

# RIKOSUGAMA

## PORTFOLIO 2025

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Ryukyu Traditional Performing Artist

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Ryukyu Traditional Performing Artist  
Ryukyuan Dancer & Singer-Sanshin Player

# RIKO SUGAMA



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## Biography & Education

- **Ryukyu Traditional Dance**

Began training since 1993 at Tamagusuku-School HARU, under Keiko Miyagi  
Received Grand Prize in 2012 at the Ryukyu Shimpo Traditional Arts Competition  
Earned Teaching Certification in Ryukyuan traditional Dance in 2018

- **Ryukyu Classical Music Uta-Sanshin**

Studied under Yahiku Kazuko since 2003  
Received Grand Prize in 2017 at the Okinawa Times Performing Arts Competition  
Earned Teaching Certification in Ryukyuan traditional music Uta-Sanshin in 2019

## Other Dan Certifications

- **Calligraphy**

Studying calligraphy (Shodō) since 2007 under Nanyo Unten - Holds 5th-dan

- **Ryukyuan Karate (Shorin-ryu)**

Practicing Ryukyuan Karate (Shorin School) since 2012 under Atsushi Kyan  
Holds 1st-dan (first-degree black belt)

## Artist Statement

Riko Sugama is a traditional performing artist from Okinawa, Japan. formerly the Kingdom of Ryukyu.

Her life' s work is dedicated to preserving and expressing the cultural heritage of the Ryukyu Islands. She believes that the spirit of Ryukyu can resonate far beyond its shores through the language of dance and music. Born and raised in Okinawa' s nature-rich and spiritually vibrant environment, her performances reflect a deep connection to the land, the body, and the passage of time. Peace, nature, and human connection are central values in her work, rooted in the essence of Okinawan culture. Historically, the Ryukyu Kingdom thrived as a cultural crossroads between Japan, China, Korea, and Southeast Asia. Its dance and music evolved as expressions of hospitality—not through power, but through emotional and artistic generosity. This spirit continues to shape Riko' s artistic practice. Her performances are not mere displays of technique but are seen as living prayers—gestures filled with ancestral memory, spiritual presence, and a desire to connect across borders. Currently based in Berlin, she brings Ryukyuan expression to the international stage while also creating new work that blends tradition with contemporary expression.

## An artistic tradition that began evolving in the 14th centuries

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Bingata  
Hanagasa

The yellow kimono is a traditional Ryukyuan textile art called Bingata. Historically, Bingata was a craft permitted only to the three royal Bingata families, officially recognized by the Ryukyu court. The kimono Riko is wearing was crafted by the 16th-generation successor of one of these prestigious families—the Shiroma lineage.

The large floral headpiece is called a Hanagasa, a ceremonial headdress inspired by lotus flowers. It was traditionally worn to welcome envoys from China during the Ryukyu Kingdom era, symbolizing grace and hospitality.

Fusayububiwa  
Kashuri

The ring on the performer's finger is a Fusayububiwa, a traditional piece of jewelry gifted by parents to their daughter at her wedding. It carries the heartfelt wish that "the daughter may be protected and happy in this life—and even in the next."

The black kimono with woven patterns is made of Ryukyu Kashuri, a textile developed in Okinawa based techniques that originally came from India via Southeast Asia. Over time, it evolved uniquely within the climate and culture of the islands.

# The History, Evolution, and Living Legacy

Ryukyuan traditional performing arts originated during the Ryukyu Kingdom, which existed for 450 years from 1429 until 1879, as refined court entertainment for welcoming imperial envoys from China.

Among these welcoming parties, Kumi-odori—a court dance-drama—was designated as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2010. Kumi-odori is a total art form, blending music, song, movement, language, costumes, jewelry, and props. The solo or extracted dances and music from these larger works are what later came to be known and categorized as Ryukyuan traditional dance or music. Ryukyuan classical dance was designated as an Important Intangible Cultural Property of Japan in 1972.

Over time, Ryukyuan performing arts took on a broader life beyond the court. After Japan abolished the Ryukyu Kingdom in 1879 and incorporated it as Okinawa, the performing arts continued to be preserved and passed down. The techniques and aesthetics have evolved and flourished to this day.

Despite the loss of sovereignty, court dancers who had once performed for royalty began to bring their art into public spaces, sharing it with local communities. In 1972, Ryukyuan dance was officially designated as an Important Intangible Cultural Property of Japan, recognizing its artistic excellence and historical value.

Riko Sugama embodies this lineage as a practitioner of both traditional Ryukyuan dance and sanshin music. She curates programs based on concept, tone, and cultural memory—ranging from solemn court pieces to joyful village dances once performed to mark harvests or local festivals. Through this wide-ranging practice, she brings the living spirit of Ryukyuan culture to contemporary audiences around the world.

# THE FEUERLE COLLECTION

## Performance Program 2023

1 March./ 19 April./ 31 May./ 11 October./ 22 November. 2023



In 2023, The Feuerle Collection, a unique contemporary art museum in Berlin housed within a renovated WWII telecommunication bunker, presented a series of performances showcasing Ryukyuan traditional performing arts.

<https://youtu.be/6Y6mEJdmQLs?si=6jbHHsOKbsZ3yae3>



## Dancing in the Shadow of Empires

Curated by Désiré Feuerle as part of the museum's performance program, the series explored both contemporary and traditional dance languages from East and Southeast Asia. Amidst a striking setting of antique Imperial Chinese furniture (200 BC – 17th century), early Khmer sculptures (7th – 13th century), and international contemporary art, Ryukyuan dance found new resonance through the museum's layered contrasts of time, culture, and form.

For these performances, Riko Sugama collaborated for the first time with hammered dulcimer and percussion artist Ayane Kondo, who reinterpreted traditional Ryukyuan music through the shimmering tones of the hammered dulcimer.

This unique collaboration created an immersive and atmospheric experience—where ancient movement and luminous sound converged in a space shaped by memory, ritual, and artistic dialogue.



# Ryukyu Traditional Dance Performance HARU The Heartbeat of Okinawa, Eternal Dance of Blooming Spirit

24, 25, 26, 27th at Prague Frige Festival in PRAGUE, CZECH  
3 Juni. at Pfefferberg Theatre in BERLIN, GERMANY



© Wai Kung



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## Bringing Ryukyu Wind to Europe

Ryukyu Traditional Dance Troupe HARU – Traditional Dance Ensemble from Okinawa

Led by master Keiko Miyagi, HARU is a distinguished Ryukyu dance ensemble known not only for its exceptional stage presence and precision, but also for its deep commitment to nurturing the human spirit. Rooted in the Tamagusuku School lineage, HARU trains dancers from early childhood—many joining as early as the age of one—growing up immersed in music, movement, and a community where children raise one another with compassion and care.

Beyond technical mastery, HARU fosters a philosophy of nonviolence, empathy, and inner beauty—values long cherished in Ryukyu culture. The troupe is widely respected in Okinawa not only for its artistic excellence, but for its ongoing social contributions, including charity performances, educational outreach, and visits to care facilities. Under Keiko Miyagi's leadership, HARU remains devoted to using traditional performing arts as a means of cultivating character and giving back to society. Bringing HARU to international audiences means inviting not just refined artistry, but a deeply rooted cultural narrative—one that speaks across borders through beauty, rhythm, and shared human spirit.

[https://youtu.be/AGb-zX19j2E?si=zu6PQ\\_UJly1KE4y](https://youtu.be/AGb-zX19j2E?si=zu6PQ_UJly1KE4y)



# Artistic Collaborations

1 March./ 19 April./ 31 May./ 11 October./ 22 November. 2023

## Embodyed Landscapes Performing in Leiko Ikemura's World

In 2023, Riko Sugama was invited to perform at the finissage of Leiko Ikemura's exhibition "Witty Witches" at the Georg Kolbe Museum in Berlin. Under Ikemura's concept and choreography, Riko delivered a performance in three evocatively titled segments—"Grace of Time, Great Memory of Earth," "Trees that Dance," and "Wind Breath, Lucid Beings."



[https://www.instagram.com/reel/CrtFOS0ISB2/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==](https://www.instagram.com/reel/CrtFOS0ISB2/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==)



Later that summer, she was invited to participate in "Wave, Wind, WE," an evening programme accompanying Ikemura's Motion of Love exhibition at Museum de Fundatie in Zwolle, Netherlands. In this unique performance, Riko and Sonoko Kamimura presented a choreographed interplay of movement, voice, and sound, all conceived by Ikemura herself.



## Carrying Okinawa's Memory Across Oceans



In June 2025, Riko Sugama performed at the finissage of Stories That We Imagine, Stories That Connect Us at Kunstverein Langenhagen, curated by Kathy-Ann Tan. Collaborating with Okinawan-Brazilian third-generation artist Thaís Omine, Sugama interpreted themes of memory, migration, and ancestral connection. She danced while singing lullabies and songs from Omine's childhood, embodying the warmth and resilience of Okinawan heritage, and concluded with a sanshin performance—bringing the essence of Okinawa into a contemporary dialogue on diaspora and remembrance.

## Where Traditions Meet Contemporary Visions



In 2024, Riko was featured as a dancer in WaqWaq Kingdom's music video "HADO," released under Phantom Limb Records. Working alongside the duo, Riko visually interpreted natural forces and ancestral resilience, translating these into motion that bridges heritage with contemporary expression. The collaboration stands as a poignant fusion of tradition and modernity, offering global audiences an embodied vision of Ryukyuan peace through dance and sound.

[https://youtu.be/0-8v4Xl8rN0?si=8FhwDdgnX\\_401NAv](https://youtu.be/0-8v4Xl8rN0?si=8FhwDdgnX_401NAv)



## Uniting Tradition and Identity in Hip Hop



In 2023, Riko Sugama served as choreographer for Awich's stage performance of "THE UNION" at the Yokohama K-Arena concert. With this track, she also performed on stage at multiple events—including joint concerts with other artists and the Fuji Rock Festival—providing sanshin accompaniment as part of the live ensemble too. This collaboration brought Ryukyuan dance into a powerful hip hop context, visually and rhythmically enriching Awich's homage to Okinawa's cultural resilience.

[https://youtu.be/cRGcDA\\_yLZw?si=WeiluMgbZAcVT42](https://youtu.be/cRGcDA_yLZw?si=WeiluMgbZAcVT42)



# MAJUN

## A Ritual of Connection Across Time and Cultures

29. 30.31. June. 2025 World Premire in Prague Czech

©Martina Kohnova



In 2025, Riko Sugama premiered MAJUN, her first original contemporary stage work that moved beyond the traditional framework. The piece finds common ground between the discipline of structured tradition and the freedom of full expression.

Grounded in the spiritual depth and historical layers of Okinawa former Ryukyu, MAJUN draws upon the ethereal beauty that emerges from the threshold between this world and the other, often evoked through the Noh mask.

Building on her lifelong training in classical Ryukyuan performing arts, Sugama reinterprets tradition through a non-verbal, cross-disciplinary lens—merging dance, music, Noh mask, and visual elements into a ritual-like performance. In Uchina-guchi (the Okinawan language), MAJUN means “together.”

The Noh mask created by Bidō Yamaguchi for MAJUN transcends the lineage of traditional Noh masks, opening a new, contemporary realm while retaining its deep-rooted heritage. The stage design incorporated the inscription of the “Bridge of Nations Bell”, a 15th-century Ryukyuan artifact symbolizing Ryukyu’s role as a bridge between cultures. Calligraphed by Riko herself.

Directed by Makoto Inoue, the staging and lighting were designed to draw out the full potential of the performers, immersing the audience in an atmosphere rarely seen in Noh theatre or Ryukyuan dance. The unusually low lighting heightened the beauty of each gesture, amplifying the work’s emotional and visual impact.

In classical Ryukyuan dance, the performer’s costume and hairstyle shift according to role—be it a woman’s dance, an elder’s dance, or a man’s dance. By wearing the Noh mask, however, Riko Sugama is freed from these constraints, embodying any role with fluidity and universality. This transformation is amplified by the powerful improvisation and delicate classical sensibilities of Ayane Kondo—an iconoclastic force in the world of classical music. Together with Yamaguchi’s mask and Sugama’s rooted yet evolving movement, their collaboration weaves a rare and resonant moment on stage.



### Awards & International Recognition

MAJUN was honored with the “Creative Award” on the final day of the 2025 Prague Fringe Festival, one of the festival’s most prestigious accolades, presented to works of outstanding creativity. Audiences and critics responded with deep emotion, offering praise such as:

*“This is a beautiful production, employing minimal elements with maximum effect... It is peaceful, moving and meditative.”*

*“Riko’s movement expresses both delicacy and fierce presence—through gesture alone, she conveys grief, tenderness, and transformation.”*

— Nina Gardner, UK-Theatre reviewer

Celebrated for its artistic excellence and profound spiritual resonance, the work was recognized for transcending boundaries of culture, gender, and identity.



[https://youtu.be/E3wT33W-Skk?si=wblYDID9IAtn9\\_Xa](https://youtu.be/E3wT33W-Skk?si=wblYDID9IAtn9_Xa)

# Okinawan Roots & Early International Exchange



Before relocating to Berlin in 2018, Riko Sugama was an active performer both in Okinawa and on international stages. Her early cultural exchange experiences included a student program in Guangzhou and Fujian, China; performance exchange trips to Brunei and Myanmar; and two years teaching Ryukyuan dance at Okinawan community centers in Hawaii.

Of these, her time in Myanmar proved especially formative—through shared musical scales, moving forms, and costumes, she discovered a profound spiritual connection between Ryukyuan traditions and the wider spectrum of Asian performance, revealing dance as a living bridge to ancestral memory. These formative years also saw her participate in numerous other overseas performances, laying the foundation for her lifelong commitment to cultural dialogue across borders.

## Riko Berlin Sanshin Schule

In 2020, Riko founded the Riko Sugama Berlin Sanshin School, offering performances and public workshops throughout Europe. At each performance, she greets audiences in Uchinaaguchi (Okinawan language), emphasizing the resonance of sound beyond literal meaning. Her performances often include historical and cultural explanations in German to invite non-Japanese audiences into the Ryukyuan experience. She also co-organizes the film series Okinawa Film Abend in Berlin, screening works like Okinawa Yamato by director Higa Kenta to raise awareness about base issues and Okinawas hidden history.



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© Aya Sawada



© Wai Kung



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## Themes & Philosophy

Through dance and music, Riko explores themes of hidden Okinawan history, migration, colonialism, and spiritual culture.

Living in Berlin, a city shaped by division, resistance, and remembrance, has deepened her awareness of Okinawa's own layered silences and trauma. She believes that Ryukyuan dance is not simply a transmission of tradition but a practice of resonance. It is a medium to unearth untold stories and forgotten landscapes, and to foster shared memory across time and culture. Through voice, body, and space, she seeks to create moments of quiet solidarity.

She believes in the power of the Ryukyu Islands, known as the "islands of the gods" —and in their enduring role in guiding not only Asia but the wider world toward peace. She carries forward the diplomatic spirit forged through centuries of cultural exchange when Ryukyu stood as a hub between nations, cherishing the values of connecting people, of forgiving and of loving. With these beliefs at her core, she dances and sings — day after day — letting each performance be an offering toward that vision.