

Madame Fujima Chiseye (January 1, 1916 – September 28, 2005)

Madame Fujima Chiseye...a gifted dancer and extraordinary teacher. Having shown great promise with her exceptional talent, she journeyed to Japan to continue her training in Nihon Buyo under the strict but edifying tutelage of Madame Fujima Ise, herself highly acclaimed as an accomplished and superb dancer. In 1941, Madame Chiseye was granted her *natori* (Fujima Kiyoi, which she altered years later) by the *Iemoto* of the Fujima *ryu*, Fujima Kanemon III (also known as the famous *tachiyaku* Kabuki actor, Matsumoto Koshiro VII).

Returning home to Hawaii, Madame Chiseye began a distinguished teaching career that spanned more than six decades. Due to her artistry and instructing, she quickly gained prominence within the islands' cultural world. However, in the mid-1950s, she determined to relocate to Los Angeles and open a new chapter in her performing and teaching profession. While initially her primary *okeiko-ba* was in Little Tokyo and then Gardena, she also taught at community-based sites in Crenshaw/Seinan, Culver City/Venice, Norwalk and Sun Valley.

A passion for Nihon Buyo ("*My life is dance.*") brought Madame Chiseye decades of fulfillment. Always aspiring to improve her dance and knowledge of Nihon Buyo, she endeavored to learn from notable *Buyo-ka* who visited Southern California. These included: Azuma Tokuho (Soke of Azuma *ryu*, touring with her Azuma Kabuki Company), Fujima Fujiko (first woman within Nihon Buyo designated a Living National Treasure), Fujima Isesuzu, Fujima Kanemon IV (Iemoto of Fujima *ryu* and Living National Treasure who also was known as Onoe Shoroku II, one of the four leading Kabuki actors of his time), Fujima Seizo, Hanayagi Chiyo (world renown as an innovative dancer and choreographer, and scholar of Nihon Buyo), and Matsudai Mitsunobu (Iemoto of Matsudai *ryu*). Madame Chiseye also had the privilege of performing at programs with many of these individuals. And, as another testament to her efforts of self-improvement, she returned to Japan in 1983 to obtain her long-awaited Nagauta/Shamisen *natori* (Kineya Samie).

Madame Chiseye possessed a generosity of spirit, not only with respect to her time, knowledge and open-heartedness but also her willingness to share her extensive collection of specialized accoutrements and paraphernalia...all to enhance the quality, appreciation and enjoyment of Nihon Buyo in the United States. To further this goal, Madame Chiseye also made efforts to build rapport and be collaborative with her peers. She was instrumental in founding the Mitsuba Kai in Hawaii and also engaged with local instructors in Southern California.

Having performed locally, nationally and internationally, Madame Chiseye left an impressive legacy, especially with generations of students whom she inspired and whose lives she enriched. With her guidance and nurturing, she had *natori* in Hawaii and Los Angeles, the latter numbering 25. Many of her *natori* also achieved the Shihan level licensure. And, through her mentorship, some of her *natori* have followed in her footsteps to teach.

But Madame Chiseye's legacy was not only related to Nihon Buyo but to the personal connection she made with her students and their families, and those with whom she built a relationship. She will be affectionately remembered for her warmth and caring, generous and down-to-earth nature, and especially for the joy and laughter she engendered.