

Noh Yamamba

(The Mountain Crone)

A dancer who has become famous portraying Yamamba, the mountain crone, is making a pilgrimage with her attendants to Zenkôji when she meets a woman who asks her to sing for her. The woman is the real Yamamba who then returns in her true form and dances as she describes the nature of the mountain crone. The play presents a famous legend mixed with Buddhist philosophy regarding the wheel of transmigration.

Author: Zeami (1363?-1443?).

Scene: Agero (Top Pass) in Echigo Province, in the present Ôme-chô, Nishi Kubishiro-gun, Niigata Prefecture.

Category: Fifth category ending (demoness) play, phantasm (*mugen*) noh in two acts, *tachimawari* (circling) dance, with *taiko* drum.

Performance Practice: Performed by all five schools.

CHARACTERS: (in order of appearance)

Tsure (accompanying *shite* actor): Dancer from the capital, Hyakuma Yamamba, famous for her portrayal of the true Yamamba, the mountain crone. Wears a young woman (*ko-omote/tsure*) mask.

Waki (secondary actor): Dancer's main attendant.

Wakitsure (accompanying *waki* actors): Two or three more attendants.

Ai/Ai-kyôgen (interlude actor): Villager from Sakaigawa.

Maeshite (first half *shite* main actor): Mountain woman. Wears a mature woman (*fukai, shakumi, ômi onna, reijô*) mask.

Nochishite (second half *shite*): Yamamba, the mountain crone. Wears a special *yamamba* mask.

SYNOPSIS: Scene-by-Scene

1. *Tsure/Waki/Wakitsure entrance*: A dancer and her attendants enter to *shidai* music and sing of the good light of Buddha whose temple they will visit. The main attendant introduces the dancer as Hyakuma Yamamba famous for her dance portraying the mountain crone. They are making a pilgrimage to Zenkôji, (temple of good light) and sing a travel song describing the sights of their long journey and their arrival at Sakaigawa.

2. *Waki/Ai/Tsure dialogue*: The attendant asks a villager directions to Zenkôji and is told there are three ways, the steepest being a passage via Agero made by Buddha himself and thus the most illuminating. The attendant reports this to the dancer and she decides that she will leave her coach behind and walk. They ask the villager to be their guide. They set off on the steep climb when it suddenly turns dark. The attendant says they should find lodging but the villager says there is none nearby.

3. *Shite entrance, Shite/Waki dialogue*: A woman calls out offering lodging. As she enters, she asks to hear the song of the mountain crone, saying she recognizes the famous dancer Hyakuma Yamamba. She begins to sing the song, then asks if they know the real mountain crone suggesting that it is herself, and that she resents the fame Hyakuma has attained as she herself remains stuck in the wheel of transmigration.

4. *Shite/Tsure dialogue, Shite exit*: The dancer is astounded to meet the real Yamamba. The dancer is about to sing when the woman interrupts, telling her to wait for dark when she will show her true form. The chorus repeats her wish and describes her sudden vanishing.

5. *Ai/Waki dialogue, Ai narration*: The villager tells how it has become light again and discusses the mysterious darkness they had just experienced. To the attendant's inquiries, the villager tells the various theories and stories of Yamamba, how she is a mixture of all things including acorn eyes, walnut nose, toadstool ears, vine hair, and pine resin body which picks up dust and grows. He tells of other natural and man-made objects which turn into Yamamba and suggests the dancer sing her song to lure the real Yamamba.

6. *Tsure/Waki/Wakitsure wait*: The dancer sings of her perplexity and the attendants describe the music sounding above the moonlit mountain.

7. *Nochishite entrance*: Yamamba enters to *issei* music and the chorus describes demons raging and angels rejoicing as good and evil are one, and asks what craftman made these mountains upon mountains. A *tachimawari* (circling) dance is sometimes performed here.

8. *Tsure/Shite dialogue*: The dancer in terror asks if the form is Yamamba. In tandem, they describe her crown of snowy weeds, star-like eyes, and demon glow. The chorus recalls how long ago a demon swallowed a terrified girl whose feelings the dancer now has. Yamamba comments on the poetic mountain scene and asks the dancer to sing. The chorus sings of Yamamba's mountain rounds.

9. *Shite narrative dance*: With the chorus, Yamamba dances as she describes mountains formed from dust and mud, oceans from dewy moss, Buddha's Law and change in the natural world, and Yamamba's existence in both the supernatural and human realms. She describes how she has invisibly helped woodcutters with their heavy loads and weaving maids at their looms. Then describing her endless mountain rounds, she tells the party to return to the capital and relate the true story of Yamamba.

10. *Shite dance*: Yamamba dances a *tachimawari* (circling) dance.

11. *Final dance*: With the chorus, she again describes her awesomeness and her jumping from mountain to mountain as she vanishes. [Richard Emmert]