

### **Takachiho Yokagura: Attendants in the Sacred Garden**

Attendants of the shrine busy themselves preparing the *yokagura* venue so that it is fit to welcome the local tutelary deities to a performance. This starts with the building of a visible landmark where the deities are invited to settle (*yorishiro*). Three tall bamboo stalks are erected and decorated outside the venue, or “kagura hall” (*kagurayado*). The attendants also set the sacred stage, which is known as the “gods’ garden” (*koniwa*). Only men are permitted to take on this servant role and the same rule applies to the dance performers, who are called *hosyadon*.

Each year some 20 venues, mostly homes throughout the district, will be selected to serve as the sacred stages for the performances, which are unique to each village and scheduled on different nights from mid-November to February. As these events are held to petition the gods for a bountiful harvest for the current year and fertile conditions for the next. To prepare for the arrival of the water god (*mizukami*) from the mountains, a dance must be performed to purify the space. During this ritual, the powerful god Tajikarao, who broke the rock door to allow the Sun Goddess to leave her cave, appears in a colorful costume, often with a bright red face or blonde hair. Then comes a night of dance by the pantheon of gods and goddesses of Japanese mythology. Between November and February, a total of 33 mythological episodes are performed at each of the venues, each accompanied by the lively strains of a *hayashi* ensemble made up of flutes and drums, and other traditional instruments.