Japanese Traditional Performing Arts (Spring 2019)

Diego Pellecchia and Galia Todorova Petkova

This class looks at different forms of Japanese performing arts. The first half of the term will focus on the study of nōgaku, Japan’s performing art combining dance, drama, poetry, mask and costumes through literary and performance analysis. After spring break, the course will shift its focus to kabuki and bunraku. The course is led by Diego Pellecchia (noh scholar and practitioner) and Galia Todorova Petkova (specialist in Japanese performing arts and gender).

Students will learn about the history and aesthetic conventions of traditional performing arts, presented as living traditions in the context of contemporary Japanese society, using a combination of textual and audiovisual materials. The course will provide ample opportunities to attend performances, visit artisans’ laboratories, and participate in workshops with renown Japanese artists, to complement a solid academic background about the arts with a more direct, hands-on approach to the topics covered.

Performances often take place during the weekend: students are encouraged to check the syllabus at the beginning of the semester and keep those dates open. Outings are regarded as compulsory activities: presence will be counted toward the final grade. Students are expected to prepare readings in advance. Preparation will be tested with quizzes and short tests. As part of the final assignments, students will choose a topic for further individual research and present the results at the end of the semester. Presentation formats may include academic papers, translations, or creative works based on research. After the final presentation, students will write a 2500-3000-words essays and further elaborate on the same topic. Readings and other handouts will be provided by the lecturers in advance.

Outings: This semester we will attend performances on January 27th, February 24th, March 24th, April 7th. In addition, we will visit the atelier of a noh mask maker on February 7th.
COURSE SCHEDULE

Jan 15  Introduction to Japanese theatre
Read before class

Jan 17  Introduction to noh
Overview of the history of noh from its origins until today.
Read before class
Further reading
• “Suma Bay” in Brazell, K. TJT, pp. 442-455. [This is a kabuki version reinterpreting the Atsumori story]

Jan 22  Noh play focus: TBA
Readings TBA depending on the plays that will be scheduled for Jan 27. (Typical readings for this kind of focus class are: a full translation of a noh play, with introduction and notes; an article related to the background of the subject matter of the play.)
Read before class

Jan 27  Noh performance observation: noh and kyogen
We will attend the performance of two noh plays (analyzed in class) and of one kyogen play (analyzed at home) at a Noh theatre in Kyoto.

Jan 29  Post-performance discussion
During this kind of meeting we will go through the notes we took during the
performance, exchange opinions, ask questions, and investigate further the plays we attended. In this session we may also create content to populate a digital database on noh theatre.

**Jan 31**  
**Nenbutsu kyogen**  
In this class we will look at various forms of nenbutsu kyōgen, a type of masked pantomime performed on the occasion of Buddhist rituals.  
**Read before class**  
- [http://www.mibudera.com/kyougen.htm](http://www.mibudera.com/kyougen.htm)

**Feb 5**  
**Noh and kyogen masks**  
This class examines noh and kyogen masks within the history of Japanese performing arts. The class will also cover aspects of mask making in preparation to the 2/7 field trip.  
**Read before class**  
**Further reading**  

**Feb 7**  
**Visit to a Noh mask carver’s laboratory**  
**To do before the field trip**  
- Based on readings and class activities, prepare questions to ask the mask carver.

**Feb 12**  
**NO CLASS**

**Feb 14**  
**Noh play focus: TBA**  
Readings TBA depending on the plays that will be scheduled for Feb 24. (Typical readings for this kind of focus class are: a full translation of a noh play, with introduction and notes; an article related to the background of the subject matter of the play.)

**Feb 19**  
**NO CLASS**

**Feb 21**  
**Noh play focus: TBA**  
Readings TBA depending on the plays that will be scheduled for Feb 24. (Typical readings for this kind of focus class are: a full translation of a noh play, with
introduction and notes; an article related to the background of the subject matter of the play.)

Feb 24  **Noh performance observation: noh and kyogen**
We will attend the performance of two noh plays (analyzed in class) and of one Kyogen play (analyzed at home) at a Noh theatre in Kyoto.

Feb 26  **Post-performance discussion**
During this kind of meeting we will go through the notes we took during the performance, exchange opinions, ask questions, and investigate further the plays we attended. In this session we may also create content to populate a digital database on noh theatre.

Feb 28  **NO CLASS**

Mar 5  **SPRING BREAK**

Mar 7  **SPRING BREAK**

Mar 12  **Edo-period performing arts**
We will look at the various genres performed during the Edo period and their social context.
Read before class:

Mar 14  **Introduction to kabuki: origins and history**
Overview of the thriving performance culture in the late sixteenth century, which brought to the birth of kabuki, and of kabuki’s development afterwards.
Read before class:

Mar 15  **Field trip to Seiryō-ji temple: 17.00 – 20.00/21.00**
On March 15th temples commemorate the Buddha’s death, or passing into Nirvana
We will visit Seiryō-ji in Saga (Arashiyama) to observe the ceremony and a Saga nenbutsu kyogen performance (17.00-20.00). The students can also stay for the main event – the fire festival Taimatsu 松明 (20.00-21.00).

Read before the field trip: the story of the play *Tsuchi-gumo* (“The Ground Spider”).
http://www.sagakyogen.info/program.html

**Mar 19**

**The kabuki actor**

We will examine kabuki as an actor’s theatre, the close relationship between actors and spectators, and its influence on the stage construction and conventions.

**Video:** TBA

**Read before class:**


**Further reading:**


**Mar 21**

**NO CLASS (National Holiday)**

**Mar 24**

**Performance observation: kabuki**

We will attend the Special Kabuki Performance by Bandō Tamasaburō, the most prominent onnagata (female role specialist), at the recently renovated Minami-za kabuki theatre in Kyoto. Doors open at 13.30, performance starts at 14.00, ends around 18.00.

**Read before the field trip:** readings will be provided – summaries of the plays or translations, if available. Students are encouraged to use the English earphone guide at Minami-za (cost 1,000 yen).

**Mar 26**

**Performance of gender in kabuki: masculinities**

We will look at the ways in which gender and the body have been presented on the stage: role types and acting patterns, focusing on the aragoto and wagoto styles of masculinity.

**Video:** excerpts from the plays *Shibaraku* (Wait a Minute!) and *Kuruwa Bunshō* (Tales of the Licensed Quarter).

**Read before class:**

- Blummer, Holly. “Nakamura Shichisaburō I and the Creation of Edo-Style

Mar 28  Kabuki: the making of onnagata
We will explore the female impersonation in kabuki: history, acting techniques, body construction, role types, prominent onnagata.
Video: TBA
Read before class:
Further reading:

Apr 2  Bunraku puppet theatre: history and performance
Overview of the development of bunraku and the elements of performance: puppets, puppeteers, music accompaniment and chanted narration, stage conventions and effects.
Read before class:

Apr 4  NO CLASS

Apr 7  Performance observation: bunraku
We will attend the April Bunraku Performance [Part 1] at the National Bunraku Theatre in Osaka: Kanadehon Chushingura (“The Vendetta by 47 Ronin”), Acts 1-4. Doors open at 10.30, performance starts at 11.00, scheduled to end at 15:10. Students are encouraged to use the English earphone guide (cost 1,000 yen).
Read before class:
Further reading:
Apr 9  Bunraku puppet theatre: the texts
Battles and love suicides.
Read before class:
Further reading:

Apr 11  Influence of kabuki and bunraku
This class will look at the influence of kabuki and bunraku on other genres of traditional performance and Japanese film.
Read before class:

Apr 16  Student presentations 1
Students will present their final projects. Students will receive feedback from peers and from the instructors, which they will be expected to include in their final paper.

Apr 18  Student presentations 2 (Hand in final assignments)
Students will present their final projects. Students will receive feedback from peers and from the instructor, which they will be expected to include in their final paper.
Textbooks (copies of selected sections will be provided).

Recommended

Translations


Keene, Donald. *Twenty Noh Plays*. (New York. 1955)

Keene, Donald. tr. *Four Major Plays of Chikamatsu*. (Columbia paperback, 1961)


Spirits from Japanese Noh Plays of the Fourth Group (Cornell East Asia Series, Cornell East Asia Program 1993 &1995)


Noh Performance commentary


Brandon, James R, ed. Nô and Kyôgen in the Contemporary World (University of Hawaii, 1997)


Lim Beng Choo. Another Stage: Knze Nobumitsu and the Late Muromachi Noh Theater. (Cornell East Asia Series, 2012).


Theory and secret writings

Hare, Thomas. Zeami’s Style: The Noh Plays of Zeami Motokiyo. (Stanford. 1986)

Hare, Tomas. Zeami Performance Notes. (Columbia University Press, 2008)


Rimer and Yamazaki, tr. On the Art of the Nô Drama: The Major Treatises of Zeami. (Princeton.
1984)


Rath, Eric C. The Ethos of Noh; Actors and Their Art. (Harvard University Asia Center, 2004)


Pinnington, Noel. Traces in the Way: Michi and the Writings of Komparu Zenchiku. (Cornell East Asia Series, 2006)

Kyōgen


Morley, Carolyn. Transformation, Miracles, and Mischief; The Mountain Priest Plays of Kyōgen (Cornell East Asia Series, East Asia Program, 1993)

General Japanese Theater and other Japanese Theatrical Arts
Adachi, Barbara. Backstage at Bunraku (Weatherhill, 1985)


Japanese Theater in the World (Japan Society, 1997)

Parker, Helen S. E. Progressive Traditions: An Illustrated Study of Plot Repetition in Traditional Japanese Theater (Brill, 2006)

Costumes and Masks
likei no nô shôzoku no haykusugata. Heibonsha. (Tokyo 1984)

likei no nô men no hyakusugata. Heibonsha. (Tokyo 1983)

*The World of Noh Costumes*, Yamaguchi Orimono, Inc. (Kyoto, 1989)

*Patterns and Poetry: Nô Robes from the Lucy Truman Aldrich Collection*. (Museum of Art Rhode Island School of Design, 1992)

Takeda, Sharon Sadako & Monica Bethe. *Miracles and Mischief; Noh and Kyôgen Theater in Japan*. (Los Angeles County Museum, 2002).


*The Tokugawa Collection of Noh Costumes and Masks*. (Japan Society. New York, 1976.)


**Background (classics)**

Anthology of Japanese Literature to the 19th C. Penguin Classics.


McCullough, Helen (tr.). *The Tales of the Heike*.

Philippi, Donald (tr.). *Kojiki*. (Tokyo. 1968.)


**Background (historical and cultural)**


Devonshire Press, GB. 1975.)


Hall, J.W./Takeshi, T. (ed) _Japan in the Muromachi Age._ (Berkley, 1977.)


Lafleur, William.  _The Karma of Words._ (University of California Press, 1983)

Matisoff, Susan.  _The Legend of Semimaru, Blind Musician of Japan._ (N.Y. 1978)

O’Neil, G.P.  _Early Noh Drama._ (London and Bradford, 1958)

Ortolani, Benito.  _The Japanese Theatre from Shamanistic Ritual to Contemporary Pluralism._ (Leiden, N.Y. etc.; E.J. Brill; 1990) (also in paperback)

_Bunraku and Kabuki_


Brandon, James, _Chūshingura: Studies in Kabuki and the Puppet Theater._ (University of Hawaii Press, 1982).


Gerstle, Andrew, Kiyoshi Inobe, William Malm, _Theater as Music: The Bunraku Play “Mt. Imo and Mt. Se; An Exemplary Tale of Womanly Virtue,_ Center for Japanese Studies at the University of Michigan, 1990.


Keene, Donald, tr. _Four Major Plays of Chikamatsu._ (Columbia Paperback, 1961).

Parker, Helen, _Progressive Traditions; An Illustrated Study of Plot Repetition in Traditional Japanese Theatre._ (Brill, 2006).