

Noted Japanese lute player to perform at AU

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Gessui Kuroda, the "grand master" of Tosa Biwa, the traditional lute of Japan, and Yoshiko Tanigawa, one of her students, will present a concert at 8 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 22, in Holmes Auditorium, Harder Hall on the Alfred University campus. Their performance, which is open to the public free of charge, is sponsored by the Division of Performing Arts at Alfred University and is made possible by a gift from Dr. Stephen J. and Michiko Levine. Dr. Levine is a 1961 graduate of Alfred University. The concert is also part of Alfred University's celebration of the dedication of the Kazuo Inamori School of Engineering. Gessui is now recognized as one of the best biwa players in Japan, and is highly regarded both for the delicate tones of her lute and for her "rich voiceful expressions." For the Alfred concert, Gessui and Yoshiko will perform two long pieces. The first is "Dan no Ural," recalling a sea battle that was the climax of the Genpei Wars, a long and bitter struggle between the Genji and Heike clans during the 12th century. The second is "Blossoms Swirling on the Wind (Atsumori)," which also tells of a battle between the Heike and the Genji in the youth Atsumori is beheaded by the great Genji warrior Kymagaya Naozane. Gessui was born in Kochi, Japan, and was encouraged to study the biwa by Master Sculptor Nagare Masayuki. At the age of 25, she became a disciple, or student, of Josui Nakatani, master Satsuma Biwa player. (There are several biwa schools, each identified by the name of the Japanese city, town or area where it originated, explains Dr. Choichiro Yatani, an adjunct associate professor of Modern Languages at AU. Thus, Gessui is grand master of the school in Tosa, and Josui, the grand master of the school at Satsuma.) Winner of the National Issui-kai Biwa contest, Gessui is also well-known internationally. Just prior to coming to Alfred University, she will perform at the "Ground Zero" site of the Sept. 11, 2001, attack in New York City. She performed in "Flamenco Sonezaki Shinju," a play produced in Madrid, Spain, in March 2004 by Ryudo Uzaki and Yoko Agi, two Japanese musicians and artists, and presented background music for the Redken National Symposium in Las Vegas. Subject of a one-hour television special in Japan in 2000, she played in Beijing and Shanghai, China, in concerts celebrating the 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Japan and China. The concerts were sponsored by the Agency for Cultural Affairs for the Japanese government. Gessui also performed as a soloist at the Buddhist memorial service at the Todaijii Temple for victims of the Afghanistan and Iraqi wars. The Alfred University Division of Performing Arts and the Pacific Rim Organization are also supporters of the program.