

Encho Matsuri: Sanyutei Encho

The Encho Matsuri, a festival at Zenshoan Temple, is named after Sanyutei Encho (1839–1900), a legendary performer of *rakugo* (traditional storytelling). Born into a family of entertainers in Edo (present-day Tokyo), Encho was a child prodigy who performed his first show at the age of 7 and rose to the rank of *shin'uchi* (master) at 17. In Encho's time, there were story-telling theaters (*yose*) on just about every corner in Edo and the *rakugo* profession was an extremely competitive one, in which few newcomers ever made their way up from the bottom.

Armed with unmatched verbal ability, Encho soon overtook his seniors in popularity. While most *rakugo-ka* choose the stories they tell from a pre-existing repertoire, Encho eventually started writing his own. He built up an immense oeuvre over the course of his career, specializing in ghost stories and long, emotional tales, many of which were later adapted into Kabuki plays and movies. Encho's influence on his art form was so great that he is now considered one of the founders of modern *rakugo*. *Rakugo* entertainers today still come to pay their respects at his grave at Zenshoan, where Encho practiced Zen meditation under Yamaoka Tesshu (1836–1888), the temple's founder and a famous samurai hero.