



Radio taiso performers, above, and Robert Stuhldreer with Flora and Kin, below



Main picture, centre, Otsu Kagura; above Robin Iris, 18, and Francesca Walters, 19; and top, Kaoru Furukawa shows off sweet sake from Fukushima

PHOTOS: EMILY FINCH

Shimane is a Japanese prefecture which is too far off the beaten path for most tourists to visit.

But on Sunday performers from the little-known area took centre-stage at the Japan Matsuri at Trafalgar Square.

Thousands gathered in the rain to watch the Otsu Kagura troupe, who donned intricate paper masks to represent deities for their performance of "Orochi" – *The Giant Serpent*. The theatrical dance, called Iwami Kagura, originated in the Shinto shrines of Shimane in the 18th century where

# MATSURI in the square

it was performed to please the gods and bring a good harvest.

Under the gaze of Admiral Nelson on his column, one performer wore a stern mask and waved a sword to represent the hero god

while eight dancers twirled on the stage to represent the evil serpent who had devoured seven women.

Egi Yuuya, the creative director of the troupe, said: "It was so wonderful to see so many people

gathered here and interested in what we do." The troupe also performed at the British Library and in Cardiff with the backing of the Japan Foundation.

Food was also a main focus of the festival with

authentic Japanese grub on offer from the various stalls. There was yaki onigiri – grilled rice balls – alongside sushi, shaved frozen ice covered in coloured syrup and Japanese curry up for grabs.

There was a stall featuring produce from the prefecture of Fukushima which suffered the devastating effects of not only an earthquake and tsunami but a nuclear disaster in 2011.

Kaoru Furukawa, who lives in London but is originally from the north-eastern prefecture, said she was volunteering at the stand where passers-by could buy sweets and fresh vegetables from Fukushima to "raise

awareness that the area is safe". She said: "We are still suffering with people not wanting to visit our area but we want to get the word out that everyone is welcome and will be safe."

Huge crowds gathered around Robert Stuhldreer's two Japanese Akitas, who were treated to an unending supply of strokes. Mr Stuhldreer, who had travelled from Islington to be there at the festival with his dogs Flora and Kin, said: "I've come here several times and it's a really nice atmosphere. Some people come from all around the country to be here and you can see why. There's so much to do."

Youngsters paid

homage to their favourite "anime" characters by wearing wigs and dressing-up.

Robin Iris, 18, said: "I came here last year and loved it. It's so good to detach from the real world for a bit and create someone else."

The audience were also taught how to follow set exercises that are usually played every morning at schools, called "radio taiso", which encourages everyone to be active regardless of age.

Children from the London Bunka Yochien nursery school, west London, (pictured page 1) put all their efforts into moving in sync with each other for their dance.

EMILY FINCH

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**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**All Welcome**

**Date:** Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> November 2019  
**Time:** 6.00pm  
**Venue:** The Lord Mayor's Parlour  
Westminster City Hall  
64 Victoria Street London SW1E 6QP

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**If you would like to join us for our AGM, please contact us as below:**

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