

# ETH-NOH-TEC

## Asia FantAsia

**Art Form:** Theatre/Performance Art  
**Style:** Fusion of Traditional & Modern  
**Culture:** Asian and Asian-American

### MEET THE ARTIST:

**Robert Kikuchi-Yngojo** weaves Asian music, dance and storytelling into a delightful style of entertainment that has charmed audiences throughout the United States. A musician as well as a storyteller, he pioneered the teaching and performing of traditional Filipino Kulintang gong music and dance in Northern California. He has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts' folk arts program, the California Arts Council and the Zellerbach Family Fund. He recently wrote the music for "Still Looking," a film on the work of Janet Adler, and co-wrote music for Felicia Lowe's film, "Carved in Silence." Other film scores include Wayne Wang's "Chan is Missing" and "Eat a Bowl of Tea." Currently, Kikuchi-Yngojo co-directs *Eth-Noh-Tec Creations*, a non-profit arts organization specializing in Asian-American cultural and educational performances. Pieces geared for children include: Japanese Jamboree, Kids Love Kulintang (Filipino), Bamboo Jambo (Southeast Asia and India) and Asian Treasure Bag (Chinese and Korean).

### ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

Storyteller Robert Kikuchi-Yngojo of **Eth-Noh-Tec** delights his audience with folk tales and myths from Asia: Korea, Japan, China, Tibet and other cultures. In *Asia FantAsia* the artist weaves a variety of traditional tales with music and theatre, embellishing the plots with the musical lyricism of a bamboo flute. He brings mythical and folk characters to life with animated facial and physical gestures. His use of timing, elements of surprise and audience participation create a joyful rapport that intrigues both students and teachers as they join in this exploration of Asian and Asian-American stories and culture.



### PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

**The Fusion** of the physical aspects of the stylized dance and movement theatre of Asian cultures features largely in the storytelling style of Robert Kikuchi-Yngojo. The inclusion of music and dance, the extensive use of hand and facial gestures, and body postures with low centers of gravity were particularly inspired by three specific forms of Asian drama: Chinese Opera, Japanese Theatre and Balinese Dance. **Chinese Opera** was created about 1260 from the tales of storytellers, and featured the lives of common people. The traditional style offers specific character types (the hero, the lover, the villain) who tell and often sing their stories. **Japanese Theatre** comes in many different forms, most of them characterized by the fusion of dramatic, musical and dance elements. The music, dance, settings, costumes and acting styles are strongly stylized and offered few realistic qualities. **Balinese Dance**, from the island of Bali in southern Indonesia, includes elaborate dance dramas as well as dances intended solely to display the exquisite grace of movement that characterizes this art form. Slow in tempo, the dancers move with a low center of gravity, staying close to the ground. The graceful arm and hand movements are very important to the look and meaning of the dances. Over 1000 years old, the dances of Bali are strongly linked to both the communal and spiritual life of the people.

The Stories presented by Kikuchi-Yngojo come from Asia, a vast continent that is the largest in the world. It contains topography that stretches from the world's highest mountain (Mt. Everest), to the lowest point on earth (the Dead Sea). The climate is as diverse as the topography, ranging from rain forest to desert to frozen tundra and tropical beaches. This diversity is carried over into the people and countries of Asia, whose myriad cultures provide a rich repository of ethnic stories, music and customs. The stories that spring from these many countries and cultures reflect not only the rich heritage they came from, but also the shared wisdom that is common to all mankind.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Ask students to answer the following questions: What did they see? Did they learn something new? What did they enjoy most? Why?
- How many different performance methods did Robert Kikuchi-Yngojo use to tell the stories? (Voice, music, movement, dance and dialogue.) Discuss which manner of 'telling' would be the way that you would tell a story.
- Were any of the stories familiar? Were any of the characters similar to characters from stories the students already know?
- Select a story from the performance and decide what could stay the same and what would need to change if it were set in a different location (e.g., moving from a desert to a mountain region.)
- Stories are often used to teach lessons. Select one story from the performance and discuss the lesson(s) that story presented. Name some other stories that "teach" a lesson to the listener.

## FRAMEWORK FOCUS - LANGUAGE ARTS:

Language and word usage are not stagnant, but continually evolve over time. This allows each new generation to develop their own unique ways of sharing ideas and expressing themselves to others. Often, younger generations will develop new definitions for existing language.

Use the following words to help students examine how the meanings of words they may use have changed over time. Ask them to write their own definitions for each word. Then ask them to look up the actual definitions and compare the original meaning or meanings of the word to how they use it. If possible, have them try to imagine why certain words gained new definitions.

awesome      bad      chill      cool  
gross      hip      hot      intense

What other words have multiple meanings for different generations? Are there variations of the above words that students use now in a new way (i.e., 'hottie')?

Legend:

- 🌀 Artistic perception
- ❖ Creative expression
- ▶ Historical & cultural context
- ⇒ Aesthetic valuing
- \* Connections, Relations, Applications

## ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

- ⇒ Ask students to illustrate their favorite part of the performance, recalling costume pieces, props and characters. Have them share their drawing with the class and explain what they particularly liked about that part of the performance. A group or pair of students can also create a series of pictures that, when put together in sequence, shows all events of one specific tale they saw.
- ❖ Ask students to make a chart with four categories: the titles of familiar stories, the settings in which they take place, a main character or the types of people in the story (woodsmen, princesses, fishermen, etc.) and an important object (the basket of goodies from Little Red Riding Hood, or the glass slipper from Cinderella). In small groups, let students select one item from each of the four categories and try to create a new story. Let the groups share their new stories with the class.
- 🌀 Discuss with students the different ways that theatre, dance/movement and music can be used to tell stories. Help them discuss the following statements:



**Dance** can tell a story by sharing feelings and showing pictures using movement.

**Theatre** tells stories by using spoken words and stage pictures.

**Music** tells a story by using sound and the listener's imagination.

- ▶ When cultures and customs blend together, new ideas, relationships and societies are created. Ask students to imagine what would happen if their school society blended with an entirely new group of students - say, from another planet. How would they communicate with them? What kind of adjustments would students need to make?

## SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

Devine, Elizabeth. *The Travelers Guide to Asian Customs and Manners*. St. Martin's Press, New York, N.Y., 1996.

Uchida, Yoshiko. *The Dancing Kettle and other Japanese Folk Tales*. Creative Arts Books, Berkeley, CA, 1986.