PLAYS

The simple skits of early Kabuki gradually developed into real plays largely through the work of two great actors: Sakata Tōjūrō in the *Kamigata* region and Ichikawa Danjūrō in Edo.

WAGOTO

Some of Kabuki's earliest skits had portrayed the ruinously expensive fashion of visiting the pleasure quarters and hopefully gaining the favors of a high-ranking courtesan (a practice known as *keiseikai*, literally "courtesan buying"). Tōjūrō capitalized on the public's fascination with *keiseikai* and, with his *wagoto* style, he portrayed the sort of young and handsome men who could afford this extraordinary indulgence. These men were often also rather foppish, pampered, slightly effeminate, and faintly comical. The stories about the celebrated courtesan Yūgiri, in particular, were very popular and the role of her lover, Izaemon, became Tōjūrō's most celebrated.

Wagoto costumes and makeup are simply stylized versions of real life, and the action portrays the emotions of a young man in love. *Wagoto* men also have a comic side, which can be seen in the petty jealousies and mock anger that Izaemon displays when things are not going his way. The great *wagoto* play is *Kuruwa bunshō*, and Jihei from *Shinjū ten no Amijima* is another famous *wagoto* character.

ARAGOTO

Meanwhile, the favorite of the citizens of Edo was the young actor Ichikawa Danjūrō I. He called his exotic and exciting style of acting *aragoto* (short for *aramushagoto* or "wild-warrior style"), and is said to have based it on a puppet character called Kinpira, whose violent antics were very popular. Some of the fearsome poses he adopted when playing *aragoto* characters were almost certainly also influenced by Buddhist statuary like the frightening deity, Fudō Myōō.

Danjūrō used the style to portray superheroes and villains, and he made his whole performance—costume, makeup, vocal delivery, and acting style—larger than life. Typically, *aragoto* characters paint their faces with broad lines of makeup called *kumadori* to increase their fearsome appearances, and some wear outlandishly large padded costumes and fantastic wigs. At the same time, Danjūrō also invented wildly exaggerated modes of acting such as the glaring, stop-motion poses called *mie*, and the dramatic, swaggering entrances and exits called *roppō*.

Aragoto heroes behave as one would

Kabuki jūhachiban

In 1840 the popular actor Ichikawa Danjūrō VII produced and starred in a play that he advertised as *jūhachiban no uchi*—"from the eighteen favorite plays". This play, *Kanjinchō*, became the first of a collection that Danjūrō based on the Ichikawa family's acting traditions. These plays were to be representative of the *ie no gei* or "family art" of the Ichikawa line. Naturally, most of the plays he chose are in the *aragoto* style and were first performed by Danjūrō I, II, and IV. The most popular of the *jūhachiban* still regularly performed are *Kanjinchō*, *Sukeroku*, *Shibaraku*, *Narukami*, *Uirō uri* and *Yanone*. Most of the original scripts of these plays have been lost and the majority was revived (in part rewritten) during the twentieth century.

Later, other actors followed Danjūrō's example with the *Shin (new) kabuki jūhachiban* of Danjūrō IX (consisting, in fact, of thirty-two works in total and including the dances *Kagami jishi*, *Funa Benkei*, and *Momijigari*,) and the *Shinko engeki jusshu*, "Ten Types of Old and New Plays" of Onoe Kikugorō V and VI (including *Tsuchigumo* and *Ibaraki*).

Although these lists of plays may be the specialties of a particular acting line, it is not uncommon for actors from other families to perform them.

PLAY TITLE	FIRST STAGED
Fuwa ("Fuwa Banzaemon")	1680
Fudō ("The Deity Fudō")	1697
Gedatsu ("The Release of Kagekiyo's Soul")	1760
Jayanagi ("The Snake Weeping Willow")	1763
Kagekiyo ("General Kagekiyo")	1732
Kamahige ("Scythe Beard")	1774
Kanjinchō ("The Subscription Scroll")	1702
Kan'u ("General Kan'u")	1737
Kenuki ("The Tweezers")	1742
Nanatsu men ("The Seven Masks")	1740
Narukami ("The Thunder God")	1684
Oshimodoshi ("Devil Pusher")	1727
Shibaraku ("Wait a Moment!")	1697
Sukeroku yukari no Edo zakura ("Sukeroku, Flower of Edo")	1713
Uirō uri ("The Medicine Peddler")	1718
Uwanari ("Jealousy")	1699
Yanone ("The Arrow Head")	1729
Zōhiki ("Pulling the Elephant Apart")	1701

expect of virtuous supermen. Supporting justice and the underdog, even their vocal delivery is hugely distorted as they confront their adversaries with screams of rage. One of the greatest plays in the *aragoto* style is *Shibaraku*, and its central character, now called Kamakura Gongorō Kagemasa is one of the most fantastic. Most of the *kabuki jūhachiban* plays are in the *aragoto* style.

JIDAIMONO, SEWAMONO AND *SHOSAGOTO*

While *wagoto* and *aragoto* are historically the oldest form of original Kabuki, as the repertoire broadened it became the practice to divide Kabuki plays into one of three principal types: plays set in Japan's historical or legendary past, called *jidaimono*; plays set in a contemporary setting known as *sewamono*; and finally the very important dance category, known as *shosagoto*. Between these three categories there is some overlap, and sometimes all three genres can be seen within the same play. There are also several important subcategories.

JIDAIMONO

Jidai means "period" or "era," while *mono*, "thing," here refers to a play. *Jidaimono* are period plays set in Japan's real or legendary past prior to the Edo period (1600–1868). The "three great plays" of the Bunraku and Kabuki repertoires all fall into this category. With the exception of minor roles such as servants, farmers, or townspeople, their main characters are almost exclusively upper class nobles, samurai, or priests. When the main characters are seemingly ordinary people, they usually turn out to be important figures in disguise. The sushi shop apprentice Yasuke in *Yoshitsune senbon zakura*, for example, is actually the Heike general Koremori.

Because of the strict censorship imposed by the shogunate, playwrights were forbidden to dramatize real contemporary events that involved the upper classes and that could be interpreted in any way as political. To overcome this they set such stories in previous epochs, one of the most famous examples being the play *Kanadehon chūshingura*, which portrays an incident that in fact took place in 1701–1703 but is set in 1338. Little effort, however, seems to have been exerted to disguise the true source. The fictional name Ōboshi Yuranosuke, for example, would hardly have been a successful camouflage for the historical character, Ōishi Kuranosuke.

Jidaimono sets and costumes are generally colorful and sometimes spectacular, while the acting style is less realistic and more stylized. Characteristic Kabuki conventions such as *mie* poses are also common. Unlike the spoken language used in *sewamono*, which is basically that of the time in which it was written, the spoken language of *jidaimono* is more classical and formal.

A full-length *jidaimono* play usually consisted of five acts and took the greater part of a day to perform in its entirety. Today, while full-length dramas (called *tōshi kyōgen*) are still occasionally staged, the practicalities of modern-day theater-going have made the performance of just individual acts far more common. Acts such as *Kumagai jinya* from *Ichinotani futaba gunki*, for example, may be performed very successfully on their own, even if a certain knowledge of what happened in previous scenes would certainly be useful.

SEWAMONO

Written by Chikamatsu Monzaemon in 1703, *Sonezaki shinjū* is generally credited as being the first *sewamono* or "domestic play" written for Bunraku. It was set at the time of writing and dealt with a true incident from the everyday life of its principal audience, the *chōnin* or townspeople of feudal Japan. The play was adapted for Kabuki in 1719. While some earlier seventeenth-century Kabuki plays set in the pleasure quarters could also be called *sewamono*, they depict nothing of the more difficult or sordid sides of real life and were only concerned with the floating world (*ukiyo*) of the pleasure quarters.

Stage sets in *sewamono* are more realistic than in *jidaimono* and speech is typical of the spoken language of the time. Despite some degree of stylization being retained, *sewamono* brought a new level of realism to Kabuki.

As *sewamono* were often inspired by real events that achieved notoriety, murders and violence are sometimes depicted. Among the many famous plays that depict this side of Edo period life are *Shinjū ten no Amijima*, *Natsu matsuri Naniwa kagami*, and *Yowa nasake ukina no yokogushi*, commonly called *Kirare Yosa*.

Sewamono may be further divided into subcategories depending on their subject matter, such as plays dealing with lovers' double suicides, for example, and plays about thieves.

SHOSAGOTO

Often performed in gorgeous costumes and against backdrops of great beauty, dances can be the most visually spectacular items on a Kabuki program. At the same time, with their combination of movement, music, and acting, they can also be profoundly moving, and works such as *Sagi musume* or *Sumidagawa* have attracted worldwide praise for their depth and emotional impact.

Most Kabuki actors begin learning dance before the age of ten and continue to take lessons until they are mature. During this time they will come across nearly every work in the vast repertoire, and it is arguable whether a Kabuki actor trained in this way is ever completely free from the influence of dance movement. Dance is an especially important part of the *onnagata*'s art, and all the top-ranking female role specialists in Kabuki must spend a great deal of time dancing as well as acting.