

Celebration of 50 years of koto music by Shirley Kazuyo Muramoto

at Kaiser Center Lakeside Theater in Oakland, Sunday, March 20th @ 4pm
300 Lakeside Drive, Oakland, CA 94612 Parking available in Kaiser Center Garage
Tickets: General \$15.00 Seniors and Students \$10.00 at www.skrnkoto.com & at the Door



Oakland native Shirley Kazuyo Muramoto has been playing and performing koto, a traditional Japanese 13-stringed zither, for more than 50 years.

To celebrate this milestone, koto players from Japan, Canada and the U.S. will join other musicians, Muramoto, her students and friends in an unusual celebration March 20, 2011.

The roster of distinguished artists includes Shigeo Tachibana, shakuhachi master from Chiba, Japan; and Linda Kako Caplan, Canada's premiere koto master. This unprecedented event also brings together masters from three of Japan's koto traditions: Shoko Hikage (Sawai School), Tamie Kooyenga (Todo School) and Michiyo Koga (Miyagi School). A joint performance by koto masters from different traditional koto schools rarely occurs in Japan, because of social decorum and koto's traditional rules.

The concert will also be a reunion for musicians who played in Muramoto's Murasaki Ensemble some 20 years ago. They include Lita Kazuho Buttolph (now of Portland, Ore.), Carol Kasumi Takao (Tempe, Ariz.), Melinda Kazumari Nakagawa (Marina, Calif.), and Michelle Kazuakimi Suwabe (San Diego and San Mateo, Calif.). Murasaki Ensemble alums will join current members of the ensemble -- Jeff Massanari, Matt Eakle, Vince Delgado, and Alex Baum.

Muramoto has been instrumental in keeping alive a musical tradition with roots in the U.S. concentration camps of World War II. Her mother learned the koto as a young girl, while interned at Topaz camp (in Utah) from teacher Haruko Suwada, and at Tule Lake (in California) from Mitsuko Sanemitsu Oda. Beginning at age five, Muramoto learned koto from her mother, who ran a koto school with as many as 70 private students at its peak. Muramoto assisted in the school recitals -- and achieved her own teaching "Shihan" credentials in 1976, with Yushusho honors, from the Chikushi Kai in Fukuoka, Japan.

Over the past half century, Muramoto has been privileged to work with and perform with many great musicians, artists and celebrities. She has taught hundreds of students and has trained new teachers, among them her son Brian Mitsuhiro Wong and Felicia Kazuo Bock. Both recently passed their teaching exams with special honors.

While continuing to teach and perform, Muramoto has been researching the story of traditional Japanese artists of the American concentration camps. As she notes, the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 -- which extended an apology and granted reparations to Japanese Americans incarcerated by the federal government during World War II -- led to an outpouring of research about the internment. Muramoto was surprised to discover, however, that there was little documentation of the role of traditional Japanese arts (such as ikebana, Kabuki theater, and koto) in the camps, or of the artists who kept Japanese culture alive in the campus, despite potential accusations that these activities proved their disloyalty to the U.S. Muramoto has been conducting interviews and collecting artifacts of that era, hoping to shed light on an important and little-known aspect of the internment. Each selection performed at the March 20 concert will represent an important juncture in Muramoto's musical journey. In the process, she hopes to honor the teachers who came before her, sharing their knowledge and expertise. She also hopes that the celebration concert will help nurture the continuance of this musical and cultural legacy by her students, new teachers, and colleagues.