

11th L.A. Tanabata Festival Celebrates ‘Romance in the Stars’

Colorful cultural event kicks off with opening ceremony Friday, Aug. 9.

The Los Angeles Tanabata Festival celebrates its 11th anniversary as part of the annual Nisei Week Japanese Festival on Saturday and Sunday, Aug. 10-11, in historic Little Tokyo.

The festival features 7-foot kazari decorations that hang from the Aileen Getty Plaza at The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA (GCMOCA).

The festival, which is free and open to the public, takes place on the Japanese American National Museum (JANM) Plaza and GCMOCA, located on First Street and Central Avenue in Downtown L.A.

This year the festival remembers Richard Fukuhara and Rodney Kageyama who were long-time supporters and contributors.

Fukuhara passed away on Dec. 4, 2018. He was on board for the inaugural year in 2009. A man of vision and contributor to numerous Japanese American community organizations, he established the kazari contest in 2010, did outreach for participants, oversaw judge selection and award processes, and coordinated the custom-designed plaque awards by Creations by June from Hawaii.

Kageyama, who passed away on Dec. 9, served as the master of ceremonies for the festival since its beginning and was a fixture on the L.A. Tanabata stage. A well-loved stage and screen actor, he brought his own brand of humor and knowledge of the community to audiences over the years.

The theme, “Romance in the Stars,” refers to the origins of the Tanabata Festival. The traditional festival in Japan is based on the legend of two stars, Altair (Hikoboshi) the Ox Herder and Vega (Orihime) the Weaver Princess, who are separated by the Milky Way, but are reunited when their stars align in the summer constellations. The festival celebrates the meeting of these two stars and is known as the Star Festival in Japan.

Chairperson Masumi Muya stated, “Our festival aims to unite the community and give everyone reasons to feel they belong since the very core of the Tanabata legend is that

everyone hopes to find happiness together.”

“We acknowledge our original presenters, Nisei Week Japanese Festival, the Japanese Prefectural Association of Southern California, and the Little Tokyo Public Safety Association, for their continued support and our merchant vendors who continue to support the festival.”

Opening ceremonies on Friday, Aug. 9, from 5:30 to 8 p.m. feature a taiko performance by Danny Yamamoto, Minyo Station, Miru-Daru duo Uchiage Hanabi, and the Tanabata legend play with Nancy Hayata and Nao Ikeda. Muya will lead the traditional kagami-biraki or sake barrel breaking ceremony with dignitaries and sponsors, followed by the announcement of the Kazari Contest winners and ondo dancing led by Hayata and children, with audience members encouraged to join in.

The festival is set for Aug. 10 from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Aug. 11 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., ending just before the Nisei Week Grand Parade begins. The Kazari Contest People’s Choice Award voting takes place on Saturday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Visitors can enjoy performances, visit arts-and-crafts booths, play games, and sample traditional matsuri (festival) food. Participants can write wishes on small strips of paper (tanzaku) and hang them from decorated bamboo branches.

Traditional festival food booths include yakitori skewers, cold soba, onigiri, shaved ice, cold drinks, Fugetsu-do manju, and the popular beer garden. New food booths this year include Fujiwara Tofu Cafe and Sunseeker Japanese Happy Food. Two food trucks to join the festival this year are Takuma’s Gourmet Burger and Drizzle, hand-crafted funnel cakes.

Vendors on the JANM plaza will offer something for everyone, including craft booths and games to entertain the children.

Sendai, famous for its bamboo decorations, has one of the largest Tanabata festivals, established over 400 years ago when the city was built by Date Masamune (1567-1636). A highlight of the Los Angeles festival is the display of 10 award-winning kazari shipped from Sendai.

Yoshihito Yonezawa, former president of the Miyagi Kenjinkai,



fulfilled his dream to bring the Tanabata Festival to Los Angeles. Working together with the Nisei Week Foundation, Japanese Prefectural Association of Southern California (Nanka Kenjinkai Kyogikai), and the Little Tokyo Public Safety Association, his wish became a reality in 2009.

The support of Ichiro Shiromatsu from Sendai was integral in establishing the festival in Los Angeles by sending the kazari from the long-running Sendai Tanabata Festival. His company is a multiple award winner for excellence and is nationally known for producing the finest quality confections in Japan.

The Aileen Getty Plaza at The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA is the site host for the presentation of the kazari. JANM is the facility sponsor.

For more information about the festival, call (323) 920-5283 or visit <http://tanabatalosangeles.org>.

Entertainment Schedule

Saturday, Aug. 10

JANM Steps Stage

5 p.m.: DJ: Yui Sensational

8 p.m.: Kawachi Ondo with Shinichi Hirokawa

Main Stage

11 a.m.: Chikara Daiko

12 p.m.: Matsubayashi Shorin-Ryu Dojo of Little Tokyo with Art Ishii

1 p.m.: Minyo duo “nou-min” with Kayoko Machida

2 p.m.: J-Town Rebels Rock Band with Mia Yamamoto and Brian Yamamoto

3 p.m.: J-pop with MiruDaru

4 p.m.: Classical Japanese dance with Nancy Hayata

5 p.m.: Kaoru Enjoji Band

6 p.m.: Cali Crisis Band with Stephanie Yanez and indie artist Plasmic

7 p.m.: Tokyo Mavericks

Sunday, Aug. 11

JANM Steps Stage

1:30 p.m.: Cosplay Contest sponsored by Anime Expo

3 p.m.: Burai production of “Samurai Sword”

Main Stage

11 a.m.: Yuujou Taiko

12 p.m.: Burai production of “Samurai Sword”

1 p.m.: Ohana Polynesian Dancers

2 p.m.: Pumana Band

3 p.m.: Awa Odori Hiryu Sakura-Ren, People’s Choice Awards

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(Schedule is subject to change)

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