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The Taiko Tides perform at Stony Brook University's Sakura Matsuri.

Japanese culture blooms in Stony Brook

Samurai symbols and cosplay brighten Cherry Blossom Festival

BY JANELLE GRIFFITH

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Spring is in session at Stony Brook University. That's where the daylong Cherry Blossom Festival: Sakura Matsuri celebrates Japanese culture with dance, drums and drawing to usher in the season at the Charles B. Wang Center.

WHAT YOU'LL SEE

Kaoru Watanabe, a Brooklyn-based composer and musician who appeared on the soundtrack of director Wes Anderson's new movie, "Isle of Dogs," is the headline performer with his Taiko drumming group, Neo.

Visitors can learn Ikebana, the ancient Japanese art of flower arranging, and see martial arts performances.

In Japan, cherry blossoms were considered one of the symbols of the samurai, says organizer Gerard Senese, who owns the Ryu Shy Kan Japanese martial arts center in Farmingville. A row of cherry blossom trees lines the entranceway to the Wang Center, where the university's Japan Center coproduces the annual event, now in its 18th year.

"And just like the samurai were required to

CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVAL: SAKURA MATSURI

WHEN | WHERE Noon-5 p.m. Sunday at Stony Brook University's Charles B. Wang Center, 100 Nicolls Rd., Stony Brook

INFO 631-632-1944, ryushukan.com

ADMISSION \$20 (\$5 ages 6-12) includes admission to three theater performances and a tea ceremony.

follow their lord and possibly die in full bloom of their life, they understood the transience of life through the symbols of the cherry blossoms, which only bloom for a week or so and then they were done," Senese says.

The samurai cultivated the appreciation of the cherry blossoms, Senese says, which trickled down to all aspects of the Japanese culture.

COSTUMES TO BEHOLD

Cosplay — a combination of "costume" and "play" — also features prominently in the festival. The term is used to describe the activity of adults dressing up as anime or video game characters by wearing distinctive costumes. Jason Linetsky, the editor-in-chief and

plus turn the page for more weekend events



FRANK FUMELLI



FRANK FUMELLI

A cosplayer branches out under a cherry tree at the Wang Center.

co-founder of CosplayNYC magazine, will oversee a fashion show from 3 to 5 p.m. in the Skylight Gallery. Guests are invited to attend the festival in costume and can sign up to be a part of the show until 2 p.m.

Linetsky works as a crew member at many conventions including New York Comic Con, the largest pop culture event on the East Coast, and ConnectiCon, a multi-genre celebration held in Hartford, Connecticut. Cosplay has become a

fixture in Japanese culture, he says, and he predicts it will only continue to grow.

At the cosplay fashion show, Linetsky will explain the activity's significance and popularity — in Japan and America. Cosplayers, such as college students Kristen Sabatino and Abigail Vilela, will be introduced to the audience and will be available for pictures.

"I started cosplaying while I was teaching the manga drawing workshop to kind of make people feel more welcome," says Sabatino, 24, of Farmingville. Sabatino dresses up as all sorts of characters from animé and video games, including Team Skull Grunt from Pokémon.

Vilela learned about cosplay several years ago when a friend invited her to New York Comic Con in 2011. That was the first year she tried cosplaying.

"It was actually a lot of fun. And since then, I just took it up as a hobby," says Vilela, 22, of North Bay Shore. "Every time I dress up, I enjoy it. I love it."

Participating in shows provides her the opportunity to meet others in the cosplay community, Vilela says.

That's a large part of the draw for Sabatino, a Japanese manga artist.

"When you're cosplaying, you all kind of share the same desire to, A. connect with people, and B. to kind of step out of the norm and do something different," Sabatino says. "And you stand out that way."

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