UTA AWASE
A Modern Take on the Traditional Japanese Poetry Contest

Wednesday, October 26, 2022
Cammilleri Hall
University of Southern California

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- Uta awase are poetry contests that date back to Japan’s Heian period (794–1185).
- In this event, students will compete in a poetry contest using the five-line Japanese form associated with waka (more formally tanka).
- The contest will be judged by LeRon Harrison, a waka expert who holds a PhD in East Languages and Culture and is a member of Kinnara Gagaku, an ensemble that performs traditional music from the Imperial Court of Japan.
- Music inspired by the winning team’s poetry will be performed by Kinnara, Inc., an L.A.-based organization that comprises Kinnara Gagaku and Kinnara Taiko, the second taiko group formed in the United States.

UTA AWASE

Uta awase are poetry contests that date back to Japan’s Heian period (794 to 1185). Sometimes called waka matches, they were not only an important part of the development of Japanese poetics but also one of the means by which political power was legitimated and concretized.

Group composition is a core part of the Uta awase tradition.

WAKA

Waka, as it is understood today, is a type of Japanese poetry that dates back to at least the Heian era (8th century). The word waka means the songs of Japan in Japanese (pointing to its orality and aurality), and it was historically a general term for Japanese poetry. By the Heian era, waka was largely understood to mean tanka, which had a 5/7/5/7/7 form. Though a longer form, choka, also occasionally appeared during the Heian era, uta awase largely employed waka in tanka form.

The characteristics of waka (more formally tanka) include:
- 5 lines
- a 5-7-5-7-7 or 5-7-5 / 7-7 meter
- no rhyme
- organized in units and phrases instead of lines (units and phrases often become lines when poems are transliterated or translated into Western languages)
What is different about writing collaboratively versus writing on your own?

How did the winning poetry inform the music performed by Kinnara, Inc.? What connections did you hear between the poetry and the music?

Try to observe the way your mind approaches different poetic forms. How does each form shape your creative process? Your thinking process?

If you liked this event, you might want to check out:

- Waka Poetry [wakapoetry.net](http://wakapoetry.net)
- USC Pacific Asia Museum [pacificasiamuseum.usc.edu](http://pacificasiamuseum.usc.edu)
- Upcoming Visions and Voices events, including
  - 11/1/22 [An Evening with Natasha Trethewey](https://visionsandvoices.usc.edu/)
  - 11/3/22 [Dahlak Brathwaite: Try/Step/Trip](https://visionsandvoices.usc.edu/)
  - 3/23/23 [Rewriting War: A Conversation with Refugee Writers](https://visionsandvoices.usc.edu/)
  - 3/31/23 [Dismantling Orientalism: This Is Not a True Story](https://visionsandvoices.usc.edu/)
  - 4/30/23 [Tales of Clamor](https://visionsandvoices.usc.edu/)

Discover more at the USC Libraries

Christopher Hepburn of USC Dornsife’s History department selected the following resources to help you learn more about this event. Electronic resources are accessible through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at [libraries.usc.edu](http://libraries.usc.edu) but may require the user to log in using their USC credentials.

**Books**


**Online Resources**

- Jittai waka
- *Sanjūrokunin utaawase*