**Bugaku (Tablet Text)**

NEXT PERFORMANCE: Bugaku Court Dance

*Ranryo’o* (Prince Lanling)

*Bugaku* court dances were originally performed for the emperor and members of the nobility.

*Bugaku* is characterized by stylized movements, ornate costumes, and traditional music called *gagaku*.

This form of dance developed over time as a blend of domestic and foreign traditions.

It was influenced by customs of mainland Asia, but eventually evolved into a uniquely Japanese type of court dance.

*Bugaku* has been passed down for over 1,200 years through rituals held at the emperor’s court, shrines, and temples.

It is one of Japan’s oldest performing arts.

Modern *bugaku* performances are a chance to experience the kind of entertainment enjoyed by the nobility of long ago.

*Ranryo’o* (Prince Lanling) is the most famous dance from the *bugaku* repertoire.

It is often performed on auspicious occasions, such as festivals and important celebrations.

*Ranryo’o* is a story of a Chinese prince who was intelligent and brave.

However, the prince was also so handsome that he was not taken seriously as a military commander.

He dons a fearsome mask to inspire his troops and intimidate enemies, leading his army to victory.

The legend is said to be based on the exploits of Gao Changgong (541–573), a famed general of China’s Northern Qi dynasty.

The performer’s mask has a dragon on top. A chin piece hanging on cords enhances the fierce expression of the mask.

More dragons are embroidered on the elaborate costume.

The dancer wields a baton-like instrument to symbolize directing soldiers in battle.

A small group of musicians in court attire and *eboshi* caps accompanies the dance with drums and traditional wind instruments.

The large hanging drum is called a *tsuri-daiko*, and the smaller barrel-shaped drum is a *kakko*.

The wind instruments include a *sho* (mouth organ), an oboe-like *hichiriki*, and a horizontal flute called a *ryuteki*.

The traditional black and red curtain behind the performers bears the crest of the Oda family.

The crest is considered a tribute to Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582), a powerful warlord who supported court arts.

As the performance comes to its end, the dancer strikes a dramatic pose of victory.