

Performing Arts: A Sanriku Tradition

The traditional performing arts of the Sanriku region are woven into the social fabric of its communities. Many reflect a natural connection to the sea, and are performed as prayers for a good harvest and safety for those who fish the offshore waters. Other dances are performed for the repose of the spirits of those who did not return.

Otsuchi

Daikagura

Daikagura is a form of *kagura*, a ceremonial dance that is one of Japan's oldest traditional performing arts. Six groups in Otsuchi take part in various performances, including the lion dance.

Shishiodori

Five local groups participate in one of northern Japan's popular folk performing arts, a "deer dance" featuring a stag, a doe, and other dancers accompanied by flutes and drums.

Kamaishi

Toramai

The origins of this "tiger dance" date back hundreds of years. Two people operate the costume of the dancing tiger, which is believed to have the spiritual power to ward off fires.

Ofunato

Suneka

On the evening of January 15, people dressed as *suneka* demons in fierce black masks and straw capes visit local homes to frighten lazy people and naughty children.

Daigongen

This giant 2-meter-wide lion head is attached to a power shovel, which is draped in a lion costume and swivels in an energetic dance. It makes an appearance at special events.

Rikuzentakata

Kenka Tanabata Festival

The local version of this colorful summer festival, based on a tale of star-crossed deities, goes back some 900 years. The festival features lavishly decorated floats clashing in mock battles.

Nesaki Hashigo Toramai

This unusually acrobatic tiger dance is performed at the top of a 20-meter-high ladder raised to a 50-degree angle. It has been designated an Intangible Folk Cultural Property by the city.

Kesennuma

Shichifukujinmai (Seven Lucky Gods Dance)

Once performed by men appealing to the gods for a good fishing harvest, this dance is

now performed by women and children, yet maintains the vigorous style of the original.

Tairyo Utaikomi (Big Catch Song)

Before powered fishing boats, fishermen returning from the sea would announce their success with songs of triumph while banging their oars on the deck. Now the songs are performed at shrines and other events.