

Rokusho Shrine: Stage

The thatched-roof stage at Rokusho Shrine, built in 1872, is a tangible reminder of the culture of folk performing arts that flourished throughout central Japan from the 1800s to the early 1900s. Stages were usually built at shrines, which functioned as centers of social interaction and celebration as much as places of worship, and villagers would gather to watch performing arts such as folk kabuki (*noson kabuki*). The performances were primarily staged by the villagers themselves, though shows by traveling performers were also common. Village stages were particularly numerous in the area that is now Aichi, Gifu, and southern Nagano Prefectures, and there are still 84 such structures in the city of Toyota alone.

The stage at Rokusho Shrine is one of the largest and best preserved of its kind. There is a platform underneath the ceiling that was part of a mechanism for lowering and raising actors onto and off of the stage. Structural elements such as the massive tie beam at the front of the building, about 80 centimeters thick and more than 11 meters in length, indicate that the stage was built at great effort and expense. This speaks to the once immense popularity of folk performing arts in the region. However, that popularity faded when cinema began to overtake theater and vaudeville as the people's favored form of entertainment. The stage at Rokusho Shrine has stood silent since 1948, when it was last used for its intended purpose.