

Noh Stage

Noh, a traditional form of theater that showcases classical Japanese drama and dance, is performed on an open-air stage at Okayama Korakuen Garden. Surrounding buildings including the Eisho-no-ma and the Suminagashi-no-ma serve as seating for the audience; these structures are connected by corridors to other significant buildings in the garden including the Enyo-tei House and the Kakumei-kan Hall.

The outdoor Korakuen Noh Stage offers visitors the opportunity to experience the art form the way it was originally staged. In the past, noh performances were often held on the grounds of temples and shrines, but today it is more common for the stage and audience seating to be provided within a single building.

The daimyo lord who built the garden, Ikeda Tsunamasa (1638–1714), enjoyed watching noh performances and sometimes performed the art himself for the enjoyment of the families of his retainers and folk of the castle town/domain. However, his successor Ikeda Tsugumasa (1702–1776) was not as interested in noh theater and reduced the size of the surrounding buildings. In 1945 the garden, stage, and auxiliary buildings were destroyed in an air raid. The current stage and garden are the result of a project, undertaken and completed in 1958, to reconstruct these features based on their eighteenth-century configuration.

Traditionally, noh was performed in front of an old pine tree, which was said to be the abode of the gods. Most noh stages today, including the one at Korakuen, continue this tradition by featuring an image of a pine tree on the wall behind the stage. Artist Ikeda Yoson (1895–1988), a skilled Nihonga (Japanese-style) painter of Okayama, painted the tree for the rebuilt Korakuen stage as well as the accompanying young bamboo thicket.

To the left of the stage is the *hashigakari*, a diagonal bridge connecting the backstage to the main stage. It can be used to emphasize the entrance of the actors as if they are coming from a faraway place. Three small pine trees placed in order of ascending height stand along the bridge, further enhancing the appearance of depth. A bed of white pebbles surrounds the stage to reflect the light and better illuminate the actors onstage. Facing the stage across the pebbled area is the Eisho-no-ma, the room where the lord and people in attendance would sit.

Noh and Kyogen (comic interlude) performances continue to be held several times a year at Korakuen, which also hosts performances by noh schools from other parts of Japan.