

Important Intangible Cultural Property: Kurokawa Noh

Noh, the classical dance-drama of Japan, is one of the oldest major forms of theater art still performed today. Generations of the parishioners of Kurokawa's Kasuga Jinja Shrine have worked to preserve this local style of the art for more than 500 years.

Kurokawa Noh is similar to the current five schools of noh (Kanze, Konparu, Hosho, Kongo, and Kita), but has its own traditions. Performances retain ceremonial aspects relating to Shinto beliefs that have all but disappeared from other traditions of performing arts in Japan.

It is unclear when noh arrived in Kurokawa. Records indicate the presence of *tayu* (troupe leaders) practicing the art at the beginning of the Edo period (1603–1867). Further evidence mentions noh being practiced in Kurokawa at the end of the Muromachi period (1336–1573).

Three Muromachi-period noh costumes, designated National Important Cultural Properties, have been preserved. Kurokawa Noh itself was designated an Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property in 1976.

The parishioners of Kasuga Jinja Shrine are divided into two troupes, the *kamiza* (upper troupe) and the *shimoza* (lower troupe). Together they form the performance troupe that is managed mainly by the group's chairman. There are approximately 150 performers, including adults and children, who make use of some 250 traditional noh masks and more than 500 costumes in performing 540 noh stories and 50 *kyogen* (comic interlude) stories.

Noh performances and ceremonies are held throughout the year. They include:

Kasuga Jinja Shrine Ogi Festival (February 1–2)

Kasuga Jinja Shrine Prayer Festival (March 23)

Kasuga Jinja Shrine Annual Festival (May 3)

Hanamatsuri Flower Festival at Mt. Haguro (July 15)

Kasuga Jinja Shrine Harvest Festival (November 23)