

## **Geihoku Kagura**

*Kagura* is a Shinto ritual performed to reenact folklore stories and honor deities. Stories are told through dance, the use of elaborate costumes, and traditional music. Dialogue is of minimal importance; instead, the emphasis is on the visual aspects of the performance.

*Kagura* is performed throughout Japan in various forms. Geihoku Kagura, with its elaborate masks and bright decorations, is unique to the northwestern part of Hiroshima Prefecture, and is based on Japanese mythology. Akiota is the epicenter of Geihoku Kagura, with 15 troupes performing in the area. Many local residents are involved in *kagura* and regularly practice for festivals, and for ritual performances every autumn.

Some *kagura* enactments portray a clear hero and villain. In one of the Geihoku plays the villain is depicted as a demon, with an open-jawed, dragon-like mask and a wig of long, stringy hair. Both characters move slowly, circling each other in a drawn-out battle while the sounds of a drum, wooden flute, and hand cymbals speed up in time with the dance. The performers wear elaborate, gold-lined costumes that weigh up to 20 kilograms, adding to the dramatic effect of the production.