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 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)


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.

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:

Feb 9  The formation of classic noh

Read before class:

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


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
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

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)


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)

**Kyôgen**


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.)


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


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

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


Background (historical and cultural)


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

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


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.


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).
Traditional Japanese Theater - an Introduction to Noh, Kabuki and Bunraku. Traditionally, Noh plays are very long. One program included five different plays, with comedic kyogen intermissions in between. While today's performances tend to be shorter (after all, today's audiences don't consist of feudal lords with an entourage of retainers and servants to take care of business while their masters enjoy the day out at the theater), the performances themselves haven't changed significantly. Noh is a slow, almost ceremonial experience where emotions are conveyed through highly stylized gestures. This codification is further emphasized by the performer.

Traditional Japanese theatre includes kabuki, noh (and its comic accompaniment, kyogen) and the puppet theatre, bunraku. 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 the noh play with Kyogen. Kyogen is a type of comic drama. Like Noh and kabuki it features only male actors but unlike noh and kabuki the performers don't wear elaborate costumes, makeup or masks. Instead they wear kimonos and are accompanied by a chorus. In 2001, kyogen was designated by UNESCO, along with Noh, as one of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Dr. Jukka O. Miettinen of the Theater Academy Helsinki wrote: The short farces that are performed between the serious noh plays are called kyogen. Together, these two art forms are called nohgaku. Both forms have a lot in c