

Noh Charity Performance

Prayers from Kyoto for Reconstruction of Japan's Disaster-affected Regions

Thursday ,
August 24
2023

Venue : ROHM Theatre Kyoto , Southhall
13 , Okazaki Saishoji-cho, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto City
Access : <https://rohmtheatrekyoto.jp/english/access/>

【Part 1】 at 10:30 a.m Noh "Atsumori" Kyogen "Kaniyamabushi" Noh "Raiden"

【Part 2】 at 6:30 p.m Noh "Kocho" Kyogen "Emmeibukuro" Noh "Aoinoue"

Organized by : Kyoto-based volunteer Noh performers

Co-organized by : The City of Kyoto , ROHM Theatre Kyoto(Kyoto City Music Arts and Culture Promotion Foundation)
The Japan Foundation Kyoto Office

Sponsor : Showa Printing Co.,Ltd. Kyotobutaibijutsuseisakusyo Co.,Ltd.

※Play synopses will be presented in English.

Admission tickets are ¥1,500 each for Part 1 and Part 2 (* Open seating ; no refunds)

Kyoto Kanze Nohplay Theatre : Box office or telephone reservations 075-771-6114
ROHM Theatre Kyoto Ticket Counter : Box office or telephone reservations 075-746-3201
Kyoto Concert Hall Ticket Counter : Box office or telephone reservations 075-711-3231
Online purchase/reservation (WEB) <https://www.s2.e-get.jp/kyoto/pt/>



<Part 1 Commentary and Storylines>

Noh play: Atsumori (person's name)

As background to the story, the warring Genji and Heike clans battled for control of 12th-century Japan. The Heike clan lost and was driven from Kyoto, which was Japan's capital at the time, and a 15-year-old boy called Atsumori from the clan was killed by a Genji warrior called Kumagai Naozane in Kobe.

Naozane (a *waki*, or secondary performer, in the play) later becomes a priest and returns to Kobe to pray for Atsumori's soul, which is where the play starts. Atsumori (the *shite*, or main performer) appears in ghostly form and tells Naozane about the fate of the Heike clan and his past battles. He thanks Naozane for his condolences, expresses his hopes for more prayers, and then disappears.

This is the tale of a fallen warrior whose spirit comes back to recount the hardships of war and attains salvation.

As seen here, the repose of souls is a major theme in Noh plays.

Kyogen play: Kani-yamabushi (The Priest and the Crab)

As background to the story, mountain priests (*yamabushi*) in Japan often undergo training deep in the hills to work on their spirituality. *Yamabushi* priests in traditional Japanese Kyogen comic theater are often portrayed as humorously ridiculous.

In this play, a mountain priest (the *shite*, or main performer) and his porter (an *ado*, or supporting performer) heading home from a learning session encounter the spirit of a monster crab. The porter attacks it with a stick, but the crab grabs his ear with its claw. The priest prays fervently to help the porter, only to make matters worse... The crab grabs his ear too, and throws the two screaming men to the ground.

Noh play: Raiden (Lightning)

As background to the story, Sugawara no Michizane (a scholar, poet and politician in Japan's Heian period <794~1185 AD>) was demoted from his aristocratic rank in the early 10th century due to political conflict, and died in exile.

This Noh play is set at Enryaku-ji Temple on Mt. Hiei northeast of Kyoto. It begins with the entry of a priest (a *waki*, or secondary performer) who was Michizane's master before the latter's passing. He prays for the spirit of Michizane (the *shite*, or main performer), who then appears in ghostly form, thanks him for his condolences, and reminisces about old times. Michizane says he plans to transform himself into lightning and strike his enemies at the Imperial Palace to avenge his downfall, and tells the priest to stay away from the palace. The priest says this won't be possible if the emperor summons him. Michizane gives a fierce look and disappears, at which point the scene moves to the Imperial Palace with two platforms on the stage representing the buildings. The priest begins to pray and, as vowed, Michizane appears in lightning form, striking everywhere except where the priest is. The emperor orders the redemption of Michizane's honor, and the latter expresses approval before again disappearing.

<Part 2 Commentary and Storylines>

Noh play: Kocho (Butterfly)

In this story, a priest on his way to Kyoto stops to appreciate some plum blossoms. As he views them, a butterfly spirit appears and laments how butterflies have no chance to enjoy these blossoms because they bloom in the cold early spring before the hatching season. She asks the priest to pray for her and disappears. The priest (a *waki*, or secondary performer) finishes up for the day (the play begins here), and the butterfly (the *shite*, or main performer) appears and happily flutters around the plum blossoms with gratitude for the prayers, before disappearing into the sky. It turns out that the whole interaction is actually the priest's dream.

This pursuit of aesthetics demonstrated here is a major element of Noh theater.

Kyogen play: Enmei-bukuro (The Longevity Sack)

In the story, a husband (the *shite*, or main performer) who can no longer stand his nagging wife orders a servant (an *ado*, or supporting performer) to deliver a divorce notification to the wife (another *ado*), who is staying with her parents. Enraged, the wife tells the servant she will address her husband directly. She storms home and demands he give her a share of his belongings if they are to split. The husband says she can take whatever she likes, whereupon she places a sack over his head to indicate that, in the end, the only thing she wants is for him to stay.

Noh play: Aoi no Ue-Azusa no de (Lady Aoi-Azusa-no-de version)

This Noh play is based on the 11th-century Tale of Genji. As background to the story, the protagonist Genji (the second son of a Japanese emperor) is married to a lady called Aoi no Ue. However, he becomes intimate with Rokujo no Miyasudokoro, the widow of the crown prince, who died young. Genji gradually loses interest in the widow, who is older and fiercely proud. After various incidents, the disappointed Rokujo no Miyasudokoro turns into a wraith (a ghostly figure) and curses Aoi no Ue, causing her to fall ill.

This is where the play begins, with a beautiful costume on the stage representing the form of Aoi no Ue lying down. A vassal (a *wakitsure*, or a character accompanying a subordinate performer) tells an priestess (a *tsure*, or subordinate performer) to engage in a reading to find out who the wraith is. The wraith (the *shite*, or main performer) appears, reminiscing for the old days and lamenting her current situation. The wraith is visible only to the priestess, and then disappears as her jealousy toward Aoi no Ue grows stronger. The vassal sends a servant (an *ai*, or interlude actor) to bring a priest (a *waki*, or secondary performer) with strong spiritual power. The priest begins to pray, and Rokujo no Miyasudokoro approaches Aoi no Ue in the form of an ogre, but is soothed by the prayer and disappears.

Instead of simply depicting a scary ogre appearing and disappearing, the play represents Rokujo no Miyasudokoro's mixed emotions, such as her feelings toward Genji, her grief at losing love, her jealousy toward Aoi no Ue, and her self-loathing for being unable to control her envy.

Such eternal elements of human nature are a common theme in Noh theater.