

## Noh **Kanshojo** 菅丞相 (“Minister Kanshojo”)

Sugawara no Michizane (845-903) was an early Heian court figure and poet in Chinese. As a brilliant scholar, he was given the ministerial title Kanshojo and had great influence at the court until the powerful and jealous Fujiwara no Tokihira had him exiled to Kyushu where he died several years later. A series of natural calamities followed which led many to assume that Michizane’s angry spirit was responsible. He was given various posthumous awards to placate his spirit and later popularly became known as the god of learning.

In the noh play, the emperor is gravely ill because he is haunted by Michizane’s vengeful spirit. Hosshobo, the head priest from Mount Hiei, has been summoned to appear at the Imperial palace to pray for the emperor’s health. The ghost of Michizane, however, appears in front of Hosshobo, tells him of Tokihira’s false accusations against him, and entreats the Priest not to go. Regardless of the ghost’s request, Hosshobo replies, he cannot refuse an imperial order to come to the palace.

In the second half of the play, the spirit of Michizane, now in his vengeful guise accompanied by the god of fire and lightning, Hono-ikazuchi no Kami, again appears in front of Hosshobo’s ox-drawn carriage on the way to the Imperial palace. The evil spirit tries to hinder Hosshobo’s journey, but is persuaded by the priest to reconsider, and finally accompanies him on his journey to the palace.

Author: Unknown, or possibly Kan’ami (1333-84). It is mentioned in a program of noh which took place in 1483, but it also could be the play *Tenshin no Noh* which Zeami mentions in his *Sarugaku dangi* as a play from his father’s era.

Scene: First, the Enryakuji temple on Mount Hiei and later on the road to the Imperial palace in the capital.

Category: Fifth category (demon) piece in two parts, *mugen* (phantasm) noh, nobleman piece, *maibataraki* (danced action) piece, with *taiko* 太鼓stick drum.

Performance Practice: Not a part of the current repertoire since the Edo period, it was revived in 2002 by Kanze actor Otsuki Bunzo and Osaka University noh scholar Amano Fumio.

Background on *Kanshojo*: *Kanshojo* may have been in the active noh repertoire during Kan’nami’s years, alternately titled as *Tenshin no Noh*, according to Zeami’s *Sarugaku dangi*. Its performance, however, is clearly documented in 1483 during Ashikaga Yoshimasa’s reign. Later performances seemed to have diminished, possibly due to the popularity of the noh play *Raiden*, which uses *Kanshojo*’s main character, Michizane, and adds more “spectacular” and flashy scenes to it. During the Edo Period, it appears to have been performed once only and thereafter disappeared from the current performance repertoire, until this recent revival.

### **CHARACTERS** (in order of appearance):

*Waki* 脇役(secondary actor): Hosshobo, the head priest from Mount Hiei’s Enryakuji Temple.

*Wakitsure* (companion secondary actors): Two priests.

*Maejite* (*shite* 主役 main actor in first half): Ghost of Kanshojo (Sugawara no Michizane).

*Ai/Ai-kyogen* (interlude actor): Porter accompanying Hosshobo.

*Nochijite* □□□(*shite* in second half): Vengeful spirit of Michizane.

*Nochizure* (*tsure* in second half): The god of fire and lightning, Hono-ikazuchi no Kami.

## **SYNOPSIS:** Scene by Scene □□□

1. *Waki and Wakitsure entrance*: The priest Hosshobo and two accompanying priests enter in silence. Hosshobo, introduces himself, and tells how the Minister Kanshobo was exiled to Tsukushi (Kyushu) due to the slanderous accusations of the powerful Fujiwara no Tokihira. Meanwhile, the emperor as become ill, perhaps due to the Kanshojo's vengeful spirit, and the priest has been asked to conduct prayers on his behalf. [nanori, sashi, ageuta]

2. *Shite entrance*□□□□□□□□, *Shite/waki exchange*: The ghost of Michizane enters recalling his traumatic exile. Hosshobo does not at first recognize him because his hair has turned white. The chorus describes his exile and how his hair had turned white overnight. [sashi, mondo, ageuta]

□□3. *Shite/waki exchange*: Hosshobo asks the ghost to tell him about his time in exile. The chorus sings about the unfortunate Kanshobo, who was sent to Tsukushi for a crime that he did not commit. He watched the days pass by without hope, as his hate grew, even though he realized it must be a result of his actions from a past life. [mondo, kuri, sashi, kuse]

4. *Shite/waki exit*: Michizane reveals that he is causing the emperor's illness and warns Hosshobo to refuse any summons to go to the palace to pray for the emperor. The priest replies that he must answer an imperial summons. Enraged the ghost transforms into a demon, plucks a pomegranate from temple offerings, takes a bite and spits it out at the door which bursts into flame. The priest douses the flame with an incantation as the demon disappears in the smoke. The priest also exits. [mondo, uta]

5. *Ai/kyogen narration*: A servant of Hosshobo appears, recounts the story of Michizane's exile as well as his appearance of his ghost before Hosshobo. He tells how the priest has received an imperial summons to go to the palace and quell the demon haunting the emperor and he announces that the priest has left for the palace to do so. [shaberi, fure]

6. *Waki/Wakitsure entrance*: The priest with attendants enters and tells that he is quickly on his way to the palace in an ox-drawn carriage in response to the imperial summons. [issei, sashi, ageuta]

7. *Waki/Wakitsure exchange*: The priests sing how it has suddenly become dark, even though it was just sunny outside. With the help of the chorus, they describe the roaring mountains, shaking earth, flood, and calamity, which has taken place with the entrance of Michizane's vengeful spirit. [mondo, ageuta]

8. *Nochijite entrance, Nochitsure entrance, dance, battle/encounter*: Michizane's vengeful spirit appears in front of Hosshobo's ox-drawn carriage. Then the god Hono-ikazuchi also enters to try and block Hosshobo's path. Hono-ikazuchi dances a *maibataraki* action dance. [issei, noriji]

9. *Shite/Waki, conclusion*: The vengeful spirit of Michizane is at last persuaded by Hosshobo to reconsider. He falls to his knees, realizing the goodness of the emperor and the gods, and accompanies Hosshobo to the palace. [noriji]  
[Richard Emmert]