



(LAS 7134)

JAPANESE KABUKI NAGAUTA MUSIC

The Kyoto Kabuki Orchestra

Makuake

Dojoji

Shinobi

Daibyoshi

Kagamijishi

Kabuki-Nagauta Music

Scenes from Dojoji and Kagamijishi

Legend has it that the originator of *Kabuki*, which means song-dance-acting, was one Okuni, self-styled divine lady from Izumo Shrine in Western Japan. She appeared in Kyoto around the latter part of the 16th Century and performed dances called Kabuki-odori. Time has shrouded the whole story of Okuni in mystery, but one description of her relates “She disguised herself in male costume and wore a sword and dagger. She goes to a Tea House to flirt with girls.” In any case, her popularity spread over the country.

In the early part of the 17th Century the first Shogun (General-in-Chief) of the Tokugawa Dynasty took over the rule of Japan and placed the capital at Edo (Tokyo). Large-scale entertainment became very popular as a form of escape from the severely dictated and rapidly changing social order imposed. As a result, those theatrical arts, which appeal to the bourgeois class reached their peak in the period from 1615 to 1858.

Kabuki as performed by Okuni was actually singing with erotic gestures, and it appealed immediately to the common people. In 1652 the government prohibited such performances for moral reasons, and women performers were expelled from Kabuki troupes altogether. Men who took women’s parts were called *onna-gata*, a term which ironically revived Okuni’s tradition of being one “who flirts with the same sex.” By the end of the 17th Century Kabuki developed into one of the most important art forms of Japan.

Compared with the Japanese Noh play, which developed a few centuries before, Kabuki is secular, realistic, and even somewhat vulgar. The gestures of Noh are condensed and symbolical; its characters abstract and esthetic. Kabuki teems with color and life. Its music is derived from many sources, including shrine and folk music.

Singing in Kabuki is called Nagauta. The instruments used include flutes, two kinds of side drums, a flat drum, big drum and the shamisen. Sometimes metal bells and a small cymbal-like instrument are added. Other instruments and sound effects are also used. The music accompanies the singing and is also used as themes, which indicate people and situations or ideas important to the opera, similar to Wagner's use of leitmotiv technique. The music of the mountains, for example, is used twice in the play Dojoji.

The recording has ten parts-five from Dojoji, three from another play, Kagamijishi, and two of stage music.

Dojoji

The plot of Dojoji is also used in a Noh play. A girl, betrayed by a monk, goes in search of him. Her yearning for him transforms her spirit into that of a snake. Crossing mountains and rivers, she reaches the temple of Dojoji, where the monk dwells. The monk has hidden himself inside the temple bell. She tries to lift the bell but cannot. She winds her serpent form round and round the bell, cursing him.

The text describes her trip to the temple and gives a picture of what she sees in poetic symbols...girls are likened to blossoms, pines trees to men, and temple bells represent the love affair.

Besides the blossoms are all the pine trees (refrain)
The sound of the temple bell will be heard in the dark
There is much to regret of the temple bell
"All is nothing" tolls the first bell *1)
And the bell hit at dawn would sound
"All is gone."

Untold is my heart, disordered as my hair
Transient are men that are vice
Vicious are girls with two long sleeves
Fluttering like flowers
They take their mission *2) with high spirits.

The girls grown in Town *3) are slim but bold
Yoshiwara, a dividing place of love
Is full of gaiety and warriors without swords
The air of the town is loosened by cherry blossoms
Whom would they who work in Shimbara Tea House see and sleep with?

From the town of Shumoku (wooden mallet) *4)

To the fourth avenue of Osaka
Frequent young ones – one, two three four
All colorful and matured.
One would wish to caress them and be
Well rounded in Gion Park *5).

How interesting is the scene of Fuji-yama
Mountain of snow-fall
And the snow of flower petals
Of Mt. Yoshino,
The petals falling, falling in the storm
Of Mt. Arashi *6)

Commanding the view of morning sun
Poetic mood of Ishiyama Temple would emerge
Traveling through Matsuyama and all the way
To Mt. Ohe
Love is felt like clouds from volcano and the moon
At Mt. Mikasa.

We were married at Mt. Imose
Between us was the golden hill,
But when flowers fell
I came to the mountain of discarded old women... *7)

Now the moon is down
The temple bell is heard and then
The crying of a rooster
The fires of fisherman on the full tide sea
Cradle the inhabitants.

This is the time to revenge
So she approached the bell
Yet she had too much in her mind.
Holding onto the temple bell hook
She flew away and vanished.

Footnotes:

*1) First bell: the girls' association with the monk

*2) Mission: mission of entertaining men

*3) Town: Kyoto

*4) Shumoku (wooden mallet): refers to the immoral monk

*5) Gion Park: the most famous park in the Kyoto called Maruyama Park, of Park of Round Hills

*6) Mt. Arashi: Arashi means storm

*7) Mountain of discarded old women: long ago there was a mountain to which all old women were sent.

Kagamijishi

Kagamijishi is usually performed at the New Year in honor of ancestors. It consists of two parts, the Dance of the Court Lady and the Dance of the Butterflies and Lion. This recording is the second part of Kagamijishi, the Dance of the Butterflies and Lion. The text runs as follows (first and third stanzas are imaginary conversations of two butterflies as they dance. The other parts are descriptive of action):

“If nature brought no flowers to this world
Where would we rest and sleep?
Not knowing of the world below,
We sleep on the grass and play with flowers
And the next day we lie
On our wings wet with dew.”

Malevolent is the wind that blows them apart.
Their lives may fade while the wind combs through
the willow strings. Lovelier are their figures
than blossoms of Mt. Yoshino. While they fly, the
the winds blow their power off their wings. Then their
love increases all the more.

“Though her shyness reflects on the wings,
There’s no use lingering here
Because there is wind in the pine tree.
The fragrant wind on the bonfire may turn
Petals into snow and we
Among the flower petals, will be lost.”

So they rested on the flower in the shade.
None but the lions could cross the stone bridge on
the mountain of ancient China which built itself in
the likeness of Buddha; but wait, the appearance of
Buddha will not be long in coming...

Resting under the leaves, they fly again through
the wind.

The Lion, so delighted, rolled and rolled, playing
with flowers (butterflies), disporting with power
and dignity before being placed on his throne.

THE TRACKS:

1. MAKUAKE

Prelude to Dojo, played by clappers, flute, okawa, tsuzumi and odaiko. Wooden clappers are often used to signal the beginning of a play. (1:18)

2. DOJOJI

(A) Bell, drum and tsuzumi introduce the narrative, Dojoji. Narrator reads first two stanzas, followed by music in quick tempo. (2:55)

(B) The third stanza is chanted with shamisen, followed by drum, shamisen, flute okawa and tsuzumi, with singing and music dovetailed. (8:19)

(C) A shamisen solo signals the break in the drums – fast with abrupt ending. (1:53)

(D) The scene of the fifth stanza is set at a mountain; mountain music motif is symbolized by the continuous beat of drum and sharp tone of flute. Clappers hit after the second of mountain music, announcing the end of the play of Dojoji. (6:15)

3. SHINOBI

Shinobi – music of gong, flute and shamisen in a lovely piece describing secret meeting of lovers. A separate stage piece. The gong is compared to a temple bell which was used to tell time. (1:50)

4. DAIBYOSHI

Daibyoshi is a short piece usually accompanying a comical dance, and also a separate stage piece. (1:25)

5. KAGAMIJISHI

(A) The beginning of Kagamijishi, starting with a strained chant :If there were no flowers in the world...” Flute, shimidaiko, tsuzumi and okawa. (5:00)

(B) Second scene starts with strong drum beats signifying a mountain scene. The singing is the 5th stanza with the accompaniment of the shamisen, in fast tempo, presaging the magnificent Dance of the Lion. (3:54)

(C) Last scene of Kagamijishi is the Dance of the Lion with a distinctive flute sound. Magnificence of the dance is accented with drums in strong beats, to describe the nature of the Lion. Flute, shimedaiko, tsuzamo, and shamisen. (11:23)



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