

## **Hiroshima *Kagura***

*Kagura* is a highly dramatic combination of theater and dance featuring demons, samurai, and regular country folk. Its origin lies in the historic Japanese belief that a pantheon of all-powerful gods controlled everything, and therefore needed to be shown great gratitude if a village were to thrive. *Kagura*, with its vibrant costumes and expressive masks, would be performed annually around the time of the autumn harvest to thank these gods for a bountiful crop. Believed to be Japan's oldest performing art, *kagura* spread across the country alongside the indigenous Shinto religion, and different regions still have their own variations of *kagura* and its tales, passed down over many centuries.

Hiroshima has long had one of Japan's most thriving *kagura* scenes: today, the prefecture boasts around 300 active troupes, which perform the dances and stories associated with their locality. Among these are "Tsuchi-gumo," which tells of defeated clan leaders turned into revenge-seeking spiderlike demons, and "Yamata no Orochi," in which an eight-headed serpent symbolizes the floods threatening to destroy a village's rice fields. Regular *kagura* performances can be seen at venues including the Hiroshima Prefectural Citizen's Culture Center and the YMCA International Cultural Hall.