

THEATRE & DANCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I AT MĀNOA HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS



1910s and 1920s

The first record of a play produced at the College of Hawaii was in 1913 with a production of *The Revolving Wedge*. Before 1930 theatre activities consisted of one-act plays, skits and one or two full-length productions by the campus dramatic club, Theta Alpha Phi.

In 1924 and again in 1925 Japanese-American students staged *The Faithful* by John Masefield, an English-language version of the famous *Chushingura* story, one of the only English translations of Japanese drama available at the time. The production used Kabuki costumes and settings and toured to the Big Island.

1930s

Farrington Hall opened on December 12, 1930, with a production of Philip Barry's *Holiday*, directed by Arthur Wyman. Farrington Hall had a seating capacity of 469.

In 1930 under the direction of Professor Arthur Wyman, known to his students as "Doc" Wyman, the first full theatre season was presented in the newly built Farrington Hall. Members of Theta Alpha Phi formed the nucleus of the group, formed as the Theatre Guild in May of 1931.

During the 1930s the Theatre Guild's seasons consisted of four plays - one "haole" play, a Japanese play, a Chinese play, and a Hawaiian Pageant.

Names that appear in the programs from the 1930s include Tadao Beppu, Masato Doi, Carol Fukunaga, Kenji Goto, "Sparky" Matsunaga, Katsuso Miho, Howard Miyake, Albert Miyasato, and Shunzo Sakamaki.

1940s

Dr. Earle Ernst arrived at the University in 1940 as part of the English Department. At that time there were one or two theatre courses and a small production program.

With the advent of World War II all University production stopped. During the war years, Maurice Evans and the Theatre Section of the Army Special Services presented about 100 productions in Farrington Hall.

Dr. Ernst was trained in Japanese language and sent to Japan during the Occupation as a censor for the theatre. He returned to the University with a first-hand knowledge of Kabuki theatre.

In March 1946 Farrington Hall was returned to the Theatre Guild and was revitalized under the direction of Joel Trapido.

After the war, theatre courses and production work were reorganized, enlarged and placed in the newly established Speech Department.

The first significant post-war Japanese play *The Defeated* by Miyata received its first production outside of Japan in a production directed by Dr. Ernst.

The second American production of Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan* was directed by Dr. Ernst in the 1948-49 season.

1950s

Speech and Theatre decided to split into two separate disciplines and in December 1950 the Board of Regents established the Department of Drama and Theatre, now offering BA and MA degrees. Courses which had since the 1930s been offered under Speech or English came under the new Department's domain. The faculty consisted of two full-time professors, Dr. Earle Ernst, Joel Trapido; one half-time professor, Lucie Bentley (who was also half-time in the Speech Department); and one graduate assistant Edward Langhans.

In 1950 New York's Theatre Guild objects to UH's use of their name. In 1951 the name was changed to Theatre Group.

In 1951 the Theatre Group performed *The House Of Sugawara*. This production was the first English-language production to utilize both Japanese staging techniques and Kabuki vocal and movement stylization. Dr. Ernst directed the play and provided the translation along with Albert Miyasato. Dr. Ernst was assisted by Onoe Kikunobu and Kenzo Tsujita in Kabuki choreography, music, and costume. The well-known Kabuki actor Onoe Kuroemon came from Japan to provide technical and artistic assistance.

Dr. Ernst directed *Benton Kozo* in 1953, newly translated by Yukuo Uyehara, a professor in Asian languages, and adapted by Dr. Ernst.

In 1957 *The Iceman Cometh* by Eugene O'Neill was designated as the University's 50th Anniversary production.

In the fall of 1959 the Department began its Great Plays Cycle - a plan to produce eight plays of special significance over a four-year period after which the cycle would be repeated. The plays in the cycle were *Oedipus Rex*, *Lysistrata*, *Everyman*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Tartuffe*, *Hedda Gabler*, and *The Cherry Orchard*. The Great Plays Cycle continued through the 1966-67 season.

Farrington Hall steadily deteriorated. Dr. Ernst convinced the administration that a new facility is needed, and in 1959 the proposed auditorium in the East-West Center complex became a "theatre" facility that would be available to the Department of Drama and Theatre.

1960s

On November 27, 1963, the East-West Theatre was renamed the John F. Kennedy Theatre in tribute to the slain President.

Kennedy Theatre officially opened on December 4, 1963, with a stunning performance of the Kabuki play, *Benten the Thief*.

Benten the Thief, *Hamlet*, and *The Man Who Came to Dinner* were the three plays that inaugurated the theatre in 1963. *Of Thee I Sing* had originally been scheduled, but the musical was cancelled on the death of President Kennedy. It was performed in the 1964-65 season.

Arnold Moss was a guest artist in the 1965-66 season playing the lead in Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

Richard Mason joined the Department of Drama and Theatre faculty as the resident set designer.

The University Dance Theatre made its debut appearance on the Kennedy Theatre stage during the 1966-67 season; Carl Wolz was the head of the Dance Program at this time.

Bette Midler appeared in several plays during the first two seasons in Kennedy Theatre, including *The Typist and the Tiger* and *Of Thee I Sing*.

Georgia Engel, later to gain national prominence as Georgette in "The Mary Tyler Moore Show," appeared on stage in 1966 and 1967 in such classics as *Camelot*, *Tartuffe*, *Mary Stuart*, and *The Crucible*.

Local personalities appearing in the first decade were Dave Donnelly, Dick Fair, Wallace Chappel (later the director of the Honolulu Theatre for Youth), Edna Lee Leib, Edward Sakamoto, Joyce Maltby, Edward Langhans, Loyal Garner, Peter Lawrence, and Patricia Herman.

1970s

Timothy Dalton appeared as a guest artist in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in the 1970-71 season directed by Terence Knapp; Paul Winfield and Cyril Cusak appeared in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, directed by Glenn Cannon.

James Brandon joined the Department of Drama faculty in the 1969-70 season and directed the Kabuki play, *Sukeroku: Flower of Edo*, with Matagoro Nakamura serving as Artistic Adviser.

Visiting Professor Daniel Yang directed the Beijing Opera *Black Dragon Residence* in 1970-71 season. It was a regional winner at that year's American College Theatre Festival and then went to the finals at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D. C.

Dr. Earle Ernst retired from the Department in June 1972 and was replaced by internationally-known scholar Dr. Bernard Dukore who served as chair from 1972 to 1975. Dr. Edward Langhans then served as chair from 1976 until 1985.

Narukami the Thundergod, starring James Grant Benton as Narukami, was produced in the 1972-73 season; Matagoro Nakamura was the guest director and choreographer.

Edward Payson Call guest directed Strindberg's *A Dream Play* in the 1973-74 season.

The Scarlet Princess of Edo by Namboku toured the neighbor islands and also was a winning production at the American College Theatre Festival in 1975.

Kumu Kahua presented the premiere of Aldyth Morris' *Damien*, originally a five-person play, in the Kennedy Lab Theatre. Morris reworked the idea into a one-man drama that starred Terence Knapp in 1975-76 and again in the 1976-77 season on the Kennedy Theatre mainstage. This version, also starring Knapp, was made into an award-winning Public Television special by KHET.

The English language premiere of Chikamatsu's classic *The Forty-Seven Samurai* was directed by faculty member James Brandon in 1979 and went on a six-week tour across the mainland, ending at Harvard University.

Other Asian theatre productions included the sanskrit play *The Vision of Vasavadatta* in 1974 and the Beijing Opera *The White Snake* in 1975.

University Dance Theatre produced the full-length ballets *Swan Lake* (1970-71) with guest artists Bruce Marks and Toni Lander, and *Coppelia* (1972-73) with guest artists Noriko and Ko Kobayashi. Also produced are *The Firebird* (1976-77), *Peter and the Wolf* (1973-74), and *Les Sylphides* (1974-75).

Local performers of note to appear on stage in the 1970s are Lee Stetson (later to found the Hawaii Performing Arts Company, now known as the Manoa Valley Theatre), Earll Kingston, James Grant Benton, Ed Kaahea, Elizabeth Wichmann, David Johnson, Paul Cravath, Peter Lawrence, David Furumoto, Bill Fiddler, Kathy Paulo, Katy Kuroda, Buz Tennant, Cecilia Fordham, and Terence Knapp.

1980s

The Subscription List was produced in 1981, a Kabuki Dance-Drama starring David Furumoto.

In 1985, Elizabeth Wichmann, the first American performer to appear in a Beijing Opera in China, directed *The Phoenix Returns to Its Nest*. *Phoenix* was revived in the summer of 1986 and went on a historic tour of mainland China.

Narukami the Thundergod was revived in the 1986-87 season.

The World Premiere of Edward Sakamoto's *Manoa Valley* in the 1981-82 season was seen by record audiences and received considerable acclaim.

In 1984-85, Kennedy Theatre underwent its first major renovation and was dark for the entire Fall Semester, reopening in the Spring with *The Phoenix Returns to Its Nest* and three comedies in repertory -- *What the Butler Saw*, *Ah, Wilderness!*, and *Right You Are! If You Think You Are*.

The Grand Kabuki presented *A Messenger of Love in Yamato (Koi Bikyaku Yamato Orai)* with Nakamura Senjaku in the summer of 1988.

In the Fall of 1988, the twenty-five-year-old lighting board and dimmers were replaced with a then state-of-the-art computerized lighting system.

Faculty member Dennis Carroll directed a production of Aeschylus' complete *Oresteia* in 1989. The five-and-one-half-hour production of the famous trilogy was one of the few complete productions ever to be done at a university theatre.

Spring 1989 featured a Noh and Kyogen training program and production. Noh Master Nomura Shiro and Kyogen Master Nomura Mansaku trained students and directed productions of two Kyogen plays and a classic Noh drama, *Matsuzake* (The Pining Wind). The Kyogen plays, *Tricked by a Rhythm* and *Buaku the Bold* were performed by UH Manoa students at the National Noh Theatre in Tokyo in December 1989.

Noted children's theatre author Aurand Harris wrote a new play for the Kennedy Theatre 1989-90 season, titled *Monkey Magic*. The production was directed by Tamara Hunt, Director of the Children's Theatre program since 1974.

Faculty member Elizabeth Wichmann translated and directed her second Beijing Opera production, *Yu Tangchun--The Jade Hall of Spring*. Training was provided by three master artists from the Jiangzu Province Beijing Opera Company. This production was invited to tour Mainland China in July 1991.

1990s

Once Upon One Time by Lisa Matsumoto, an MFA student at the time, debuted on the mainstage in the 1991-92 season. Its local-style humor was wildly popular and the second part of what was to become a trilogy debuted at Kennedy in 1992-93.

Matsumoto's *How the B52 Cockroach Learned to Fly* (originally called *Das How Come*) premiered at Kennedy Theatre in 1995-96.

The 1992-93 season saw the debut of the Late Night Theatre season in the Lab Theatre with performances beginning no earlier than 10:30pm.

Edward Sakamoto's *Our Hearts Were Touched with Fire* about the 442nd Regimental Combat Team and the 100th Battalion premiered in the November 1994 season.

In August 1995 the Kennedy LAB Theatre was renamed the Earle Ernst Lab Theatre in honor of the Dr. Earle Ernst, who died in the summer of 1994. Ernst was a co-founder of the Department of Theatre and Dance, serving on the faculty from 1940 to 1972. He also served as chair of the Department from 1950 to 1972.

Nijinsky's landmark 1912 *L'Après-Midi d'un Faune (Afternoon of a Faun)* was recreated at the 1998 Annual Dance concert. The students are also invited to perform the piece with the Honolulu Symphony Orchestra as part of the Masterworks series. In 1999 acclaimed Japanese choreographer Kei Takei does a residency that results in performance of her piece *Time Diary*.

2000s

Kirstin Pauka joined the Asian Theatre faculty in 1997 and produced the first ever English language production of an Indonesian Randai, *Umbuik Mudo and the Magic Flute* in 2001.

Dennis Carroll directed the full length *Faust* by Goethe in 2001, which went on in spite of a faculty strike which crippled campus in the Spring semester.

The theatre was closed in the summer of 2003 for extensive ADA renovations.

James Brandon retires after directing his last Kabuki production, *The Summer Festival: A Mirror of Osaka* in 2000. He is replaced by Julie A. Iezzi who brought Kyogen masters to train UH students for her first production in 2003.

In the summer of 2005 the theatre's 42-year-old rigging system was replaced. A side effect of the renovation was an infestation of mold that forced the closure of the theatre in the Fall of 2005 and the cancellation of the first production of the season.

Terence Knapp retired in 2005 and is replaced by Paul Mitri, who directs his first Shakespeare play at UHM, *As You Like It* in 2007.