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INTRODUCTION

The theatregoer in search of performances in any cosmopolitan center of the Western world may choose among plays in the avant-garde forms, realistic works of the modern era, or revivals of classics from the past presented, for the most part, in styles which have little connection with the traditions of bygone days. Or he may choose opera performances which prolong European traditions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, ballet which largely lives on conventions of the past century, or nontheatrical musical forms which hark back to much earlier periods. In Tokyo, the same spectator would have all of these theatrical opportunities, and many more, representing a far broader spectrum because the Japanese, unlike most of us in the West, have not lost their old theatrical traditions as they absorbed new ones.

Alongside the underground experimental theatres, the most formless happenings, and outrageous concrete music, exist the staid nō theatres, the highly ritualistic court dances, and dozens of forms of traditional music. In one building, girlie shows are taking place on an upper floor at the same time that extravagant musical reviews go on below. Down the street, the all-girl Takarazuka presents operettas, reviews, and melodramas bringing together in a colorful extravaganza the most flamboyant elements of five centuries of Japanese entertainment along with Western melodrama, musical comedy, and the Folies Bergères. Just around the corner, a German opera company performs, or a Japanese troupe plays Giraudoux or Anouilh, while five blocks away the all-male kabuki theatre presents its ten-hour-long programs of dances and plays integrating all the theatre arts. In addition to these major theatrical entertainments, numerous peripheral ones are available as well: story-telling, sentimental soap operas, folk and festival entertainments.

The rich variety of theatre in Japan today can be ascribed, at least in part, to the paradoxical character of the nation; conservative on the one hand, on the other, it is curious and open-

minded toward the new and the non-Japanese. The earliest form of entertainment, still represented among the performing arts of Japan, demonstrates both these tendencies. The music and dance of the Imperial Household, *gagaku* (elegant music) and *bugaku* (dance music), originated in the eighth century when music and dances from the Asian mainland (via China, but coming from as far as Tibet, India, and even Persia) were introduced at the court and blended with already existing forms. Curiously enough, whereas the originals on the Asian mainland died out over a thousand years ago, the Japanese forms, stylized and refined to the courtly tastes of the eighth to the eleventh centuries, have persisted until today and are performed on ceremonial occasions in the Imperial Palace in Tokyo, and in several shrines in the country. The strength of tradition has kept alive an art which, in its origins, was a foreign importation, but had by the tenth century already become a particularly Japanese art form.

Gagaku and bugaku are, despite their exotic derivation, in many ways typical of the courtly culture of the Heian period (782–1185). Chinese culture, along with Buddhism, had been introduced as early as the sixth century and the Imperial Court in the capital city of Heian (today's Kyoto)—the arbiter in all matters of taste and culture as well as the political center of the country—slowly assimilated the writing system, religion, architecture, and other marvels imported from the more ancient country to the west. With its careful symmetry, quiet dignity, and elegant ceremoniousness set off by elaborate and colorful costumes and sometimes masks, the bugaku seems a fitting representative of the aesthetic and ceremonious Heian society depicted in the first masterpiece of Japanese literature, *The Tale of Genji*. The image of the refined courtier—supposedly a poet, calligrapher, scholar and gentleman all in one, who fell in love sight unseen because of a beautifully written poem scented with the proper perfume—seems somehow appropriate for a society which relished the polished and graceful postures of the highly abstract bugaku with its subtly suggested themes emptied of dramatic content and emotion.

The hyperaestheticism of the Heian court was the outward manifestation of a crumbling within, and announced the doom

of the effete nobility, dominated in the late Heian period by the Taira family of regents. The Taira subsequently engaged in a bitter battle with the Minamoto family and were exterminated by them during the thirty-year Gempei Wars. These wars, and the families engaged in them, furnish the subject matter for a number of literary works, as well as for numerous dramatic pieces belonging to a variety of theatrical forms.

The story of political power in Japan is one of slow descent from the emperor at the summit to his regents, and then down to the military dictators, known as shōgun, beginning with Minamoto Yoritomo in 1185. Yoritomo set up his capital in the frontier outpost of Kamakura, far from the cultural oasis of the emperor's residence in Heian, which remained the nominal capital. In succeeding centuries, although the shōgun's headquarters sometimes shifted back to Kyoto, the power did not revert to the emperor until the middle of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the shōguns who seized power after the heyday of the Minamotos were of lower rank and were themselves followed by men of rough military cast with none of the refinement associated with the Imperial Court.

Japanese culture, including the theatre, followed a similar pattern: the courtly culture of the Heian period seeped down into the lower nobility and thence into the warrior classes who, by the fourteenth century, had become the guardians of culture and had replaced the impoverished and totally powerless nobility. By the late seventeenth century, it was the merchants who, although placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy, actually held economic power and quickly became the center of the amazing cultural renaissance which marks the years at the turn of the seventeenth century. The destitute nobles and samurai were destined never to regain their place as custodians of culture, but they continued to influence it in three ways: through regulations, sumptuary laws and the like; through their image, a vestige of the past which was perpetuated in the popular theatre particularly; and through the arts they had developed and protected in the past, and which continued to condition and influence the development of popular arts sometimes directly and sometimes only obliquely.

Even while the major cultural achievements were in the hands

of the nobility and the warrior class, however, popular arts were flourishing. Indeed, with the exception of the imported gagaku-bugaku, all the Japanese theatrical forms derive from popular entertainments, so that even when a "polished" form has become world-famous as an aristocratic art, as in the case of nō, it is based in the vigorous, often earthy, performances which belonged to the plebeians. Like a firm, steady ground bass beneath a baroque melody, the healthy, heady, popular element underlies and forms a kind of balance to the highly aesthetic elements which derived from the more refined or learned classes.

The legendary beginnings of Japanese theatre and dance (they are inseparable from the start) are firmly rooted in the earth, both literally and figuratively. According to the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Things, compiled in 712), the Sun Goddess, angered by pranks played by her mischievous brother, retired into a cavern and closed up the entrance with a stone, thereby casting the world into darkness. To lure her out the other gods gathered outside, and Heavenly-Alarming-Female, laying out a sounding board before the cave, began to perform an extravagant dance in which she pulled open the top of her costume and lifted her skirts—a kind of divine striptease. The gods were so pleased that they shook with laughter, piquing the curiosity of the Sun Goddess, who finally emerged from her cave.

Many of the elements found in this first performance were to prosper in later forms of Japanese entertainment: dance, eroticism, a sense of play, the foot striking the sounding board. This stamping sound is both a rhythmic device and a reminder of the physical presence of the performer and his connection with the earth. To this day, Heavenly-Alarming-Female's dance is commemorated, in very attenuated form, in the *kagura* or sacred dances at the Shinto shrines.

Aside from the imported bugaku, two dance forms of importance developed in Japan before the first major theatrical form, nō, was to prosper in the fourteenth century. They were *dengaku* and *sarugaku*, and both contributed enormously to the creation of nō; indeed, they were its immediate precursors, nō at first being called *sarugaku nō* (the skill of saragaku). Sarugaku was introduced from China in about the eighth century, but quickly

adapted to Japanese culture. At first it was made up of miscellaneous entertainments: songs, dances, acrobatics, juggling and magic. Later, short comic plays were added, and little by little the dramatic element became more important, until sarugaku was more like a simple play with songs and dances interpolated than like the variety program it had at first been. It was well on its way to becoming the first highly developed theatrical form in Japan.

Dengaku, the other popular form preceding nō, derives, as its name "field music" suggests, from peasant songs and dances which accompanied work in the rice fields. This folk dengaku survives today, but it was soon taken over by professional performers and incorporated into other kinds of entertainment, including sarugaku. It finally emerged as a kind of show combining song, dance and acrobatics, and became so popular in the fourteenth century that writers claimed there was an epidemic of dengaku fever. In fact, the fall of the Kamakura shogunate in 1333 is often ascribed to the regent's passionate obsession with dengaku.

With the fall of Kamakura off in the east, Kyoto once again became the political as well as cultural capital of the country, and the warriors in power there felt more strongly than ever the refined influence of courtly tastes and manners. Politically, under the Ashikaga shōguns, the country was in turmoil for several centuries; but, far from being in a state of decadence, the arts of Japan and her cultural life were fermenting and beginning to blossom under the fertilizing impact of contact and compromise between the two major elements of military and civilian, or samurai and courtier.

There were other forces at work as well: during the Kamakura period (1185–1333), Buddhism had become a popular religion in Japan, no longer restricted to the noble classes. Finding a relatively easy coexistence with Shinto, the native animistic religion, Buddhism sometimes merged with it. A number of great religious leaders arose and preached their gospels among populace, warriors and nobles alike. Most important for their impact on the theatre were two Buddhist sects: Jōdo, or Pure Land, and Zen. The former was a distinctly popular form of Buddhism calculated to appeal to the simple and downtrodden

during a time when they had little to look forward to in this life, and little assurance that they might not perish from one day to the next. Essentially, it taught that all men can receive the mercy of Buddha and be reborn in his Paradise if they will but repeat, with a pure believing heart, the name of Amida Buddha. Faith, not works, and the utterance of the magical name, even if only at the moment of death, offered a hope of eternal salvation. No wonder men of all walks, from beggars to emperors, became followers of the Jōdo sect, and practiced the repetition of the *nembutsu*, as it was called: *Namu Amida Butsu*. In all forms of traditional Japanese theatre, but most often in the nō plays, these words are heard time and again on the lips of characters about to die, or those who are expiating their attachment to human passions.

Curiously enough, however, it was the other form of Buddhism, Zen, which influenced the deeper meanings and the shape of the nō drama. The apparent simplicity, austerity, and vital experiential qualities of Zen appealed to the stern, unlearned warriors who were not inclined either to spend time in studying abstruse metaphysics or to accept the emotionalism inherent in other forms of Buddhism. Bypassing the written word, Zen attempts to go directly to the heart of the matter, hopefully arriving at enlightenment by a process of meditation, quiet introspection, and a leap beyond logic. So profoundly did the deep spirituality of Zen penetrate the Japanese arts and way of living during the Kamakura and Ashikaga shogunates that more than one historian has described Japan's finest arts as quintessentially Zen-inspired. However partial this view may be when seen in the perspective of Japan's rich cultural achievements, it is certainly applicable to a major portion of it, particularly to those arts which blossomed in the feudal period: nō, tea ceremony, calligraphy, ink painting, flower arrangement, rock gardens. The flamboyant side of the coin comes to the fore only at the end of the feudal period and is best represented in the flowering of popular arts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The age that saw the zenith of sarugaku nō, now called simply nō, was the period of the samurai, but it was a warrior softened, or at any rate refined somewhat by his contact with the court.

Indeed, the shōguns for many decades were men of great elegance and refinement, living a life of learning and aesthetic pleasures in the exquisite Golden Pavilion which they had built on the outskirts of the capital. Newly rich, they gave themselves over to the meditative disciplines of the Zen arts, developed new forms of poetry, and once again turned their eyes toward the Chinese with whom they had reestablished relations.

The two most important steps in advancing sarugaku toward nō as we more or less know it today were taken shortly after the middle of the fourteenth century. In 1368, a well-known performer of sarugaku, Kannami, incorporated a special kind of dance known as *kuse mai* in his performance, thereby enriching both music and dance forms within sarugaku and making it more popular than ever. In 1374 Kannami and his eleven-year-old son, later to be known as Zeami, performed ceremonial sarugaku at the Imakumano shrine, where their performance was witnessed by the shōgun, Yoshimitsu. Apparently impressed by the skill of the nō, and struck by the childish beauty of Zeami, the sixteen-year-old shōgun took the troupe under his protection. From that day sarugaku nō quickly outstripped dengaku in both artistic achievement and popularity, and under the sensitive and brilliant leadership of Zeami, it reached a peak of perfection that remains unsurpassed in theatrical history.

Nō is a performing art integrating music, dance and speech in order to present, usually obliquely and often through reference to past events relived by a ghost, a simple situation or story. According to Zeami's treatises, which were written over a period of about thirty years and which covered all phases of the art from the most material to the most spiritual, nō reposes upon two foundations: *monomane*, or the imitation of things, which may be thought of as giving a certain realism to the performance, and *yūgen*, a difficult term whose basic meaning is mystery or depth, and which pulls nō in the direction of spirituality and unearthliness. For Zeami, a perfect balance is necessary, but nō has seldom managed that feat, and almost inevitably falls on the side of *yūgen*, attenuating the realistic elements so that they harmonize with the high stylization, refinement and elegance of the more spiritual elements.

Some viewers have refused to call nō theatre, comparing it rather to a ceremony. It is true that the spectator of nō must be closely in tune with the performers. Otherwise, he will miss entirely the experience which, somewhat akin to meditation, is led by the spiritual strength of the protagonist who, according to Zeami's prescriptions, must move only seven-tenths on the outside and ten-tenths on the inside. The slow pace requires patience, but the aesthetic rewards can be great. Nō is subtle, suggestive, and oblique, both in its text and its presentation. The reader who has not had the opportunity to witness a performance will find it difficult to imagine the exquisite refinement of the actor-dancer, the unearthly quality of the singing and chanting, and the dramatic impact of the sparse instrumental accompaniment of two or three drums and a flute punctuated by the sharp cries and guttural groans of the musicians.

The music, so strange to Western ears, underlies the entire rhythm and organization of a nō play, which falls into three parts: *jo* (introduction), *ha* (development) and *kyū* (finale). This structure, basic to most of the performing arts in Japan, derives from the old gagaku and bugaku of the Imperial court, and in nō regulates not only each play, but the series of five plays which, traditionally, were performed in a day-long program, with comic interludes (kyōgen) separating them. The two-hundred-odd nō plays in the repertoire today are divided into five groups, according to theme or major character *(shite)*, and each group represents a different aesthetic feeling which contributes to the total impact of the full program.

The first group is made up of god plays, works of an auspicious nature, celebrating perhaps a deity of some shrine. Their rhythm is slow and their action almost nonexistent. They are introductory pieces *(jo)* and must slowly prepare the spectator for the nō experience which is to follow. The next three groups belong to the development section *(ha)* of the program. Warrior plays, more complex and active than god plays, deal with the ghosts of dead warriors who are condemned to unrest because of their attachment to the world or for their sins while alive. For the *waki*, or secondary role, usually an itinerant priest, they re-enact a major event of their lives, often a battle, and ask the priest to pray for their repose. Women plays, perhaps the most refined

of all the pieces, certainly containing the most concentrated dose of *yūgen*, make up the third group. The fourth group is miscellaneous, but contains a number of madwoman plays. They have none of the flamboyant romanticism which the Western reader associates with such themes. The madness is usually simply suggested by a branch carried by the major character. The final group *(kyū)*, faster and more dramatic than the others, is made up of demon plays, no doubt the most accessible to the beginner, but frequently considered of lower rank by the nō connoisseur, who invariably prefers the understated elegance of the woman plays.

The deep spirituality of nō in its higher reaches is related to the spirit of Zen. Zeami himself was a practitioner of that philosophy, and one feels that the theatre he brought to full flower is, much like Zen, pointing beyond itself to an experience that transcends human expression. Zeami states it metaphorically: "At Shinra [an ancient Korean kingdom] at midnight, the sun is shining."

Actually there is more evident theatricality in the nō performance than one might at first think. Even in the more elegant works, the size, richness and striking colors and design of the costumes are essentially theatrical, as are many of the masks. And as a corrective to the otherworldliness or *yūgen* of nō, the plays in a typical day's performance are interspersed with the delightful kyōgen which, unlike nō, lean heavily in the direction of *monomane* or the imitation of things. These homely farces treat, in simple terms, many of the basic human relationships, showing men, and even gods, to be basically foolish, proud, vain, cowardly, avaricious, or devilishly clever when it comes to taking advantage of others.

Kyōgen (literally, "mad words"), derived from the comic elements in sarugaku and dengaku, are performed in a highly stylized way which accentuates their vitality and humor and suggests their relation to the nō, although never approaching the level of abstraction of nō. There is rarely music or dance; instead, dialogue dominates as the rogue outwits the fool in these delicious vignettes which have not lost their instant appeal.

After more than a century of protection by the Ashikagas,

nō once again became a popular form in the sixteenth century, and might well have developed into a theatre like kabuki. The Tokugawas, however, when they finally succeeded in centralizing political power, took over nō as their official ceremony, thus bringing about its coagulation into set forms and slowing down its pace which today, most critics agree, is about half what it was in Zeami's day. A text of a few pages, running for perhaps forty-five minutes in Zeami's day, now requires an hour and a half to perform.

While the Ashikaga shōguns were preoccupied with nō and other aesthetic, or at any rate nonpolitical, pursuits, the country was falling down around them. The centralized government established by the Minamotos in Kamakura gave way to a full-blown feudal state with warring barons fighting among themselves, and finally to a state of utter chaos which prevailed for most of the sixteenth century. This period is known in Japanese history as *sengoku*, the country at war. It was brought to an end by the ascension to power, one after another in rapid succession, of three of the greatest warriors and leaders in Japanese history: Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa Ieyasu.

The accomplishment of Nobunaga was to destroy the strength of many powerful houses and to take possession of all the central provinces of Japan, including, of course, Kyoto, the capital. When Hideyoshi followed him in 1584, he subjugated the rest of the outlying feudal estates and, by 1590, brought peace to the country for the first time in over a hundred years. Upon Hideyoshi's death in 1598, Ieyasu's power was contested by several powerful families, including adherents to the son of Hideyoshi. In 1600, however, Ieyasu won a definitive victory at the battle of Sekigahara, and in 1603 was named shōgun by the emperor. In 1615 he destroyed the remains of Hideyoshi's family adherents, and from that time until 1868 the Tokugawas occupied the shōgun's seat, although, as had been customary in the past, the real power was often wielded by a regent.

From the Kamakura period to the reign of the Tokugawas, Japan had witnessed the growth and firm establishment of the warrior class as the ruling power and as guardian of culture.

It had seen also the development of the so-called "Way of the Warrior," *bushidō*, which, ideally at any rate, elevated loyalty and courage to the highest virtues and set up a code of behavior—austere, manly, and impassively stern—which influenced almost every facet of Japanese life until the nineteenth century, and is strongly reflected in the kabuki and bunraku (puppet) theatres. With the coming of peace under the Tokugawas, the warrior was denied the very activity which seemed his *raison d'être*, and he posed a grave problem to public tranquility. Curiously enough, it was only in the eighteenth century, centuries after it had lost its vitality, that the word *bushidō* came to be used, and the practices of the "Way of the Warrior" codified.

The two hundred fifty years of the Tokugawa period marked the rise of the townsmen and merchants to a role of economic and artistic importance in Japan. Where the warriors had formerly been arbiters of taste, now the merchant class took over that role. The shōguns, in an effort to stabilize their power and save it from the deleterious effects of change, promulgated edicts which discouraged social flexibility. At the top of the social scale were the samurai, and just below them the peasants who supplied the country with its chief means of subsistance, rice. Third were the artisans, and at the bottom the merchants (*chōnin*). The social mobility, which had existed briefly during the Ashikaga rule and had actually allowed the rise of a humble foot soldier like Hideyoshi to the role of virtual ruler of Japan, was once more impeded by Hideyoshi himself and his successors. In 1585, ordinances were issued forbidding men of whatsoever station to leave their employ without special permission.

Ironically enough, it was the lowly merchant class that was to furnish the economic force of the Tokugawa years; by as early as 1700 all the gold and silver in the country was in the hands of the merchant class, to whom the military and even the nobles were sorely in debt. The traditional rice economy, which the shogunate insisted lay at the base of its wealth, was only a relic of the past, and the true strength lay in the hands of the *chōnin*. This economic lie is at the foundation of many of the Tokugawas' economic problems, for here as elsewhere

their inherent conservatism denied what was already fact and kept Japan in the Middle Ages far past the period of her natural development.

Indicative of this conservatism was the official attitude toward incursions from the West. At first friendly and even encouraging to Dutch and Portuguese merchants and to Christian missionaries, the rulers soon grew suspicious of their real intentions, and missionaries and converts alike were cruelly persecuted. After 1640 ports were closed to all foreign ships with the exception of a few Dutch ships a year. Likewise, no travel was permitted Japanese outside the country, and for more than two hundred years there was only minimal contact with developments in the rest of the world.

Within the country, at peace for the first time in centuries—although under the heel of a conservative military dictatorship—a new cultural renaissance was in the making. Indeed, indications of its character were evident as early as 1576 when Nobunaga built his luxurious Azuchi castle, famed for its brilliant decorations and bright coloring, set off with lavish use of gold leaf. The antipode of the austere Zen style preferred a century earlier, it announces the joyous hedonism and spirited sensuality which were to reign during the popular renaissance of the late seventeenth century. The culture of the merchants offers a happy contrast to the "Way of the Warrior." Although the *chōnin* often tried to emulate the samurai, even in the ethical standards he imposed upon himself (at least in the idealized picture which emerges from the popular theatre), he essentially represents a more carefree and liberated outlook, and offers a healthy balance to the stern ethics of *bushidō*.

There is a tendency among foreigners to think of Japanese arts in terms of the austere Zen-inspired forms which in Japan are sometimes characterized as *shibui* or astringent. Typical as well are the joyous color and spirited movement of Imari pottery, of Momoyama architecture, and of the kabuki theatre. In Japanese arts taken as a whole, there is an immense range and an impressive balance, with the *shibui* at the one extreme and the flamboyantly colorful, the *hade*, at the other.

Just as gagaku-bugaku reflects the courtly orientation of Japanese culture in the Heian period, and nō the refined warrior

aesthetics of the Ashikaga shōguns, kabuki reflects the popular culture that begins to dominate with the Tokugawa rule. Kabuki was created by and for the townsmen, and depended upon their approval and enthusiasm for its very existence. Late in the sixteenth century, or perhaps early in the seventeenth, there appeared among the popular entertainers who customarily offered their performances in the dry river bed of the Kamo River in Kyoto, Okuni, a woman who was attached to the ancient shrine at Izumo. Her dancing of the *nembutsu*—a prayer dance of Buddhist origin, but now debased and blended with comic and folk elements—found the favor of a large public, and soon others joined with her or emulated her. Before long, groups performing similar dances developed, and because they were made up of rather unsavory characters—prostitutes, pimps, hangers-on—people not quite acceptable in decent society, they were known as *kabuki-mono*, kabuki things or people. Kabuki was derived from a now obsolete verb, *kabuku*, "to be aslant." In 1629 the shogunate forbade the performances of women's kabuki claiming it was corrupting the samurai. Young men stepped into the breach and performed all the roles, bringing along with them some of the acrobatic elements of the dengaku they had previously performed. In 1652 they were outlawed for reasons similar to those given in banning women's kabuki. With this step, kabuki's artistic development could begin in earnest, performed by *yarō* or mature men. Quickly the simple scenes and erotic dances of the first half of the century developed into a more sophisticated theatrical form: lengthy plays with incredibly complicated plots, a variety of characters, and families of actors specializing in particular types of roles.

In western Japan where the courtly influence of Kyoto was still felt, the commoners wished to emulate the refinement of the aristocracts and, at the same time, to see themselves represented on the stage. For them, a special style of elegant and refined acting developed, and plays were written dealing with the problems of the merchant class. Called *sewamono*, or domestic problem plays, they reflect in idealized form the lives of the city dwellers, and give an important role to the women in the pleasure districts which had come into prominence about this time. Ill-fated loves between *chōnin* and geisha were

depicted with endless variations, often ending in stylized travel scenes in dance form which led to double love suicides. Such a romantic aura came to surround the love suicides depicted in the plays that the impressionable spectators too often found it the logical way out of their own personal dilemmas, and the government placed a ban on the theme.

Many plays of this kind were written by Chikamatsu Monzaemon, universally recognized as the greatest dramatic genius of Japan. Writing for the great actor of refined young lover roles, Sakata Tōjūrō, Chikamatsu brought the kabuki to its literary zenith in the Osaka–Kyoto region toward the end of the seventeenth century. But Chikamatsu wrote plays of different kinds, and soon turned to writing for the puppets who were at this time beginning to compete for popularity with the kabuki actors.

At the same time, in eastern Japan, an actor of genius, Ichikawa Danjūrō, was developing his own style to conform to the tastes of the merchants and the toughs from eastern Japan who had settled in the brash frontier town of Edo, as Tokyo was then called. The military capital of the country, it was filled with swaggering samurai—proud men who alone were permitted to wear two swords, and had the legal right to cut down any commoner who showed them disrespect. Danjūrō realized his audience would enjoy living the lives of the samurai, transposed to a theatrical key and made bigger than life. He developed a style known as *aragoto*, rough style, in which movement, wigs, costumes, everything, conspired to give the impression of gigantic size and strength. Black and red lines, sometimes blue, violet and other colors as well, stressed the musculature of the face and limbs. Great stamping feet and energetic arrangements of the limbs, culminating in the crossing of one eye, resulted in the climactic poses known as *mie* which have become a standard technique of any heroic kabuki presentation.

The color, vigor and sensuality of *aragoto* and of the tragedies of love in the gay quarters suggest the spirit of the period that is known as Genroku. Strictly speaking, it is the years from 1688 to 1703, but as a state of mind and spirit it embraces several decades beyond those dates and represents the first full expression of popular culture—the flamboyant attitudes to art and

life that are apparent from the beginning of the Tokugawa period and even before. The commoners, sensitive to the more aristocratic arts of earlier years, were able to free themselves from their influence and give birth to arts that were purely Japanese and imbued with their love of life, vitality, luxury and sensuous appeal.

Intimately related to the arts, and above all to the kabuki, were the so-called gay quarters where women of all ranks, from the common street walkers to the grandiose courtisans who received a king's ransom for one night, were available to the young man in search of pleasure. Here the arts of music, song and dance grew as accomplishments requisite in the entertaining of the refined townsmen, and here the woodblock prints which so spiritedly depict this world were developed. Known as *ukiyo-e*, or pictures of the floating world, they reveal the glamorous side of that fickle world of life which passes like a dream. And next to this prospered the dramatic actor-prints which were collected by the fans of the men who were the matinee idols of their day, and who exercised an immense influence on contemporary speech, clothing and behavior.

As kabuki matured, the movements, costumes, poses, and speech patterns of the great actors came to be regarded as definitive, and the highly choreographed character of the performance became more pronounced. In the early periods, the *onnagata*, or men who specialized in women's roles, were the only ones to perform dances but in the eighteenth century, *tachiyaku*, or actors of male roles, began to perform dances as well, and the kabuki dance was born.

The dance play came to form an important part of the kabuki repertoire, along with the *sewamono* and the heroic and highly stylized history play *(jidaimono)* based on Japan's past and her legends. A standard kabuki program today usually includes one play of each type, although during other periods the differing types of plays were sometimes written into a single monstrous play lasting ten hours or more.

Since kabuki had apparently outgrown its immoral beginnings, it was decided to write its name in a different manner. Three Chinese characters were chosen, but were pronounced in their pseudo-Chinese manner: KA (the native Japanese is

uta for the same character), meaning song, formed the first syllable; BU (*mai* in its Japanese reading), dance, was the second; and KI, or performance, the third. Thus the new way of writing kabuki was almost a definition of its theatrical form: a performance containing song and dance. Unlike Western musicals, however, kabuki totally integrates all elements of the production so that the actor is at one and the same time an actor-dancer-singer.

Kabuki could not have developed into its present complex total theatre form without the contribution of a number of other theatrical forms, most notably the puppet or doll theatre, often called bunraku, after the name of the man who revived the dying art in the early nineteenth century. The puppet theatre arose about the same time as kabuki, and reached the first high point in its history when Chikamatsu, growing tired of the liberties the actor-centered kabuki took with his plays, decided to devote himself to the puppet theatre. He combined his talents with those of a singer-narrator of great genius, Gidayū, whose name is now used to designate the singing style which accompanies the puppet play.

The bunraku is a composite theatrical art made up of three important elements: the puppets and their manipulators, the narrator, and the *shamisen* accompaniment. Each of these arts had begun independently of the others and finally they merged toward the end of the seventeenth century into the most serious and literate puppet theatre in the world. Reciters, as early as the fifteenth century, had accompanied themselves on the *biwa*, a kind of lute, as they sang the story of a certain Princess Jōruri. This tale was to become the prototype of the narrative element in bunraku, and the name *jōruri* is now applied to the narrative singing style, and is oftentimes used synonymously with bunraku.

The shamisen, a three-stringed banjo-like instrument, forms the chief accompaniment for both puppet and kabuki. It came from China via the Ryukyu Islands about the middle of the sixteenth century, and soon replaced the biwa as the accompaniment for the jōruri. After the middle of the seventeenth century the jōruri and its shamisen were used to accompany puppet performances. Slowly the puppets were improved, and at the same time the literary elements developed. Chikamatsu wrote history plays showing off the fantastic possibilities of the puppets, and in 1703 wrote his first *sewamono*, the famous domestic tragedy, *The Love Suicides at Sonezaki*.

It was after Chikamatsu's death in 1734 that the large puppets manipulated by three visible puppeteers were first used. It is these puppets, with their highly expressive heads and the complex manipulations permitted by three operators working in close harmony, which are identified with bunraku today. The puppet theatre enjoyed its zenith of popularity during the 1730s, 40s and 50s. Some of the perennial masterpieces of the repertoire were written during this period by a group of playwrights headed by Takeda Izumo I: *Sugawara's Secrets of Calligraphy* (in no. **13**, freely translated by Ernst as *The House of Sugawara*), *Yoshitsune and the Thousand Cherry Trees* (untranslated), and *Chūshingura* (no. **3**). Although by the mid-eighteenth century the puppet theatre had fallen on lean days from which it never fully recovered (even though writers of talent continued to enrich its repertoire, notably Chikamatsu Hanji), so great was the puppet theatre's popularity at this time that it overshadowed the kabuki.

In order to regain their lead, the kabuki actors began to borrow not only the plays, but the very techniques of the puppet theatre. This enriched their performances immensely and introduced the new world of jōruri music into the theatre of living actors. At times the imitation of puppets is so extreme that an actor moves with expressionless face and unarticulated hands while he is "operated" by several visible black-clad "puppeteers". For many years there was a fruitful borrowing back and forth between the two theatres. Today the kabuki repertoire is made up largely of classics which were originally written for the puppets. The above-mentioned plays by Izumo I are, in fact, listed as the three masterpieces in the *jidaimono* category of the kabuki repertoire.

The eighteenth century was a great period of growth for the kabuki. It saw the development of theatre music into an abundant and varied accompaniment which was closely integrated with the movements and speech of the actor-dancers. Drawing on nō and popular and folk elements, theatre music attained

an unprecedented richness and expressiveness. The eighteenth century also saw the rise of the dance choreographers, as opposed to the actors who had originally invented their own dances. This led to the luxuriant period of dances in the early nineteenth century, from which many dances survive to this day as classics of the repertoire. The eighteenth century was also a period of important developments in the physical theatre. Notably the revolving stage was added—used commonly in the kabuki more than a hundred years before its adoption in the West, if it can be said to have been really adopted in the West. Elevators appeared on the stage, and most important of all, the *hanamichi* was extended as a kind of bridge-stage connecting the stage proper with the back of the auditorium. This permitted the actors to make their entrances and exits through the audience, posing at a focal point. This development stressed the intimacy between the actors and the audience which is an important factor in the aesthetics of kabuki.

In the early nineteenth century kabuki was again in its heyday, and, catering to the tastes of its public as always, it created works that delighted the audiences of a period known for its decadence. As the strength of the Tokugawa shogunate declined, and that of the military caste as well, the true power of the merchant class became more and more apparent until finally the military and merchant classes were to merge in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In the meantime, playwrights like Tsuruya Namboku IV were writing works which allowed for the use of dazzling stage tricks while depicting the seamy side of life as men saw it around them. Rather than glamorizing the masterless samurai, or *rōnin*, who had proliferated by this time and had become a real social problem, he revealed the chaotic state of a society which was ready for upheaval. With Namboku a new kind of realism enters into kabuki and is taken up by the greatest kabuki writer of the nineteenth century, Kawatake Mokuami, whose plays remain widely performed today. He is the master of *kizewamono* or raw domestic plays, centering usually on the adventures of criminals, prostitutes and the like. *Benten the Thief* (in no. **13**) and *The Love of Izayoi and Seishin* (no. **62**) are two of his best-known works and typical of the genre.

Spanning the last years of the Tokugawa rule and the first years of the Meiji Restoration (1868) when power was once again returned to the Imperial house, Mokuami is a link between the old kabuki and the new plays which today continue to be written in emulation of Western forms of theatre. When the Japanese once again opened their ports to foreign vessels and cast their eyes abroad, they were as eager to import the Western culture they found in Victorian Europe as they had been to import Chinese culture centuries earlier. The traditional theatre arts were in a real danger of perishing; in their enthusiasm for all things Western, even the kabuki actors sometimes tended to throw over the old classic styles and bring into kabuki a kind of realism that was incompatible with the high theatricality and the integration of music, dance and performance which have always been essential elements of kabuki.

The little creative vitality shown by kabuki in the twentieth century is found chiefly in dance pieces. When the shogunate collapsed, nō theatre, long protected by the shōguns, almost vanished with it. It was saved largely due to the efforts of a minor actor, Umewaka Minoru, who continued to perform in a theatre in Tokyo. Now that nō no longer belonged exclusively to the samurai, the kabuki actors could more easily pillage that repertoire; dating from the end of the nineteenth century are some of the more famous kabuki versions of nō plays such as *Funa Benkei* (Benkei in the Boat) and *The Maple Viewing (Momiji Gari)*, and some of the delightful kabuki versions of kyōgen, all of which are performed as dance plays. Aside from these adaptations, the new plays written for kabuki, with very rare exceptions, have been disappointing; the texts make little use of techniques long identified with kabuki, and take this gigantic form away from the integrated total kind of theatre which it had become. The new kabuki is heading in the direction of Western theatre in a more realistic mode, depending almost entirely on dialogue: the antithesis of kabuki at its zenith. The greatest name among writers of neo-kabuki is Okamoto Kidō.

The great kabuki classics continue to be performed, but because they are now museum pieces, there is little creative imagination deployed in their performance in spite of the magnificent art exhibited by the actors, musicians and stage workers

of this highly disciplined world. Hopefully playwrights and actors of genius and imagination will create, in the future, works that combine both the high style and total arts of kabuki and the rapid rhythms and meaningful content which seem essential to a popular theatre today.

As Westernization made greater inroads, the Japanese theatre in the late nineteenth century created new dramatic forms, notably *shimpa*, a hybrid of kabuki and Western melodrama, often described by Western writers as a sort of soap opera. Its appeal today is limited and it will probably disappear, mourned by few, within the next few generations. The other Western form is *shingeki*, "new theatre," and embraces all the plays written, whether by foreigners or by Japanese, in the modes deriving from the West. Probably nowhere are playwrights like Chekhov, Giraudoux and Brecht as popular as they are in Japan. The works of these playwrights and their offspring, covering an immense range of styles, ideologies, and qualities, are imitated by Japanese playwrights. The most famous of the playwrights is Mishima Yukio, who, although best known in the West for his novels, wrote dozens of plays including some of the most successful modern kabuki plays, adaptations of nō, and plays completely in the style of modern Western drama. The novelist Abe Kōbō has also ventured into theatre with the experimental *Friends*. But shingeki, most critics agree, has not yet come of age. Many observe that the future of Japanese theatre lies not in imitation of Western models, but in an integration of these new modes with Japan's traditional forms. If we look at the best of Japan's ancient arts, this seems a valid conclusion, for many of her most typical art forms were originally introduced from abroad, but through the years were adjusted to the spirit and mentality of the Japanese, and took on a shape which is universally recognized today as essentially and typically Japanese. There are signs of this happening already in the theatre, reflected not only in the works of Mishima, but in the highly experimental efforts of playwright-directors like Kara Jūrō who blends modern and ancient, East and West, Beckett, Artaud, Sophocles, and kabuki into a frenzied pop art product performed in his famous red tent. His plays are published and his theatrical

ventures chronicled in the only English-language magazine devoted exclusively to Japanese theatre, *Concerned Theatre Japan* (see Further Readings). This recently founded periodical is devoted overwhelmingly to the most modern developments in Japanese theatre, but it occasionally relates contemporary to traditional forms, and reflects the theatrical ferment in Japan today.

Brief Chronology of Japanese History and Theatre

A.D. 400	Recorded history begins in Japan.
560–571	Buddhism introduced into Japan.
701	Gagaku-ryō, the Imperial Music Department, founded.
710–782	Nara the capital. Period of Chinese influence.
782–1185	Heian period.
794	Capital founded in Heian-kyō (today's Kyoto).
11th century	Dengaku and sarugaku popular.
1156–1185	Rise and fall of the Taira family regents.
1185	Defeat of Taira (Heike) by Minamoto (Genji).
1185–1333	Kamakura period.
1333–1573	Ashikaga period.
1349	Famous dengaku performance in Kyoto in which the stalls collapsed.
1368	Kannami uses kuse mai in sarugaku nō.
1374	Yoshimitsu sees Kannami and Zeami perform and begins to protect sarugaku nō.
1400–1436	Zeami writes his essays on nō aesthetics
16th century	Sengoku: the country at war.
late 16th century	Nobunaga and Hideyoshi unify the country.
1573–1600	Momoyama period. Flowering of colorful arts.
1590	Edo (Tokyo) founded.
1593–1596	Hideyoshi performs in nō.
1600	Ieyasu's definitive victory at Sekigahara.
1603–1868	Tokugawa period. Nō becomes official ceremonial.
1603	Ieyasu named shōgun, celebrates with nō performance. Okuni performs her dances in Kyoto.
1615	Puppet jōruri presented in Edo.
1617–1641	Persecution of Christians. Expulsion of Spaniards, then Portuguese. All Europeans excluded. Dutch confined to Dejima in Nagasaki.

1629	Woman's kabuki forbidden.
1652	Young men's kabuki forbidden, theatres closed.
1653	Mature men's kabuki begins.
1664	First full-length kabuki plays produced.
1673	Danjūrō introduces aragoto style.
1678	Sakata Tōjūrō flourishes in Kyoto–Osaka.
1685	Gidayū opens his puppet theatre in Osaka with Chikamatsu as writer.
1688–1703	Genroku. Flowering of popular culture.
1703	Chikamatsu's *Love Suicides at Sonezaki*, first double suicide play. Chikamatsu flourished until 1724.
1746–1748	Composition of three puppet history plays destined to become major history plays in kabuki as well: *Sugawara's Secrets of Calligraphy*, *Yoshitsune and the Thousand Cherry Trees*, and *Chūshingura*.
1753	First use of large stage elevator in kabuki.
1758	First use of revolving stage in kabuki.
1766–1780	Chikamatsu Hanji flourishes.
1825	*Yotsuya Ghost Story*, most famous kabuki ghost play, representative of decadent late Tokugawa tastes and society.
1840	*Kanjinchō*, major kabuki work based on nō.
1854	Treaties between Japan and United States.
1854–1890	Kawatake Mokuami, major nineteenth-century kabuki writer, flourishes.
1868–1912	Meiji Restoration. Shōgun resigns, emperor becomes political head, capital moved to Tokyo. Nō troupes disband.
1878–1881	New nō stages built in Tokyo.
1887	Emperor first witnesses kabuki performance.
1911	Major neo-kabuki play, Okamoto Kidō's *Shūzenji Monogatari* (The Mask Maker).
1928	First kabuki tour abroad: Russia.
1955	Kabuki tour to People's Republic of China.
1960	First kabuki tour to the United States. Since this date almost each year has seen a tour of some traditional Japanese theatre either to the United States or to Europe.
1966	National Theatre opens.