

Fujikoto Hōsaku Dances

The Fujikoto Hōsaku dances have been performed in the town of Fujisato every September for the past 400 years. The main dance, the *koma odori*, originated as an attempt to soothe the wounded pride of the samurai lord Satake Yoshinobu (1570–1633). As the head of the august Satake clan, Yoshinobu was lord of the sizeable Hitachi province (today Ibaraki Prefecture), but he fought against Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) in the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600. When Ieyasu emerged victorious, he demoted Yoshinobu to lord of the Kubota domain (today Akita Prefecture), a smaller holding far from the center of power. On the journey to Kubota, Yoshinobu's retainers tried to keep his spirits up by performing dances. These dances would later become formalized into the Fujikoto Hōsaku dances.

In the modern-day rendition, the *koma odori* dancers create a stylized battle through their dancing. Over 20 people from the town don elaborate costumes that look like exaggerated samurai armor. Around their waists are belt-like contraptions that make it appear as if they are riding horses. On their shoulders are huge shoulder plates called *hane* or *sode*. As the performers dance, they bounce the plates up against their faces, some so vigorously that a few of the dancers end the day with cuts on their ears and cheeks. For this reason, the Fujisato version of the dance is acknowledged as one of the most intense *koma odori* in Akita.

Following an initial *koma odori* dance is the *shishi odori*, a dance performed by three people costumed as stylized lions called *shishi*. *Shishi* are legendary guardian lions, and *shishi* dances are regular features of religious festivals in Japan. In Fujisato, the dance tells the story of a love triangle. A male lion (wearing blue) and a female lion (wearing red) are traveling together when a black lion suddenly appears. He steals the female lion away from her partner, and the blue lion goes to look for her. The blue lion fights the black lion, and the red lion returns happily to her original partner. A single dancer controls each *shishi*, manipulating the mouth and head, while dancing beneath the loose cloth costume. After the *shishi* performers are finished, the *koma odori* dancers return for the main dance of the festival.

The dancers are accompanied by drummers and flute players, who play music that evokes the battlefields the dancing represents. Throughout the day the dancers perform around the town before their final dance at Asama Shrine.