

HANDBOOK
for
THE 35TH OGANO FOLK KABUKI & PERFORMING ARTS FESTIVAL
Sunday, November 20th, 2005

Program

Historical Overview of the Ogan Kabuki

Kabuki is one of the three major traditional theaters of Japan, along with Noh and Bunraku (puppet theater). Kabuki started in the early 17th century as a kind of variety show given by itinerant entertainers and grew into an artistic theater, incorporating elements of Noh and Bunraku as well as social happenings of the time. Over the next two and half centuries, the acting and musical styles became more dramatic and complex, eventually developing into the highly sophisticated theater we see today.

In the course of Kabuki's development, the Tokugawa shogunate, established in 1603 for the centralized control of Japan, was very aware of the explosive of Kabuki as popular entertainment and enforced stringent restrictions on it. Performances were limited to the three cities of Kyoto, Osaka and Edo (the old name for Tokyo) and to the licensed troupes only. All the plays were rigorously censored as to every detail of the dramas. In Edo, three professional theaters were allowed to operate in a designated district in the city. After the Meiji Restoration of 1868, one of them moved to the central city, where there now stands Kabukiza, a permanent theater for Kabuki.

In rural areas, Kabuki was, in principle, forbidden as unsuitable entertainment for the farming folk who was supposed to be just toiling and mooling. The ban, however, was cleverly evaded by the farmers, who outwitted local administrators and enjoyed the clandestine thrill of the colorful dramas. Troupes from urban theaters frequently traveled to the provinces, and local enthusiasts took to the stage, often organizing themselves into semi-professional companies. Chichibu, close to Edo, was advantageously located for this purpose.

In the surge of the Kabuki fervor, a farmer in western Chichibu aspired to become a professional actor and apprenticed himself under Bando Mitsugoro, a prominent Edo actor of the late 18th century. After some years of training, he received Mitsugoro's permission to use the Kabuki house name of Bando and took the title of Bando Hikogoro. Returning home, he organized his young neighbors into a troupe, presenting plays in village festivals with a great success.

After his death in 1834, local actors kept up the tradition in Kabuki by establishing their own companies or pursuing it as communal activities with high respect for the acting styles and skills as intangible village assets. On the back of favorable economy based on the silk and forestry industries, Kabuki was an extremely popular art form all over Chichibu and in the adjacent regions. Many farmers too lessons in the music and ballads for Kabuki plays and the plots of dramas were very familiar to all. Seasonal festivals were occasions for them to show off their talents and skill, forgetting about the daily hard labor in roaring applause from their friends and relatives in the audience.

With the advent of the movie in the early 20th century, interest in Kabuki began to decline. During WW II, it almost died out owing to military drafts and economic austerity in general. When peace was restored in 1945, entertainment-hungry villagers revived their Kabuki with huge success, but the tide reversed again in the subsequent

years of high-paced economic growth. The spread of television sets in every household deprived folk Kabuki of audiences who used to come join in love performances.

Hoping to stem the unfavorable tide, actors of Ogano formed a society named the Ogano Kabuki Preservation Society in 1972. The Society now has about 7 adult members in four district branches of Juroku, Tsuyagi, Ogano and Iida. Closely affiliated to it is the Children's Kabuki Society established in 1975. More recently, teachers at junior high schools have adopted Kabuki lessons in the curriculums. There also are amateurs' Kabuki clubs and a women's group.

Meanwhile, the town hall started a Kabuki festival in 1971 as a cultural event different from the traditional village festivals. Local artists – painters and potters – offered their cooperation with art exhibitions in old building along the town's main thoroughfare, stimulating general interest in architectural preservation. Held annually since then, the Ogano Folk Kabuki and Performing Arts Festival marks its 35th in 2005. Since 1993, the preservation of local Kabuki is emphasized as a main pillar in the town's administrative policies. The members of the Ogano Kabuki Preservation Society are sent out as good missions to wherever in the country they are invited, having traveled to 50 cities and towns to this day. The town itself has hosted the Kanto Region Folk Performing Arts Festival in 1996 and the Japan Folk Performing Arts Festival in 1997.

Mayor 7 is proud to keep up and reinforce his town's tradition in performing arts under the slogan he has inherited from his predecessors, "Ogano-machi – where the whole town are Kabuki players."

Types of Kabuki Plays

Among the three categories of Kabuki plays, the *jidai-mono* and the *sewa-mono* contain dramatic presentations while the *shosa-goto* consists of dancing or pantomimic scenes. The *jidai-mono* often staged contemporary events relating to the members of the ruling samurai class with changes, however, in the names, places and the historical setting of the incidents in order to satisfy the government censors. This practice of rewriting the factual events turned the *jidai-mono* into a mixture of fact and fantasy.

The *sewa-mono* started as a re-enactment on stage of sensational events or topics among the townspeople. For instance, a shocking double suicide by desperate lovers might be presented on a Kabuki stage a few days later. As the themes treat the affairs of the common people, these dramas were enacted more factually and realistically.

The two styles are often mixed in a play to present different aspects of a character.

Makeup

In the *sewa-mono*, the makeup is more realistic than the *jidai-mono*. The *onnagata* (the female characters) wear heavier makeup in the roles of young women, court ladies and courtesans. The actor playing the roles of a young man in a realistic play and a dashing military hero in a historic play are heavily made up to accentuate his handsome features.

The outstanding example of Kabuki makeup is the *kumadori*, an established set of mask-like style, using red and blue colors, red expressing passion, virtue or superhuman powers, and blue expressing jealousy, fear and other negative traits which reveal the evil aspects of a character.

Synopses

1. Koinyobo Somewake Tazuna (Beloved Wife Handling the Rein of Variegated Colors) Act X: Shigenoi Bids a Farewell to Her Son

Shigenoi is a lady-in-waiting in service to Lord Yurugi, the daimyo of the Tamba domain. Eleven years ago she fell in love with Date Yosaku, a retainer of Lord Yurugi, and had a son with him. Since love between the servants was a strict taboo in the feudal age, the couple and their new-born baby were all to be punished with death. Lord Yurugi, however, was gracious enough to save their lives by expelling Date from the house and giving the boy baby to someone outside. Shigenoi was ordered to stay in the house to nurse Lord Yurugi's just-born girl baby. The broken family never met since then.

As the curtain rises, the scene is a room in the back of Lord Yurugi's mansion. It is the day of the wedding of Princess Shirabe, Lord Yurugi's daughter now eleven years old. The marriage has been arranged by her father in a common practice in the feudal age when military leaders often attempted to establish peace with their rivals through marital relationships. Time is pressing for everyone to get ready for the wedding ceremony, but the princess, being too young to fully understand her circumstances, is cross, unwilling to leave her home.

Shigenoi is at her wit's end, having tried everything to persuade the little princess. Wakana, a junior female servant, enters, saying that she happened to see a packhorse boy playing in front of the mansion. He seems to be about the same age with the princess and have a good humor. Maybe, he could make the princess happy by playing together for a while. Shigenoi agrees that it is a good idea and order her to bring him in.

As the boy comes in and introduces himself as Sankichi, it is obvious that he is a poor orphan eeking out a modest living by offering porter service to passers-by on streets. Being cheerful and smart, however, he soon fixes the mood of the princess, and she leaves to get ready for her departure.

Delighted with the good job done by the boy, Shigenoi thanks him gratefully. Introducing herself as Shigenoi, the nurse, she is about to hand him a token of her appreciation. The boy asks her back if she is indeed called Shigenoi. As she nods, he exclaims that she is his mother, the one he has been dying to meet all his life.

Shigenoi reels back at his words. Looking at him closely, she recognized the images of her beloved husband in the boy's face and knows that he is telling the truth. Joy fills her heart, and she wants to hug him in her arms.

She has to control herself, however, compelled by the awareness of her duty as the nurse of Princess Shirabe. What would people think of the princess having been nursed by the mother of a packhorse boy? The discovery might ruin the important wedding for the house of Lord Yurugi, to whom she owes her life to this day. (Her agony over the contradiction of a motherly love and the sense of duty is one of the great moment of the play.)

Recovering herself, Shigenoi admits that she is indeed his mother, but refuses to accommodate his wish to leave the house to live with him, explaining why. Her mission as the nurse of Princess Shirabe is a lifetime commitment and obligation she had accepted when pardoned by Lord Yurugi. To abandon the mission is a sin which she does not wish to commit. Sankichi as her son should be strong and intelligent enough to understand such a way of life.

Sobbing but convinced, Sankichi stands up with the courage of a man who understands the cruelty of the real world. Time is running out for Shigenoi to go with the princess. She bids a farewell in sorrow and sees Sankichi off as he leaves, singing a song as he usually does when walking his horse on a road.

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The performance of this play was revived in May 2004 for the first time in 50 years since its last in Ogano, by the efforts of the Tsuyagi Branch of the Ogano Kabuki Preservation Society. The revived show met big applause from the audience for well-coordinated, natural acting by a real father and son? Cast as Shigenoi and Sankichi.

Ogano Children's Kabuki Preservation Society scored a great success, too, with this play in the 7th National Children's Kabuki Festival in Komatsu, Ishikawa Prefecture, on May 14-15, 2005. The success was a gratifying reward for young actors who had practiced it for months under the guidance of the players of the Tsuyagi Branch. Today's performance is the first in their home town. Upcoming shows have been set for the Gumma Children's Kabuki Festival on January 14, 2006 and for another festival in Kanagawa Prefecture in March 2006.

2. Kanadehon Chushingura (The Treasure of Loyal Retainers)

Act V: The Shotgun Scene

The play is based on an incident of 1701-1703, in which 47 retainers avenged their master's death by killing wicked Lord Kira who had humiliated and provoked their master, Lord Asano, into drawing his sword in the shogun's palace of Edo, an act for which Lord Asano was sentenced to commit suicide. The historical facts are reshaped, changing the names and places and moving the historical setting of the incidents to an earlier period, all these to meet the criteria of the censorship. Complementing the tense drama of the disgrace and suicide of Lord Asano (En'ya Hangan in the drama) is a pathetic love story of his young retainer, Kayano Sampei (Hayano Kampei in the drama), who was dating with his girlfriend, O-karu, time of his master's crisis, thus, running away from the sense of guilt.

In Act V, some months have passed since the tragic incident. Kampei is living in the house of O-karu's parents, isolated among the hills. He is making his living as a hunter to keep himself and his family-in-law. As the scene opens, it is raining heavily at night. Kampei with his gun in his hand, takes shelter under a tree. The rain has extinguished his match, and he is wondering what to do, when a traveler comes hurrying toward him, shielding a small lantern under his coat. Kampei asks for his help with relighting his match. The traveler is suspicious, but when Kampei offers to hand over his gun while he takes the light, he looks at Kampei more closely and recognizes him. Called his named by the traveler, Kampei realizes that this is Sanzaki Yogoro, one of his former colleagues in service to En'ya Hangan. Kampei explains his failure to be at his master's side in the hour of need and his subsequent disappearance. He thought of dying when the news of the master's suicide reaches him, but he could not. He then heard of the plan of revenge and asked Yoroogo to help him join in the group.

Yoroogo is touched by Kampei's remorse, but not quite certain of telling Kampei the secret plan, suggest that perhaps, Kampei could contribute to the fundraising

now being planned in honor of the deceased master. Kampei understands and promises to somehow find money in a few days through he is penniless at the moment. Yorogo gives Kampei the contact address for the contribution, and the two part.

(The stage revolves to show another part of the same area. Bundles of harvested rice are hung on bamboo frames.)

An old man comes hurrying on the *hanamichi* approach to the stage. He is O-karu's father, Yoichibei, who has been on a sad errand to the Gion red light district, Kyoto. He has sold his daughter to a brothel in order to raise money to help Kampei to redeem his honor. He, his wife and O-karu concocted the plan without telling Kampei because they could think of no other way of helping him. Getting tired from the long journey to Kyoto, Yoichibei decides to rest a while under the drying poles. While resting, he takes out a purse of striped cloth to check 50 *ryo* in it, half the price of his daughter's service. A moment later, a hand shoots out of the bundles of rice and seized the purse. Yoichibei is dismayed, and there comes out a man with a drawn sword, who quickly put an end to the old man, twisting the blade brutally. The thief kicks the body into the undergrowth, and turning around, shows himself to be Sadakuro. He is about to make off with the money in his bosom, when he hears sounds in the woods nearby and hides himself once more behind the screen of rice. A shot rings, and a wounded wild boar charges across the stage, followed by Kampei. Guessing by the noise made by the animal since it is too dark for him to see, Kampei fires at the very spot where Sadakuro is hiding. Sadakuro staggers out and collapses. Kampei hurries forward, thinking he has got his boar and feels about in the dark for his game. To his horror, he finds the body of a man and is about to run away. Then, his hand touches on the money bag. He grabs it and makes off as fast as he can to deliver the money to the fundraiser as a token of his loyalty.