



Kyogen



The theatre forms of Noh and Kyogen are still popular today, six hundred years after their birth, not only because of the universality of the themes of the plays, but because of their spare use of gesture and space. Kyogen is performed on a simple, open stage with a polished wooden floor that enhances the gliding motion of its footwork. Tall pillars, often supporting a pagoda style roof, mark each corner of the stage. At the back of the stage is a pine-tree (outdoors) or a painting of a pine-tree that represents long life and good fortune. It is the only "set" used in Kyogen performance.

Kyogen movement is highly stylized and each movement is choreographed. Each posture, every walk and each piece of business is defined. The accompanying dialogue is simple, direct and comically exaggerated because the literal translation for Kyogen is "crazy words".

Kyogen training begins at the age of three or four in "families" of actors who have generations of experience. The child is trained, one-to-one, by the grandfather in short dances and songs, and without a script. The child mimics everything the grandfather does. Although he may appear very briefly onstage as a child, it is more likely that his acting career begins between eighteen or twenty. Even then he will remain under the eyes of senior family members until the age of forty when it is considered that he is mature enough in the tradition to occasionally depart from the style with small innovations.

Kyogen appeared in the period of the Northern and Southern Courts, but came to the fore with the rise of the commoner classes. Kyogen is the opposite of elite Noh in that it is a robust comic genre. It has the role of a counterpoint facing the tragic and profound tension of Noh. Full of satire in the manner of Commedia dell'Arte, Kyogen goes for improvisation and laughs; it regarded as the ancestor of the modern Japanese comic arts.



In **People Like Me 2002: Face to Face!** Ellen Brooks will perform the character of Kazumo, or "Ka" the Mosquito, from the play Sumo Wrestling with a Mosquito. Ka always performs in mask and sometimes adds a foot long stinger when he is "vexing" his opponents. It is said that he is the spirit of a mosquito from mount Moriyama in Goshu province where the mosquitoes grow to be as large as people.

The Ka mask is carved out of wood by highly trained artists, and tied (firmly) around the head with a cord. The performer can actually only see out of the nostrils. His choreography is carefully planned to avoid the edge of the stage. The costume consists of a Japanese kimono in a traditional small plaid (to denote his station), an undergarment, kukuri-bakama (a legging pant), a traveling coat called a misogoromo and, of course, a koshi-obi (a belt worn around the hips) and yellow tabi(socks that separate the big toe from the other toes).

Ellen Brooks has performed classical Japanese Kyogen with Theatre of Yugen since 1987, training and touring with Artistic Director Yuriko Doi and other Japanese Masters, including Akira Matsui of Kita Noh, Ms. Doi, Kaz Tanahashi (Brush) and Yukihiro Ito (Shintaido) at the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago, as well as in the company's fusion productions of Noh Christmas Carol, Elephant, The Dressing Room and Inugami, The Dog-faced Boy. As a solo artist she has performed for both the Yuki Teiki Haiku Society of California (Internment of the Heart, Saigyo, The Ancient) and Natica Angilly's Peoetic Dance Theatre. Ms. Brooks teaches Kyogen for the American School of Japanese Arts and in college workshops. She was recently movement director for Lamplighter's 2001 production of Gilbert and Sullivan's Mikado.



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