



Okada Toshiki's New Noh

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Aula Magna Silvio Trentin, Ca' Dolfin

Speaker: Prof. M. Cody Poulton

Moderator: Katja Centonze

Abstract

"The stage is a place where ghosts can be seen" (Okada Toshiki, *Ground and Floor*)

Arguably the most important Japanese playwright and director on the international stage today, Okada Toshiki (b. 1973) rose to fame with the Kishida Kunio drama award-winning *Five Days in March* in March in 2005. His book *The End of the Special Time We Were Allowed* (*Watashitachi ni yurusareta tokubetsu na jikan no owari*), which included a fictionalized version of *Five Days in March*, won the Ōe Kenzaburō Prize in 2008. Other literary prizes have followed, including The Yomiuri Drama Prize in 2021 and the Mishima Yukio Prize in 2022. He has been active in both Germany and the US staging new work since 2006.

The Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami in 2011 profoundly affected his creative work, beginning with *Current Location* (Genzaichi, 2012), *Ground and Floor* (2013), and *Time's Journey Through a Room* (2016). All works are haunted by the spirits of the dead. Okada's debt to nō dramaturgy was made explicit with

Nō Theater, a production of two new plays he premiered with the Münchner Kammerspiel in 2018. More recently he has followed up with four new plays, *Zaha* and *Tsuruga*, which premiered in 2021, and *Sango* and *Maruyama-chō* (2026). These were presented in a series called *Unrequited Ghosts and Monsters* (*Miren no yūrei to kaibutsu*). This year he also published a modern Japanese translation of Zeami's classic treatises on nō, *Fūshikaden* and *Sandō*.

I will focus on the last four plays in particular, tracing his evolution as a playwright and how the dramaturgy of the nō theatre is a means for playwrights to articulate the meaning of disaster and loss.

M. Cody Poulton

Professor Emeritus at the University of Victoria, Canada, Cody Poulton is currently Resident Director of the Kyoto Consortium for Japanese Studies. Poulton specializes in Japanese performance and is author of numerous studies on and translations of Japanese

theatre. He has also translated kabuki and contemporary Japanese drama for such multivolume series as *Kabuki Plays on Stage* and *Half a Century of Japanese Theater*. He is co-editor with Mitsuya Mori and J. Thomas Rimer of *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Japanese Drama* (2014) and served as contributing editor to *The Cambridge History of Japanese Theatre* (2015). He is editor and chief translator of *Citizens of Tokyo: Six Plays*, by Oriza Hirata (Seagull Press, 2019) and co-editor (with Peter Eckersall, Barbara Geilhorn, and Andreas Regelsberger) of *Okada Toshiki and Japanese Theatre* (Performance Research Books, 2021). His most recent publications are a translation of a play by Betsuyaku Minoru in *Asian Theatre Journal* (Spring, 2025) and two short stories by Izumi Kyōka in *Japanese Language and Literature* (Spring 2026).

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