

Noh Takasago 高砂

(“Takasago Bay”)

This deals with the legend of the twin pines of Sumiyoshi and Takasago, located across from each other on Osaka Bay, and personified by an aged couple. According to legend, the spirit of the Sumiyoshi Pine travels nightly to visit his wife, the Takasago Pine, in a bond which defies age and time. The Twin pines are also symbolic of the two great poetic anthologies, the Manyôshû and the Kokinshû, and the prosperity of the land due to the observance of the high moral and aesthetic principles exemplified in these two anthologies.

Author: Zeami (1363?-1443?).

Scene: Early spring, Takasago in Harima province, the present Takasago city in Hyôgo Prefecture; then Sumiyoshi in Settsu Province, the present Sumiyoshi Ward in Osaka City.

Category: First category god (male god) play, phantasm (mugen) noh in two acts, kami-mai (god dance) piece, with taiko stick drum.

Performance practice: Performed by all five schools.

Characters (in order of appearance)

- Waki (secondary actor): Tomonari, chief priest of the Aso Shrine.
- Wakizure (accompanying waki actor): two companion priests.
- Tsure (accompanying shite actor): an old woman, in fact the spirit of the Takasago Pine. Wears an old woman (uba) mask. Carries a broom of cedar branches.
- Maejite (First half shite main actor): an old man, in fact the spirit of the Sumiyoshi Pine. Wears an old man (Ko-jô) mask. Carries a broom of cedar branches or a bamboo rake.
- Ai/Ai-kyôgen (interlude actor): a Takasago villager.
- Nochijite (Second half shite): the God of Sumiyoshi. Wears a young man (kantan otoko) mask.

Synopsis: scene by scene.

1. Waki/Wakizure entrance: Several priests enter to shin-no-shidai music and sing of starting a long journey. The main priest tells that they are from Aso Shrine in Kyûshû and are on their way to the capital. In a travel song, they sing of departing by ship, of the spring air, of the many days of travel, and of their arrival at Takasago Bay.
2. Tsure/Shite entrance: An old woman and an old man enter to shin-no-issei music and sing of the spring breezes blowing through the pines of Takasago, the sound of the ebb and flow of the waves veiled in mist along the shore, and the countless years during which they have daily swept the pine needles under the tree as they wonder how much longer they will live like the ancient sturdy pines.
3. Wki/Shite/Tsure exchange: Tomonari, the main priest, asks the old couple about the Takasago Pine and how it could be a twin pine with the far away Sumiyoshi Pine. The old man replies that indeed these pines are called twin pines in the Kokinshû anthology and he himself is from

Sumiyoshi and comes daily to visit the old woman who is from Takasago. The old woman says the hearts of a husband and his wife are joined by love despite the distance between them. They tell that these twin pines symbolize auspicious imperial reigns and the flourishing of the art of poetry. The chorus sings of the calm of the seas, the peace of the world, and the happiness of pines growing old together under the blessed reign emperor.

4. Shite's narrative: With the chorus singing for him, the old man points out the difference with blossoming trees: the pine is ever green through all seasons. The chorus sings that all nature is one with poetry and the pine towers above all else. The old man mimes raking pine needles as the chorus sings that of all pines the Takasago Pine is the most extolled.
5. Shite/Tsure exit: The chorus singing for the priest asks the old couple their names and they reveal that they are the spirits of the twin pines in human form and that even trees and plants share the glory of this realm. The chorus describes how the old man boards a boat and sets sail for Sumiyoshi where he will await them.
6. Ai's narrative: The priest calls a local villager who retells the legend of the twin pines including the belief that the old couple are the Gods of the respective shrines and that they confer blessings on those who practice poetry and wedded couples. When the priest reveals whom he just met, the villager is astonished and says that they have been manifestations of the Gods. He urges the priests to sail to Sumiyoshi and will guide him himself.
7. Waki/Wakizure's wait: The priests sing a waiting song describing how they hoist sails under the moon, pass the isle of Awaji, and arrive in Suminoye (Sumiyoshi).
8. Nochijite entrance: The God of Sumiyoshi enters to deha music and sings of the many ages of the Sumiyoshi Pine and their close bond, and that this night should be one of dance, music and rejoicing
9. Shite's dance action: The chorus and the God sing in turn about the waves of the western sea from which the God first arose, the melting snow on Asaka Beach where men gather seaweed, the god sitting on a pine root with a thousand year's greens in hand, and how he plucks a blooming plum branch and sticks it in his hair as snow falls on his sleeves. The god dances a very quick kami-mai “god dance”.
10. Conclusion: The chorus and God in turn sing of the divine vision of the god dancing beneath a clear moon, of the voices of the dancing maidens as the pine stands mirrored in the sea, of the straight road of the God, of the Emperor, and of the path to the capital, and of the dances which bring peace and joy to all.

[Richard Emmert]