Introduction

Kyogen is the classical Japanese comic theatre form that, as a companion art to the Noh drama, has been passed down primarily from father to son for the past six hundred years. Its contents are simple, basic human situations, while its movement and vocal patterns are complex, structured, and highly stylized.

Sarugaku, the womb from which Kyogen was born, was a Japanized version of the variety of performing arts that had been imported from China and were originally known by the collective name of *sangaku. Sarugaku* came into its own as Japan's first popular formalized theatre style during the middle part of the Heian period (794–1185), when the Fujiwara family was at the height of its power at the Imperial Court. Its numerous performance types are listed in the *Shin sarugaku ki* (New *Sarugaku* Chronicle), written during the early 1060s by Fujiwara Akihiro, who related that performances were so humorous that they "loosened the chins" of all those in attendance. Also, in *Genpei seisui ki* (The Chronicle of the Rise and Fall of the Genji and Heike Clans), written about 1300, *sarugaku* is described as an art "in which humorous lines are spoken constantly to make the audience laugh."

During the Kamakura period (1185–1336), *sarugaku* split into two arts, known as the "principal craft" (*hongei*) and the "refined craft" (*nogei*). The former maintained the original humor of *sarugaku,* amalgamated with the Shinto festival performing arts of *sanbaso* and *dengaku,* and underwent a process of alteration and rationalization that resulted in what we know today as Kyogen; the latter, with song and dance as its two major elements, and tragic themes from history and legend as its main materials, was eventually transformed into the Noh. Thus, two closely related art forms of clearly disparate characters came into being.

In his *Kyogen no michi* (The Way of Kyogen), Manzo Nomura wrote:

> The highly refined tastes of the medieval audiences demanded an organic separation of the miscellaneous aspects of *sarugaku* into music and dance on the one hand and mime and humor on the other, resulting in the birth of these twin arts of Noh and Kyogen. The twins were clothed in color patterns as widely disparate as red and white, on top of their differing skeletal structures of symbolism and simplicity, in such a way that they could never again be mistaken for one another. But when the *yin* personality of the Noh and the *yang* personality of the Kyogen are placed side by side, a mutual reflection effect produces a truly pleasing harmony.

Most scholars are somewhat reluctant to make a definite statement as to which is the older and which is the younger of these twin brothers. However, if we are to accept the general belief that the work of bringing the Noh to perfection was carried out by the father-and-son team of Kanami and Zeami between the 1320s and 1420s, we must also note that Priest Genei (1269–1350), said to be Kyogen's first playwright and the author of 59 of the plays in the present repertoire, died when Kanami and Zeami had barely begun their work. Also, in his *Shudosho* (Book of Attaining the Way), written in 1430, Zeami himself speaks of the "high attainments of the Kyogen actor of the distant past named Tsuchidayu." These facts seem to indicate quite clearly that Kyogen had already reached an appreciably high level of artistic perfection in the period previous to that of Zeami and his creation of the Noh as the sublime art we know today.

Kyogen deals with the subplot of everyday human relations. It reveals the way our natural, untrammeled selves would really prefer to react to everyday situations—the stream-of-consciousness fantasies that rage through our brains as we face the little unpleasantries demanded of us by sophisticated society—the world of the daydream. But just as in real life, bothersome reality never ceases to intrude into those daydreams.

The costumes are stylized versions of the everyday clothing worn during the Muromachi period (1336–1658). The servant Taro Kaja always wears a brightly colored checked, striped, or plaid kimono (technically known as a *kosode*), over which is worn a stiff, vestlike *kataginu* and a broad, ankle—length, trouserlike *hakama.* A Master (*shu*) wears a kimono with broad, soberly colored horizontal stripes, a long *hakama,* which covers the feet and trails out behind, and a *kataginu.* A Warrior Priest (*yamabushi*) wears a kimono of a gaudy pattern, a *hakama* that is gathered and tied around the ankles, and black leggings (*kyahan*) covering his shins. He also dons a thin cloak with broad sleeves that is gathered and tied at the waist, a neckpiece (*suzukake*) made up of large pompoms that hang in rows down the front and back of his body, and a small round black headpiece (*tokin*) with strings that tie under the chin. A Woman wears a kimono with a large flower pattern, a sash around the waist, and a headpiece (*binan—boshi*) that is made of a simple, long, broad band of white cloth wrapped around the head and hanging all the way down to below the waist on both sides. All other characters wear variations of these basic types with special paraphernalia by which they can normally be easily identified upon sight.

The staging of Kyogen is extremely simple. No sets or special lighting are used. Masks are seldom worn and makeup is never applied to the face. Very few hand properties are used: rather, a single folding fan is manipulated in such a way as to evoke the image of most necessary items. In addition, the average play has only two or three characters. At the same time, blocking is strictly set in terms of the precise position on the stage, the direction in which the body faces, the shape and speed of patterns of movement, and even posture.

Traditional training begins with vocal exercises in the form of songs, and with dances that provide an initiation into the stance, the walk, and the basic movement patterns that go together to make up the physical techniques of the art. Throughout even the most advanced training, strict imitation and repetition are required until the teacher voices approval of the student's precision. During lessons, abundant information is provided on what is to be done,

but very little on how the body or the voice should be utilized for execution. And no discussion is ever offered or allowed concerning significance, motivation, or characterization. (However, when my teacher, Mansaku Nomura, holds workshops abroad, he takes an entirely different approach, making a concerted effort to present the art in a Western context.)

To me, one of the most charming aspects of Kyogen is the stylized movement and dialogue patterns that appear again and again throughout the entire repertoire. To give a few brief examples: First, there is the initial announcement of identity—"I am a resident of this neighborhood"—delivered while standing upstage right and facing full front, as the first line of dialogue of the first character to appear. Second is the sequence used when a Master summons his servant Taro Kaja:

MASTER: I will call my servant Taro Kaja and give him a job to do. (*Crossing downstage left and turning to face* TARO KAJA.) Taro Kaja, are you there?
TARO KAJA: (*Crossing upstage right and facing* MASTER.) Here.
MASTER: There you are.
TARO KAJA: (*Bowing.*) At your service, Sir.
MASTER: You came quite quickly.

Third is the travel sequence that begins upstage right with the words, "I must hurry on my way," after which the character walks in an arc passing along the outer edge of the stage to the downstage right corner, where he makes a sharp turn and walks in a straight line back to his original position upstage right and says, "Well, here I am already," upon arrival. And fourth is the special aside technique in which the body is faced at an angle away from the other character.

I spent a full ten years training and performing in Japanese before I first began translating the scripts of Kyogen. In setting the style in English, I avoided the use of any word or turn of phrase that has specific British, American, regional, or period connotations, except in cases where it seems so right in the context that it blends in-

to the overall texture of the line. When a unique Japanese idiom is communicable in direct translation, I use it rather than replacing it with a more common English phrase of the same meaning. And pure onomatopoeic sounds, such as the vocalization expressing physical effort, "Ei, ei, yatto-na," I leave in Japanese.

All the plays of Kyogen present straightforward and universal human situations. All characters speak for themselves in terms of both overt and covert intent. There are no hidden or esoteric meanings. Thus, I feel that the scripts themselves are sufficient for a full understanding of the depths and nuances of the plays. And I have chosen only to embellish them with serial photographs and stage directions that indicate mimetic action not described in the dialogue, rather than to impose any of my own interpretive remarks upon the reader.

THE KYOGEN BOOK