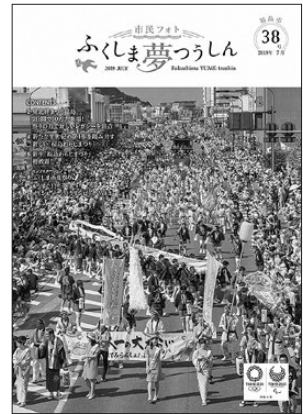


Fukushima Dreams – a quarterly publication of Fukushima City — JULY 2019

Thank you for picking up this quarters' "Fukushima Dreams – a quarterly publication of Fukushima City". In this issue, we hope that you will learn more about, and be moved by the various charms that Fukushima City has to offer.

With a population of around 290,000 people, Fukushima is surrounded by the beauty of nature. Due to its location, the city has a characteristic basin climate, and is a famous fruit production area: producing many varieties through the seasons, including cherries, peaches, Asian pears, grapes and apples.

We hope that through this edition, you'll come to appreciate even a little of what Fukushima City has to offer.



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① 300,000 visitors over two days! Creating new legacies through dynamic festivals

② It has been six years since the Tohoku Rokkon Festival 2013 in Fukushima, when the festivals from the capital cities of the six prefectures in the Tohoku region gathered in Fukushima City. Carrying on the spirit, the Tohoku Kizuna Festival 2019 Fukushima was held for two days on June 1st and 2nd in Fukushima City. The newly reformed Fukushima Waraji Festival commemorating its 50th anniversary, led the parade followed by the Yamagata Hanagasa Festival, the Morioka Sansa Odori (dance), Sendai Tanabata Festival, the Aomori Nebuta Festival, and the Akita Kanto Festival. The roughly 1,200 performers captivated the spectators with their dynamic dancing.



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① In August 2019, the new Fukushima Waraji Festival will take its first step to start its second half century

② The Fukushima Waraji Festival is a summer festival celebrated by the residents of Fukushima City that began in 1970 with roots in the Shinobu Sanzan Akatsuki-Mairi, an event held for the last 400 and some years in early spring. The Fukushima Waraji Festival Executive Committee made the decision to implement a bold renovation of the popular 50-year-old festival. Last autumn, musician Yoshihide Otomo, who hails from Fukushima City, was welcomed as the executive producer, and practice began this year in March. We spoke with Mr. Yuta Watanabe (Fukuonza-kumi taiko drum leader) and Mr. Masaki Shiroyama (Maiza-kumi dance leader) about their hopes for the new festival as it draws near.



③ Renewing the festival by going back to its origin

The first question we asked was what the motivation was for renewing this festival that has been held for the last half century, to which they replied, "it was triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and the predecessor to the Tohoku Kizuna Festival, the Tohoku Rokkon Festival." Watching their hometown festival being presented outside the prefecture conjured up a variety of emotions, he said. "I want to make it a festival that gives the children of Fukushima confidence and makes them feel proud." "The music should not be played from a recording. There should be live performances of traditional Japanese drumming, pipes, and singing." Those feelings resonated with musician Yoshihide Otomo, who spent his childhood in Fukushima.



Taking on this major reformation, Mr. Otomo did not propose a simple renewal, but rather a comprehensive structural overhaul that included music, choreography, costumes and other aspects of the festival. This is based on a scenario created by Mr. Otomo that took into consideration the history of the festival so that we could always look back to the origin of the festival if we lose our way in the future. Reformations always come with difficulties, but everyone on the executive committee and Mr. Otomo were prepared to face them when they came.

④ This is going to be amazing. Expect great things!

First, they practiced focusing on the Tohoku Kizuna Festival coming up in June. How has the new festival, applauded at the Kizuna Festival, changed? The music is a rearrangement of the "Waraji Ondo" song written by Fukushima-born composer Yuji Koseki and uses the rhythm of the "Fukushima Bon Festival dance song" present throughout the neighborhoods of Fukushima City as a reference and added the new "Waraji Taiko Midare-uchi" drum song. Upon hearing the newly arranged song for the first time, Yuta Watanabe said his first impression was that "it's a familiar melody that I was able to readily accept." The dance incorporates the traditional dance movement called "namba" and the choreography was made so that it would be easy to remember. It is characterized by its leg movements that were created in the image of healthy feet. Props called "waranowa" are held in both hands during the dance. The singer changes every time the song returns to the first verse, and everyone gives a "washoi!" yell when the 12m long giant waraji sandal is carried. Leader of the Maiza-kumi dance team, Masaki Shiroyama said, "It is a fun performance blending music and dance. The long hanten coats the dancers wear are a brilliant peach color. The choreography has a good rhythm that gives it momentum. It's a choreography that is fun to watch and even more fun to dance. Every time I watch at practice, I think 'this is going to be amazing.'" And a smile spreads across his face.

⑤ Feel history moving

We asked what the highlight of August will be. "The live pipe and drum performance played by the 130 members of the Fukuonza-kumi, the giant waraji, and the movements of the beautiful 400-person formation of the dancing Maiza-kumi. The Maiza-kumi's representation of a giant snake battling the giant waraji sandal should not be missed. The Fukuonza-kumi will liven the mood with our Midare-uchi drumming," said Mr. Watanabe. In addition, this year is a special year for enjoying both the new and the old Waraji Festivals. "The new Waraji Festival is a festival that will be built up over the next five, and then maybe another ten years by everyone, both young and old, men and women, and people of all nationalities. We welcome spontaneous participation. We want everyone to have a good time together," said Mr. Shiroyama. This summer, the Fukushima Waraji Festival will display its dramatic evolution. Take part in the experience of feeling the movement in history.

① The unveiling of the reborn Fukushima Waraji Festival!

② At a length of 12m, Japan's largest waraji sandal led the promenade followed by a live performance of roughly 400 people playing drums and pipes and yells of "Washoi! Washoi!" while dancers revealed a dynamic display.

③ We asked the dancers

Question 1 What triggered your participation in the Waraji Festival?

I thought the unveiling of the new Waraji Dance would be a rare opportunity and at the same time I thought it would be a good opportunity to show people from other prefectures the power of the young people of Fukushima.

Question 2 The Waraji Dance was renewed this year. When did you start practicing? Were there any difficulties?

We began practicing at the end of April during the long holiday. This was the first time I participated in the Waraji Dance. I found it difficult that the dance is not of the same genre we usually dance, and that the choreography would gradually change each time we practiced.

Question 3 Tell us what you would like everyone to watch for in the new choreography.

The part during the Midare-uchi portion (musical interval between songs) by the drummers when everyone moves like a giant snake.

Question 4 What were your impressions when you actually danced the dance in the Kizuna Festival?

The cheers from the spectators gave me energy and helped me to think I really wanted to do my best. During the return trip in the finale, we interacted with dancers from other prefectures and danced together. I really felt the bonds and connection among ourselves, which filled me with joy.

Question 5 Lastly, looking toward the actual Waraji Festival in August, what do you want to work hardest on?

I want to make the dance even more fulfilling and work hard on helping the Dance Club at Tachibana High School infuse the festival with energy.

④ We will dance the "Reborn Waraji Dance" to a live performance by the thrilling drummers

The Fukushima Waraji Festival, first held in 1970, will celebrate its 50th year this year. The Waraji-ondo song of the Waraji Festival, whose origins lie in the Akatsuki-mairi, was written by the late composer Yuji Koseki. Musician Yoshihide Otomo, who has ties to Fukushima City, has been welcomed as the executive producer of the Waraji Festival, which started a half century ago. Based on the scenario created for the festival that takes into account the legends and origins of the festival and its original meaning, the music, dance, and costumes were all integrated to give the festival a rebirth.



① On the cover

Fukushima Waraji Festival at the Tohoku Kizuna Festival Parade

The unveiling of the renewed Waraji Odori dance at the Kizuna Festival. They displayed a perfectly synchronized dance and dynamic live performance of drums and pipes before spectators who filled the streets along National Highway Route 4.

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