[title]

**How Stage Performance made Yokai Popular**

[body]

Like visual arts, performance is one of the cultural modes that popularized yokai stories and imagery. Stage theater was particularly popular during the Edo period (1603–1867) and numerous classical plays feature ghost, demon, and monster-like characters. These characters and their stories have enjoyed long-lasting appeal. Ghostly stage presentations from centuries ago inform today’s iconic image of vengeful female ghosts, with long disheveled hair, a white death kimono, and no feet. A number of contemporary Japanese horror films feature these images and they have also made their way into Hollywood blockbusters.

Among the forms of traditional Japanese stage performance that portray demons and ghosts are puppetry, noh, and kabuki theater.

[subtitle]

***Awa Ningyo Joruri* (Puppetry)**

[file: puppet]

[caption]

“Kiyohime”

*Awa Ningyo Joruri* (Puppet from Awa )

Amari Yoichiro (aka Ningyo Yo)

2019, commissioned by the Museum of International Folk Art

Tokushima

Wood, natural pigments, lacquer, hair, silk cloth, metal springs, paper, cord

Museum of New Mexico Foundation purchase with funds from the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, Museum of International Folk Art (T.2019.51.1)

The legend of Dojoji Temple is set in Wakayama in the year 929, the play *Hidakagawa iriaizakura*, centers on the lovelorn Kiyohime, a monk named Anchin, and the destructive nature of obsessive passion. Kiyohime falls in love with Anchin but he rejects her. Kiyohime’s rage, damaged pride, and emotional pain overtake her and she loses complete control of herself and her humanity. She transforms into a serpent-demon, swims across a river, and makes her way to Dojoji Temple, where Anchin hides from her under a large bronze bell. She finds him, coils herself around the bell, spitting flames until Anchin burns to ashes.

[file: puppetfinal.mov]

[caption]

Kiyohime is crafted with strings and levers that are manipulated by the puppeteer to transform her from princess to demon. Click the image to view her transformation.

Awa ningyo joruri is a regional style of puppet theater specific to Tokushima, where performances take place on an open‑air, village stage. It takes three puppeteers to operate one puppet: one each for the head, hands, and feet. Puppetry is one of Japan’s oldest performance genres and some forms are inscribed on UNESCO’s list of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

[file: puppet artist Amari]

[caption]

Amari Yoichiro, from Tokushima, is a renowned maker of Awa ningyo joruri. He explains that Kiyohime is a challenging character to create because her articulated structure is complex and her emotions are intense; this makes her a favorite character for him to craft.

[subtitle]

**Noh Theater**

[file: FA.2018.33.1a-f]

[caption]

White Hannya

Noh mask

Terai Ichiyu

2017, commissioned by the Museum of International Folk Art

Kyoto

Wood (cypress), natural paints (shell, mercury, carbon [sumi], ocher, gold), cotton cord

International Folk Art Foundation, Museum of International Folk Art (FA.2018.33.1)

Hannya is a female demon transformed from a human woman due to jealousy and rage. An example of a hannya character is Lady Rokujo from the play Aoi no Ue (Lady Aoi ), based on a chapter from Tale of Genji. The story is primarily about the life, loves, and exploits of Prince Genji, who is married to Lady Aoi. A known philanderer, Genji takes Lady Rokujo as a mistress and she falls in love with him, but her love is unrequited. Cast aside by her lover and in a jealous rage, Lady Rokujo loses control of her emotions and she transforms into a vengeful demon.

Noh theater is a formal masked dance drama with musical accompaniment. Plays often involve deities, ghosts, and demons. Established as a theatrical form in the fourteenth century, noh developed through the Edo period (1603–1867) but declined in popularity when Japan was (forced) open to the outside world after 1868. Actors played an active role in ensuring that the tradition continued. Today, noh theater is inscribed on UNESCO’s list of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

[file: noh artist terai]

[caption]

Artist Terai Ichiyu, from Kyoto, explains that mask making is like “time travel” in that it makes him feel connected to the generations of mask-makers who have crafted that same character before him. In creating a powerful mask like hannya, Terai says he senses her energy, enabling him to help the mask express its complex set of emotions: ferocious rage, fear, and sadness. He notes: “the character loses control of herself, and that is a terrifying place to be.” PHOTO BY TERAI SHUHEI, 2017.

[subtitle]

**Kabuki**

[file: kabuki]

[Caption]

Oiwa, from the play *Tokaido Yotsuya kaidan* (Ghost Story of the Yotsuya Road)

Kabuki Ghost Costume

Shochiku Costume, LTD

Early 2000s replica of 1950s costume

Tokyo

Silk

Courtesy of U.S. Kabuki Kenkyū Kai in cooperation with Shochiku Costume, LTD.

Chochin (lantern) stage prop

Fujinama Props

2018

Tokyo

Metal, paper, wood, cord

Courtesy of U.S. Kabuki Kenkyū Kai in cooperation with Fujinama Props

*Tokaido Yotsuya kaidan* (Ghost Story of Yotsuya Road) was written by Tsuruya Nanboku in 1825 and is one of Japan’s most famous ghost stories. The story centers on a woman, Oiwa, whose husband, Iemon, decides he wants to be married to a wealthier woman. He poisons his wife’s cosmetics, which horribly disfigures her face. He then tries to set her up to look like she was having an affair so he could divorce her. She eventually dies in a dramatic, self-inflicted accident. Her strong emotions transform into an uncontrollable, terrifying rage. Oiwa comes back as a vengeful ghost and haunts Iemon for the rest of his life. She appears to him in different environments and in objects. For example, in one scene she emerges from a lantern.

Kabuki theatrical performance developed in the Edo period (1603–1867), a time of relative prosperity with new markets for leisure activities. People of all social classes were drawn to the theater to see the newest plays. Kabuki was especially popular for its stage tricks, special effects, and action. Ghost stories were very popular and often challenged social norms, especially those related to gender roles and economic status. Kabuki is inscribed on UNESCO’s list of Intangible Cultural Heritage.