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OPENING CEREMONY KICKS OFF SPRING AND HONORS GIFT OF TREES WITH WORLD-CLASS TALENT FROM THE U.S. AND JAPAN

Washington, DC [March 1, 2018] – The National Cherry Blossom Festival’s signature [Opening Ceremony](#) will take place Saturday, March 24 at the Warner Theatre from 5-6:30 p.m. The event welcomes the nation’s greatest springtime celebration and marks the annual commemoration of the 1912 gift of cherry blossom trees from Tokyo to Washington, DC. The friendship between the U.S. and Japan is celebrated through outstanding performances from acclaimed artists with ties to both countries; Festival leaders and dignitaries help narrate the ceremony, including a special moment of friendship between DC Mayor Muriel Bowser and the newly appointed Ambassador of Japan, His Excellency Shinsuke Sugiyama. Free tickets have all been claimed, but the ceremony will be streamed live to audiences around the world on the Festival’s Facebook.

Performers include:

- **T.M.Revolution:** Takanori Nishikawa made his debut under his stage name T.M.Revolution (T.M.R.) in May 1996 with his single “Dokusai –monopolize-”. Since then, he has established a reputation as a singer with ear-catching tunes, perfect stage-setting and intriguing live performances. Many of his singles have been featured as theme songs for major animations and video games including “Mobile Suit Gundam”, and “Sengoku BASARA”. Since his debut, T.M.R. has built a global fan base and reputation mainly among Japanimation fans.
- **Akiko Yano:** Akiko Yano was born in Tokyo and raised in Aomori, Japan. When her debut album *Japanese Girl* was released in 1976, many reputed her to be a “girl with a musical wonder.” To date, Akiko has released 27 original albums. In 2008, her original album *akiko* was recorded in Los Angeles, California and produced by Grammy Award winning producer T Bone Burnett.
- **The 6821 Quintet:** Created by The Ryuji Ueno Foundation as part of the Potomac Music-Lab Project, this classical ensemble was specially assembled for the National Cherry Blossom Festival and named to reflect the distance from Tokyo to Washington, D.C. The group is comprised of five internationally renowned musicians and led by Mayu Kishima, who caused a stir in the music world when she took top prize at the First Shanghai Isaac Stern International Violin Competition. Additional group members include violinist Eric Silberger, violist Meng Wang, cellist Clancy Newman, and pianist Matias Piegari. The 6821 Quintet will debut a special piece composed by Kunihiko Murai, who composed the theme song for the 1972 Olympics in Sapporo.
- **Shodo Girls (Fukuoka Prefectural Yahata Chuo High School):** During Shodo performances, whether on stage or at a street corner, a work of calligraphy is completed vibrantly while dancing to music. “Shodo Performance Koshien” is a competition to determine the top high school Shodo performance team in Japan. In this competition, each team produces a single piece of work with the dynamic strokes on a large sheet of paper. In 2017, the Fukuoka Prefectural Yahata Chuo High School Japanese Calligraphy Club won the first prize in the 10th “Shodo Performance Koshien”, and has been one of the top finalists eight consecutive times. The club has been praised for their dynamic performance, innovative calligraphy composition, and their natural approach toward Shodo expressions.

The Opening Ceremony is co-presented by Japan Foundation and supported by Ryuji Ueno Foundation, Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), Japan Commerce Association of Washington Foundation, TOYOTA, Toshiba America, Inc., Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group, Kawasaki Heavy Industries, and Warner Theatre.

The National Cherry Blossom Festival is the nation's greatest springtime celebration. The 2018 Festival, March 20 – April 15, includes four weeks of events featuring diverse and creative programming promoting traditional and contemporary arts and culture, natural beauty, and community spirit. Visit nationalcherryblossomfestival.org or call 877.44.BLOOM for more information, or check out [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/CherryBlossomFestival) (CherryBlossomFestival), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/CherryBlossFest) (@CherryBlossFest), and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/CherryBlossFest) (@CherryBlossFest).

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