

Nōgakuden (Noh Stage)

Important Cultural Property

This is a stage for noh, a form of drama and dance that uses masks, costumes, and highly stylized movements and is based on traditional stories. The pine tree painted on the back wall of the stage is typical of all noh stages. The pine is a traditional symbol of longevity, and deities are believed to descend into these paintings while noh plays are being performed. There is a long tradition of holding noh performances at Shinto shrines, often after prayer services, as a form of entertainment for the deities.

Noh has been performed since the fourteenth century and was initially developed by the actor Kan'ami Kiyotsugu (1333–1384) and his son Zeami Motokiyo (c. 1363–c. 1443). A stage was first built here in the early Edo period (1603–1867). The current stage was built in 1853 by the Date samurai clan of Sendai and is constructed entirely of Japanese cypress. Emperor Meiji (1852–1912) watched noh performances here in 1876. The painter Matsuno Sōfū (1899–1963), known for works depicting noh actors, executed the current pine painting in 1947.