

Music 101

Japanese Traditional Theatre and Music

Mark Cole

NOH: (“accomplishment”) One of the oldest extent professional theatre forms in the world is the Noh Drama. Noh is a lyrical, dance drama that grew out of religious ceremonial music, festival rituals and entertainments during the 14th Century. By the early 15th Century, Noh blossomed into a full dramatic form, embraced by the aristocratic class. Noh, despite periods of near extinction during times of political upheaval and public disinterest has survived and today continues to be performed.

Musical Elements of a Noh Performance

SINGING: (yokyoku) A solemn, sparse, style derived from Buddhist chanting. Sections of a play are sung by a chorus (10 men) and by the principle actor (shite).

INSTRUMENTS: bamboo flute (nohkan)
 shoulder drum (ko-tsuzumi)
 hip drum (o-tsuzumi)
 stick drum (taiko)

VOCAL CALLS MADE BY DRUMMERS: KAKEGOE

BUNRAKU: A puppet theatre developed during the 17th and 18th Centuries. Music performed by two artists: The singer (Gidayu) and shamisen player)

KABUKI: (“song, dance, art”) A spectacular, flamboyant actors’ theatre of great emotion and melodrama. Developed during the 17th and 18th Centuries (like the Bunraku) in the cities of Osaka, Kyoto and Edo (present day Tokyo). A variety of drums, including the Noh drums, bamboo flutes and the shamisen are used to accompany the Kabuki plays.

BON-ODORI: Folk and religious festival music