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2028 Taiga Drama “John Man” starring Kento Yamazaki

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The 67th Taiga drama is
a one of a kind great adventure in Japanese history.

The protagonist is “John Manjiro,” also known as Manjiro Nakahama.

A poor fisherman who was never meant to leave his name in history.
But after the tragedy of being cast adrift, he was rescued and taken to
America,
where he became a first rate sailor who gained the “knowledge and skills”
that would help save Japan.
His friends in that foreign land called him John Mung.

Set in nineteenth century Japan, the United States, and the Pacific,
this is a sweeping and moving epic about an ordinary man who became a
“castaway,”
filled with life or death survival and the romance of a long awaited reunion.

Starring: Kento Yamazaki
as Manjiro Nakahama

Profile

Born September 7, 1994. He made his acting debut in 2010. In the first half of 2015, he made his first appearance in an NHK morning drama with Mare. His major recent starring works include the films Kingdom series (2019 to 2026), Theater (2020), Onmyoji Zero (2024), Golden Kamuy series (2024 to 2026), and Under Ninja (2025), as well as the drama series Alice in Borderland (2020 to 2025), among others. For Kingdom: Return of the Great General (2024), he received the Excellent Lead Actor Award at the 48th Japan Academy Awards and became the first Japanese recipient of The Best from the East Award at the New York Asian Film Festival. He has starred in a wide range of roles. This will be his first appearance in a

Taiga drama.

Written by Yuki Fujimoto

Comment from the writer

Sometimes there is a moment when I think, one day I may write about this person. A page in a book I came across in everyday life, a scene from a film, a casual remark in an ordinary conversation. You encounter them somewhere, yet you do not chase after them. They simply remain in your heart, waiting for their time. For me, John Manjiro was exactly that kind of person.

Those who know him, I think, feel excited the moment they hear his name. Those who do not know him, I think, will still feel excited the moment they hear it. John Manjiro. His name alone already tells a story. It speaks of how strange and turbulent his life was. It speaks of how boldly and delicately he rode those waves. It speaks of how rare a figure he was in late Edo period Japan.

The words that surround Manjiro, sea, ships, whales, English, America, carry a sense of brightness, grandeur, romance, and adventure. At the same time, his life was shadowed by ominous words such as drifting, starvation, discrimination, capital punishment, and assassination, suggesting how constantly tense his circumstances must have been. Manjiro lived through such extreme highs and lows with remarkable lightness. I hope to trace, one by one, how his wisdom and courage were cultivated and how they were put to use, while at times allowing the story to leap boldly forward.

Writing a Taiga drama is like setting out upon the open sea. At first, there is no chart and no compass. You board carrying only the resolve to write, and you set sail timidly. Before long, the land disappears from view, and you realize there is no choice but to keep sailing toward the destination. And yet I feel no fear. This ship carries an excellent captain and many reliable navigators. And this ship has been fortunate enough to find a shining star in Kento Yamazaki. With John Manjiro dwelling in his heart, Mr. Yamazaki will surely guide the adventure of the Taiga drama John Man like Orion blazing in the winter night sky, a constellation that serves as a guide for the voyage.

The time has come to write about John Manjiro. I only hope it reaches your

hearts.

Profile

Her major television drama works include the NHK morning drama Chiritotechin (2007 to 2008), the Saturday period drama Sakuya Kono Hana (2010), the Taiga drama Taira no Kiyomori (2012), the Saturday drama Meoto Zenzai (2013), the Thursday period drama Chikaemon (2016), the Super Premium drama Soseki Mondon (2016), the Saturday period drama Mio's Cookbook (2017 and 2019), the 8K special drama An Artist of the Floating World (2019), the NHK morning drama Come Come Everybody (2021 to 2022), and the drama Snow Country (2022), among others. In 2016, she received the 34th Mukoda Kuniko Award. In 2022, she received the 111th Television Drama Academy Award for Best Screenplay, the 48th Hosono Bunka Foundation Award for Best Screenplay, the Tokyo Drama Award 2022 for Best Screenplay, and the 73rd Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's Art Encouragement Prize. This will be her second Taiga drama.

Story

In 1840, when Japan's fragile ships were producing countless castaways, Manjiro, a poor boy from Tosa, leaves his mother behind and heads out on his first offshore fishing voyage with older fishermen. It is the beginning of a journey that will change his fate.

After a desperate struggle between life and death, Manjiro and the others are rescued by the American whaling ship John Howland. English, which he encounters for the first time, the rough foreign sailors, and the whaling trade that generates wealth all stir his curiosity. Even if he somehow returned to his closed off homeland, he might face execution. If that is the case, he decides, he wants to live and learn more. And so, accepting Captain Whitfield's invitation, he resolves to cross alone to America.

America is in the midst of the Industrial Revolution. Supported by the captain, Manjiro goes to school, experiences friendship, love, and youth at full speed. Though he faces racial discrimination, he also comes to know a world where skill can earn respect. And he becomes a sailor acknowledged by all.

But gradually, he begins to hear more and more negative stories about Japan. Reflecting on the meaning of his own life, Manjiro makes another

decision.

“I will return.”

He will return to see his mother again, and to bring to Japan the “knowledge and skills” that opened up his life.

Determined that one day he will repay the captain’s kindness, Manjiro pushes forward through the adventure of a life filled with rough seas.

Regarding the production
Executive Producer Mio Ietomi

“Where am I now?”

From the moment he drifted at sea, perhaps Manjiro was always confronting that question. To spend nearly three years sailing across the widest ocean on earth, chasing whales whose whereabouts were unknown, and then return to port, is an astonishing feat of skill. A nameless ordinary person, through tremendous effort, gained the technique of knowing his position and discovered the feeling of being able to advance across the great sea without losing his way. I found immense romance in that.

Manjiro has been portrayed in novels, television, and kabuki by many people in the past, yet the general image of him may still be limited to “a man with an unusual name” or “a man who could speak English,” leaving him wrapped in mystery. And although he may have stood beside so many great historical figures and at so many historic moments, the words he left behind are modest. Perhaps, as someone born a fisherman, he could not leave many words behind, or perhaps doing so would have endangered his life. On the other hand, Manjiro did leave behind numbers. Rows of carefully written numbers and calculations. I believe they may be the traces of his voyages, records of where he was at any given moment. To me, they also feel like proof that he survived.

The Taiga drama John Man combines into one title the English name “John” and the Japanese character “Man.” I am thrilled that Manjiro, who survived the fierce waves of a life spanning Japan and America, will be depicted by screenwriter Yuki Fujimoto and portrayed by actor Kento Yamazaki. It feels like the greatest adventure. With all my heart, I hope to deliver a drama that will stir viewers of every generation and become a kind of compass in someone’s life.

2028 Taiga Drama John Man

Broadcast schedule
From January 2028

Production schedule
Filming scheduled to begin in early summer 2027

2026年4月13日(月)