

Japanese Dance

Roxanne Dian

Types of Dance and Theatre

- Early Dance
- Noh
- Kyogen
- Bunraku
- Kabuki
- Modern



Early Dance

- Kagura
- Gigaku
- Bugaku
- Dengaku
- Sarugaku



Kagura

The Sun Goddess Amaterasu hid in a cave to escape her storm god brother's behavior. The goddess Uzume danced, and the laughter of the other gods lured Amaterasu out of her cave. This is the earliest mention of dance in Japanese literature. The Kagura dances are said to be directly descended from the dance performed by Uzume. Because of this, it has strong religious affiliations and is usually performed by priestesses attached to a Shinto shrine.

Kagura



Gigaku

Gigaku was brought over by a Korean dancer around the 7th century. It began as simple dances performed in front of Indian Buddha images. The dance as it existed in Japan used large masks that covered the entire head, and was accompanied by a three-piece orchestra. While it is no longer performed, it has had some influence on Noh performance.

Gigaku



Bugaku

There are two types of dances (and dancers) in Bugaku: left dances, from India, China, and Central Asia; and right dances, from Korea and Manchuria. Left dancers, dressed in red, would enter the stage from the left, and right dancers, in green, would enter from the right. The themes in Bugaku can be very abstract, and without narrative quality. Dancers wear a mask or show no facial expression.



Dengaku

Dengaku grew out of traditional harvest dances. It later acquired some narrative features and became a fashionable pastime for the nobility.

Dengaku



Sarugaku

Sarugaku began as court entertainment. It is typically a comedic theatre act, often with lewd themes.

Sarugaku



Noh



Noh

Noh is performed on a specially-designed stage, which changes very little from theatre to theatre. The performers usually wear masks, and move slowly, and with great control. It is performed solely by men.

Noh



Noh

Legend says that Noh was given to humanity by the gods, sent down through a sacred pine tree in Nara. Originally, the nearby villagers would all dance, with any one of them acting as an interpreter for the god. Eventually, they chose one man as being an especially skilled interpreter.

Noh



Noh

Noh has existed for a long time. However, its current form was largely developed by Kanami Kiyotsugu and his son Zeami Motokiyo in the 14th century.

Kyogen

Kyogen is a short comical performance added into a Noh performance to serve as comic relief. It usually features no more than three actors. It grew out of Sarugaku performances. They are sometimes adapted into Kabuki performances.

Kyogen



Bunraku

Bunraku is the puppet theatre of Japan. The puppets are about a third of the size of a full-grown adult. They can take as many as three people to operate them. The plays performed in Bunraku are similar to those performed in other types of Japanese theatre, although they are known for being especially violent.

Bunraku



Kabuki

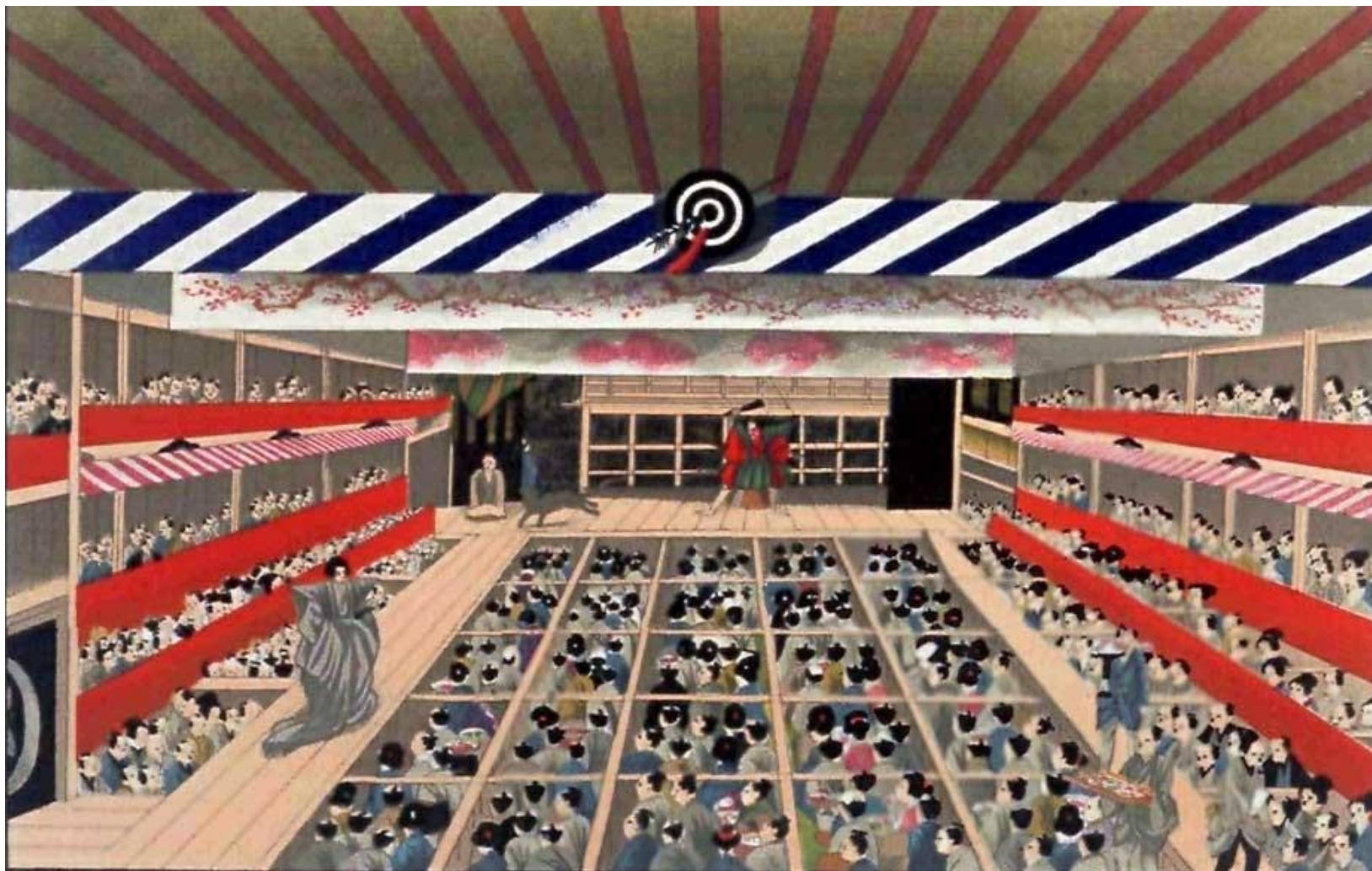
Kabuki began as a form of street dance, its creation credited to a woman named Okuni near Kyoto around the turn of the 17th century. Originally, many of the performers were women; however, rowdy admirers causing problems led to the government declaring that only men could perform Kabuki.



Kabuki

Performers use symbolic makeup and elaborate costumes to portray characters. Stylized movements and frozen poses are also a part of the standard repertoire. Popular subjects are samurai and courtesans, and love-suicides are common in the plots of Kabuki plays.

Kabuki



Modern Dance

Butoh is a Japanese form of modern dance that began in 1959. Its original values included exposing unpleasant social truths, although that purpose has relaxed somewhat.



Bon Odori

Obon is a traditional festival held each year throughout Japan. Its purpose is to interact with and show appreciation for the dead. It is always in summer, although different communities hold it on different dates. Traditionally, people go back to their family homes and care for the graves of deceased relatives as part of the holiday.

Bon Odori



Bon Odori

The festival part of the holiday involves a traditional dance called Bon Odori. Anyone can participate. People dance, usually in a circle or inward spiral (though occasionally through town in a line) on a multi-tiered stage called a yagura. The music typically uses drums, vocals, and clapping.

Bon Odori



Bon Odori

The story goes that Mokuren, a disciple of Buddha, saw that his mother was suffering in the afterlife because food kept turning to fire as it reached her mouth. He asked the Buddha what he could do to help her. The Buddha told him to make offerings of food to the local monks. When he did this and saw that he had saved his mother, Mokuren danced for joy. That is where Obon and Bon Odori come from.

Bon Odori

