
Noh and Kyogen

The New Found in the Old

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The “New” Found in *Fukkyoku* Revival Pieces

Noh, as a classic drama, has always explored types of “newness” while emphasizing its traditions and their transmission. One of these is *fukkyoku*. *Fukkyoku* are revivals of noh plays, some of which had been performed again in the Edo period but whose performances had ceased and were removed from the repertory (also known as *haikyoku*—pieces no longer performed, or *bangai noh*—pieces that are not part of the repertory). In a narrow sense, such noh pieces that have been revived since the 1950s came to be called *fukkyoku noh*, and their number had reached 85 by the end of 2005 (*Nogaku Daijiten* [Noh Encyclopedia], Chikuma Shobo Publishing). The method for these revivals is usually based on the existence of an old script and references to old production information to which new composition (*fushitsuke*) and new choreography (*katatsuke*) are created. The most important thing is that the work considered has historical significance and an attractive quality in the present and second is the introduction of new elements in the piece’s directing and acting. It can be said that the unique quality of revivals is the mixture of the old and the new, as well as the contradictory vectors of the old and the new. In recent years, along with the increase in the number of revivals and the number of groups working on them, the methods for creating such revivals have also diversified. In particular, the *ko-enshutsu joen* or “old-style performances” (the provisional name that refers to the re-staging of past performing styles that have been discontinued and also includes current noh plays), which have become popular since around 1985, have an affinity for exploring the newness in oldness, which tends to be associated with revivals. Below, I would like to take a look at the revivals of 2022 and give an overview of the

current state of *fukkyoku* (listed in order of title, date, location, organizer, and comments).

Kamo Monogurui (The Madwoman of Kamo)

(July 28 and 30, the National Noh Theatre, Monthly Theme: A Genealogy of Madness in Noh Plays, Special Program of Noh Performance, Rediscover Noh)

Since its opening in 1983, the National Noh Theatre has produced new works, revivals, and old-style performances, and this program is its biggest event of the year. What is noteworthy is the thorough outreach and publicity for the event. In addition to a gorgeous leaflet and pre-performance commentary by Amano Fumio, who supervised the project, the extensive pamphlet includes the script of the performance with a modern Japanese translation, commentary and discussion, contributions by the *shite* (main actor) Kanze Kiyokazu and others, as well as the Aoi Matsuri-zu Byobu (Aoi Festival Design Folding Screen) by Nishimura Nantei. A special public lecture was also held on July 4 with demonstrations. Information dissemination and pre-performance learning programs have become common for other revivals, which compensate for the fact that they are “premieres.” The performance was filled with the enthusiasm and passion of the *shite*, and new innovations were developed, especially in the dance. There may be pros and cons to the rather excessive costuming and acting, but it is certainly a revival and an example of free creation that is not bound by the strict principles of traditional performance. In fact, *Kamo Monogurui* is not a *haikyoku* (a discontinued piece); it is a current piece in the Hosho, Kongo and Kita schools. This performance by the Kanze school revived the nearly extinct first half, and the eclectic script relied on the *utaibon* (chant book) of the Komparu school lineage while incorporating a chant that has been handed down in the Kanze school as *rangyoku* (short solo sections from older *bangai* pieces that often have unusual chant characteristics). The manner in which the script was created and the new staging of the piece gave it a quality quite unlike the conventional characteristics of revival pieces.

Hanaikusa (The Battle of Flowers)

(October 5, Toyota City Noh Theater, Nohgaku Performers' Association, Toyota City Cultural Promotion Foundation)

This is part of the All-Japan Noh Caravan program developed by the Nohgaku Performers' Association. Based on the original work by Kanze Nagatoshi (1488?–1541?), the last noh playwright of the Muromachi period, this *furyu* noh (a piece that generally features spectacle or show-like characteristics), where the spirits of different flowers divide into two groups and compete for superiority, is similar in manner to the battle stories of the Muromachi period civil war tales. Although it is a small piece, it has historical significance and charm. It was also good to adopt the *ai-kyogen* from what was apparently a later piece, *Konomi-araso*i (*The Battle of Fruits and Nuts*). The script is a blending of the oldest book of play texts, *Kanze Motoyori-bon*, and its revised version from the Edo period. The direction follows the revised version. In this way, the recent trend is to not always use the original text as the first priority but instead search for ways to create the best performance with each revival and re-performance. In 2019, Kongo Hisanori revived the noh *Susuki* (revised and re-performed at the National Noh Theatre on September 23), which is another such ambitious revival.

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Awade-no-mori (The Labyrinthine Forest)

(November 12, Nagoya Noh Theater, Revival Noh Viewing Program, co-sponsored by the Nagoya Noh Promotion Association)

Kanze school *shite* actors Kato Shingo, Hasegawa Haruhiko, and Komuro Tomoya and Izumi *kyogen* school actor Okutsu Kentaro formed a group in 2021 and have performed the revival *Wada-sakamori* and other renditions of Soga pieces. *Awade-no-mori* is an old work written before 1456. It is thought that it may have been created by Komparu Zenchiku (1405–1470?). The story is about a father who can see his deceased daughter after burning special incense that is said to bring back the spirits of the dead.

The piece is characterized by novel developments, such as when the father and daughter stay in the same inn yet are unaware of each other, the daughter dying on stage and her body being buried, and the daughter appearing in a cloud

of smoke. What is eye opening is that this type of noh has parallels to *mugen* (phantasm) noh. There are few documents from which to base the production, so the direction and choreography is quite original, and the movement of the actors probably needs further refinement. The text was created by noh researcher Ikai Takamitsu and is based on the 1686 *Sanbyaku-ban-bon* text collection.

Kyogen *Hakamasaki* (A Hakama Pair Becomes Two)

(March 25 and 26, National Noh Theatre, Special Project Performance, Rediscover Noh and Kyogen)

This is a postponed performance that was originally scheduled for March 2020. The new script by Nomura Matasaburo (script, direction, and *shite*) combines the plot described in the oldest kyogen book, *Tensho Kyogen Bon*, along with research on Edo period paintings. While the popular play *Futari-bakama* depicts the slapstick comedy of two people sharing one *hakama* (trouser-skirt) by splitting it in half, *Hakamasaki* splits only one side of the *hakama* and unfolds it to make it look like two connected *hakama*. Although described as a revival or reconstruction, it has a strong creative side, yet it is meaningful relative to the current piece *Futari-bakama*.

The above-mentioned revivals, which started with respecting the original texts of the pieces, have created new direction and performances, thus moving the vector toward that of creation. Old scripts are no longer necessarily the most important aspect of a revival. Partial revisions have been seen for some time, but there was also the completely new kyogen *Hakamasaki*. The 2021 performance of *Tsuna* may be the first such example from noh (revised and re-performed this year on December 9). The program, titled Reconstructing Creative Noh, used a new script created by researcher Nishino Haruo that was based on notes from the late Muromachi period while consulting the later performances of *nagauta* and *kabuki*. Performances that make use of old records of noh and kyogen as starting points for creations will likely continue to increase in the future. What is necessary is to clarify the purpose of the performance, leave a record of the history of creating the revival, and actively critique such works. The work of the dramaturg, who oversees the whole, will also become increasingly important.

The Power of Otsuki Bunzo

One of the leaders in the noh world in recent years is Otsuki Bunzo (Kanze school *shite* actor who was born in 1942), whose highly dignified and consistent performances have led him to develop a wide range of activities at the Otsuki Noh Theatre in Osaka, where he is based. Since the 1980s, he has been actively working on revivals and performing old-style productions. This year he had many performances one after the other of such difficult pieces as *Eguchi*, *Motomezuka*, and *Teika*. The *ranbyoshi* variant of the difficult *Higaki* (May 7) made me realize the latent power Otsuki places on both tradition and innovation. The performance, from April to June at the Yokohama Noh Theater, was titled Three Old Women and was one of the *kikaku* (designed) performances, where three master actors performed *Obasute*, *Higaki* and *Sekidera Komachi*, which is considered the three most profound pieces of noh. *Higaki* is the story about the ghost of an old woman from Higaki, who was once a *shirabyoshi* dancer who took pride in her beauty, who continues to draw water with a hot iron bucket. It is a difficult piece with many *naraigoto* (secret teachings). And an old style performance is employed that incorporates a *ranbyoshi* variant (a special *shirabyoshi* or stamping technique) within the *jo-no-mai* dance. Otsuki's acting is dispassionate without emphasizing an "old woman" character or a thematic "pain of hell" but instead entrusts the dramatic expression to the chorus (the chorus head is Umewaka Rosetsu). The scene that had a strong impact was in the middle of the dance (the *oroshi* or slowdown in the second dan) in which the dancer leaned against the left pillar at the front of the reed hut to take a rest while looking upward diagonally for a long time. The angle of the mask looking up at the sky and the appearance of standing with the body pressed firmly against the pillar was extremely unusual, but it conveyed realistically the loneliness of the *shite* thinking about her long life. It seems that Otsuki chose this passage as the key point of *Higaki* and expressed it in a bold way that no one had ever previously attempted. In general, this writer has previously had the impression that Otsuki's performances easily hide passionate emotions and strong dramatizations with meticulous and stylish choices of masks and costumes and a delicacy of movements. But *Higaki* was a superb performance envisioned by Otsuki, where beauty

and dramatic quality both resonated clearly.

Noh Actors Who Carry the Future

The 44th Kanze Hisao Commemorative Hosei University Nohgaku Prize was awarded to Mikata Shizuka (Kanze School *shite* actor who was born in 1966), who has drawn the strong attention of audiences as one of the most energetic actors in the noh world. He is based in Kyoto and is the organizer of the group Theatrenoh. For the 44th Theatrenoh performance held in Tokyo (July 2, National Noh Theatre), there was an excellent showing of the *Dojoji* variant *Hyoshi-nashi no kuzushi*, which was postponed in 2020. Mikata's performance had clear character portrayal and expressive intention with little ambiguity. His words and movement perfectly created the inner expression of the *shite*, making it much like watching a modern dialogue play. He made full use of this characteristic in *Dojoji*, where the physical acting is constructed to create a thrilling play. After the gripping *ranbyoshi* section, with its drawn-out, sporadic beats, the *Kyu-no-mai* dance was attacked with an unmatched speed. It was followed in the second half by the *Inori* prayer dance featuring the *shite* wrapping his collapsed shoulders around the *shite* pillar, which seemed to express intense regret. Despite very little *shite* chanting, Mikata made full use of high and low pitches, strong and soft chants, and timing spaced freely to express inner feelings. Even if you are unfamiliar with noh, Mikata's performance certainly generates excitement and perhaps is even too stimulating. There is bound to be more that will unfold.

Uzawa Hikaru (Kanze School *shite* actor who was born in 1979), who belongs to Tessenkai, gave a youthful and vibrant portrayal of the eternally unsatisfied soul of the main character (September 2, Shibuya Noh second night) in her first performance of *Nonomiya*. Uzawa's distinct characteristic is her careful crafting of each movement. Her use of the mask stands out, and her gaze at the brushwood fence and *torii* gate is heartfelt. Her individuality could be seen in the flow from the *jo-no-mai* to the *ha-no-mai*, which captured a frenzy of sadness. The venue, the Shibuya Cerulean Tower Noh Theatre, has only about 200 seats, which helps convey the delicate expressions of the mask, along with the breadth of the actors. Perhaps, noh was originally a type of theatre that fitted into

such an intimate space. The coexistence of Mikata and Uzawa, who both carry the future of noh, demonstrates the depth of expression in noh, with these contrasting pieces and styles of performance.

● *Yorozukyogen* sponsored *Ancestor Festival: The 300th Anniversary of the Birth of Nomura Manzo I* (October 16, National Noh Theatre) received the Grand Prize for the 77th Agency for Cultural Affairs Art Festival. The performance, with a colorful diversity of guests and pieces, was characterized by various innovations and new ideas. The kyogen *furyu Chichi-no-jo furyu yorozu-no-shiki* is a playful new work with a new direction by Manzo IX, with the theme of the Manzo family's saké. Meanwhile, Man (born in 1930), who performed the kyogen *Kenbutsu-zaemon*, has a strong voice that, as in the past, takes my breath away. Manzo, who has recovered from illness, launched the *Manzo no Kai* on his birthday, December 23, last year. The program's freshness, which discards ambition, is pleasing, and it demonstrates the quality of warmth. The program is scheduled to be held on the same day every year, and this year was its second iteration.

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●The *Nohgaku Times*

The *Nohgaku Times*, a monthly newspaper about the world of *nohgaku*, will cease publication after the February 2023 issue. Published by Nohgaku Shorin (founded by Maruoka Katsura in 1907), which publishes books related to noh, the *Nohgaku Times*, since its first publication in March 1952, has for over 70 years published noh and kyogen news, including information on performances and stage reviews, from across all schools of noh. It has also been a first-class source that traced the history of *nohgaku* after World War II. I am humbled by the sense of mission of successive company owners who disregarded profitability yet continued to publish. There is no end to the voices of lament for its suspension, which is said to be the result of poor sales of chant books and other factors due to the pandemic.

●Describing the World of Noh during the Pandemic

The movement to record the ripples and effects of the pandemic has been

remarkable. Since March 2020, the *Nohgaku Times* has provided real-time information on cancellations, postponements of performances, the various responses in the world of noh, as well as online information. The Department of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties launched a website titled *New Coronavirus and Intangible Cultural Heritage* and made *A Report and Discussion by Traditional Performing Arts Performers and Related Parties* in September 2020. It continues to conduct extensive surveys and reports on all aspects of performing arts. In addition, symposiums and reports using Zoom were held by the Musashino University Noh Research Archives, the Gakugeki Gakkai Society of Music and Drama, and the Nohgaku Gakkai Society of Nohgaku and were published in the same year in each organization's bulletin. This year for the 70th anniversary of The Nogami Memorial Noh Theatre Research Institute of Hosei University, a special exhibition titled *Crisis and Noh - How We Accepted and Overcame It* was held by the HOSEI Museum (September 2022–January 2023). While tracing the response of the world of noh in the face of natural disasters and wars through exhibitions, symposiums, and booklets, the Institute took up the booklet *Corona disaster and Noh*. The booklet, to be published in September, outlines the trends before and after the declaration of a state of emergency and specifically introduces the voices of noh performers and their online activities. The above records convey the ingenuity, effort, solidarity and cooperation of noh performers who faced this crisis. Through these activities, one feels the nurturing of new connections between creators and recipients, such as online activities and crowdfunding.

●Various Awards

New member of the Japan Art Academy

—Nomura Mansaku, Izumi School Kyogen actor

Holder of Important Intangible Cultural Property (being recognized as an individual is equivalent to being a Living National Treasure)

—Otsubo Kimio, Hosho School Noh actor

Person of Cultural Merit

—Yamamoto Tojiro, Okura School Kyogen actor

43rd Matsuo Entertainment Awards Grand Prize

—Nomura Mansai, Izumi School Kyogen actor

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(Translation: Richard Emmert)