

***Baketo* Jokers**

Baketo resemble old-fashioned circus clowns with their farcical and sometimes scary costumes. They serve the purpose of entertaining the audience with their amusing appearance, and can be seen clowning around in the moments after a Nebuta float has passed by and before the next one arrives. The *baketo* have been around since at least the Meiji era (1868–1912), and occasionally outnumbered the *haneto* dancers in the pre-World War II period. In those days, the *baketo* ranged from circus strongmen to men dressed in racy, feminine costumes.

Nowadays, fewer people are willing to take on the role of the fool and most would rather participate as a *haneto* dancer or in the *hayashi* (musical ensembles) instead. However, the *baketo* still exist and there is even a *baketo* association dedicated to keeping the tradition going.