

# Kabuki Program

## Caution



**Please turn off all electronic devices inside the theater.**

**Taking pictures, taking movies, recording sounds is forbidden during the play.**

**Please do not lean forward during the performance.**

# OSHIEGUSA YOSHIWARA SUZUME

## -Dance-

### Cast:

Male bird-vendor .....Onoe Matsuya  
Female bird-vendor .....Nakamura Baishi  
Bird-hunter .....Bando Kamesaburo

### Background information:

'Yoshiwara Suzume' is a dance performed to Nagauta accompaniment, depicting two bird-vendors, husband and wife, making their way through the geisha quarters of Yoshiwara. It was originally performed as a scene within a 1768 play written by Sakurada Jisuke, in which version the male bird-vendor represented the character of warrior Hachiman Taro and the woman bird-vendor the spirit of a falcon that came to his rescue when he was in danger. However, the dance as it is performed today is a later creation which no longer has any relation to the original.

The phrase 'Yoshiwara Suzume' means literally 'sparrows of a meadow of reeds,' but there is a play on words in which it comes to mean the non-paying loiterers thronging the streets of the Yoshiwara pleasure quarters. The dance has no story to tell in itself, but is a delightful genre number in which the Nagauta music to which it is performed is considered a masterpiece.

### Synopsis:

The bird-vendors are selling the birds', which the purchasers set free as part of a Buddhist ritual known as Hoshō-e. The song starts with the husband and wife gesturing as if they are setting the birds free while talking about the origin of Hoshō-e. They take off their hoods and start dancing a tale of the Yoshiwara pleasure quarters as geisha and customer. When a hunter comes along and screams, the husband and wife bird-vendors suddenly turn into sparrows, revealing that they were in fact spirits of sparrows. The hunter is moved by the love of the sparrows for each other when they try to escape, so he lets them go free.

# SAKANAYA SOGORO

Shin Sarayashiki Tsuki no Amagasa  
(The New Tale of Sarayashiki)

—Sogoro, the Fishmonger —

by Kawatake Mokuami

—in two acts—

## Cast :

|                         |                  |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| Sogoro .....            | Onoe Kikunosuke  |
| Urato juzaemon .....    | Bando Kamesaburo |
| Ohama .....             | Nakamura Baishi  |
| Onagi .....             | Onoe Ukon        |
| Sankichi .....          | Nakamura Mantaro |
| Isobe Kazuenosuke ..... | Onoe Matsuya     |
| Tahei .....             | Ichikawa Danzo   |

## Background information:

This play was first performed in 1883 and was written for Onoe Kikugoro V by Kawatake Mokuami, the last great playwright of kabuki. It is a rework of the story of “Sara Yashiki” (“The Plate Mansion”) in which a samurai lord cruelly kills a lady-in-waiting because she has broken a valuable plate that is one of the set often.

## Synopsis :

Even though it is time of the local festival, things are very somber at the house of Sogoro, the fishmonger. They have been told that his sister Otsuta was executed by Isobe Kamenosuke, the lord she served as a lady-in-waiting because she was having an illicit affair with a retainer in the clan. At this point, Onagi, another lady-in-waiting in the mansion, comes to mourn for Otsuta and brings a keg of sake as a gift. Sogoro accepts the gift, even though he has sworn off sake because he becomes very violent. They are

all surprised when Onagi tells them that Otsuta did nothing wrong and the lust of a fellow retainer made him slander her and in turn, the lord killed her in jealous rage. They are all upset to learn the truth and Sogoro has a drink to calm down. But as he drinks more and more, he becomes increasingly angry and finally goes rushing out of the house to confront the lord himself.

Sogoro comes to the gate of the lord's mansion. Sogoro explains how happy they were when Otsuta first went into service with the lord. The lord loved her and the money they were given when she went into service made her family's life comfortable for the first time. He berates the lord for killing Otsuta unjustly and leaving her grieving family behind. The senior retainer is moved by Sogoro's plight and explains ponderously how seriously they are treating the matter, but as he speaks, Sogoro falls into a drunken sleep. Finally the lord himself comes. By this point Sogoro has sobered up and is shocked to hear what he has done while he was drunk. The lord admits that he was wrong and apologizes. At the time, it was almost unthinkable for a samurai to humble himself before a commoner. The scene ends as the lord promises to do something to make amends for Otsuta's death.

# Historical Background of Kabuki

The word "Kabuki" literally means song, dance and acting and is a combination of all three arts with the main emphasis on the last. Its origins can be traced back to a woman named *Izumo no Okuni* who popularized a new form of dance drama, known as *Okuni Kabuki*, in Kyoto at the beginning of the 17th century. After the appearance of professional groups of women specializing in this form of entertainment, *Okuni Kabuki* was eventually suppressed by the government of the day as having a bad influence on public morals. It was soon replaced by *Wakashu Kabuki* performed by young male actors, but this was also banned on grounds of immorality.

Toward the end of the 17th century, however, Kabuki began to assume respectability and take on its present form, ceasing to be a mere dance drama and developing a repertory of first-class plays ranging from those with a historical background to those depicting contemporary life. The actors, though all male, were no longer restricted to youths and gradually formed themselves into professional families who handed down their acting skills from generation to generation. There emerged a certain type of actor, known as "*onnagata*," who specialized in playing female roles.

With the establishment of Kabuki theaters, many innovations were made in the structure of the stage. The most notable of these was the "*hanamichi*" a raised passage way leading through the audience from the stage to the back of the theater. It was primarily designed to highlight the entrances and exits of the principal actors.

The music in Kabuki is mainly provided by the three-stringed *shamisen*, with the addition of flutes and drums depending on the type of play. There are also singers who carry the narrative.

## *Kabuki dictionary*

*Aragoto* — the masculine “rough style” of acting associated with the Ichikawa Danjuro line of actors and typified by exaggerated movement, makeup, costume and diction.

*Gaza* — background music played from behind the slatted wall on the left of the stage. Gaza employs a great variety of instruments such as the *shamisen*, drums, gongs, flutes, and bells. The *geza* musicians provide stylized sound effects which add immeasurably to the atmosphere and character of Kabuki performances.

*Hanamichi* — literally “flower path.” The walk-way running through the auditorium from the green room to the main stage. Used for important entrances and exits.

*Jidaimaao* — period plays set in Japan’s real or legendary past prior to the Edo period (1603- 1868).

*Kabuki* — written with the three characters (歌舞伎) that mean “song,” “dance,” and “acting.”

*Kabuki Juhachiban* — the “Eighteen Favorite” plays of the Ichikawa line of actors, mostly in the *aragoto* style of acting.

*Kakegoe* — a form of appreciation called out to the actors by highly knowledgeable members of the audience. Most commonly shouted is the actor’s *yago* or generation number. Ichikawa Danjaro XII for example, would be “Narita-ya!” his *yoga*. Callers may also shout “Juni-daime!” (“The Twelfth”). The calling is usually timed to an actor’s entrance or to the subtle and important pauses during a speech, or else during dramatic poses such as a *mie*. The callers are almost exclusively male and are called *Omuko-san*, “great distant people” because they traditionally call from the cheapest and most distant seats (third or fourth floor) from the stage.

*Ki* — also known as *hyoshigi*. Wooden blocks, most commonly struck together to signal the opening and closing of the curtain.

*Koken* — formally dressed stage assistants who discreetly assist the actors in both plays and dances by handing them props or adjusting their dress, makeup or wig.

*Kurogo* — similar to *koken* but usually dressed completely in black and traditionally considered invisible. The role of the *kurogo* is less formal than that of the *koken* and is more one of keeping the stage tidy.

*Mie* — poses at climactic moments involving rotating, nodding movements of the head and the crossing of one eye in a powerful glare.

*Onnagata* — actors who specialise in female roles.

*Sewamono* — “domestic plays” which deal with the everyday life of the *chonin*, the townspeople in feudal Japan.

*Shosagoto* — dances. Together with *jidaimono* and *sewamono*, one of the three main categories of Kabuki play.

*Tachimawari* — stylized, choreographed fight scenes, usually with musical accompaniment. The blows of the sword or hand are mimed to the beating of the *tsuke*.

*Tachiyaku* — actors of male roles.

*Tsuke* — the beating of two wooden blocks onto a board at the far right of the stage and done to punctuate and emphasize such movements as *mie* poses, walking, running and *tachimawari*.

*Yago* — the “acting house name” which all Kabuki have and which they share with other members of the same acting family, and which is often shouted as *kakegoe*. Examples include, *Narita-ya* (成田屋), *Harima-ya* (播磨屋), *Korai-ya* (高麗屋), *Kyo-ya* (京屋), *Matsushima-ya* (松嶋屋), *Narikoma-ya* (成駒屋), *Nakamura-ya* (中村屋), *Otowa-ya* (音羽屋), *Tennoji-ya* (天王寺屋), and *Yamati-ya* (大和屋).