

**Nō/Kyōgen Masks
and
Performance**

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Nō/Kyōgen Masks and Performance

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This volume is dedicated to the memory of Roy Teele, the father of Rebecca Teele, who passed on in December of 1985.

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Note: Following the Japanese style, all Japanese names (excluding Japanese-American names and authors of contemporary books) have been written with the family name first.

knowing the *chōshi*, the correct balance of elements of timing and tempo. At last he is ready to learn the *kyōku*: to study each of the different types of *Nō*.

Figure Legends

43. Shakumi, carved by Yamato. This is lighter complected than the Shakumi Kawachi and is used when an actor wishes to portray a more youthful man in *Sumidagawa*. Photograph: *Yūgen no Bi*, Kōronsha, 1973.
44. Shakumi, carved by Kawachi. This is used when an actor wishes to portray distraught mother in *Sumidagawa* as a more mature woman. Photograph: *Yūgen no Bi*, Kōronsha, 1973.
45. Magojirō, carved by Kawachi. This Magojirō was the favorite of Kongō Iwao's father. Photograph: *Yūgen no Bi*, Kōronsha, 1973.
46. Ko-omote, carved by Echi. This Ko-omote is Kongō Iwao's favorite mask, the first mask he wore in a woman's role. Photograph: *Yūgen no Bi*, Kōronsha, 1973.
47. Kongō Iwao in *Sumidagawa*. The distraught mother gestures as she finally accepts the loss of her son. Photograph: Kissetsu Tatsuo, 1960.
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49. Kongō Iwao in *Nonomiya*. The spirit of Lady Rokujo brushes dew from the hedge at the entrance to the Shrine in the Fields. Photograph: Tanaka Masao, 1983.
50. Kongō Iwao in *Nonomiya*. A lady worshipping at Nonomiya speaks with a there about Lady Rokujo who came to the desolate area in self-imposed seclusion. Photograph: Tanaka Masao, 1982.
51. Kongō Iwao in *Matsukaze*. The two sisters, Murasame and Matsukaze, see the reflection of the moon in their saltpans as they labor at the seaside. Photograph: Tanaka Masao, 1984.
52. Kongō Iwao in *Matsukaze*. Matsukaze, wearing the robes and hat left as keepsakes by Ariwara no Narihira, dances as she remembers days long past. Photograph: Tanaka Masao, 1984.

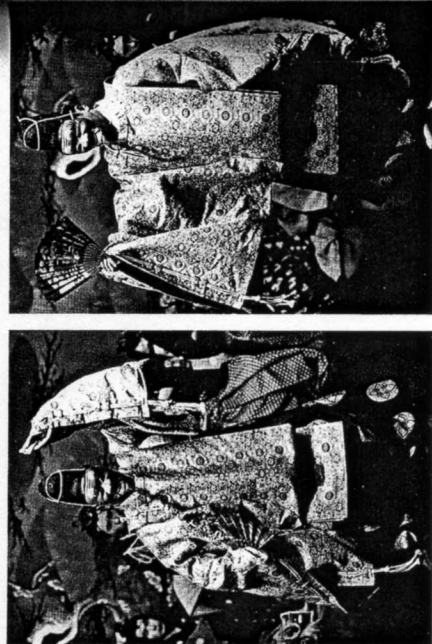
Okina:

An Interview with Takabayashi Kōji,

Actor of the Kita School
by Monica Bethe



Monica Teele and I interviewed the Kita school actor Takabayashi Kōji in December, 1983. The Takabayashi household is the only Kita school household in Kyoto, and this isolation, along with other circumstances, compelled to give Kōji a rather unusual training. During his formative years (1941-1946) his father, Ginji, a notable scholar and *Nō* historian as well as a talented actor, was temporarily banned from the Kita school. As a result,



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The son is the only Kita actor today who has not spent years in apprenticeship with the head of the school in Tokyo, but has been solely trained by his father. Throughout the years of banishment, father and son staged fully costumed and orchestrated Nō plays in their own house, drawing on the members of their family. The broad scope of technical know-how in all aspects of Nō, including costumes, masks, and instruments that Kōji now passes on to his son, is a tribute to the thorough knowledge and conscientious dedication of both Ginji and Kōji.

Though not a publishing scholar, Kōji has a deep knowledge of Zeami and Zenchiku, particularly the latter. He follows Zenchiku in placing importance on the centrality of *Okina*, the ritual predecessor of Nō which stands apart from the main body of Nō plays, yet belongs to the Nō actor's repertory. The reader may find it worthwhile to compare the ideas discussed here with those presented in Mark Nearman's "Behind the Mask of Nō."

Can you tell us why you feel so strongly about Okina?

Okina is the source of all Nō. In *Okina* lies the spiritual core of Nō and from *Okina* stems many of the technical bases of Nō, such as the rules of choreography. Perhaps it is best to start by outlining what happens in a performance of *Okina* and then to compare and contrast this with other Nō plays.

The ritual of *Okina* as it is performed today by Nō actors has been adapted for the Nō stage from ceremonies performed in Shinto shrines. Indeed, even today, many shrines continue to perform their own versions of the ancient practice. In the Nō version, on the day of performance the ritual begins behind the scenes at what is called *Okina kazari*, an altar set up for purification rites. The sacred objects, or *shintai*, are placed on the upper shelf of the altar. This is a lacquer box containing the mask of *Okina*, an old man with wrinkled smile, pom-pom eyebrows, and loose chin (*kiri age*), and a similar black mask to be worn by *Sambasō*. On the lower shelf of this typical Shinto altar stand two white flasks of sake with folded white paper funnels in their necks and small round dishes, one with a hill of salt, another with a hill of uncooked rice, and a third to be used to serve sake. All these symbols of a rice-growing culture serve both to feed the god and to purify the performers.

The function of the masks as *shintai*, or objects in which the god resides, can clearly be seen by the practices of the priests of *Taga-taisha*

for their New Year's performance of *Okina*. After setting up an altar in the space beyond the bridge leading to the stage (the mirror room in Nô terms), the priest carrying the mask box approaches the front of the stage, mounts the stairs leading to the stage (otherwise never used) as if he were climbing the stairs leading to a Shinto deity, crosses the stage, walks down the bridge, and places the box on the altar in exactly the same way he would handle any other *shintai*. From this point on until the masks are put back into storage, they embody the god, though, of course, when they are not in use the god does not reside in them.

Shortly before the performance is to begin, all the performers gather in front of the altar and form two columns. The man who will perform *Okina* worships the masks, purifies the area, and proceeds to have the rice, salt, and sake passed around. All drink from the same cup, thus joining their hearts as one. They then line up to go on stage. The box carrier leads, holding the mask box in front of his body. After him follows the *Okina* player, striding manfully to the downstage center, where he bows deeply to venerate the North Star.

Once these preliminary obeisances have been paid, the rest of the performers file on stage and take their places. The chorus sits behind the instrumentalists, unlike in regular performances when they sit on a projecting verandah to stage left. The box carrier brings the mask box to the *Okina* performer, who is sitting stage left, and reverently places the *Okina* mask in the upturned lid.

An energetic dance by the unmasked *Senzai* serves to rid the stage of evil spirits. While *Senzai* stamps and swirls his sleeves, the main performer quietly salutes the mask and places it to his face. From this point on his whole demeanor will change, for he becomes one with the god in the mask.

What do you mean by becoming one with the god in the mask? Does this imply that the actor while he wears the mask is no longer himself, but in a state of possession?

No. Quite the opposite. The actor who performs *Okina* must become himself (*ibun ni nankiru*). This is a different self from the self who enters the stage and bows down before donning the mask. I walk onto the stage as my everyday self. Once I wear the mask I am in communion with the god inside me, with the universal part that transcends the mundane. That part of me which is godlike dances and that same universal god resides in the mask; therefore both mask and performer are god.

Because one becomes oneself when playing *Okina*, and not a dramatic personage, the function of the mask is very different for *Okina* than for all other Nô plays. In the one it is a symbol, in the others the mask embodies a personality which represents a stage figure: Kiyotsune, Matsukaze, the Thundergod. Indicative of this difference is that while *Okina* is donned on stage, all other masks are put on out of sight of the audience as the last stage of costuming in the mirror room.

Please continue with your description of the performance.

After chanting a few lines, the masked *Okina* performer stands and performs the *Okina* dance, which evokes the harmony of all mankind by calling heaven, earth, and man, each represented by a different section of the stage and by stamps or sleeve manipulation. After a final celebratory chant the mask is removed, the performer returns to his everyday self, strides to the front of the stage, bows to the North Star, and retreats to quickening music that announces *Sambasô*.

A *Kyôgen* player performs two dances in succession. The first, *momnodan*, or beating dance, is done unmasked with loud calls, leaps, stamps, and thumps. The second, *suzunodan* or bell dance, comes after he has donned his black mask and has been given a ritual bell by another *Kyôgen* player. This completes the final prayers for good harvest, peace, and prosperity.

Considering the religious importance of Okina, there must be special preparations for its performance.

There are a set of ritual austerities traditionally done before a performance of *Okina*. These include a week or ten days of regulated life designed to purify the spirit by such things as washing in cold water (*misogi*). Often in the country festivals this is done by standing in a stream in the middle of winter. In addition, one should have no contact with women. On the last days before performing *Okina*, not even the fires used for cooking, let alone any of the food one eats, should have been touched by a woman. These are physical austerities intended to purify the mind. Their purpose is to clean out unnecessary distractions, but there are times in the modern age when circumstances do not allow for precise adherence to the formula, as for instance, when I performed *Okina* in America. The important thing, however, is internal, and I believe that this inner preparation must begin the moment one hears one will perform *Okina*. To

put it more exactly, one's whole life ought to be in accordance with the spirit of performing *Okina*. This I learned from my father, who had to come to a theory of the central importance of *Okina* through the bitter trial and error of his life. I have been lucky enough to have had his example and therefore to have been able to follow a single straight path.

My studies have only strengthened my belief, for I find that the performance of *Okina* has antecedents that go back to prehistory. One finds similar masks and rituals in Tibet, Korea, and Bali, and I am sure in many other places. I believe that the piece was born in the cradle of civilization and moved east and west with the races of the world. Vestiges of this origin can be seen in the three major roles: Senzai, the unmasked representative of the Mongolian race; *Okina*, the white masked representative of the Caucasian race; and Sambasô, the black masked representative of the Negroid race. Attributions of the sculpting of some *Okina* masks to sixth century artists suggests that the origins of the performance in Japan go far back into history. Probably the form of *Okina* was rather drastically altered due to its association with *Nô*, and it must have changed quite a lot during the Muromachi and early Edo periods.

When you perform Okina, what mask do you use?

If I perform in a shrine, of course I use the mask of that shrine, if they own one. Otherwise I use a mask carved by my father. It is a copy of a mask from the village of Isshiki in the area of Ise. My father carved it without knowing anything about mask carving. Still it is imbued with the spirit of the original, so I think he was indeed possessed by the god of the mask while he was creating it.

Could you expand on your views of how the use of masks differs for Okina and for standard Nô plays?

Very simply stated: In *Okina*, the mask is a symbol; in other plays, it is a face. In *Okina*, although one's whole demeanor changes once the mask is fitted to the face (the walk also changes from a stride to a gliding step, *surashi*, and the singing becomes gentler), one does not "use" the mask while dancing. That is, there are no dance patterns designed to serve dramatic ends. Mask-centered movements like looking up or down are conspicuously lacking. At downstage right one stamps to heaven, but does not look up, as would be only natural in a standard play; nor does one

look down when one stamps to earth, but always looks straight ahead. No attempt is made to act out or explain the meaning of the ritual or to bring out the emotions of the mask. This is because the mask is a symbol, not a face. It is a symbol much like the cross is in Christianity. Everybody knows the cross is man-made and insentient, yet they pray to it with a sincere belief that God hears and will answer their prayers. Through it one approaches God. So also with the mask of *Okina*. Ironically, just because it is a symbol, it is in some ways dispensable: One needs no outside tool to become oneself.

In contrast, for all other *Nô* plays, the mask becomes the center of the emotional expression of the stage figure. It is the face of a person with whom the actor seeks to become one. As one gazes at one's costumed and masked figure in the mirror room before going on stage, one loses oneself in the image. The mirror is a tool for the merging of identities. One becomes the role personified in the mask.

The audience, in turn, responds to the mask as it would to a face. Constructed for fluid shifts of expression, a good mask is constantly alive on stage. A few movements are specifically designed to heighten the sense of reality, particularly by bringing the eyes of the mask into play. These include looking up and down, to the right and left. However, there is no mathematical correlation between the angle of the mask and its expression. After all, people watching from the side see the same play as people watching from the front. The whole body, not just the mask, expresses the emotions read as being in the mask. When one lowers the face (*kumorasu*, "cloud mask"), one lowers not only the head, but the whole upper torso. When such a pattern is meant to express sadness (as looking up (*terasu*, "brighten mask"), likewise involves a lifting of the upper torso. Therefore one might say that the audience, influenced by the words, melody, rhythms, and body posture, sees the feelings it is experiencing as if they emanated from the mask. The audience reads into the mask what in normal life we read from facial expression.

A number of technical problems arise from the mask being used as the face of the stage presence. First is the problem of proportion in relation to the rest of the costume. Because the mask rests in front of one's own face, it sticks out beyond one's own nose, mouth, and eyes. To compensate and to bring the mask into proper line with the costume, one must tuck in one's chin, pulling back with the neck. For the same reason one also stuffs the costume at the chest with a layer of padding.

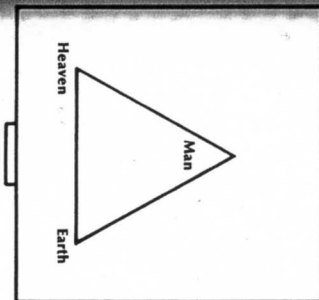
Movements should likewise accord in size with what is proper for a face somewhat in front of one's real face. When gestures are too large, the mask seems to jump away. The use of the eyes is a particular point in question. If one looks through the mask, one destroys the sense that the eyes of the mask are the real eyes of the personage by establishing a separate entity behind it. Rather one must learn to see with one's inner eye (*yōgan*), and to know the stage well enough that one's feet are all that are needed for guidance.

In fact, most actors, including me, are half-blind on stage because the small eyeholes of the mask rarely correspond to those of the face. The mask, which is usually somewhat smaller than a face, is placed so that its chin comes just slightly above one's own chin. The reason for this placement is twofold: to make singing behind the mask easier and to allow one's own face to complete the mask so the neck appears as a natural extension.

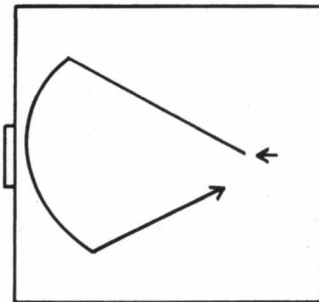
Not all movements described as mask movements are in fact meant to bring the mask alive. There are times when *omote o kiru*, a quick sideways jerk of the head, is done with the intention of manipulating the head gear instead of the mask. When wearing a large dragon-shaped crown on the head, a jerk of the head sends ripples down the dragon's body. In *Dojoji* a similar quick head movement serves to flip the tall dancer's hat. In these cases, even small movements have an exaggerated effect.

Are there any ways in which Okina has influenced Nō?

Okina is the core of Nō. Much of the choreography of Nō dances is an outgrowth of the dance of *Okina*. The central dance of *Okina* is constructed as a triangle symbolizing the harmony of heaven, earth, and man. Starting at upstage center, one goes to the downstage right corner and stamps to heaven, then to the downstage left corner and stamps to earth. Finally, one returns to stage center and indicates mankind with sleeve manipulation. This leftward progression around the stage is the basis for the fundamental sequence of Nō dance: the left circling sequence which begins upstage, goes in a straight line to the downstage right corner and then circles to downstage left and finally returns to the upstage area again. This left circling begins most *kuse* and instrumental dances. A variant of it known as the congratulatory ending (*shūgen no tome*), concludes these same dances and many *shūrai* versions of final dances (*kitn*). In *Okina*, and in other dances, the left circling sequence is followed by a right circling, the alternation of the two directions being a fundamental rule.



The *Okina Triangle*



The *Left-circling Sequence*

Although the Nō choreography incorporates much from *Okina*, care is also taken to preserve distinctions between the two. One important feature differentiates the triangle of *Okina* and the left circling sequence of standard Nō: the former is constructed entirely of straight lines, the latter is rounded at the top. The curve in the front of the stage shows deference to *Okina* and to the North Star God. Also out of respect for the god, one lifts the right arm as one makes the curve. (This is clearly preserved in the other schools, but only hinted at in the Kanze school).

The use of the bridge (*hashigakari*) shows a similar deference to *Okina*. While performing *Okina* one walks down the center of the bridge, and at all other times one walks to the left of center. The bridge itself functions differently in *Okina* where it merely connects two points and in other plays where it is part of the performance area. In *Okina* one crosses over (*wataru*) the bridge. It is true that at the beginning the instrumentalists and chorus line up along the bridge to wait for the mask box to be presented and the first bows to be made, but this is merely a practical solution to the custom of waiting in front of the *haideri*, or central worship building of a Shinto shrine. In regular Nō plays, however, the bridge functions not only as a place of entrances and exits, but also as an important place of action.

Many of the patterns found in *Okina* and which can in turn be seen in standard *Nô* dances, derive from Shinto ritual. Various types of veneration predominate: bows, sleeve manipulation, stamps. In Shinto ritual before and after each important action, the priest bows. In preparation for this he may swish his sleeves back to adjust them (*sode o harae*). These actions have been incorporated in stylized form into *Okina* and into *Nô* dance patterns. The *sayu-uchikomi* (left, right front circling scoop), for instance, mimics the adjusting of the sleeves of the priest and his bow to the front. Holding out the left sleeve, the *Nô* actor steps to the left, holding out the right sleeve one step to the right. Next one circles the fan from the right up, out, and then down to the front while one turns to step forward. This is the bow. This "left-right" pattern may open a dance and often acts as a cadence ending a section of a dance with a "bow."

In *Nô*, as in Shinto ritual, the arc of the left and then the right arm may have the practical function of getting large, open-cuffed sleeves properly out of the way. Examples in *Okina* occur just before the main dancer bows at the beginning and end of the performance. Also after *Senzai* presents the mask box to the *Okina* performer, he moves back with large swishes of left and right sleeves. Similar adjustments of the sleeves appear at given spots in the long instrumental dances, and during the performance of a *Nô* the actor is free to circle his arms for such purposes at appropriate times. While in *Okina* the movement is rather large, in other plays it is generally smaller.

More elaborate manipulation of the sleeves grows out of this adjustment pattern and punctuates the dances of *Senzai* and *Okina*. It is also incorporated into the choreography of long instrumental dances. Patterns include wrapping the sleeves around the arm, either by an outward flip (*kake*), or by an inward snap (*naku*), of the arm. One can also flip the sleeve over the head (*kazuki*).

In the dance of *Okina* the overhead sleeve (*kazuki*) precedes a circling to the right, the wrapped sleeve (*naku*) precedes a circling to the left. In the long instrumental dances the right sleeve is given an outward flip (*kake*) at the beginning of the second section, and an inward wrap (*naku*) during the retard (*oroshi*) of the third section (for a softer effect this can be an overhead sleeve) and both sleeves are flipped outward to begin the fourth section. These actions are meant to represent in visual form the opening words of the purification incantation in Shinto ritual calling on the god-creator *Izanagi*: "kake-maku mo kashikoki Izanagi no" Stamps may function to pacify the ground demons or to call on the

gods. In *Okina* the dances of *Senzai* and *Sambaso* clearly demonstrate the first; *Okina*'s stamps to heaven and earth suggest the second. In long instrumental dances the stamps during the retards (*oroshi*) evoke the descent of the god (*kamioroshi*). An alternative to stamping is the bow (*khizumi*), which provides the interconnection between these two actions.

Related to stamps are the timed steps to unmeasured calls of the drummers. In *Okina*, as one approaches the downstage right corner, each sliding of the foot forward is made in synchronization with the calls and beats of the *kotsuzumi* (shoulder drum) players (three in *Okina*). This, like its parallel in the *ranbyôshi* of the play *Dôjôji*, represents the climbing of steps (figuratively of the Shinto shrine). A similar synchronization of steps and drummers' calls occurs with the exit music, *nakairi raijo*. Also the prelude (*jo*) to some long instrumental dances (e.g., *Jonmai*, *kagura*, *shirunojonomai*) involves taking three or five such timed steps forward and then an equal number of steps back, though these can also be interpreted as *herpai*, or ground purifying steps and stamps.

I think your explanation has made very clear some of the technical correspondences between Okina and Nô, as well as important ways in which they differ. What would you say is the spiritual legacy of Okina to the rest of the repertory?

I mentioned earlier that while I perform *Okina* I become one with the god within me, the universal god of all mankind. At that time I contrast "becoming oneself" in *Okina* with "becoming a role" in other *Nô* plays. Here I would like to say that the life force that reaches upward and outward, that works to encompass all, is central to all *Nô*, not just to *Okina*. Every *Nô* play, no matter how sad the story, no matter how fearsome the vision, is at its core a celebration (*shûgen*). Performing, I am completed through communion and I hope the audience senses the celebration and goes away purified, too.

Figure Legends

- 33) Takabayashi Koji in *Okina*. Photograph: Tanaka Masao.
- 34) Takabayashi Koji in *Okina*. Photograph: Tanaka Masao, 1978.
- 35) Takabayashi Koji in *Okina*. Photograph: Tanaka Masao, 1978.