

## Japanese Comedian Ken Shimura Dies of COVID-19 Infection

Japanese slapstick comedian, Ken Shimura, veteran in the entertainment industry, died of an illness caused by the novel coronavirus COVID-19 on Sunday March 29, his agency reported. The icon of Japanese comedy was beloved by Japanese of all ages. Shimura was 70 years old.

Shimura was transferred to a Tokyo area hospital earlier in the month on March 20 after experiencing symptoms on March 17. His agency confirmed on March 25 that Shimura had been infected with the contagious coronavirus, and four days later, his death was confirmed on the evening of March 29.

Shimura was set to appear in the NHK morning drama series Yell (2020) for the first time, and was scheduled to feature in the film Kinema no Kamisama (キネマの神様, roughly translated as Cinema God, by Shochiku, 2020), directed by Yoji Yamada, a movie which was set to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the foundation of film production and distribution company Shochiku Co. Ltd. Filming was supposed to start in April.

Ken Shimura – whose real first name was Yasunori – was born in Higashimurayama City, Tokyo prefecture, in 1950. According to an essay he wrote, “Hen na Ojisan” (Strange Uncle), his father was a judo instructor and strict with his students, but he was enthralled by live comedy shows on television. Surprised to see this, the son began aspiring to become a comedian.

After graduating from high school, he entered the immensely popular comedy rock and roll band, The Drifters, in 1974, the band that was the opening act for The Beatles in 1966. Upon joining the band, he replaced the former band member, the now late Chu Arai, and played the guitar.

### An Artist With Enduring Popularity

Shimura was known for his ability to come up with a unique silliness in his jokes, which delighted several generations born in the Showa era and after.

Early in his career he joined the band, The Drifters, although his aim was always to become a comedian rather than be a musician. Shimura had his real break after appearing in “It’s 8 o’clock! Everyone, Assemble!” (8時だよ! 全員集合), a variety TV show on Japanese broadcasting channel TBS, as part of The Drifters. With his song about Higashimurayama, his hometown, he became a particular hit with children. In 1973, the show achieved the record highest share of the Tokyo area TV audience – 50.5 percent – according to viewer research for the Kanto area.

Shimura was also well known for his other numerous popular skits and acts, such as “At the Crow’s Convenience” (カラスの勝手でしょ) and “Ain”. His skits of students in schools imitating the sullen face of parents have become legendary.

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In popular culture, the untranslatable punch line *saisho no gu* (“最初のグー”, roughly meaning first start and important for the beat it establishes) that many Japanese use to get the timing right when playing Rock, Paper, Scissors, goes back to Shimura, who first used it during “It’s 8 o’clock! Everyone, Assemble!”. He quickly became the most popular personality on the show.

Eventually, there were several factors which contributed to the lessening popularity of *The Drifters* and of the TBS show. In the 1980s a competitor comedy program, “Our Funny Family” (おれたちのひょうきん族) on Fuji Television, began pulling away viewers. The TBS show was discontinued in 1985.

After this period, Shimura branched out on his own as a singular personality. He worked with fellow former colleague and popular comedian Cha Kato. Shimura also became known for performing particular characters in his own programs, such as “Shimura’s Foolish Lord” (志村けんのバカ殿様) and “Strange Uncle” (変なおじさん), which with their unique humour stole the hearts people of all ages without reserve.

Shimura also was talented in the broader field of the arts. He played the shamisen, a traditional Japanese instrument, and collaborated with several Japanese artists such as musician Nobuyoshi Kuwano, the Warai Trio (Japanese traditional comedy) Dacho Club, and many more.

From 2006 Shimura also led his own theater company called the “Shimura Spirit” (志村魂), which centered its performances around the stories of the Foolish Lord, and the escapades of different characters in the castle.

One could write many things on this formidable artist and his passing. In every way, it is clear that his important presence in the field of the arts will be deeply missed.

Source: **Japanese Comedian Ken Shimura Dies of COVID-19 Infection**  
<http://japan-forward.com/japanese-comedian-ken-shimura-dies-of-covid-19-infection/>

## 志村けんさん、新型コロナウイルス感染で死去

「カラスの勝手にしょ」「アイ〜ン」…。独特のばかばかしさにあふれたギャグを次々に生み出し、長年、お笑い界のトップを走り続けた志村けんさんが、新型コロナウイルスに感染し、死去した。昭和時代の子供をとりこにし、現在に至るまで世代を継いではやったギャグは社会現象にも。高齢者から子供まで誰もが知る志村さんの死は、日本のコロナ禍に一層の衝撃を与えた。

志村さんは、音楽・コントグループ「ザ・ドリフターズ」でギターを担当したが、音楽グループとしてのドリフというよりも、コメディアンを目指してのグループ入りだった。

グループの看板番組「8時だヨ！全員集合」が最高視聴率50・5%（ビデオリサーチ調べ、関東地区）を取ったのは、まだ加藤茶さんがグループのお笑い人気を支えていた昭和48年のこと。49年に正式メンバーとなった志村さんは、出身地である東京都東村山市を歌った「東村山音頭」をきっかけに、子供たちから絶大な支持をされ、押しも押されぬ、グループの人気者となっていた。

当時は「全員集合」と並び、グループの冠番組だった「ドリフ大爆笑」なども、「下品」「低俗」と非難され、PTAなどの教育関係者からやり玉に上げられることも多かった。

ただ、「東村山音頭」のほか、「カラスの勝手にしょ」「アイ〜ン」など、数々のギャグを生み出し、大人の渋面をよそに、子供たちが学校でまねをする姿は当時から現在まで続く。

じゃんけんの際に普通に使われる「最初はグー」の掛け声も、志村さんがテレビ番組で使ったことをきっかけに広まったとされる。それほど影響力は大きかった。

56年には、競馬の「ノミ行為」で書類送検され、一時、謹慎。「全員集合」などの出演を見合わせた時期があった。直後に「全員集合」の裏番組となった「オレたちひょうきん族」の人気で、ドリフ人気にも陰りが見られ始めた時期と重なり、「全員集合」は60年秋に放送を終えた。

だが、志村さん自身は「全員集合」終了後も、さまざまな番組で活躍した。加藤さんとの「加トちゃんケンちゃんごきげんテレビ」のほか、個人の冠番組となった「志村けんのだいじょうぶだぁ」「志村けんのバカ殿様」などの人気は長く続く。志村さんを慕う芸能人も多く、これらの番組などからミュージシャンの桑野信義さん、お笑いトリオ「ダチョウ倶楽部」、近年ではお笑いコンビ「千鳥」の大悟さんなどと人脈が連なっている。

古希を迎え、新たに主演映画や、NHKの連続テレビ小説「エール」の出演も決まり、収録にも臨んでいた矢先。お笑いの巨人が逝った穴はとてつもなく大きい。

出典:ばかばかしで絶大な人気 志村けんさん、新型コロナウイルス感染で死去  
<https://www.sankei.com/life/news/200330/lif2003300028-n1.html>