

Video 1 - Text

A Festival for the Spirit of the Shrine (Filmed in 2016)

It is early morning. Children gather at Kasuga Jinja Shrine to join a procession carrying Ogi-sama, the deity of the shrine. It is believed their energetic chanting protects the deity. A representative leads the procession with a lantern lit from a sacred flame inside the shrine. The deity is carried from Kasuga Jinja Shrine to the *toya*, the home of the *tonin* (lay officiant) who is in charge for the duration of the festival.

Children play important roles in the rituals and festivities for giving thanks to Ogi-sama, the deity of the shrine. The festival is held annually on February 1 and 2, dates that marked the New Year in the lunar calendar followed in Japan until 1873. The Ogi Festival centers on the offering of prayers for peace and a successful harvest in the coming year.

[Chanting]

Kurokawa Noh (a local type of the classical noh drama) is performed in the shrine as an offering to the Ogi-sama deity. This tradition of noh was handed down in the Kurokawa area of Tsuruoka, Yamagata Prefecture. Some of its stylistic elements are similar to those in the five contemporary schools of noh (Kanze, Konparu, Hosho, Kongo, and Kita) but its expressions are unique. It is performed not by professionals, but by parishioners of the shrine, who are mostly farmers, and people travel from across the nation to see it.

[Performance]

[Fade to white]

The home of Watanabe Gonbei, the *tonin* (lay officiant) living in the Kamiza area of Kurokawa, has been designated for the overnight visit of the Ogi-sama deity this year. The deity resides in a different residence every year and this is the first time in 192 years that it will stay with the Watanabe family.

The deity is first brought to the civic hall in the Kamiza area of Kurokawa. After lunch, young volunteers start to prepare the stage for the performance of Kurokawa Noh in the evening. The Ogi-sama deity is placed in the center of the stage. It is believed this placement allows the deity and the local people to enjoy the festival together.

[Background conversation]

As the start of the performance nears, people begin to arrive, filling the audience seats. Fans of Kurokawa Noh travel from various parts of the county to see the performances.

All of the seats have now been filled.

[Background conversation]

The flickering light of large candles illuminate the performance. Gonbei proceeds to the stage along with the lantern carrier and the bearer of the Ogi-sama deity.

The young boys start the performance.

[Performance]

The first performance was *Daichifumi*. A boy aged about five plays the role of messengers to the deities, stamping his feet on the stage in the ritual of *daichifumi* (stomping of the earth). His stamping is believed to awake the spirit of the earth, ward off evil, and welcome a peaceful year and bountiful harvest.

Akiyama Wataru, aged five, performs the leading role this year.

[Performance]

Under the watchful eyes of the audience, Wataru delivers his lines impeccably and performs the dance beautifully. The audience erupts with applause.

[Performance]

After the ritual stomping, a series of noh performances continues into the night. They are drawn from the three categories of plays—noh, *shiki sanban* (plays of prayer), and *kyogen* (comic interludes)—and include the humorous *Suehiro* (The Fan of Felicity) and the dramatic *Hachinoki* (Potted Trees).

[Performance]

For the audience, the stylized movements and solemnity of the performances are important parts of the festival.

[Performance]

On the morning of the second day, the stage is moved to Kasuga Jinja Shrine and the festival continues.

Young members of *kamiza* (upper troupe) and *shimoza* (lower troupe) compete to pass the object representing the deity through the shrine's small window as quickly as possible. The mood of the festival shifts from solemnity to excitement.

Afterwards, noh plays are performed: *Naniwa* by the *kamiza* (upper troupe) and *Arashiyama*, by the *shimoza* (lower troupe). Each play represents the locations of the festival. *Daichifumi* (stomping on the earth) and *shiki sanban* (plays of prayer) are performed.

[Performance]

Another climactic moment is when young men lift up the object representing the Ogi-sama deity and install it in the beams of the shrine as quickly as possible. Two young men from each troupe dash from in front of the central altar to their corresponding side of the shrine and climb up on the stage.

Following a signal, two other competitions start. Young men of each troupe pull down each Ogi-sama deity from the beams and peel off the cloth covering them. This cloth is then placed around the neck of the young man who is going to be a Ogi-sama bearer of the following year. After the ceremony, it is dyed to make a special kimono (*suo*), which will be worn by the *tonin* (lay officiant) during the following year's Ogi Festival. Participants also compete to pull down huge mochi rice cake offerings from the beams as quickly as possible. After these competitions, the festival ends.

The Ogi Festival has been passed down, from generation to generation, for 500 years.

With the completion of the festival, the people of Kurokawa prepare to say farewell to the harsh winter and welcome the spring.

[Blackout]