Japanese Traditional Theater: Noh and Kyōgen
Monica Bethe and Diego Pellecchia

This class introduces several traditional Japanese performing arts with a focus on noh and kyōgen. Field trips include performances, festivals, and artisan studios.

Classes will introduce various aspects of each performing art—text, music, dance, stage and staging, costumes, masks—through readings and visuals, and also hands-on experience. Focus will be on noh and kyōgen, but sections will also cover kagura, bugaku, mibu kyōgen, bunraku, and kabuki.

Students will be expected to prepare the readings before time and to choose a topic for further study to be presented at the end of the semester. These can be academic research papers, translations or new plays composed in the style of one of the arts, work with costumes/masks/sets, or other field work.

In addition to the semester-end presentation, students will need to write a 7-10-page paper developing their presentation ideas. There will also be quizzes and worksheets.

The basic text is Karen Brazell: Traditional Japanese Theater. Columbia University Press, 1998, but readings will be taken from various sources. All field trips not marked “optional” have required attendance.

Jan 12  Overview of Japanese traditional performing arts
Reading:
This is your textbook and the first chapter gives an overview of the course.
Background reading:
“Pleasures of Noh” “Nō and Kyōgen as Literature” in Keene, Nō and Bunraku. P. 13-27

Jan 14  Noh and Kyōgen: From ritual to stage entertainment (Okina, Tsurukame and Kazuraki)
Read before class

Okina (Handout)


Jan 17 Performance at Kanze Kaikan: Okina, Tsurukame, Kazuragi
Jan 19 Text and stage art: discussion of the performance

Reading:


Jan 20 Optional: festival with yudate kagura at Jōnangū 城南宮 near Takeda station.

Jan 21 Noh music: vocal and instrumental (Hagoromo)

Related reading


Read before Jan 24: Naniwa (Handout)

Jan 24 Noh Performance at the Kongo Noh Theater: Hagoromo and Naniwa

Jan 26 Noh movement

Related Reading


Jan 28 Kyōgen: history, text, technique (Setsubun). Mibu kyōgen

Read before class


“Setsubun” in “A Demon in Love” in Don Kenny, 1989, pp

“Mushrooms” in Brazell, TJT, p 245-254.

Further reading:

Explore:
http://kyogen-in-english.com/ Don Kenny’s site
http://www.mibudera.com/kyougen.htm Mibudera site with plot summaries and examples of plays and some music.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Feb 2</td>
<td>Fieldtrip to Mibudera to see Mibu kyōgen</td>
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<td>Feb 3</td>
<td>Optional: setsubun related rites in Kyoto and Nara</td>
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<td>Feb 4</td>
<td>Pre-noh performing arts. PROJECT PROPOSALS DUE</td>
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<td>Read before class:</td>
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<td>Feb 9</td>
<td>The formation of classic noh</td>
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<td>Read before class:</td>
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<td>For reference in class: read as many as you can beforehand</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Kamo</em> by Zenchiku in Brazell. TJA pp.44-60</td>
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<td>Feb 11</td>
<td>Spring trip: NO CLASS</td>
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<td>Feb 16</td>
<td>Noh and kyōgen costumes and props.</td>
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<td>Read before class:</td>
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Further reading


Feb 18 Fieldtrip to Costume Workshop
Feb 23 Noh and kyōgen masks

Read before class:

Tanabe, “The Birth and Evolution of Noh Masks” in Miracles and Mischief. p. 43-69


Nomura Manzo, Nearman “Behind the Mask of Nō” and “Mask Making” Pp. 20-64, 171-176

Feb 25 Fieldtrip to Mask maker
Feb 27~ March 6 Spring Break
March 8 Composing noh

Read before class:


March 10 Zeami’s theories (Kadensho, Nikyoku Santai Ningyōzu)

Read before class

Hare, Zeami’s Performance Notes, “Fushi Kaden” p. 25-75 and “Figure Drawing of the Two Arts and the Three Modes.” Pp 139-149

Quinn, Developing Zeami: The Noh Actor’s Attunement in Practice. P. 1-21

March 12 Tentative Performance of Noh at Kawamura Stage
March 15 Shōki

Read before class:
Shōki (Handout)


Related reading


March 17 Ceremonial noh and noh culture. QUIZ, PROJECT PROPOSAL UPDATE DUE

Reading to be decided.

March 20 Performance of Noh Shōki at Kongo Theater

March 22 Tamura and Hyakuman

Read before class:

Tamura in 10 Noh Plays, NGSK, 1955, pp, 19-36


March 24 Kasuga Ryūjin

Read before class:

Kasuga Ryūjin in Tyler, Japanese Nō Dramas, pp. 142-155

Further Reading


March 27 Performance of noh Tamura, Hyakuman, Kasuga Ryūjin at Kanze Kaikan

March 29 Amateur performers through the ages

Reading to be decided.

March 31 “Atsumori” from The Tales of the Heike→noh→kowakamai→kabuki/bunraku

Read before class, in this order:

“The Death of Atsumori” in Royall Tyler, tr. The Tale of the

Atsumori in Brazell, TJT, pp 126-142

Ko Atsumori, Keller Kimbrough tr. In Oyler and Watson, ed. Like Clouds or Mists, Cornell East Asia Series, 2013, pp. 247-260


Suma Bay, tr. James Brandon, in Brazell, ed. TJT, pp 442-455

April 5  Kabuki

Read before class:
The Puppet and Kabuki Theaters Elements of Performance.
Brazell, ed. TJT, pp. 303-313.


April 7  Bunraku

Read before class:
Keene: Nō and Bunraku, p. 123-146, 159-165
plays (to be announced)

April 9  Performance of Bunraku at the National Bunraku Theater, Osaka (date flexible)

April 12  Student Presentations

April 14  Student Presentations

April 19  Papers due

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Translations
Bethe, Monica and Richard Emmert. *Noh Performance Guides: Matsukaze, Fujito, Tenko, Atsumori, Aoinoue, Miidera, Ema.* (National Noh Theater)


Tyler, Royall. *Japanese Nô Dramas.* (Penguin classics, 1992)

* A Cycle of Noh Plays, Pining Wind.* (Ithaca, N.Y. 1978.)
* A Cycle of Noh plays, Granny Mountains.* (Ithaca, N.Y. 1978.)
* To Hallow Genji: A tribute to Noh,* Self published, 2013


**Noh Performance commentary**


Brandon, James R, ed. *Nô and Kyôgen in the Contemporary World* (University of Hawaii, 1997)


Lim Beng Choo. *Another Stage: Knze Nobumitsu and the Late Muromachi Noh Theater.* (Cornell East Asia Series, 2012).


**Theory and secret writings**


Hare, Tomas. *Zeami Performance Notes.* (Columbia University Press, 2008)


Rath, Eric C. *The Ethos of Noh: Actors and Their Art.* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2004)


Pinnington, Noel. *Traces in the Way: Michi and the Writings of Komparu Zenchiku.* (Cornell East Asia Series, 2006)

Kyōgen


General Japanese Theater and other Japanese Theatrical Arts
Adachi, Barbara. *Backstage at Bunraku* (Weatherhill, 1985)


Keene, Donald. *Nō and Bunraku: Two Forms of Japanese Theatre.* (Columbia University Press, 1990)

*Japanese Theater in the World* (Japan Society, 1997)

Parker, Helen S. E. *Progressive Traditions: An Illustrated Study of Plot Repetition in Traditional Japanese Theater* (Brill, 2006)

Costumes and Masks
*Iikei no nō shōzoku no haykusugata.* Heibonsha. (Tokyo 1984)

*Iikei no nō men no hyakusugata.* Heibonsha. (Tokyo 1983)

*The World of Noh Costumes*, Yamaguchi Orimono, Inc. (Kyoto, 1989)

*Patterns and Poetry: Nō Robes from the Lucy Truman Aldrich Collection.* (Museum of Art Rhode Island School of Design, 1992)


The Tokugawa Collection of Noh Costumes and Masks. (Japan Society.
New York, 1976.)

Trinh Khanh, ed. Theater of Dreams, Theater of Play: Nō and Kyōgen in

Background (classics)
Anthology of Japanese Literature to the 19th C. Penguin Classics.

McCullough, Helen (tr.). Tales of Ise: Lyrical Episodes from Tenth Century

McCullough, Helen (tr.). The Tales of the Heike.

Philippi, Donald (tr.). Kojiki. (Tokyo. 1968.)

Rodd, L.R./ Henkenius, M.C. (tr.) Kokinshû: a Collection of Poems Ancient

Sato Hiroaki and Burton Watson An Anthology of Japanese Poetry From the


Background (historical and cultural)

Blacker, Carmen. The Catalpa Bow. A Study of Shamanistic Practices in


O’Neil, G.P. *Early Noh Drama.* (London and Bradford, 1958)


Bunraku and Kabuki


Brandon, James, *Chūshingura: Studies in Kabuki and the Puppet Theater.* (University of Hawaii Press, 1982).

Brandon, James, William Malm, Donald Shively. *Studies in Kabuki: Its


Keene, Donald, tr. *Four Major Plays of Chikamatsu*. (Columbia Paperback, 1961).

About Noh, a form of traditional Japanese theater originating in the 14th century. Noh theater is structured around song and dance. Movement is slow, language is poetic, tone is monotonous, and costumes are rich and heavy. Plots are usually drawn from legend, history, literature and contemporary events. Themes often relate to dreams, supernatural worlds, ghosts and spirits. Stage. Noh is performed on a square stage with a roof that is supported at its four corners by pillars. All sides of the stage are open except for the back side which consists of a wall with a painted image of a pine tree. Traditional Japanese theatre includes Noh and its comic accompaniment Kyogen, Kabuki, the puppet theatre Bunraku and the spoken theatre Yose. Noh and Kyogen theatre traditions are among the oldest continuous theatre traditions in the world. The earliest existing Kyogen scripts date from the 15th century. Noh was a spiritual drama, combining symbolism from Buddhism and Shintoism and focusing on tales with mythic significance. Kyogen, its comic partner, served as a link between the theological themes of Discover Japanese Theater from the traditional (Kabuki, Noh, Kyogen, Bunraku, Gagaku, Geisha and Maiko) to the modern (Takarazuka, Shiki Theatre etc) with our guide! Japanese theater is undeniably one of the most significant pieces of Japanese culture. Having survived World War II, it has continuously developed and is still widely popular today. Its extensive and rich history has deemed many of the performances themselves, including Kabuki (1965), Noh (1957), Bunraku (1955) and Gagaku (1955), Intangible Cultural Heritage as designated by UNESCO. Similar to Noh, the origin of Kyogen is believed to come from sarugaku and Kyogen is often considered the sister theatrical art form of Noh. Noh is one of Japanâ€™s oldest theater forms | © posztos / Shutterstock. Kyogen. Kyogen plays are typically performed between breaks during a Noh performance. Unlike the high-brow, sophisticated performances of Noh, Kyogen plays are light comedies about ordinary people. Bunraku or ningyo joruri is traditional Japanese puppet theater. The puppets are incredibly detailed and intricate, with many requiring multiple puppeteers in order to operate. The use of puppets in Japanese theater is believed to have originated with Noh, but the plots of ningyo joruri plays have many similarities with both Noh and kabuki. Along with puppets, this type of theater usually features a single narrator to chant the charactersâ€™ lines and a shamisen player for musical accompaniment. Geisha dances. Kyogen:) Kyogen ("mad words" or "wild speech") is a form of traditional Japanese comic theater. It developed alongside Noh, and was performed along with Noh as an intermission of sorts between Noh acts on the same stage, and retains close links to Noh in the modern day; therefore, it is sometimes designated Noh-kyogen. Its contents are nevertheless not at all similar to the formal, symbolic, and solemn Noh theater; kyogen is a comic form, and its primary goal is to make its audience laugh. Costumes:) Outfits are generally kamishimo (Edo period outfit consisting of katag