



PRESS RELEASE

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78TH NISEI WEEK JAPANESE FESTIVAL ONDO AND CLOSING CEREMONY ON SUNDAY, AUGUST 19

(Los Angeles – July 15, 2018) – The Nisei Week Japanese Festival celebrates its 78th year being held from August 11-19. As tradition goes, the nine day festival will conclude with the Ondo and Closing Ceremony on Sunday, August 19. The public is welcome to come enjoy the live entertainment and participate in the Ondo “traditional Japanese street dancing”, followed by the Closing Ceremony. This event will begin at 4 p.m. and is held on 1st Street, between San Pedro Street and Central Avenue. The public dance practice schedule can be found on NiseiWeek.org. Questions should be directed to Miles Hamada at 323.620.0662 or mileshamada@yahoo.com.

The 2018 Nisei Week choreographer is Madame Fujima Kansuma. Madame Fujima Kansuma was born Sumako Hamaguchi in San Francisco in 1918. When she was three years old, her family moved to Los Angeles. She began her dance training at the age of nine and was soon actively performing starring roles in a local 15-member girls’ kabuki group.

Upon graduating high school, her passion for this traditional Japanese performance art continued to grow, so she traveled to Japan and enrolled in the foremost kabuki acting school of the legendary Onoe Kikugoro VI. For five years she studied acting, dancing, shamisen, tea ceremony, flower arrangement, and narimono (percussion instruments).

Since kabuki includes dancing as well as acting, the late Onoe Kikugoro VI sent her to renowned kabuki dancer and choreographer Fujima Kanjuro VI. Determined to succeed, she survived the rigors of training, overcoming obstacles including discrimination for being born in America. Finally in 1938, Fujima Kanjuro VI bestowed upon her the professional name of Fujima Kansuma and she was granted permission by the legendary Kikugoro VI to dance his renowned “Kagami Jishi” (Mirror Lion Dance), an honor and privilege given only to exceptional students.

She then returned home to the United States, but just as she opened her first dance studio, her life and career were disrupted by WWII. With the bombing of Pearl Harbor, she and her parents were taken to Arkansas and put in one of the many Japanese American internment camps. There, with only a kimono, fan, and a single recording of Japanese music, she attempted to bring light and joy to a dark and dismal situation. Later, camp authorities allowed Madame Kansuma to travel to other camps to perform and teach Japanese dance. To this day, many can still recall her performances of “Urashima” and “Tange Sazen.”

After the war, Kansuma returned to Los Angeles and resumed her dancing and teaching career, beginning to do more choreography for a westernized audience. She has taught countless women how to dance; 46 of them have received their natori, meaning that they have been granted their professional name. Her troupe has performed at

high-profile events such as the 1984 Summer Olympics and the Rose Parade, as well as such venues as the Disney Concert Hall, Music Center, and Hollywood Bowl.

Her work to educate and build bridges between two cultures and two nations has been recognized by both the Japanese and American governments. In 1985, the government of Japan awarded Madame Kansuma the Order of the Precious Crown, Apricot in recognition for her work in enhancing the appreciation of Japanese culture in the U.S. The National Endowment for the Arts also deemed her a National Heritage Fellow for the Arts in 1987, honoring her as a master traditional artist and recognizing her lifetime achievements and contributions to the nation's traditional arts heritage. In 2004, she was given the Japanese American National Museum's Cultural Ambassador Award for her devotion and commitment to the art of Japanese classical dance.

Celebrating 100 this year, she continues to teach and choreograph, and remains very active. Her passion and devotion to her art has no bounds and it is her dream that her legacy be kept alive and continued for generations to come.

The 2018 Nisei Week Japanese Festival is a nine-day event first held in 1934, and is recognized today as one of the longest running ethnic festivals in the United States. Celebrating its 78th anniversary, the festival will take place in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo district from August 11-19. For a calendar of events, log on to NiseiWeek.org, call the Nisei Week Foundation office at 213.687.7193 or email info@niseiweek.org. The Nisei Week office is located at 244 South San Pedro Street, Suite 303, Los Angeles, CA 90012.

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The Nisei Week Foundation is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) charitable organization.