

## Japanese Traditional Theater: Noh and Kyōgen

Monica Bethe and Diego Pellicchia

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:

Brazell, *Traditional Japanese Theater*, “Introduction” pp. 3-43.  
This is your text book 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)

*Tsurukame* (Teele, tr. "Tsurukame, The Crane and the Tortoise" in *The Husk*, 1955

*Kazuraki* in Shimazaki, *Restless Spirits from the Japanese Noh Plays of the Fourth Group*, East Asia Series, Cornell, 1994. Pp 77-110.

Jan 17 [Performance at Kanze Kaikan: Okina, Tsurukame, Kazuragi](#)

Jan 19 Text and stage art: discussion of the performance

Reading:

*Hagoromo* in Royall Tyler, *Japanese Nō Dramas*. Penguin, 1992, pp 96-107

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

Bethe and Brazell. *Dance in the Nō Theater*. Cornell East Asia Series, 1982. Vol 1, 143-154, Vol. 2 pp 79-87, 169-179.

Read before Jan 24: Naniwa (Handout)

Jan 24 [Noh Performance at the Kongo Noh Theater: Hagoromo and Naniwa](#)

Jan 26 Noh movement

Related Reading

Bethe and Brazell. *Dance in the Nō Theater*. Cornell East Asia Series, 1982. Vol 1, pp 1-13, 65-68, . 143-154; Vol. 2 pp 79-87,

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

Read before class

"Introduction" in Kenny, Don, *The Kyogen Book: An Anthology of Japanese Classical Comedies*. The Japan Times, 1989, pp xvi-xx and 24-29.

"Setsubun" in "A Demon in Love" in Don Kenny, 1989, pp

"Mushrooms" in Brazell, TJT, p 245-254.

Further reading:

Carol Morley, *Transformation, Miracles and Mischief: the Mountain Priest Plays of Kyōgen*. Cornell East Asia Series, 1993. Pp. 3-39.

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.

Feb 2 [Fieldtrip to Mibudera to see Mibu kyōgen](#)

Feb 3 Optional: setsubun related rites in Kyoto and Nara

Feb 4 Pre-noh performing arts. PROJECT PROPOSALS DUE

Read before class:

Ortolani, *The Japanese Theatre: from Shamanistic Ritual to Contemporary Pluralism*. P. 13-27 and 54-81

Ortolani, "From Shamanism to Buto: Continuity and innovation in Japanese Theater History" in *Japanese Theater in the World*. Japan Society, 1997. Pp. 15-24.

Feb 9 The formation of classic noh

Read before class:

Keene, "The History of Nō and Kyōgen" in *Nō and Bunraku*. Columbia. 1990. P. 31—45 (from Yoshimitsu and nō on).

For reference in class: read as many as you can beforehand

*Kayoi Komachi* by Kannami, Eileen Kato, tr. In Keene, ed. *Twenty Noh Plays*. Columbia University Press, 1970, pp 51-64.

*Izutsu* by Zeami in Brazell. TJT. Pp 143-157.

*Sumidagawa* by Motomasa in Royall Tyler, tr. *Japanese Nō Dramas*. Penguin, 1992, pp 251-263.

*Kamo* by Zenchiku in Brazell. TJA pp.44-60

Feb 11 Spring trip: NO CLASS

Feb 16 Noh and kyōgen costumes and props.

Read before class

Takeda, "Fashionable Dress or Theatrical Costume: Textiles and the Evolution of Noh Robes" in LACMA *Miracles and Mischief*, pp. 70-99

Bethe, “Color, Texture and Tailoring: The Role of Costume in Nō and Kyōgen” in Khanh Trinh, ed. *Theater of Dreams: nō and kyōgen in Japan*. Art Gallery NSW, 2014, pp 42-51.

“Dance and Props” in Bethe and Brazell: *Dance in the Nō Theater*. Pp. 69-96.

Further reading

Nagasaki Iwao, “History of Noh Costume” in *Patterns and Poetry*, RSDI, 1992. Pp. 47-61.

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

Teele, *Nō/Kyōgen Masks and Performance*. *Mime Journal*, 1984.

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:

Zeami Motokiyo, “The Three Courses” 三道 in Tom Hare tr., *Zeami Performance Notes*. Columbia University Press, 2008, pp 150-164.

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)

“*Shōki*” in Paul Atkins, *Revealed Identity: The Noh Plays of Komparu Zenchiku*. Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2006, pp. 116-124, notes 127-128.

Related reading

Lim Beng Choo, *Another Stage: Kanze Nobumitsu and the Late Muromachi Noh Theater*. Cornell East Asia Series 163, 2012, pp. XI-XXV, 97-109.

“*Yōkihi*” in Paul Atkins, *Revealed Identity*: pp. 165-174 notes 193-194.

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

*Hyakuman* “Million” in Tyler *Granny Mountains, A Second Cycle of Noh Plays*. Cornell East Asia Series, 1978, pp. 117-127¥9

March 24 *Kasuga Ryūjin*

Read before class:

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

Further Reading

Royall Tyler: *The Miracles of the Kasuga Deity*. Columbia University Press. Reprint 2016

March 27 [Performance of noh \*Tamura, Hyakuman, Kasuga Ryujin\* 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*

*Heike*. Viking Press, 2012, pp. 504-506

*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

*Atsumori* in James Araki, *The Ballad-Drama of Medieval Japan*,  
University of California Press, 1964, pp. 150-171

*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.

*Sukeroku; Flower of Edo* in James Brandon, *Kabuki Five classic  
Plays*. Honolulu University of Hawaii Press, 1992, pp 49-92.

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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Main text. Karen Brazell. *Traditional Japanese Theater: An Anthology of  
Plays*. (Columbia University press, 1998)

Recommended: Royall Tyler. *Japanese Noh Dramas*. (Penguin Classics.  
1992)

Translations

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

Brazell, Karen, ed. *Twelve Plays of the Noh and Kyôgen Theaters.* (Cornell East Asia Series, Ithaca, N.Y. 1988) ISBN 0-939657-50-3

Keene, Donald. *Twenty Noh Plays.* (New York. 1955) ISBN 0-231-03455-5

Kenny, Don. *The Kyôgen Book: An Anthology of Japanese Classical Comedies.* The Japan Times. (Tokyo, 1989)

Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkokai, trans. *Japanese Noh Drama.* (3 vols. Tokyo 1955, '59, '60: Vol 1 reprinted as *The Noh Drama.* Tokyo and Rutland. LCC 60-11007

Shimazaki Chifumi. *The Noh. God Noh, Warrior Noh, Woman Noh I,II,III.* Hinoki Shoten,( Tokyo, Japan. 1973, 76, 77, 80,87). *Warrior Ghost Plays from the Japanese Noh Theater. Restless Spirits from Japanese Noh Plays of the Fourth Group* (Cornell East Asia Series, Cornell East Asia Program 1993 &1995)

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

Waley, Arthur. *The Nô Plays of Japan.* (New York. 1957.) LCC 57-7276

Noh Performance commentary

Atkins, Paul. *Revealed Identity: The Noh Plays of Komparu Zenchiku.*

(Center for Japanese Studies, U. of Michigan, 2006)

Bethe and Brazell. *Nô as Performance: An Analysis of the Kuse Scene of Yamamba*. (Ithaca, N.Y. 1978) ISBN 0-939657-16-3

Bethe and Brazell. *Dance in the Nô Theater*. (Ithaca, N.Y. 1982)

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

Keene, Donald. *Nô: The Classical Theater of Japan*. (Tokyo, 1966, 1973)  
ISBN 0-87011-192-2

Komparu, Kunio. *The Noh Theater: Principles and Perspectives*. (Tokyo. 1983)

Hoff and Flindt. *Life Structure of Nô. An English Version of Yokomichi Mario's Analysis of the Structure of Nô*. Reprint from Concerned Theatre Japan, Vol. 2, no. 3,4. (Asia Pub., 1973)

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

Terasaki Etsuko, *Figures of Desire; Wordplay, Spirit Possession, Fantasy, Madness, and Mourning in Japanese Noh Plays*. (Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2002)

#### Theory and secret writings

Hare, Thomas. *Zeami's Style: The Noh Plays of Zeami Motokiyo*. (Stanford. 1986) ISBN 0-8047-1290-5

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



Nearman, Mark. translations of Zeami's *Kyu'i, Kyakuraika, and Kakyô* in *Monumenta Nipponica* (Autumn 1978, Summer 1980, Autumn, Winter 1982, Spring 1983)

Rimer and Yamazaki, tr. *On the Art of the Nô Drama: The Major Treatises of Zeami.* (Princeton. 1984) ISBN 0-069-10154-X, 0-069-0652-9

Michiko Yusa , "Riken no Ken: Seami's Theory of Acting an Theatrical Aprreciation" *MN* Vol. 42, no. 3, (Autumn 1987)

Thornhill, Arthur H. *Six Circles, One Dewdrop: The Religio-Aesthetic World of Komparu Zenchiku* (Princeton University Press, 1993)

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

Quinn, Shelley Fenno. *Developing Zeami: The Noh Actor's Attunement in Practice.* (University of Hawaii Press, 2005)

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

### Kyôgen

Haynes, Carolyn ."Parody in Ky\_gen: Makura monogurui and Tako" *Monumenta Nipponica* 39 (1984)

Haynes, Carolyn . "Comic Inversion in Kyôgen: Ghosts and the Nether World," *Journal of Association of Teachers of Japanese.* (1988)

Kenny, Don. *The Kyôgen Book. An Anthology of Japanese Classical Comedies.* The Japan Times, Tokyo, 1989. ISBN 4-7890-1459-7

Morley, Carolyn. *Transformation, Miracles, and Mischief: The Mountain Priest Plays of Kyôgen* (Cornell East Asia Series, East Asia Program, 1993)

General Japanese Theater and other Japanese Theatrical Arts

Adachi, Barbara. *Backstage at Bunraku* (Weatherhill, 1985)

Brandon, James. *Kabuki: Five Classic Plays* (Harvard University Press, 1975, University of Hawaii Press, 1992)

Keene, Donald. *Nô 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

*Ikei no nô shôzoku no haykusugata*. Heibonsha. (Tokyo 1984)

*Ikei no nô men no hyakusugata*. Heibonsha. (Tokyo 1983)

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

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

Takeda, Sharon Sadako & Monica Bethe. *Miracles and Mischief: Noh and Kyôgen Theater in Japan*. (Los Angeles County Museum, 2002).

Teele, Rebecca, ed. *Nô Kyôgen Masks and Performance*. *Mime Journal* 1984. (Claremont, Ca. 1986.) ISSN 0145-787

*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 Japan.* (Art Gallery New South Wales, 2014).

#### Background (classics)

Anthology of Japanese Literature to the 19<sup>th</sup> C. Penguin Classics.

McCullough, Helen (tr.). *Tales of Ise: Lyrical Episodes from Tenth Century Japan.* (Tokyo 1968/1978.) UTP 3093-87052-5149.

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

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

Rodd, L.R./ Henkenius, M.C. (tr.) *Kokinshū: a Collection of Poems Ancient and Modern.* (Princeton 1984.) ISBN 4-13-087048-3.

Sato Hiroaki and Burton Watson *An Anthology of Japanese Poetry From the Country of Eight Islands.* (Anchor Books, 1981).

Tyler, Royall. *The Tale of Genji.* (Penguin books, 2001).

Tyler, Royall. *The Tale of the Heike.* (Viking Press, 2012).

#### Background (historical and cultural)

Araki, James. *The Ballad-drama of Medieval Japan.* (Berkeley, 1964).

Blacker, Carmen. *The Catalpa Bow. A Study of Shamanistic Practices in Japan.* (The Devonshire Press, GB. 1975.) ISBN 0-04-398004-X.

Goff, Janet. *Noh Drama and The Tale of Genji. The Art of Allusion in Fifteen Classical Plays.* (Princeton Library of Asian Translations. 1991).

Hall, J.W./Takeshi, T. (ed) *Japan in the Muromachi Age.* (Berkeley, 1977.)  
ISBN 0-520-02888-0

Hisamatsu, Sen'ichi. *The Vocabulary of Japanese Literary Aesthetics.*  
(Tokyo. 1963/1978.)

Izutsu, T&T. *The Theory of Beauty in the Classical Aesthetics of Japan.*  
(The Hague. 1981. ) ISBN 90-247-2381-7

Lafleur, William. *The Karma of Words.* (University of California Press, 1983)

Matisoff, Susan. *The Legend of Semimaru, Blind Musician of Japan.*  
( N.Y. 1978. ) ISBN 0-231-03947-6

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

Ortolani, Benito. *The Japanese Theatre from Shamaistic Ritual to Contemporary Pluralism.* (Leiden, N.Y. etc.; E.J.Brill; 1990) (also in paperback)

#### Bunraku and Kabuki

Brandon, James, *Kabuki: Five Classic Plays,* (Harvard University Press, 1975, pb 1992).

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*

*Acting, Music and Historical Context.* A Cultural Learning Institute Monograph. (U. of Hawaii East-West Center and U. of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies).

Brandon, James, tr. With Miwa Tamako. *Kabuki Plays: Kanjinchô and the Zen Substitute.* (New York. Samuel French, 1966).

Gerstle, Andrew, Kiyoshi Inobe, William Malm, *Theater as Music: The Bunraku Play "Mt. Imo and Mt. Se; An Exemplary Tale of Womanly Virtue,* Center for Japanese Studies at the University of Michigan, 1990.

Gerstle, Andrew, *Circles of Fantasy; Convention in the Plays of Chikamatsu,* (Harvard Council on East Asian Studies, 1986).

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

Parker, Helen, *Progressive Traditions; An Illustrated Study of Plot Repetition in Traditional Japanese Theatre.* (Brill, 2006).

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), as Intangible Cultural Heritage as designated by UNESCO. Similar to Noh, the origin of Kyogen are believed to come from sarugaku and Kyogen is often considered the sister theatrical art form of Noh. Noh is one of Japan'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 characters' lines and a shamisen player for musical accompaniment. Geisha dances. Kyogen:) Kyogen (ç, è, "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