Matsu no Odera Temple

Matsu no Odera Temple is part of the 33 Kannon Temple Pilgrimage Route through Western Japan, and was established on Mt. Aoba in the early eighth century. The principal object of worship is a statue of the Bato Kannon Bodhisattva, distinguished by the horse head that is worn like a crown and who, unlike other Kannon (bodhisattva of compassion), is depicted with an angry expression.

The temple is one of very few places where the Buddha Dance (*hotokemai*) is performed. The dance is done in a traditional style characteristic of the Heian period (794–1185). Six dancers dressed in gold masks and full robes and representing Shakyamuni Buddha, Amida Buddha, and Dainichi Buddha appear before the audience with musical accompaniment. The wind and percussion instruments played here are extremely old and difficult to maintain, making for a most unusual performance. Records show the Matsu no Odera Buddha Dance has been performed at the temple since at least the Edo period (1603–1867), and perhaps much longer. It is held annually on May 8, one month after Shakyamuni Buddha's birthday, and was designated an Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property in 2004.

Artworks, including many that have been designated Important Cultural Properties, are exhibited for one month every spring and autumn in the repository. The temple collection includes one National Treasure: a twelfth-century painting of Fugen Enmei, a bodhisattva associated with longevity, seated on a three-headed elephant.