

Okina 翁

This is not a noh play in itself, but rather a highly refined, felicitous Shinto religious rite which prays for peace and prosperity across the land. In it, three characters perform ritual dances: the young man Senzai, the white-masked old man Okina, and the black-masked old man Sanbaso. The piece is unique for many reasons among which are the following: 1) the masked actors don their masks on stage; 2) the characters wear formal ritual dress rather than costumes; 3) three *kotsuzumi* shoulder drums are employed which give the music a festive quality; and 4) the chorus sits at the back of the stage instead of the usual chorus spot at the side.

Author: Unknown. The oldest extant piece in the noh repertory, it clearly predates noh's 14th-15th century formative period.

Category: A Shinto religious rite, it is in a category by itself. With three *kotsuzumi* shoulder drums and without taiko.

Performance practice: Performed by all schools. During the Edo period, it was traditionally performed at the start of a full day's program. Today, it is presented mainly at the first performance of the New Year or on other special occasions. Also known as *Shiki Sanban* (式三番) or *Okina-Sanbaso* (翁三番叟／翁三番三), or when sung without accompaniment, *Kamiuta* (神歌). In *kamigakari* (Kanze and Hoshō “upper lineage”) school performances, the role of Senzai is performed by a *shite* actor; in *shimogakari* (Komparu, Kongo and Kita “lower lineage”), Senzai is danced by the *ai* actor who is also the *menbako-mochi* “mask box bearer.”

Time: 60~70 minutes.

CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

Ai (interlude actor) *menbako-mochi* (“mask box bearer”). In *shimogakari* performances, this actor also takes the role of Senzai.

Shite (main role actor): the old man Okina. Enters without mask but later puts on the white old man (*okina*) mask.

Tsure (companion to main actor): the young man Senzai. Without mask. In *shimogakari* performances, the *menbako-mochi* takes this role.

Ai (interlude actor): the old man Sanbaso. Enters and dances first dance without mask. Then dons the black old man (*kokushiki*) mask and carries a *suzu* bell tree for his second dance.

SYNOPSIS: Scene by Scene

Backstage ritual: The ritual begins in the mirror room (*kagami no ma*) backstage. A special shrine is constructed to house the masks to be used. All performers purify themselves by sipping sake, eating grains of uncooked rice, and sprinkling themselves with salt. Immediately before the performers enter, a stage assistant sticks his hands out of the curtain and strikes pieces of flint stone together to make fire sparks which purify the stage.

1) **Performers' entrance:** In complete silence, the mask bearer, Okina, Senzai, and Sanbaso (in *kamigakari* performances) enter in order followed in order by the *hayashi* instrumentalists, the *jiutai* chorus, and the *koken* stage assistants who all stop along the bridgeway as Okina advances to front center stage, bows deeply, then sits at the side. The mask bearer places the mask box in front of the Okina actor and takes out the masks; then everyone takes their places. The flute immediately begins playing *zatsuki* “seat arrival” music.

- 2) *Okina's song*: Soon after the drummers join the flute, Okina, in exchange with the chorus, begins to sing felicitous lyrics which refer to endless prosperity and joy. His words *tototarari tararira* are thought to suggest the sound of a full flowing river.
- 3) *Senzai's dance*: Senzai stands and moves to center stage as he sings with the chorus referring to the sound of the river flowing unceasingly. He then dances the vigorous *Senzai-no-mai* dance which is divided by a sung section which includes a prayer asking for the emperor's reign to last a thousand years. The second half of the dance speeds up considerably. During this, Okina puts on his white old man's mask. After the dance, Senzai returns to his seat.
- 4) *Okina's dance*: Okina stands and moves to center stage, briefly faces the Sanbaso actor, turns front and bows his head, then with arms spread wide sings making references to ancient times, to the tortoise and the crane as symbols of longevity, and to peace throughout the land. He then dances the slow, stately *Okina-no-mai* dance which includes stomps at the three corners of his triangular movement which symbolize heaven, earth, and man. He sings a final phrase referring to the *manzairaku* "ten thousand years dance."
- 5) *Okina's departure*: With drum accompaniment, Okina returns to his seat, takes off his mask, stands and goes to front center stage where he again bows deeply, then leaves. In *kamigakari* schools, Senzai also leaves.
- 6) *Sanbaso's first dance*: Beginning with a rhythmic introduction, the Sanbaso actor dances the *momi-no-dan* "stamping segment" dance done without mask. It is noted for the dancer's stamping, which suggests preparing the earth for planting, and yells which are done together with the drummers' calls. Toward the end of the dance as it continues to build in excitement, of particular note is the *karasu tobi*, the "crow jump," in which the dancer jumps three times in quick succession.
- 7) *Sanbaso's second dance*: Attendants at the back of the stage put on the black old man mask on the Sanbaso actor. He then has a conversation with the mask bearer who gives him the bell tree. While shaking the bell tree in rhythm, he dances the *suzu-no-dan* "bell tree segment" dance which mimes the planting and growing of rice. It begins slowly and builds into a very hypnotic, quick and powerful dance. At the end, Sanbaso takes off his mask which together with the bell tree is placed in the mask box. He exits followed by the mask bearer and then the other performers. When a first category noh play is to follow, the chorus moves to the regular chorus seat and the two extra drummers leave.
- [Richard Emmert]