

Chapter 1



Overview

I have seen the *nebuta* lanterns paraded through the summer streets behind their massive drums . . . watched the Emburi dancers stamping about in the February ice at dawn on Choja Hill . . .

—Booth 1995:36

Seeing the Folk Performing Arts Today

Japan's folk performing arts and the festivals with which they often go hand-in-hand are the stuff of travelers' dreams. They transform car-choked city streets into spectator-lined parade routes filled with well-orchestrated troupes of dancers and musicians. They turn remote country shrines into intimate theaters where the cast of characters comes out of a marvelous script that may be unknown in the professional repertory.

The folk performing arts are marked by contrast and variety. Seasoned performers arrayed in wildly unreal animal masks and costumes who are the perennial stars of local festivals and of folk-culture programs out of town are part of the folk performing arts—as are schoolchildren just beginning to master the complexities of puppet handling and the musical and narrative arts that are traditions of performance where they live.

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On any given day of the year, folk performing arts are presented somewhere in Japan. It is not always easy, however, to find out where and when they take place. The guidebooks targeted at travelers interested in festivals make a good beginning. Along with a few paragraphs on the history and highlights of a festival and the folk performing arts connected with it, the books often give the telephone number of the local chamber of commerce or tourism office, which should definitely be consulted because the time and location of events can change from one year to the next.¹ Festivals and their folk performing arts are also advertised on posters displayed in trains, and announced in articles in newspapers and magazines and in programs on television and radio.²

When it comes to folk performing arts presentations unrelated to festivals, anyone who keeps up with cultural current events will probably at least be aware of shows at central and high-profile locations such as the National Theatre in Tokyo. Numerous programs are mainly promoted locally, however. The determined folk performing arts viewer can do well by contacting prefectural and municipal visitor bureaus. Members of the academic Society of Folkloric Performing Arts who attend the group's seminars and meetings invariably receive flyers announcing upcoming presentations in localities around Japan. Those who join the Japan Folk Performing Arts Association also receive a newsletter noting future programs.³

The brief sketches of the half dozen events that follow are intended to give an idea of some of the occasions, settings, and kinds of presentations that reflect the folk performing arts in Japan today. It is a small sampling, to be sure, but one that also serves to illustrate differing perspectives that the folk performing arts offer on traditional culture (or, sometimes, what passes for traditional culture) in contemporary Japan.

For the student of the folk performing arts, and of the performing arts in general, the *Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri* (the festival of Kasuga Wakamiya Shrine) in the city of Nara in Nara Prefecture is a veritable "banquet" (Misumi 1982b:66). Starting around three o'clock in the afternoon of December 17, and concluding after ten o'clock that night, groups of performers take turns presenting several different styles of dances and dramas—*kagura*, *Azuma asobi*, *dengaku*, *seino*, *sarugaku*, *bugaku*, and *Yamato mai*. Though the presentations have certainly changed over time, all possess lineages going back at least to the twelfth century, when the festival began.

In them can be seen the vestiges of court entertainments and of performing arts that may have originally come to Japan from Korea and China.

The setting for performances is a grassy, parklike area along the main avenue that leads up to Kasuga Shrine, the main shrine of which Kasuga Wakamiya is part. A small, temporary shrine building, called the *tabisho*, is erected for the duration of the festival. The darkness and cold of the December night is broken by bonfires, and the attention of spectators is captured by the reverberations of drums, the cry of flutes, and the sight of performers outfitted, for example, in the richly hued and patterned costumes and otherworldly masks of *bugaku* and the ghostly white robes and face coverings of *seinoo* (fig. 1). The movement of the dancers tends to be slow and repetitive, the effect hypnotic rather than boring. The occasional sound of chants and songs is likely to be muffled behind masks or simply overwhelmed by the music. The spectators are prepared: they come equipped with detailed program notes in a pamphlet published by the shrine.



Figure 1 *Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri* (Nara). *Seinoo* dancers perform on a snowy night. (Photo: Kasuga Taisha)

Other events of the festival of Kasuga Wakamiya include a procession earlier in the day by scores of people dressed in period costumes. The parade starts at the prefectural office building in the city and winds its way along Nara's stately avenues, finally arriving at the temporary shrine building. Before the dances and dramas get underway, there is another opportunity to view performances: at the "under the pine ceremony," a brief revue given by the performing groups at the site where, it is said, the model for the venerable pine tree painted on the back wall of *nō* stages stood.

The presentations at the *tabisho* are the climax of the *Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri*. From a religious perspective, the performing arts here are offerings to the deity in whose honor the festival is carried out.⁴ When the presentations are completed the deity is escorted from the temporary shrine back to his permanent abode within the wooded precincts near the main buildings of Kasuga Shrine. The festival as a whole is brought to a close early in the afternoon of December 18, with *nō* and *kyōgen* plays given by professional actors at the site of the *tabisho* (fig. 2).



Figure 2 *Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri* (Nara). *Nō* being performed in front of the *tabisho* (temporary shrine). (Photo: Kasuga Taisha)

One of the most interesting conversations I have had on the subject of the folk performing arts was with an official of Kasuga Shrine. He talked about the difficulties in recruiting volunteer performers from among the busy residents of Nara for the dances and dramas and costumed procession and of raising the funds necessary to buy costumes and equipment for the vast and multifaceted *Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri*. Firmly opposed in principle to promoting the folk performing arts as tourist events, Kasuga Shrine is a consummate manager of what has long been a major religious, cultural, and, to be sure, tourist event. The festival offers an accommodating context for the folk performing arts in late-twentieth-century Japan.

In contrast to the air of solemnity and to the darkness that literally envelops the performing arts at the *Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri*, the festival called *Nagasaki Kunchi* is a vibrant display of dances and skits that unfolds under the usually brilliant blue skies of early autumn at Suwa Shrine in the city of Nagasaki in Nagasaki Prefecture. *Kunchi* means ninth day; the festival, which now runs from October 7 to 9, used to take place on the ninth day of the ninth month on the lunar calendar. Dating back to the early Edo period, the festival was promoted by the local shogunal authorities supposedly as a way to divert people from Christianity. Nagasaki was not only a center of Christianity, but also Japan's principal port for foreign trade. Bright and fanciful Chinese and European-style costumes, lively music, and eye-catching floats—cartoonlike renditions of trading ships, among others—make the *Nagasaki Kunchi* today as much an historical pageant (and tourist event) as a shrine festival. Communities within the city compete with each other in putting on as lively and polished a show as possible.

Both Nara and Nagasaki are, of course, major urban centers. The folk performing arts are often associated with more rural locations, such as those that can be experienced on the occasion of the *Mibu no Hana Taue*, a rice-planting festival with folk performing arts that takes place in the town of Chiyoda, which is tucked in the interior of Hiroshima Prefecture. On the first Sunday in June young women in matching patterned kimono step into a muddy rice field to sing and to plant fresh green rice shoots in unison. Dozens of people—neighbors, friends, and relatives of the performers, along with a sprinkling of out-of-town festival and folk performing arts enthusiasts—look on. Accompanied by the music of drums, flutes, and

gongs, the women are joined by men playing the *sasara*, an instrument made from slats of bamboo or wood. The distinctive rasping sound of the *sasara* occupies a prominent place in the folk performing arts. The *sasara* players of *Mibu no Hana Taue* are said to embody the deities who watch over the fields.

Mibu no Hana Taue would not be complete without the parade of ten or so head of oxen festooned with decorations that is also a highlight of the show. The oxen are no longer beasts of burden; farm machinery does the job now. They are, rather, beasts of culture, regarded as essential components of the presentation today.



Figure 3 *Ogano Kabuki* (Saitama). Children performing *kabuki* on a festival float. (Photo: Ogano-machi Kyōiku Iinkai)

Another example of folk performing arts in a rural location is *Ogano Kabuki*. Out of a population of thirteen thousand in the town of Ogano, Saitama Prefecture, there are some one hundred and fifty people—men, women, and children—active in *kabuki*. Six presentations are regularly scheduled in Ogano every year: on March 5 at Yamato Takeru Shrine, on April 12 at Oshika Shrine, on May 3 at Kimusubi Shrine, on the first Saturday in October at Myōkengū Shrine, on the third Sunday in November at the town's newly built culture center, and on December 14 and 15 at Hachiman Shrine (fig. 3).

Ogano Kabuki is a superb example of a folk performing art driven by civic pride. Descended from a professional troupe that was established in Ogano in the mid-nineteenth century, *Ogano Kabuki* could still claim the presence of professional performers in the years following World War II. In 1973, with professional *kabuki* no longer economically viable, town residents organized a preservation society which carries on the *kabuki* today.

Ogano Kabuki was an immediate revelation to me when I first saw it presented at the Saitama Prefectural Folk Culture Center in 1993. Here was a chance to see not only folk *kabuki* but also *kabuki* performed by women. The drama was the famous Amagasaki scene of the play *Ehon Taikōki* (The picture book of the Taikō). It is the story of the fateful meeting between the characters Akechi Mitsuhide and Mashiba Hisayoshi (the dramatists' name for the historical figure Toyotomi Hideyoshi). In the process of trying to kill Hisayoshi before Hisayoshi kills him, Mitsuhide winds up killing his own mother and witnesses the death of his own son. It is a play of great emotion. The impressively skilled actors that I saw were the women who make up an all-female troupe among the five troupes of *Ogano Kabuki*. In December 1982, Tamura Shizue, a resident of Ogano, went to the preservation society asking to learn *kabuki*. One of the directors inquired if she would be interested in reviving *kabuki* in her neighborhood—it had ceased being done there (by professional, which is also to say male, actors) in 1948—and she agreed, getting together a dozen women who began practicing in January 1983. Their debut was at the festival of Myōkengū Shrine, and they have been appearing at the festival there every year since. They also perform on other occasions, such as the time I saw them at the Folk Culture Center. In Ogano, as elsewhere, it is principally

the enthusiasm of dedicated amateurs that supports the folk performing arts.

Folk performing arts groups are often called on to participate in a variety of folk-culture programs. In May 1995 I had the opportunity to attend the annual meeting of the National Union of Cities, Towns, and Villages for the Preservation and Promotion of the Folk Performing Arts (Zenkoku Minzoku Geinō Hozon Shinkō Shichōson Renmei). The four hundred members of the organization include representatives from the cultural properties divisions within prefectural and municipal governments as well as folk performing arts specialists with various affiliations, such as universities and the Agency for Cultural Affairs. The purpose of the organization is to exchange ideas and, to a degree, coordinate government support of the folk performing arts. The union is a sponsor of such events as the National Convention of Folk Performing Arts (see Chapter 5).

The members of the union get together in a different location each year, always in a place well known for its folk performing arts. A



Figure 4 Washinomiya Shrine, Saitama Prefecture. *Kagura* being performed for people attending the May 1995 meeting of the National Union of Cities, Towns, and Villages for the Preservation and Promotion of the Folk Performing Arts. (Photo: Barbara E. Thornbury)

presentation for attendees is a regular part of the proceedings. The 1995 gathering took place in the town of Washimiya, Saitama Prefecture. After a day of business meetings and a panel discussion on the current state of the folk performing arts, attendees were transported by bus to nearby Washinomiya Shrine. Rows of folding chairs were set up in front of the old wooden stage which faces the main building of the shrine (fig. 4). The word *hōnō* (offering) is written in bold strokes on the curtain hanging over the stage—meaning that the dances and dance-dramas done on the stage are offerings to the deities of the shrine.

As I watched the program that cool, humid, eve-of-the-rainy-season afternoon, I could not help but think that the performances were also a kind of offering to the assembled bureaucrats. After all, they are the ones who distribute what government aid there is to help folk performing arts groups buy and repair costumes, musical instruments, and props. They also sponsor folk performing arts events, designate certain presentations as “cultural properties,” and, in general, act as official guardians of traditional culture.

Two groups were featured in 1995: performers of *Washinomiya Saibara Kagura* and of *Edo no Sato Kagura*—the latter from Tokyo, but whose history is linked to the *kagura* at Washinomiya Shrine. The performers appeared in *nō*-style costumes and masks. As in *nō* and *kyōgen*, serious drama was offset by comical elements. The *Washinomiya Saibara Kagura* group includes high school-age members. Though they tended to fumble a bit onstage, being able to recruit young performers, both male and female, is a point of pride for this group.

Folk performing arts events, wherever they take place, tend to attract swarms of photographers, and this was no exception. It seemed to get to the point that the audience was not watching *kagura* as much as watching photographers take pictures of *kagura*. It must have been intrusive for the performers who literally had cameras pushed to within inches of their faces whenever they approached the edge of the stage. It certainly was intrusive for the audience. But it is a fact of life for the folk performing arts today. They are a photo opportunity, providing satisfying images of traditional culture in contemporary Japan.

Photographers were also very much in evidence at a specially arranged day-long folk performing arts event I also attended in 1995 at the Oni no Yakata (House of Demons) museum in the city of



Figure 5 *Gongen mai* (lion dance). Part of a *Daijō Kagura* (Iwate) presentation at the Oni no Yakata museum. (Photo: Barbara E. Thornbury)



Figure 6 *Daijō Kagura* (Iwate). Performers wind their way through the audience at the Oni no Yakata museum. (Photo: Barbara E. Thornbury)

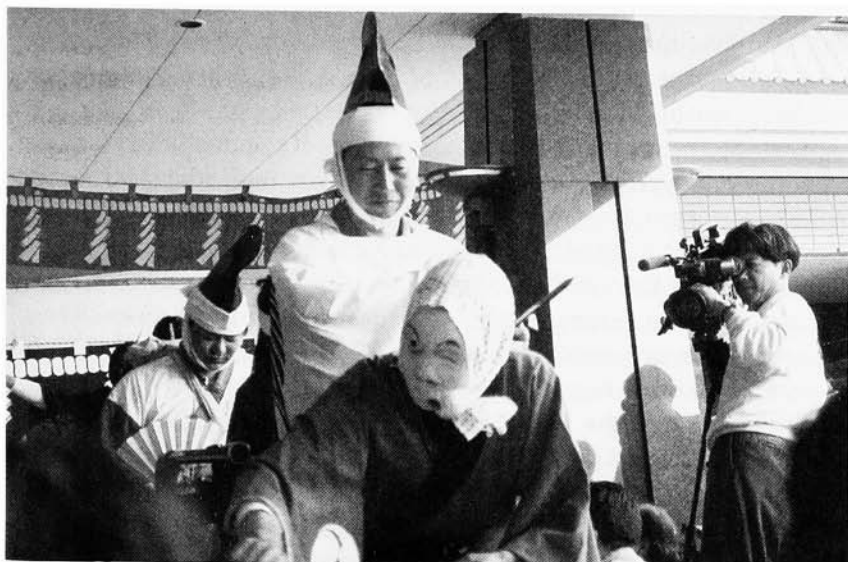


Figure 7 *Daijō Kagura* (Iwate) at the Oni no Yakata museum. In the foreground, the masked comic character Hyottoko. (Photo: Barbara E. Thornbury)

Kitakami, Iwate Prefecture. Demons (*oni*) make frequent appearances in the folklore, performing arts, and festivals of the Kitakami area, which accounts for the theme of this quite serious museum which opened in 1994.

The program was the museum's second annual *daijō kagura* festival (figs. 5–7). *Daijō kagura* dances and dance-dramas were once performed by mountain ascetics (*yamabushi*) in communities in northeastern Japan. Iwate Prefecture is especially rich in this type of folk performing art.

Flyers advertising the event were given out at a meeting of the Society of Folkloric Performing Arts, and several of us who decided to go met early on a Sunday morning on the Shinkansen platform at Tokyo Station. Thanks to high-speed Shinkansen trains, a trip to Kitakami and back to Tokyo can easily be done in a day.

The museum is equipped with a handsome outdoor stage, used mostly for monthly demonstrations of *oni kenbai* (demon sword dances), another type of folk performing art for which the Kitakami area is well known. Because it was raining on and off, by the time we

arrived the presentations had been moved to the museum's roofed-over outdoor terrace. Despite the cramped conditions, the tightly scheduled program, featuring more than a half dozen groups, proceeded smoothly.

Each segment, which lasted an average of twenty to twenty-five minutes, was preceded by explanations given by Kadoya Mitsuaki, a folk performing arts specialist who is a professor at Morioka University and head of the museum. Kadoya's approach, I thought, tended toward the overly academic, as if he felt compelled to leave no doubt in the minds of the audience of mostly local residents regarding the importance of their regional culture. Kadoya is a dynamic speaker, however, and at each brief interval his words skillfully bridged the time it took for the performance area to be readied for the next group. Local identity being all important in the folk performing arts, every group hung up along the back wall a curtain on which its name and the name of its village or town were clearly printed. There were also drums to set up, cushions to arrange for the musicians, and the occasional prop to put in place.

The pieces included several variations of *gongen mai*, the ritualized, signature lion dance of the *kagura* of northeastern Japan. As the presentation proceeds a dancer gradually puts on the robes and mask of *gongen*—in religious terms, a manifestation of a Shinto deity. The *gongen* mask represents a large and powerful creature, the sound of whose clacking jaws (manipulated by the dancer from inside his costume) brings the dance to its crescendo. As captivating as the lion dances were, the highlight of the day was a dramatic enactment of the climax of the medieval tale of the Soga brothers, who avenge the murder of their father. The audience was riveted by the ringingly clear voice of the narrator, who told the story to drum and flute accompaniment, and by the strongly expressive faces of the performers who really looked like brothers.

The program, which started at 10 A.M., concluded at 4 P.M. When lunchtime arrived, the audience took out the food they had brought from home: big, picnic-style *onigiri* rice balls, along with cans of beer, bottles of sake, and thermoses of tea. It was a Sunday out, a day to relax and see friends, neighbors, and relatives perform. People came and went in the course of the day; about thirty to forty people were watching the show at any one time.

The museum was built as an attraction for visitors and as a symbol of the new city of Kitakami, which, in the interests of admin-

istrative efficiency, recently incorporated several surrounding towns. Kitakami seems determined to reverse the effects of the area's postwar depopulation. The museum is also a cultural institution that needs the support and validation of other cultural institutions. Those of us who came up from Tokyo for the day were treated as honored guests. Although the arrival of the leading folk performing arts specialist from the Agency for Cultural Affairs had been expected by the event organizers, when the rest of us (three from universities and one from the Tokyo National Research Institute of Cultural Properties) got off the train with him we too became VIPs. We were all presented with box lunches, interviewed by a newspaper reporter, and ushered into the museum reception room for tea and an impromptu seminar after the show. Our hosts were both museum personnel and representatives of the city government.

The day provided a fascinating glimpse of the folk performing arts as an element of culture, politics, and economics. Were it not for the opportunity to see presentations related to our academic interests, my Tokyo colleagues and I would not have gone up to Kitakami that day. But our presence and whatever we might later say and write about *daijō kagura* were obviously perceived as helpful to the city and the museum in their desire to win recognition through the folk performing arts. It was gently suggested to the representative of the Agency for Cultural Affairs that *daijō kagura* be a candidate for national cultural property designation. Although he responded with a pleasant but noncommittal reply, it was a telling moment. National designation has the power to convey to the entire country the message that here is an important example of Japanese culture and, by extension, that Kitakami is an important place in Japan—worth living in, worth investing in, and, of course, worth visiting.

As even these few examples suggest, Japan's folk performing arts cover the map both literally and figuratively. How they have been sorted out and labeled is the subject of the next section.

The Categories

As one of the first scholars to travel throughout Japan to experience firsthand the variety of folk performing arts that were—and in many cases still are—an important aspect of community life, Honda

Yasuji perceived a need to classify the different types of presentations being done. The standard division of the folk performing arts into the five categories that provide a basic descriptive framework in the same way that *nō*, *kyōgen*, *kabuki*, and *bunraku* do for the professional classical stage arts is credited to him.⁵ Throughout a lifetime of studying the folk performing arts, Honda was concerned not only with different styles and modes of presentations (the words, movement, music, and costumes) but also with their history and folkloric *raison d'être*.

Honda's system emphasizes the folk beliefs that gave rise to the festivals and ceremonies that are traditional occasions for performances.⁶ It divides the folk performing arts according to purpose, form, and transmission (Nishitsunoi 1990a:71). Like the three other systems that will also be mentioned, Honda's is descriptive. It aims at constructing a framework and providing a place within it for each of the folk performing arts that exist. Folk performing arts imply a presentness: to be included a performing art must be carried on. They also imply a pastness: the folk performing arts are traditional performing arts, not newly developed ones.

The five main categories of folk performing arts in Honda's system are *kagura*, *dengaku*, *furyū*, *shukufukugei* (along with *katarimono*), and *butaigei* (also called *tairaigei*). These are the headings as they are presented in Honda's *Nihon no dentō geinō* (The traditional performing arts of Japan, 1990), a work devoted entirely to explicating the kinds of performances that belong to each category and its subcategories, illustrated with photos of performances Honda took over the course of decades of travel and study.⁷

Kagura

Early in the history of folk performing arts research the word *kagura* was often applied to any presentation that occurred on the occasion of a shrine festival. Even as the definition was narrowed by scholars, *kagura* remained the archetypal folk performing arts form.⁸ *Kagura* can be defined as an invitation to the deities to be present while a community entertains them, and through that entertainment seeks to be favored with long life and good fortune.

One of the four subcategories that Honda identifies is *miko*, or shrine maiden, *kagura*. The dancer who brought light and life back

to the world by luring the sun goddess out of the cave in which she had hidden herself in a fit of pique is the legendary ancestor of the *miko* who perform in honor of the deities at whose shrines they serve. The women dance alone, in pairs, or in larger ensembles, moving to the accompaniment of songs and instrumental music.⁹ Once associated with female shamans whose purpose in dancing was to reach a state of trance, *miko kagura* today are for the most part quietly elegant and well-choreographed presentations performed by volunteers from the community or shrine employees.

Though the dancers of shrine-maiden *kagura* often hold some type of object—a fan or bells, for example, that are said to be symbolic of the presence of the deities for whom the dances are performed—Honda makes *torimono kagura* (literally, the *kagura* of handheld objects) a separate subcategory. Other objects include wands decorated with strips of paper used in Shinto rituals, branches of *sakaki* (an evergreen also used in Shinto rituals), swords, and bows and arrows. *Torimono kagura* is also known as *Izumo kagura* because of its association with Sada Shrine in the Izumo area of western Japan.¹⁰

The silent dramas of *Edo no Sato Kagura* (Tokyo) are an example of *torimono kagura*.¹¹ The stories that are depicted are often lost to contemporary audiences who require the explanations that are usually provided in program notes distributed at presentations. Other examples of this subcategory include *Washinomiya Saibara Kagura* (Saitama), *Takachiho no Yokagura* (Miyazaki), and *Bitchū Kagura* (Okayama).

A third subcategory is *yudate*, or boiling water, *kagura*, also known as the Ise type because of its historical connection with the Ise Grand Shrine.¹² Here, a cauldron of steaming water invokes the deity and also represents the purification of the performance area. As if energized by the hot water, the dances tend to be fast-paced and showy, such as those in which the dancers wear the masks and costumes of impressively evil-looking demons. *Yudate kagura* includes *Shimotsuki Kagura* (Akita) and the *kagura* of the *Hanamatsuri*, a festival carried out in a score of locations in Aichi Prefecture, in two locations in Shizuoka Prefecture, and in one community in Nagano Prefecture.

In addition to the handheld objects and boiling water, the symbolic elements of *kagura* also include masks. The fourth subcategory, *shishi kagura*, is characterized by its use of “lion” (*shishi*)

masks which cover dancers' heads.¹³ There are two main strains. One predominates in northeastern Japan, and includes the *nōmai* of Aomori Prefecture, the *yamabushi kagura* of Iwate Prefecture, the *bangaku* of Akita Prefecture, and the *hiyama kagura* of Yamagata Prefecture. The other, known as *daikagura*, is concentrated in the Ise area of Mie Prefecture.

Dengaku

The term *dengaku* today refers to two different types of presentations. One is generally associated with late-winter or early-spring festivals that seek to ensure a successful agricultural cycle. Within the grounds of a shrine or temple, in processions along country roads, or in fields where crops are grown, community members dance to the accompaniment of musical instruments. Subcategories include *tamai* (field dances), *taasobi* (field entertainment), and *taue odori* (rice-planting dances). Examples are *Mibu no Hana Taue* (Hiroshima), the *ontaue* of Sumiyoshi Taisha (Osaka), *Gero no Ta no Kami Matsuri* (Gifu), *Yuki Matsuri* (Nagano), and *Mutsuki Shinji* (Fukui).

One of the best-known examples of agricultural *dengaku* is *Nishiure no Dengaku* (Shizuoka). Although legend claims that the presentation began in the eighth century, the oldest extant mask dates from the late sixteenth century and the oldest documents relating to *Nishiure no Dengaku* date from the late seventeenth century. One aspect of its fame today is the determination of the community to adhere to past practice. The date of the presentation, which extends from the evening of the eighteenth day to the morning of the nineteenth day of the first month, is determined according to the lunar calendar. Participants are drawn only from families within the town of Misakubo (of which the area called Nishiure is part) that are historically associated with the presentation. The festival context for *Nishiure no Dengaku* is the *Kannon Matsuri* (also called the *Nō Matsuri*). The *dengaku* is comprised of forty-six dance pieces (forty-seven in years containing an intercalary month on the lunar calendar) prized by scholars as examples of early *nō* drama.¹⁴

The other type of *dengaku* is usually referred to as *dengaku* dance (*dengaku odori*). These presentations were once done by troupes of

professionals (*dengaku hōshi*) who performed at shrines and temples in medieval Japan. Though little remains of the extremely popular and lavish shows, which featured daredevil acrobatics, elements of *dengaku odori* can still be found, for example, in the *ennen* (various entertainments linked with Buddhist ceremonies) of Mōtsūji Temple (Iwate).

Furyū

Furyū is a category of presentations often done on a grand scale. There are the dances—such as *bon odori* (*bon* festival dances), *nenbutsu odori* (dances accompanying the recital of Buddhist chants), *kenbai* (sword dances), and *kouta odori* (dances with folk ballad accompaniment)—that may involve large troupes of performers. There are also the choreographed processions that wind through city streets, some with giant floats on which puppets or live actors present plays. They are exuberant, even wild displays, accompanied by loud drums and shrill flutes. The costumes and floats are colorful and big. These are the folk performing arts of the summer, when folk belief says that such presentations are effective in invoking divine assistance to counter the harm from insects or lack of rainfall, for example, that may befall crops and the diseases that strike people already enervated by heat and humidity. A community may have begun its *furyū* at a time of trouble, and then continued to perform it by way of thanks for deliverance from that trouble.

The word *furyū* conjures up images of splendid innovation.¹⁵ Kyoto's Gion Festival with its floats, costumed attendants, and accompanying festival music is a preeminent example. Associated with Yasaka Shrine, its origins are said to be in the ninth century when Kyoto was struck by an epidemic. It was carried out sporadically until the sixteenth century, when it became a regular event. Using the Kyoto example as their model, many other Gion festivals, such as the Hakata Gion Festival (Fukuoka), are held throughout Japan.

In the *Hitachi Furyūmono* (Ibaraki) the focus, too, is on the floats. Called *furyūmono* ("innovative things"), the floats are forty-five-foot high, multilevel structures (fig. 8). Closed, they represent huge castles topped by towers with mountains in the background. When the wings are open, each level becomes a stage where puppets are

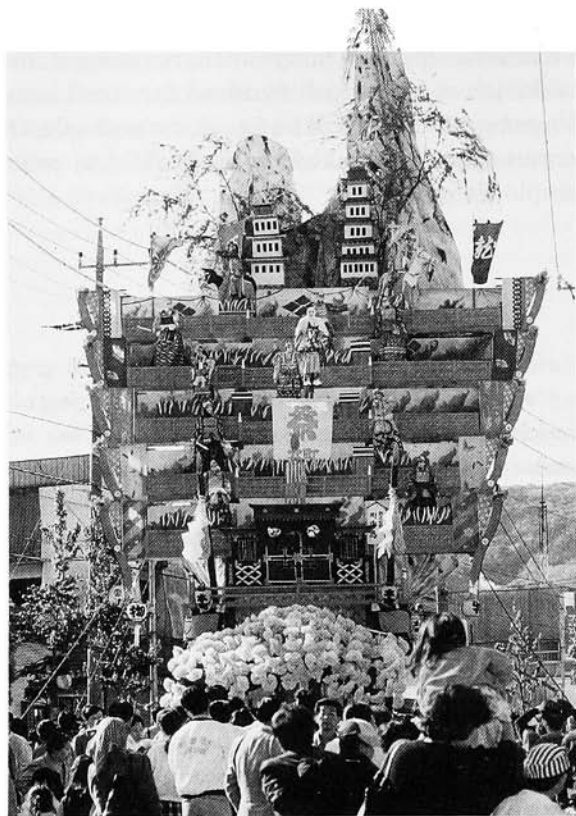


Figure 8 *Hitachi Furyūmono* (Ibaraki). A festival float on which puppet plays are enacted. (Photo: Hitachi-shi Kyōdo Geinō Hozonkai)

manipulated by a crew that is hidden inside and does its work with strings and wires. Musicians provide the accompaniment. The dramatic repertory of *Hitachi Furyūmono* is classic battle-scene fare, such as *Chūshingura* (The treasury of loyal retainers) and *The Picture Book of the Taikō*. The finale of a presentation is a stunning display of technical skill. Just as *kabuki* actors can transform themselves into new characters with the pull of a thread in their costumes, the warrior puppets on the floats are equipped to be suddenly changed into beautiful ladies who dance to an accompanying crescendo of music. *Hitachi Furyūmono* is an enormous undertaking, with a single float requiring the cooperative efforts of some one

hundred and fifty people. Though once transmitted from father to son within the farming families of the town of Miyata, which is now part of the city of Hitachi (established in 1939), the presentation is now open to anyone who wishes to join the Hitachi Folk Performing Arts Preservation Society.

The history of *kabuki* can be seen in *furyū*, in presentations such as *Ayako Mai* (Niigata). Classified as an example of the dances with folk ballad accompaniment that had become popular by the sixteenth century, *Ayako Mai* has attracted a great deal of interest from scholars as well as from people in the field of traditional Japanese dance. It is aesthetically pleasing: the dancers are young girls dressed in colorfully patterned, long-sleeved kimono, their heads covered with bright red cloths. It is also historically significant. Scholars regard *Ayako Mai* as a surviving example of the women's *kabuki* that was the initial stage in the development of *kabuki* dance-drama.

There are a number of aspects, as Nishitsunoi Masahiro (1990a:346–47) has pointed out, that connect *Ayako Mai* with early *kabuki*. One is that the titles of the songs that accompany the dances are the same as those listed in historical documents related to women's *kabuki*. Another is that the costumes, including the bright red cloth headwear, are strikingly similar to those depicted in Edo-period woodblock prints of women's *kabuki*. Others are found in the dance movements, the way folding fans are used, and the musical accompaniment—a combination of drums, bronze clappers, bells, and flutes. Not found here is the shamisen, which later became predominant in *kabuki*. *Ayako Mai* is presented annually on September 15 at Kurohime Shrine in the village of Onnadani.

In general, *furyū* presentations are the most public variety of the folk performing arts in terms of the sheer number of participants and spectators and in terms of the variety of settings where performances take place. *Bon* dances come closest to being Japan's universal folk performing art. *Furyū* lion dance (*furyū shishimai*) performers take their show wherever people invite them. Of course, with the growth of tourism and with the transformation of the folk performing arts into cultural properties, presentations in all categories have become public events that attract spectators, if not participants, from well beyond the geographical borders of their communities.

Shukufukugei and Katarimono

From the perspective of folk belief, handheld objects, such as those used in *torimono kagura*, and masks, as in *shishi kagura*, are symbolic of the presence of deities. Words can also embody a spirit. Such belief is the basis of the *shukufukugei* and *katarimono* category in which the focus is on the delivery of words.

A representative example of *shukufukugei*, which literally means auspicious art, is *manzai* (Nishitsunoi 1990a:216). There are two stock characters, the straight man Tayū and his comic sidekick Saizō, both of them elaborately costumed in formal crested kimono and black lacquered hats. Tayū sings and dances holding a fan. Saizō keeps beat with a small drum. Until the early Shōwa period a common sight during the New Year's season—when performers traveled from house to house and were paid by residents for the good luck they were thought to bring—*manzai* presentations, which feature comic dialogue, are now associated with only a few communities. Examples include *Akita Manzai* (Akita) and *Mikawa Manzai* (Aichi).

Katarimono, or narrative arts, are represented by *Kōwaka Mai* (Fukuoka), the subject of James T. Araki's fine study, *The Ballad Drama of Medieval Japan* (1964). "The *kōwaka* is normally performed by three men. The principal player, called the *tayū*, sings the solos and performs the foot-stamping movement during the climactic sections. The two supporting players, called the *shite* and *waki* . . . serve as the chorus and also alternate with the *tayū* in delivering the 'narrative' sections. . . . The other participant in the performance is the drummer, who accompanies the singing with the beating of the *ko-tsuzumi*, the small hand drum that is shaped like an hourglass" (Araki 1964:92).

Butaigei (or Tairaigei)

Here the textbook of Japanese theatrical history opens up, with presentations of folk performing arts versions of *nō* and *kyōgen*, puppet plays, and *kabuki*—along with *gigaku*, *ennen*, and *bugaku*, among other subcategories. This is also where the familiar suddenly takes on a new twist, where *kyōgen* is done without words, where puppets appear on strings or sticks or wheels with one, two, or three