

Kanze's shows have a distinct style. For one, they have some serious pedigree: the Kanze family is related to Kannami and Zeami, the founders of classical noh. Moreover, back when Sakon Tadachika was the ninth grandmaster of the Kanze school (1578–1621), he was appointed the noh instructor to the shogun just as Tokugawa Ieyasu rose to power under the Tokugawa shogunate. This protection from the government was a big boost to the profile of the Kanze school of noh. Today, almost 70 percent of noh actors in Japan come from the Kanze school. The school's illustrious reputation was further cemented in 2016 when Kanze was invited to perform at the Lincoln Center Festival in New York.

While the Kanze family originated from Nara and Kyoto, they first established a theater in what is now Tokyo's Ginza area back in the Edo period. In 1972, the theater relocated to Shoto in Shibuya, and later moved back to Ginza in April 2017. Today, you'll find the gorgeous Kanze Noh Theatre in the basement of the glitzy Ginza Six shopping complex. True to noh traditions, the stage is roofed, even though it is an indoor venue—an homage to noh's heritage as an outdoor theater in its formative years.

There are around 200–250 plays in the noh repertoire, most of which have remained unchanged since the Edo period (1603–1867). However, the Kanze school doesn't just perform these traditional pieces. They have also created a number of original, modern noh dramas. Spring and autumn are the peak seasons for noh, when Kanze puts on eighty of their annual roster of 120 shows. A typical noh performance lasts four hours, including an intermission of a *kyogen* comedy act followed by a *shimai*, which is a type of dance interpretation of a chosen noh text.

Part of the enjoyment of the play is to focus on the emotions and the characters' elaborate costumes and makeup. It's not necessary to follow the spoken words as even most Japanese find the classical language difficult to understand without a translation aid. For beginners, it's advisable to start with the happy hour admission, where the ticket price for just the last act of a performance is reduced to ¥3,000.

The Kanze Noh Theatre in Ginza Six is more than just a noh performance space. It occasionally hosts other performances and events, including pop concerts and classical music recitals.