

Okina
(The Ancient of Days)

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Okina is Japan's most venerable and sacred drama, and, as such, it is always performed during the New Year season and on other celebratory or auspicious occasions.

The origin of its present three dance pieces is lost. Zeami states, however, in his *Fushi kaden sho* [Writings on the Transmission of the Flower and Style] that the present structure of the piece was established during the reign of Emperor Murakami (r. 946–67). It seems that the emperor called upon the imperial court musician Hada no Ujiyasu (whom Zeami claims, rather doubtfully from modern scholars' viewpoint, was a direct descendant of Hada no KTMkatsu, a man of Korean descent who supposedly originally created a program of sixty-six auspicious pieces at the command of Prince Shôtoku) to organize a program of KTMkatsu's sixty-six Sarugaku pieces to offer up as prayers for peace in the land. These were presented in the Shishinden of the Imperial Palace in Kyoto in the space of a single day.

Due to the favorable effect attributed to the performance, Emperor Murakami decreed that this

ceremonial program should be preserved and presented regularly in order to procure the favor of the gods. However, he felt that sixty-six was an inordinately unwieldy number of pieces for a single day's presentation; therefore, thirteen of them were chosen and organized into a single group. However, by Zeami's day the number had been reduced to only five, and only three of those have come down to us as the *Okina* we know today. The three dances of *Okina* as performed today are those performed by the venerable ancient Okina ("old man"), the youth Senzai ("a thousand years old"), and Sanbaso ("third old man"). They have had different names in the past and the titles of the pieces have also changed many times. But the significance of the dances has remained very much the same: Okina prays for long life, peace, and prosperity; Senzai, for general peace and welfare; and Sanbaso, for fertility and a rich harvest. The most ancient roots of these dances are found in Shinto rituals, but (as is true of so many religious concepts and artifacts in Japan) they have also been attributed to Buddhist rituals. For example, in a Hokke-sect document written in A.D. 112_Y (the oldest extant writing on the subject), Okina is equated with the Bodhisattva Mañjusri (the deity of wisdom); Senzai, with Shakyamuni (the historical Buddha and supreme savior figure); and Sanbaso, with the Bodhisattva Maitreya (the future Buddha, who will come to save the world).

The role of Okina, traditionally always performed by the head of a Noh troupe, is now usually danced by a high-ranking Noh shite actor, while Senzai is performed by a Noh shite actor in the Kanze and Hosho schools, but by a Kyogen actor in the Komparu, Kongo, and Kita schools. The part of Sanbaso is always performed by a Kyogen actor. When the role of Senzai is portrayed by a

Noh actor, there is an additional role added called Mask Box Bearer (*men-bako mochi*), and when it is done by a Kyogen actor, the same actor carries out all the responsibilities of both roles.

In actual performance, there is a great deal of ceremonial activity backstage before the performers appear on the stage. Those actors performing the three major roles are traditionally required to undergo a period of abstinence from all contact with women for the purpose of purifying both body and soul. This is known as the period of Separate Fire (*bekka*).

On the day of the performance, an altar is set up in the Mirror Room (or green room; the *kagami no ma*). Its central objects include the mask box (containing the white mask to be used by Okina, and the black mask and set of tree-bells to be used by Sanbaso), as well as the tall black hats (*eboshi*), the fans, and the short swords to be worn by the three dancers. Offerings of sacred rice wine, uncooked rice, and sea salt are placed in front of these objects.

Just before curtain time, all participants in the day's performance (including the musicians and the chorus) gather in front of the altar. A special prelude is played right there by the orchestra, after which Okina receives his hat and fan. Then all performers purify themselves with a sip of the sacred rice wine and a kernel of the uncooked rice, plus a toss of salt over the shoulder.

Then they all approach the curtain, with the Mask Box Bearer going first, followed by Okina (who whispers a special incantation known as the *Okina watashi* as he passes under the curtain), then Senzai, Sanbasô, the orchestra, the shite's stage assistant, the chorus, and the Kyogen stage assistant.

The Mask Box Bearer proceeds to downstage left and kneels on one knee. Then Okina goes to downstage center, kneels, and bows profoundly, touching his head to the stage. The rest of the performers have, in the meantime, kneeled in single file along the bridgeway (*hashi-gakari*).

Now the orchestra and chorus move to the main stage and take their places upstage with the orchestra and chorus in parallel lines (with the chorus behind the orchestra; in all Noh plays except *Okina*, the chorus sits at stage left). The main characters move to the sides of the stage, leaving the central area open, as it will be used as the dancing space.

The play translated here is the one most commonly performed; it is known as the “rite for the fourth day” (*Yokka no shiki*). In Zeami’s day, *Okina* was always performed at the beginning of the day’s program; it was also a rule that the actor who performed the part of Okina also take the *shite* role in the God Noh that followed, although this practice is no longer observed.

SHITE Okina (an old man); unmasked; wearing Okina *eboshi*, double white *eri*, white linen kimono, *sashinuki-komi ôguchi*, and Okina *kariginu*; and carrying an Okina fan. He will later wear the Okina mask (which is usually white).

TSURE Senzai (a youth of a thousand ages); unmasked; wearing a samurai *eboshi*, red *eri*, *iro-iri dan-atsuita*, *hitatare kami-shimo*, and a short sword; and carrying a god fan. He remains unmasked throughout.

KYOGEN Sanbas™; Mask Box Bearer

Okina
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— Act I —

OKINA. *TTM tTM tarari tararira!*
Tarari agari rarari tTM!

CHORUS. *Chiriya tarari tararira*
Tarari agari rarari tTM! ¹

OKINA Tarry the gods for a thousand generations;

CHORUS. For a thousand autumns may we endure to
serve them;

OKINA. Reaching the long life of the tortoise and the
crane,²

CHORUS. On jubilant hearts relying, ever rejoicing.

OKINA. *TTM tTM tarari tararira*

CHORUS. *Chiriya tarari tararira*
Tarari agari rarari tTM!

— II —

¹ These four lines are so old that their exact meaning was not known, even in Zeami's day. Some have tried to prove that they constitute an ancient *saibara* song; the vocalization of the flute melody of the Bugaku piece *Enbu*, which is usually performed at the beginning of a long performance (Tatsuyuki Takano); part of a Tibetan *darani* (e.g., Ekai Kawaguchi); or even a prayer for rain (especially given all the water imagery in the piece), and others feel they must be corruptions from either an ancient Shinto norito prayer or some Buddhist prayer.

² In both China and Japan, the crane was said to live a thousand years; the tortoise, ten thousand.

SENZAI. It resounds, the water of the fall,
 It resounds, the water of the fall,
 Though the sun shines bright,
 CHORUS. Endlessly it rushes on,³
 Flowing vigorously.
 SENZAI. Endlessly it rushes on,
 Forever it rushes on.

(*Senzai dances to orchestral accompaniment.*)

SENZAI. May our Sovereign's life exceed e'en a thousand
 years,
 Untouched by the heavenly maiden's
 feather-robe.⁴

CHORUS. It resounds, the water of the fall,
 Though the sun shines bright,
 Endlessly it rushes on,
 Flowing vigorously.

(*Senzai performs another dance to orchestral accompaniment.*)

³ The preceding three lines are part of a poem that appears in the *Ryôjin hissh*TM, the *Genpei j*TM *suiki*, the *Heike monogatari*, and the *Gikeiki*, and appears in the last three as:

	<i>Ureshi ya mizu</i>	Ah, what joy!
The water	<i>Naru wa taki no mizu</i>	Resounds, the water of
the falls,	<i>Hi wa teru to mo</i>	Though the sun
shines bright,	<i>Taezu tTM tari.</i>	
	Endlessly, it rushes on.	

⁴ These two lines are based upon an ancient poem that appears in the *Sh_ish_*:

	<i>Kimi ga yo wa</i>	May the
Sovereign's reign	<i>Ama no hagoromo</i>	Be like the
mighty rock	<i>Mare ni kite</i>	That,
though brushed rarely	<i>Nazu to mo tsukinu</i>	By an angel's
feather-robe	<i>Iwao narunan</i>	Remains unworn
in the end.		

—III—

OKINA. O bound-hair lover, *tondo ya!*
CHORUS. But a short space away, *tondo ya!*
OKINA. Although I have remained seated,
CHORUS. Yet will I go forth to meet you, *tondo ya!*⁵
OKINA. Even in ages
Old as the unrecorded
Age of the timeless
Commands of the mighty gods
Did the rejoicing begin!⁶

CHORUS. So it is, nature's law!
OKINA. Ah, that the hoary crane of a thousand years
The joys of ten thousand generations⁷
Might sing;
That the tortoise in the pool
Of a myriad ages
The words of heaven, earth, and man
Might bear upon his back;
That the tiny grains of sand
Lying brightly on the shore

⁵ These four lines derive from an ancient *saibara* song known as “Agemaki” (Bound-hair Lover):
lover! Oh! Oh! *Agemaki ya, tTM, tTM!* O bound-hair
oh, *Hiro bakari ya, tTM, tTM!* But a fathom away, oh,
we went to sleep; *Sakarite netaredomo* Were we when
met, oh, oh! *Marobi-ai ni keru, tTM, tTM!* Yet in rolling over, we
together, oh, oh! *Kayori-ai ni keru, tTM, tTM!* Repeatedly coming

⁶ This ancient poem appears in the same form in the *Ise monogatari* as well as the *Shin Kokinshū*. The original text reads: *Chiwayaburu / kami no mikoto no / mukashi yori / hisashikere to zo / iwai someteki*.

⁷ This line is also the title of a Bugaku dance: *Manzairaku* (The Joy/Dance of Ten Thousand Generations).

The light of the morning sun
Brilliantly might reflect;
That the water of the fall,
Ever coolly flowing on,
The noctambulous moon,
Clearly, vividly,
Might reflect and float---
That under heaven peace might reign
And tranquillity rule the realm:
Truly, this is our humble prayer this
day.

—IV—

OKINA. Ah, that man there—

What manner of ancient be he?

CHORUS. As for him,

What manner of ancient be he?

Verily, whence has come this man of
old, *t*TM *t*TM?

OKINA. Come what may. . . .

(Okina performs a kagura dance to orchestral accompaniment.)

OKINA. Since the dance is in celebration of
A thousand autumns and a myriad
years,⁸

Let then this one dance be
performed—

“The Joy of Ten Thousand Years.”

CHORUS. The joy of ten thousand years!

⁸ This line contains another reference to the *Manzairaku* dance, as well as one to an accompanying piece known as *Sensh_raku* (The Joy/Dance of a Thousand Autumns).

OKINA. “The Joy of Ten Thousand Years!”
CHORUS. The joy of ten thousand years!

— V —

(Sanbaso begins to sing and dance.)

SANBAS™. Great joy! Great joy! Greatest of great!
Here is happiness! Here is
happiness!
I am determined to keep it from
going from this place!

(Sanbaso completes his first dance and dons a mask for his second dance.)

SANBAS™. Oh, how felicitous! Is there an Ado player who
will play Ado for me?⁹

MASK BOX BEARER. I have arrived here just this very moment.

SANBAS™. Who is this who stands here?

MASK BOX BEARER. As you called for an Ado, I, an Ado player
who knows quite well how things should be, have come
here and stand before you now.

SANBAS™. Oh!

MASK BOX BEARER. And now you must dance with precision
and skill as a prayer for today, Most Honorable Sir.

SANBAS™. Oh, it is a thing of great simplicity for this
black-masked old man to dance this day’s Sanbaso as a
prayer for long life for all and prosperity for this place.
But first of all, my performer of the Ado, you must
return with dignity to your seat.

⁹ The term *ado* is used in Kyogen to refer to the secondary character in a play. The *ado* is usually the straight character off of whom the the more humorous main character plays.

MASK BOX BEARER. It is a thing of greater simplicity for me to return to my seat, than for you, Honorable Sir, to do your dance. But first, I will observe your dance, and, after it is done, I will return to my seat.

SANBAS™. No! Until you return to your seat, I will not dance.

MASK BOX BEARER. No, you must get on with your dance.

SANBAS™. No, you must return to your seat.

MASK BOX BEARER. If that is the case, receive these bells from me.

(The Mask Box Bearer hands some tree-bells to Sanbasô.)

SANBASO. I must say, we've made much ado about nothing!

(Sanbasô dances with the tree-bells. Then he exits, followed by the Mask Box Bearer, the chorus, and the musicians.)