



Osaki-san, William Gillette's Gentleman Valet, December 22nd, 2018
Presented by the East Haddam Stage Company as part of the
Immigrant Artist Series at Russell Library, Middletown CT

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Library Programming

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By far the single most well attended program was East Haddam Stage Company's presentation of "Osaki-san, William Gillette's Gentleman Valet", a new play written and directed by Kandie Carle, and featuring Japanese actor Taku Hirai. The space was completely filled, and the audience did not hesitate to give the performer a standing ovation.

The story of the play is about Yunitaka Osaki, the second son of a warrior-class family from Kanagawa Prefecture. Born in 1865, he came to the U.S. with his older brother, Yukio, in 1888. Instead of returning to Japan, he stayed, eventually being hired by actor William Gillette as a valet and dresser. He became a confidante and friend to the actor, who, at his death in 1937, bequeathed Osaki-San a place to live on his estate.

"The Date that Will Live in Infamy" – December 7, 1941, caused Osaki-san a great deal of trouble. Like other Japanese-Americans, he was suspected of anti-American sentiments, and was interviewed by the F.B.I. He was one of the lucky ones, and was not sent to an internment camp. He died in Hadlyme CT, at his home, in 1942.

The play is based on extremely thorough research, and is highly entertaining. Taku Hirai is a subtle and conscientious actor, hitting both high dramatic notes and small, sweet, comic tones. It is a rich hour of information delivered in a wonderful way. The Q & A afterward gave the audience more insight into the process of developing the play, as well as additional details of the life of this extraordinary man who lived just outside the spotlight of one of the most famous celebrities of the time.

Born during the Victorian Era, Osaki lived through the First World War and was directly impacted by the second. His brother became a prominent political figure in Japan, and as the Mayor of Tokyo fulfilled the gift of the famous Cherry Trees to Washington D.C