



## Yanagiya Tozaburo Introduces 'Rakugo' to the World

Tozaburo Yanagiya, 42, is a storyteller with a drive to spread the word on rakugo, a traditional form of Japanese comic storytelling. If you ask him, the only way he could do so would be to make the leap from Japan to New York.

Intent on bringing full-fledged rakugo to America he moved to New York, where he now performs rakugo in earnest. In the meantime he applied for an artist's visa (O-1) with strict requirements designed for individuals with extraordinary talent in areas such as fine arts or film. The Sankei Shimbun and JAPAN Forward recently caught up with him to talk about what it's like to be the first from the rakugo world to take on this challenge.

### Popular with Children

In April 1999, Tozaburo was accepted as an apprentice to rakugo master Yanagiya Gontaro. In 2014, he was promoted to the highest rank of storyteller. His talent and spot-on delivery won him the Arts Festival Newcomer Award in Popular Entertainment, as his popularity as a young artist in the field grew.

To further his longtime interest in American culture, Tozaburo decided to study English on Cebu Island in the Philippines. "I was interested in stand-up comedy and I really wanted to do it in English," he explained.

He said he sees himself as someone who "always does things in excess." Therefore, it should have been no surprise when he set off for America in October 2018.

Freeloading off American friends as he went, he took it upon himself to organize his own tour, doing 50 performances at venues including American universities.

He translated and performed "The Zoo," a story often performed on stages in Japan. Tozaburo found the story was well-received from the first time he told it in English.

"No matter where I tell it, it's a hit. I've never experienced a deafening silence," he told us confidently. He tells his stories from the stage, watching the reactions of the audience. In this regard, his performances in America are no different from those in Japan.

Explaining his decision to take his work to America, he said: "When I think about whether to do something or not, I try to intuitively turn my thoughts into actions. That way I never regret missing a moment of opportunity."

And he's very popular among children as a Japanese comedian. "When my shows finish, the children love to come up on stage."

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## Touring America

When his mentor, the rakugo master Yanagiya Gontaro, heard about Tozaburo's activities, he was happy for him. Tozaburo said, "At first I was worried he would try to stop me, but he loves adventures too."

Having tasted success at the beginning of his American adventure, Tozaburo says he intends to do more rakugo performances in English from here on. He also wants to perform for local Japanese residents.

"Kabuki, sumo, and sushi are all commonplace in America now. Rakugo is still unknown, and I want to change that."

What is it like to perform rakugo in America? Tozaburo told us, "It's no different from what I do in Japan," but in a huge country like the U.S., just getting from place to place is draining. "I now understand how hard it is for major leaguers," he said, lamenting time differences even within the same country.

Nevertheless, with his kimono, mohsen performance "rug," and his zabuton cushion crammed into a backpack, Tozaburo can perform his rakugo anywhere. He says he practices even on his airplane trips.

## Turning His Gaze to the World Map

Except for three days one time in Miami, Tozaburo says he's never felt homesick. He cooks for himself and doesn't find it a hardship.

He's also interested to see how his rakugo has changed due to living in America. "Performing the story 'The Mind's Eye' the other day, I surprised myself with a greater intensity in the emotional swings of the story, and my gestures were more animated. I suppose people in Japan might find my art a bit less refined," he said, laughing.

What of the future? "I'm not sure how much I'll be able to accomplish in just three years, but I might stay five years, and after that I might be doing rakugo in Europe or Africa," he said.

Tozaburo sees a world map of opportunities ahead of him. But, for now, his dream is to "perform rakugo in all 50 American states."

Source: **Yanagiya Tozaburo Introduces 'Rakugo' to the World**  
<http://japan-forward.com/yanagiya-tozaburo-introduces-rakugo-to-the-world/>

## 世界に「ラクゴ」伝える 柳家東三楼、芸術ビザ取得へ

世界に「落語」を広めたいと、日本を飛び出して米国で活動を始めたのが柳家東三楼（とうざぶろう）（42）。現在、一時帰国して、芸術、映画などで優れた才能を持つ人に発行され、厳しい条件があるアーティストビザ（O-1）を申請。取得後にニューヨークに移住して、本格的に米国で落語を行うことになる。落語界では初めての挑戦という。東三楼に話を聞いた。（地方部 松垣透）

### 子供たちにも人気

東三楼は、平成11年4月に、柳家権太楼（ごんたろう）に入門した。26年に真打ちに昇進。芸術祭大衆芸能部門新人賞を受賞するなど、実力や端正な口跡（こうせき）が評判の若手として活躍していた。

東三楼はもともと、米国のカルチャーに興味を持っていたので、英語を学ぼうと、フィリピンのセブ島で学んだ。

「スタンダップコメディーに興味があり、どうしても英語でやりたかった」と話す。

「やりすぎる性格」というのも、自身の分析だ。

昨年10月に、米国に乗り込んだ。米国の知人などの家に居候しながら、自分の力だけで予定を組んで、米国の大学をはじめ、50公演を行った。

日本でもよく高座にかけられる「動物園」という噺を自分で英語に翻訳して披露している。米国で初めて英語で落語をやったときから受けた。

「どこに行っても受ける。シーンとなったことは一度もない」と、自信を持つ。高座からお客さんの様子を見ながら噺（はなし）を進める。それも日本での高座と同じだという。

「やるかどうか。直感的に、思ったことをやる。あの時にやるときゃよかったということがないように」と、米国での活動を決めた。

ジャパニーズコメディアンとして、子供からも受けた。「終わったら、子供たちが喜んで舞台上がってくる」

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## 全米を飛び回る

そうした東三楼の様子を聞いた師匠の柳家権太楼も、東三楼の挑戦を喜んでくれたという。

「最初は止められそうで怖かったが、師匠も冒険が大好きだから」

今後はさらに英語での落語の数を増やす。

地元の日本人に向けても落語会を開く。

「歌舞伎、相撲、すしは、もう米国では一般的。落語は、まだ知られていない。米国に R A K U G O (落語) を広めたい」

既に米国で4月のスケジュールも入っている。

「日本にいるときと、やることは変わらない」というが、広い米国で、移動だけでも大変だ。「大リーガーのつらさが分かる」と、米国内での時差にも悩まされる。バックパックに、着物、毛氈（もうせん）から座布団までを詰めて、どこでも落語を披露する。落語の稽古も飛行機の中だ。

## 視線の先は世界地図

これまで一度だけ、マイアミで「これがホームシックかな」と、3日間だけ感じたという。食事でも自炊をして、苦労じゃないという。

米国での生活が続き、自身の落語がどう変わったのかも興味深い。

「先日、『心眼』をやったときに、感情の起伏が激しくなっていて、自分でも驚いたが、身ぶり手ぶりが大きくなっていた。日本では粋な芸じゃないと言われるかな」と笑う。

「3年では結果が出ないかもしれないが、5年いて、その後、ヨーロッパかアフリカで落語をやっているかもしれない」と、東三楼の視線の先には世界地図が広がっている。

「50州全部で落語をやりたい」と、東三楼は夢を語る。

出典:世界に「ラクゴ」伝える 柳家東三楼、芸術ビザ取得へ  
<https://www.sankei.com/premium/news/190309/prm1903090003-n1.html>