

Noh Naniwa 難波

(“The Village of Naniwa”)

Returning to the capital, a court official, having spent the new year in retreat at the three shrines of Kumano, stops on his way at the village of Naniwa where he meets an old man and his young companion sweeping the blossoms beneath a plum tree. The men tell of the famous blossoms of Naniwa and then reveal that the former is the ghost of the scholar Ônin and the latter is the goddess Ko-no-hana Sakuya-hime. They disappear and later return in their true form and dance for the official, conveying their blessings on the country.

Author: Zeami (1363? – 1443?).

Scene: Early spring, the village of Naniwa in the Settsu Province, in the present City of Osaka.

Category: First category god (uncommon god) play, phantom noh in two acts, tennyô-no-mai (heavenly maiden dance) and either gaku (court dance) or kami-mai (god dance) piece, with taiko stick drum.

Performance practice: Performed by all five schools. There is a considerable variation among schools in the second half. Kanze does not use a drum stand in the second half and employs the kami-mai god dance instead of the gaku court dance. In Komparu, the Tsure does a ha-no-mai breaking dance instead of the tennyô-no-mai heavenly maiden dance. Hôshô, Komparu and Kita schools eliminate scene 7 altogether.

Characters (in order of appearance)

- Waki (secondary actor): Court official from the capital.
- Wakizure (accompanying waki actor): attendants to official
- Maejite (first half shite main actor): an old man. Wears an old man (ko-iô) mask.
- Maazure (accompanying main shite actor): a young man. Without mask.
- Ai/Ai-kyôgen (interlude actors): the spirit of the plum tree. Wears a goblin (usobuki) mask. [Or a local man from Naniwa without mask].
- Nochijite (second half shite): the ghost of Ônin, a scholar minister from the Korean Koguryô kingdom who protected the 4th century emperor Nintoku. Wears a young god (kantan otoko) mask.
- Nochizure (second half tsure): the goddess Ko-no-hana Sakuya-hime. Wears a young woman (ko-omote/tsure “accompanying actor”) mask.

Synopsis: scene by scene.

1. Waki/Wakizure entrance: A court official and his entourage enter to shin-no-shidai music and sing of the misty mountains and quiet bay wind. The official tells how he spends each new year in retreat at the tree shrines of Kumano and, having done so again this year, is now returning to the capital. They sing a travel song describing the new spring, and their passing by Fukuage Bay, crossing the Ki Barrier, and arriving at Naniwa in Settsu Province. The official tells his attendant

to ask about the special plum tree which they see.

2. Shite/Tsure entrance: A young man and an old man carrying a cedar broom enter to shin-no-issei music and along the bridgeway, sing of the long imperial reign and the appearance of spring and plum blossoms long hidden by the winter snow. They enter the main stage to ashirai music and sing of the heavenly winds blowing across the land, the wise reign bestowing blessings on the people, and the quiet sun shining in all directions. They continue singing of the scenic spring beauty and the prosperity of the imperial reign.
3. Waki/Shite exchange: The official asks the old man if the plum tree before them is a famous one. Alternating with the young man, he replies that this is a famous plum tree of Naniwa known for its plum trees. They quote an old poem describing plum blossoms as the first sign of spring, and blossoms in full bloom moving in the breeze. The chorus sings of the plums of Naniwa which blossom out of their winter retreat bringing the fragrance of spring, and the richness of the land under the imperial control.
4. Shite narration: In reply to the official’s inquiry, the old man, and the chorus for him, sings of the peaceful rule of emperor Nintoku and the poem written about the blossoms of Naniwa.
5. Shite/Tsure exit: for the official, the chorus asks who the men are and is told that the young man is the spirit of the plum blossoms and the old man is Ônin, a poet scholar minister of old. The chorus describes how the bush warblers singing sounds like court music and that the official should stay the night beneath the tree. The old and young men exit to raijo music.
6. Ai interlude: The spirit of plum blossoms enters to kyôgen raijo music and tells of Ônin and how he came from Koguryô (Korea) to help protect emperor Nintoku. Then he dances a sandan-no-mai “three division dance”, and then exits. [Or, a local man’s narration]
7. Waki’s wait: The official and his attendants sing of waiting the night under the plum tree and hearing beautiful music.
8. Nochijite/Nochizure entrance: The ghost of Ônin and the goddess Ko-no-Hana Sakuya-hime enter to deha music and introduce themselves.
9. Tsure’s dance: With the chorus, the ghost of Ônin tells of the reign of Emperor Nintoku, recalling the many entertainments including the court dance. The goddess dances a tennyô-no-mai heavenly dance.
10. Shite’s dance: Ônin and the chorus sing of recalling the scenic beauty of ancient Naniwa. He dances a gaku court dance.
11. Shite’s exit: The chorus and Ônin sing recalling the many different kinds of court music and dance which protect the peace and prosperity of the country and sing in celebration of it. [Richard Emmert]