

## **Itsukushima Shrine: Kangen Festival Folding Screen**

The annual Kangen (“wind and string instrument”) Festival is the most grandiose and popular event on Miyajima. During the festival, a musical ensemble performs classical court music onboard an elaborately decorated boat which is towed between Itsukushima Shrine and other shrines on Miyajima and the mainland. The colorful festival scene on this folding screen, painted in 1928, features the musicians’ vessel in the middle, flanked by the rowboats that tow it.

The festival’s origins can be traced back to the late Heian period (794–1185) when the powerful Taira no Kiyomori (1118–1181) introduced *bugaku* dancing, *gagaku* music, and other elements of Kyoto’s aristocratic culture to Miyajima. These traditions included playing music onboard boats, both for entertainment and to honor the deities of the sea. The current program and configuration of boats, however, did not take form until the Edo period (1603–1868). The festival takes place on the night of the seventeenth day of the sixth month according to the traditional lunar calendar, which now falls anywhere between mid-July and early August.