (fishcake and vegetable hotpot) stalls were also held by a local izakaya (Japanese-style pub). A piece of Oden was offered only at 10 yen. The event was a great success, with almost all of the 50 servings prepared for the event sold out.

■ Summary

Through this performance, the local interns participated in the production and the research of a new play about the Niigata Meiwa Disturbances. This was a valuable opportunity not only for the participating students, but also for us at the Japan Culture and Taishu Engeki Association. The production of a Taishu Engeki play on the theme of local history and the great people of Niigata meant a lot, not only in promoting Taishu Engeki, but also as an initiative to pass on the local history and culture to future generations. Here are some of the delightful comments by the interns: 'I was able to learn about history and people I did not know', 'I had an impression that Taishu Engeki was too classical and difficult, but I was surprised by the many modern performances' and 'I want to share Taishu Engeki with my friends'.

On the other hand, the preparation period was too short and this can be improved in future. None of the interns had ever seen a Taishu Engeki performance before. It would have been better if more time could be spent on teaching them the history of Taishu Engeki and the theatrical production processes so that they could have fully appreciated the magic of Taishu Engeki. Due to the time constraints, the students were unable to carry out sufficient promotional activities. As a result, they mainly advertised on the website. However, it was necessary to conduct additional publicity activities by actually visiting relevant places and taking necessary actions in order to reach various people of different ages who had never seen Taishu Engeki.

■ Future Perspectives

The special performance of this 'Meiwa Gijin-den' was given at Niigata Prefectural Hall in July 2023. In August, we were also seeking to get involved with the Meiwa Gijin festival sponsored by the Meiwa Gijin festival committee. In addition, we plan to stage other theatrical productions of great historical figures who were active in Niigata and produce them as the Niigata's historical figures series with the involvement of university interns and local residents. The experience from this Taishu Engeki performances created with the local interns will be utilised to further develop Taishu Engeki and contribute to society by passing on historical and cultural heritage.