Kenichi Enomoto (榎本 健一) (October 11, 1904 – January 7, 1970)

Japanese comedian, also known as Enoken, Enomoto initially created popular musical comedies in Tokyo’s downtown entertainment district Asakusa. His comedy style, containing elements from both Japanese and Western theatre and popular entertainment, was a product of modernism and liberalism of the Taishō period (1912-1926) – the age of *ero-guro-nansensu* (literally, “erotic, grotesque, nonsense”), erotically charged, frightfully new and nonsensical but attractive. His musical comedy led to the birth of the current-day *wasei* (Japanese style) musicals.

Born in Tokyo, Enomoto became a student of the Asakusa Opera singer Yanagida Teiichi and made his stage debut in 1922 as chorus member of Negishi Opera Company. After the 1923 Great Kantō Earthquake, he moved to Kyoto and played many minor roles in silent film. In 1929 Enomoto returned to Asakusa and joined the theatre company Casino Folies specializing in western style revues and variety shows. In 1930 he formed his own troupe New Casino Folies. His comic and energetic acting and amusing and speedy dialogues, inspired by Western cabaret performance and Hollywood talkies, were introduced in novelist Kawabata Yasunari’s *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa* serialized in *The Asahi Newspaper* (1929-1930) and gained high popularity.

In 1932, with over hundred actors Enomoto moved to Shōchikuza, the largest theatre in Asakusa and produced a full scope of his musical comedies containing adaptations of Western opera and operetta and Hollywood musical comedy films (such as *Carmen* and *Rio Rita*), *kabuki*’s history drama (such as *Hōkaibō* and *The Revenge of Togitatsu*) and the company’s original, teen situation comedies. Shōchiku’s Enomoto in downtown Asakusa, with Toho’s Furukawa Roppa in Tokyo’s business center, Marunouchi, created the golden age of comedy in prewar Japan. In 1938, Enomoto’s theatre company left Asakusa and began performing at Yurakuchō’s Nichigeki Theatre near Marunouchi, contracted with Tōhō. Joining Tōhō’s Theatre of the Nation project, Enomoto performed in *Going to the Sea God Palace* (1941) and *Tale of Momotarō* (1943) at the Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre.

Meanwhile, Enomoto played in over 100 films including PCL *(*Photo Chemical Laboratory; later Toho) early talkies directed by Yamamoto Gajirō. Many early films were adaption of musical revues written by Kikuya, including *Enoken’s Tale of Youth’s Folly* (1934), *Enoken’s Millionaires* (1936) and *Enoken’s Chakkiri Kinta* (1937). Films extended Enomoto’s popularity nationwide. In 1945, Enomoto played in Kurosawa Akira’s *They Who Step on the Tiger's Tail* (1945), based on *kabuki*’s *Kanjinchō*, which was banned until 1952 by the occupying [Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supreme_Commander_of_the_Allied_Powers) (SCAP) due to its portrayal of feudal values.

After World War II in occupied Japan, Enomoto, with Kikuya Kazuo, his playwright in early days and then Tōhō’s Director and creator of the Tōhō Musicals, regenerated musical comedies by staging his prewar signature and postwar new pieces at Tōhō theatres, including *Yaji and Kita’s Shank’s Mare Tour of the Tōkaidō* (1947), *Osome and Hisamatsu* (1949) and *Okaru and Kanpei* (1951, 1955). As his gangrenous right leg’s condition got worse and he had his right leg amputated in 1962, Enomoto continued to perform on the stage as well as in film, TV and radio in the postwar Japanese entertainment industry until one year before his death.

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