

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.