

## **Iwami Kagura**

*Kagura* combines performance and dance in an ancient tradition that is preserved today. Believed to be Japan's oldest performing art form, it spread across the country alongside the indigenous Shinto belief in a pantheon of myriad deities. With its vibrant costumes and expressive masks, *kagura* was traditionally performed around the autumn harvest to thank the gods for a bountiful crop. Different regions still have their own variations of *kagura* and the tales passed down with it over the centuries.

Iwami has long had one of Japan's most thriving *kagura* scenes: there are more than 130 active troupes in the area, many of which perform throughout the year. Although Iwami Kagura retains its ceremonial essence, it is also a form of entertainment, distinguished by fast-paced music and dancing, elaborate stage props, and simplified storylines featuring deities, demons, and country folk. Some of the most popular stories are "Orochi," in which the storm god Susanoo battles an eight-headed serpent, and "Jinrin," which tells of the semi-mythical Emperor Chuai who defended Japan from a pair of winged demons using a bow and arrow.

Iwami Kagura is performed every Saturday evening at Tatsunogozen Shrine in Yunotsu.