



# KABUKI

'Kabuki' is recognized internationally as one of Japan's great performing arts with 400 years of history. It originated as a style of dance called *kabuki-odori*, which was developed in Kyoto in 1603. Essentially a popular theatre, it always led the tastes and fashions of the townspeople of that time.

The word 'ka-bu-ki' itself is made up of three characters that mean 'song' (*ka*- 歌), 'dance' (*bu*- 舞) and 'acting skill' (*ki*- 伎), indicating the composite nature of this art that includes elements of music, dance and drama.

## Kabuki Categories

### *Jidaimono* (Historical Plays)

A category of plays depicting events that occurred among the nobility and samurai classes, often incorporating historical legend. Incidents involving loyalty, betrayal and political dispute are often combined and dramatised.

### *Sewamono* (Domestic Plays)

A category of plays portraying the lives of ordinary townspeople during the Edo Period (1603-1868) that would have been considered realistic and modern at that time. The styles of hair, costume and speech, etc., were those of the contemporary audience and the dramas evolved as though real life was unfolding before one's eyes.

### *Shosagoto* (Dance Dramas)

*Shosagoto* is a category that incorporates a strong element of classical dance. The stories are expressed by the elegant movements of the dancers who perform to a wide variety of accompanying music styles, such as *Gidayū*, *Tokiwazu*, *Kiyomoto* and *Nagauta*.

### Modern Kabuki

Kabuki plays from the mid-Meiji period to the Shōwa period that were written by playwrights not affiliated with a kabuki theatre are known generally as *Shin Kabuki*. Another category of newly created works mainly written since the postwar era is known as *Shinsaku-Kabuki*. Recently, manga comics adapted as kabuki have gained popularity.



*Jidaimono*



*Sewamono*



*Shosagoto*



Modern Kabuki

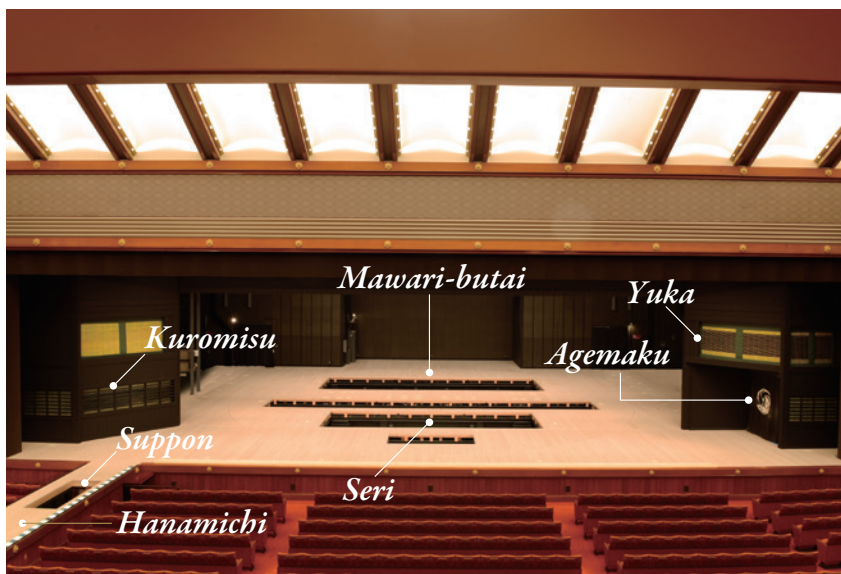


## Amazing Performance Skills

### *Onnagata* and *Tachiyaku*

There are many remarkable features of kabuki, and the existence of *onnagata*, the specialists in female roles is one of them. Although kabuki was started by a woman, a law was passed in 1629 that forbade real women from appearing on stage due to their immense popularity and influence. In order to preserve itself, kabuki had to adapt throughout its long history, and men began to perform female roles. In this way, the art of *onnagata* has evolved over hundreds of years as a special theatrical creation based on artistic convention.





## Unique Structures

### *Mawari-butai*

Revolving stage which turns 360 degrees. You might have seen a revolving stage in many other theatres, but this stage mechanism was actually first used in kabuki! It turns around during scene changes.

### *Seri*

The holes in the stage are for stage lifts. They lift or lower the actors and stage sets and create a dynamic atmosphere.

### *Hanamichi*

A raised passageway running straight through the auditorium that brings the excitement and action of the dramas right into the audience's space. The passageway can represent various scenes: the ocean, the corridor of a castle, or a road, according to the performance.

### *Suppon*

The *seri* built into the *hanamichi* that allows actors to appear suddenly in the midst of the audience. Use of the *suppon* is generally reserved for supernatural characters.

### *Agemaku*

The curtain that hangs down at the end of the *hanamichi*. It is opened and closed in conjunction with entrances and exits of important characters and often bears the theatre's crest.

### *Yuka*

Inside this space the narrative musicians sing or play the *shamisen*. Beneath this *yuka* sometimes you will see a raised dais that contains a spinning stage on which they also play in full view of the audience.

### *Kuromisu*

The room behind the slatted wall located on the left-hand side of the stage, where the orchestra plays the background music and produces sound effects such as rain and snow.

# The Kabuki Stage

## Tips

### *Kumadori*

One characteristic style of kabuki makeup, which you can see in the cover picture of 'Shibaraku', is called *kumadori*, in which the color and the way of painting the lines changes according to the role.

### *Ômukō*

Some audience members shout out during the plays or dances as applause and encouragement to the actors. This traditional practice, called *kakegoe*, adds a lot to the atmosphere. The people who call out are called *Ômukō*, and they are specialists in choosing the best intervals for timely shouts.

### *Kurogo*

During the performance, sometimes you'll see men dressed in black suddenly appear. They are called *kurogo*, and they function as support for the actors onstage, helping them with props and costumes so they can perform seamlessly and always look their best. The black color of their attire means *kurogo* are "invisible" to the audience.

### English Supporting Guide

Essential translations of dialogue and lyrics, as well as explanations relating to kabuki will be provided via English captions (subtitles).

\*The English Captioning Service is available for most of the performances at the Kabukiza Theatre (Tokyo) and occasionally at other theatres. For precise information, please check <https://www.kabukiweb.net/>



### Food & Drinks

Most of the theatres offer traditional Japanese cuisine, including elaborate boxed meals! Traditional sweets are usually on sale, too, while sushi or sandwiches are also available to buy at some counters. There's always a large choice of refreshments, including Japanese saké. You can enjoy this during the intermissions (usually 20 - 30 minutes) even from the comfort of your own seat.



## Your Next Destination



Kabukiza Theatre  
(Tokyo)



Shinbashi Enbujo Theatre  
(Tokyo)



Minamiza Theatre  
(Kyoto)



Osaka Shochikuza Theatre  
(Osaka)



Official Website



@kabukiofficialpage



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