

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**MEDIA INQUIRIES**

Patsy Brown  
713-963-0121  
pybrown@jas-hou.org



JAPAN  
AMERICA  
SOCIETY OF  
HOUSTON

## CELEBRATE AAPI HERITAGE MONTH WITH THE INDIGENOUS SOUNDS OF JAPAN'S AINU PEOPLE

HOUSTON, TX (April 2022) – Join the Japan-America Society of Houston (JASH) in a celebration of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month through the Texas debut of **OKI: Music of the Ainu** at **Miller Outdoor Theatre** on **May 4, 2022** from **8:15 PM**.



**Oki Kano**, known professionally as **OKI**, is an Ainu musician leading efforts to preserve the endangered sounds of Japan's northernmost indigenous people.

Born to a Japanese mother and an Ainu father, OKI has recovered and recreated traditional music on the *tonkori*, a stringed instrument of the Ainu people of Karafuto (a region also known as Sakhalin). The rich, reverberating twang of the *tonkori* strings, which are traditionally made from deer tendons, allowed Ainu shamans to communicate with spirits that control the wind, rain and other natural phenomena called *kamuy*.

[Photo credit: © Maciej Komorowski]

Currently, OKI is the most prominent performer of this instrument in the world. His contemporary approach, which fuses Reggae, African and Electronica with Ainu folk melodies, has won praise not only in Japan, but also worldwide. Through his active participation in the **United Nations' Working Group on Indigenous Populations** (WGIP), OKI has developed a network with other indigenous artists. He has collaborated so far with well-known Native American Flutist R. Carlos Nakai, Australian Aboriginal band Waak Waak Jungi, Taiwanese singer-songwriter Pau-Dull (Chien-Nien), as well as East Timorese poet Abe Barreto Soares, and Siberian vocalist Olga Letykai Csonka.

OKI and his band members perform frequently in Japan and have been featured in folk music and world festivals across the globe. OKI was touted as the breakout sensation of the 2005 WOMAD festival in the UK, where the group also appeared with the highly regarded British broadcaster Charlie Gillett live on BBC London. Also of note, OKI is featured in the film *Ainu Mosir* (2020), currently streaming on Netflix.

In his Texas debut, OKI will perform solo pieces as well as contemporary works from the new album *Tonkori in the Moonlight*, which [The Guardian](#) has lauded is “a collection that gives [Ainu] people’s endangered ancient sound a modern lease of life – with dub, harmony and dazzling percussion.”

[continued]

jas-hou.org  
2990 Richmond Avenue  
Suite 670  
Houston, TX 77098

713.963.0121

All performances at Miller Outdoor Theatre are FREE. Seating in the covered area of the theatre requires an assigned ticket. Assigned tickets will be available for reservation at [milleroutdoortheatre.com](http://milleroutdoortheatre.com) starting May 3 from 10:00 AM.



JAPAN  
AMERICA  
SOCIETY OF  
HOUSTON

“Japan-America Society of Houston takes pride in our ability to provide authentic encounters with Japan, and the Texas debut of *OKI: Music of the Ainu* is a reaffirmation of our commitment to the sharing of Japanese traditions, both old and new,” said Laird Doran, JASH President. “This performance not only pays tribute to the indigenous people of Japan and generations of Ainu who have enriched human history, it serves as a reminder of what Japan Festival Houston has to offer and is a preview of things to come in 2023.”

JASH Executive Director Patsy Brown shared, “We are thrilled to be back in Hermann Park sharing the diversity of Japanese culture particularly at a time when hosting Japan Festival remains a challenge. While restrictions continue to limit travel between Japan and the U.S., the opportunity to present the distinct music of Hokkaido’s indigenous people allows Japan-America Society of Houston to resume our annual celebration of the rich cultural heritage of Japan.”

The North American tour of *OKI: Music of the Ainu* is produced and organized by **Japan Society**, New York, and is supported by the **Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan** through the **Japan Arts Council**. Moreover, the Houston performance of *OKI: Music of the Ainu* is sponsored in part by the City of Houston through the Miller Theatre Advisory Board.

For print-ready high-resolution images, to request press tickets, or to arrange for an interview with Oki Kano, contact Japan-America Society of Houston Executive Director Patsy Brown at 713.963.0121 or by email at [pybrown@jas-hou.org](mailto:pybrown@jas-hou.org).

###

### **About Japan-America Society of Houston**

Japan America Society of Houston (JASH) is the leading organization that connects Houston’s diverse community, local businesses, and individuals to advance the mutual interest of American and Japanese peoples. Our programs in language and education, arts and culture, and business initiatives and networking provide opportunities for collaboration and important people-to-people exchange. Visit [jas-hou.org](http://jas-hou.org) for more information, or follow JASH on Facebook ([JapanAmericaHouston](https://www.facebook.com/JapanAmericaHouston)), Instagram ([@JapanAmericaHouston](https://www.instagram.com/JapanAmericaHouston)) and Twitter ([@JASHouston](https://twitter.com/JASHouston)).

### **About Japan Society**

Japan Society (JS) is the premier organization connecting Japanese arts, culture, business, and society with audiences in NYC and around the world. In over 100 years of work, we’ve inspired generations by establishing ourselves as pioneers in supporting international exchanges in arts and culture, business and policy, as well as education between Japan and the U.S. This year, Japan Society is celebrating our heritage through the 50th anniversary of our landmark building, designed by the late architect Junzo Yoshimura, with the launch of a new distinct modern logo and visual identity. Visit [japansociety.org](http://japansociety.org) for more information, or follow JS on Facebook ([JapanSociety](https://www.facebook.com/JapanSociety)), Instagram ([@japansociety](https://www.instagram.com/japansociety)) and Twitter ([@japansociety](https://twitter.com/japansociety)).

[jas-hou.org](http://jas-hou.org)  
2990 Richmond Avenue  
Suite 670  
Houston, TX 77098

713.963.0121