

Thematic Exhibition

The World of Noh Drama: *Gods, Men, Women, Madness, and Demons*

April 15 (Sat.) - May 28 (Sun.), 2023
Exhibition Rooms of Hōsa Library, City of Nagoya

Organized by
Hōsa Library, City of Nagoya & The Tokugawa Art Museum

Introduction of Exhibition

Nohgaku (commonly known as Noh) is a form of traditional Japanese theater with a 600-year history. The Noh repertoire is said to consist of more than two hundred scripts, which are classified into the five categories of God, Man, Woman, Madness, and Demon plays. This exhibition presents an arrangement of masks, costumes, and stage props for each category of play from the collections that were handed down in the Owari Tokugawa family. We hope that you enjoy this glimpse of the brilliance of the Noh stage.

About Noh Performance

During the Muromachi period, the father and son Noh actors Kan'ami (1333–1384) and Zeami (1363–1443) perfected the dramatic art of Noh under the patronage of the Ashikaga shoguns. The strong voicing, the choreographed movement of masked actors, and the instrumental music played by a flute, and drums, make Noh among the most abstract stage art in the world. The Noh plays draw for the most part on Japanese and Chinese classical literature.

In the Edo period, noh became a ceremonial performance staged for official daimyo events. Celebrations and ceremonies included Noh performances almost of necessity. The daimyo not only enjoyed attending Noh but also sought to take lessons in the performance of the song (*utai*), dance (*mai*), and instruments such as hand drum and flute. Because of this, the daimyo palaces always included a stage for Noh performances on felicitous and formal occasions. The daimyo families invited Noh performers and prepared a stock of masks, costumes, and props for various Noh performances.



Okina

— Noh, but not Noh —

A formal Noh program lasts from early morning until the evening and consists of five categories of plays performed in the order of God, Man, Woman, Madness, and Demon Plays. This structure is called a *goban-date*, or a “five-play program.” *Okina* (lit. “The Elder”) is a special piece that is performed at the top of the program outside of the five-part structure. It is a sacred and ceremonial piece in which a god in the form of an old man dances on the stage and prays for peace under the heavens and tranquillity throughout the land. *Okina* is different from other Noh plays

in that it does not have a narrative storyline. Rather, the performer puts on the mask on stage and undergoes the transformation into a deity in front of the audience, reciting auspicious words and incantations. After ritual sleeve-waving and foot-stamping, the performer takes off the mask before exiting the stage. Before Okina's dance, a figure named Senzai (lit. "A Thousand Years") purifies the stage with a dynamic dance, and after Okina leaves the stage, a Kyōgen actor performs the dance for good harvest, called *Sanbasō*. *Okina* is considered a sacred piece of music, and is performed at festive events, inaugural performances for Noh stages, and for the New Year's holiday.

神 Gods: *Waki* Noh — The World of the Divine —

The first plays that are performed within the five-play program feature deities (*kami*) in the leading roles. These pieces are sometimes called *waki* (flank/side) Noh because they accompany or are performed "beside" *Okina*. Regional gods from various parts of Japan appear as the main characters in these plays, recounting their divine powers and the origin tales of their respective shrines and performing dances to bless the land with prosperity and peace. Representative examples of *waki* Noh include *Takasago*, which features an elderly couple who are incarnations of the pine trees of *Takasago* and *Sumiyoshi*; *Yōrō*, which features the sacred water of the *Yōrō* Waterfall and a mountain deity; and *Chikubushima*, in which deities arrive on the island of Chikubushima in Lake Biwa and bring blessings to the land.

男 Men: *Shura* Noh — Tragic Warrior Tales —

Shura Noh plays are also called *nibanme-mono* (second-group plays) because they are performed second in the five-play program. *Shura* (Sanskrit *asura*) are the spirits of warriors who have taken the lives of others in battle and inhabit a particular realm in the afterlife. In these plays, the spirit of a general of the Minamoto or Taira clan appears before a priest and re-enacts battle scenes from his life, recounts his final days and the suffering he has endured after death, and seeks salvation from the priest. The most representative examples of *shura* Noh are tragedies featuring generals who were defeated in battle (*maké-shura*), such as *Yorimasa*, which depicts the final days of Minamoto no Yorimasa, and *Atsumori*, in which the ghost of Taira no Atsumori appears before Kumagai Naozane, by whose hand he had fallen. Conversely, plays featuring victorious warriors, such as *Yashima*, which recounts the exploits of Minamoto no Yoshitsune, and *Ebira*, which features Kajiwaru Kagesue, are called *kachi* (victor)-*shura* and were staged at celebratory Noh performances held on auspicious occasions such as the ascension of a new shogun or the succession of family headship.

女 Women: *Kazura* Noh — Ladies of the Imperial Court —

This class of Noh plays features women and men from classical literary tales such as *The Tales of Ise* and *The Tale of Genji*, as well as celestial maidens and spirits of plants. Since the group includes many female protagonists, these are commonly known as *kazura* Noh for the type of wig that is worn by female characters. In the latter half of these pieces, the main characters usually appear on stage in their original living form and sing and dance to a dramatic climax before disappearing once again, bringing the piece to an end. These are also called *sanbanme-mono* (third-group plays) because they are performed third in the five-play program. Representative pieces include *Matsukaze* and *Izutsu*, in which the ghosts of women recount stories of their former loves; *Kakitsubata*, in which the spirit of an iris flower dances and muses on *waka* poetry and love; and *Hagoromo*, which is centered on the songs and dance of a celestial maiden who recovers her precious feathered robe from a fisherman.

狂 Madness: *Zatsu* Noh — Miscellaneous Stories —

The fourth class of plays in the five-play program, the *yonbanme-mono*, is also called *zatsu* (miscellaneous) Noh because of the wide variety of subjects it covers, such as wandering figures searching for their departed lovers or their own children, plays about insurmountable attachment to the profane world, stories of revenge, or plots taking place in China. This category includes *Dōjōji*, the tale of a woman whose rage at a man who ran away from her led her to burn him to death along with the temple bell in which he was hiding; *Sumidagawa*, about a mother who is separated from her child; *Aoi no Ue*, about Prince Genji's lover, Lady Rokujō, whose jealous spirit possesses his wife Lady Aoi; and *Shunkan*, about the anguish of a man left alone on a solitary island.

鬼 Demons: *Kiri* Noh — Bringing Supernatural Forces to the Stage —

The last class of play performed in the five-play program is known as *kiri* (ending) Noh. The main characters are supernatural beings, such as demons, *tengu* (long-nosed goblins), fairies, and dragon kings. The protagonist generally appears in this world and then returns to another world, and the songs and dances in the latter half of the play in particular are often dynamic and lively, or cheerful. Representative plays in this group include *Shakkyō* (The Stone Bridge), in which a *shishi* lion-dog appears and performs a dance; *Sesshōseki* (The Killing Stone), in which a giant stone possessed by the spirit of a fox demon is appeased by the power of Buddha; *Shōjō*, which features a demon that is fond of saké;

Tōru, in which the Heian-period statesman Minamoto no Tōru dances and reminisces about the beautiful scenery; and *Funabenkei*, in which the ghosts of warriors of the Taira clan appear before the great military commander Minamoto no Yoshitsune.

PICK UP

Shibyōshi — The Musical Instruments of the Noh Theater

There are four musical instruments used in Noh: the *nōkan* (flute), *kotsuzumi* (shoulder drum), *ōtsuzumi* (hip drum), and *taiko* (stick drum). Collectively, they are called the *shibyōshi* (four rhythm-makers) or the *hayashi* (musical accompaniment) instruments. The musicians who play these instruments accompany the performance seated in a row at upstage center with their backs to the rear stage wall, which is painted with an image of an old pine tree.

PICK UP

Kazura-obi and Koshi-obi: Noh Costume Accessories

The *kazura-obi* is a thin sash about 4 cm wide that is fastened over the wig of a female character to hold it firmly in place and hangs down in the back. As with *karaori* and *nuihaku* robes, there are two distinct types: “with red” (*iro-iri*), which indicate a young woman, and “without red” (*iro-nashi*), which indicate a middle-aged or older woman. With the exception of the area that is placed against the forehead and the part that is knotted, the sashes are decorated with various plant motifs or scale patterns in the case of serpent transformation roles, or family crest designs rendered in embroidery, applied gold and silver foil, gold foil ground, and other exquisite techniques. They are indispensable accessories for female role costumes.

The *koshi-obi* is a sash that is fastened over outer garments, such as *mizugoromo*, *happi*, or *kariginu*, and is also used in the *koshi-maki* (waist-wrapped) costume draping style, in which an outer *nuihaku* robe is tied at the waist and the arms removed from both sleeves so that it hangs down at the back, showing the *surihaku* robe that is worn beneath. The part of the belt that touches the waist and the stiff, flat ends that hang down in front are decorated with various designs in embroidery and metallic foils. Like the *kazura-obi*, these are also described as being either with color or without color.



© The Tokugawa Art Museum
1017 Tokugawa-cho, Higashi-ku,
Nagoya, 461-0023
TEL: 052-935-6262 / FAX: 052-935-6261