

Memorandum for Kachokai's Noh Workshop (June 12. 2010 at SOAS
in London)

(DVD 1、Touzu)

1, Opening address by Mr.Hirato

Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon!

My name is Masahide Hirato, the leader of the Kachoukai group of amateur Noh lovers from Japan.

The name Kachoukai means 'flower and bird group'. You might say that the word flower stands for beautiful England and we are birds that have flown here from the Far East

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who has helped to make this meeting possible, especially SOAS and the Japan Research Centre who have made this room available, Jane and Rahima who have been very helpful with the arrangements and here our technician.

Also, many thanks to all of you who have come to join us here today.

Now, with the help of my friend Paul Courtney, I want to tell you about Japanese Noh drama.

Many of you will already know that Noh is a form of classical theatre using words, music and dance. In some ways it is like European opera, but on a small scale.

Noh has been in existence for over 600 years.

In 2001 it was designated by UNESCO as a world cultural asset.

Bunraku (traditional puppet plays) and Kabuki (traditional popular drama) received this international recognition later.

First let me say something about myself.

I was born in 1936 in Tokyo and when I was 22 years old, after graduating from university with a degree in law, I decided to take up Noh chanting and two years later Noh dance as my lifelong hobby.

It has been my good fortune to continue to perform Noh chanting and dance for over 50 years.

When I was young, I was urged to become a professional Noh actor. This was very tempting, but I decided against it. The main reason for this is that I believed that amateurism is a very important element in traditional art, just as it is in European classical music.

2. Speech by Mr. Courtney

Before going into more detail, I would like to ask Paul Courtney to say a few words about his own encounter with Noh and to tell us how Noh appears to a non-Japanese.

Thank you very much, Paul. That was very helpful.

3. A brief explanation of the Noh by Mr. Hirato and others)

Hereafter let me talk about Noh.

(1) Theatrical formation of Noh-gaku (Noh and Kyogen)

As the style of performance of Noh, Noh is always played accompanied with Kyogen, which is another style of theater drama on the Noh stage.

Kyogen is a kind of comedy with many realistic gesture and dialogue, while Noh is rather serious and has fantastic and abstract representation.

Combined with Noh and Kyogen, audience does not easily exhaust.

(2) History

Noh was established about 650 years ago, mainly by Kanami and his son Zeami.

Especially Zeami (1333~1384) was created new fantastic artistic Noh system by the guardianship of the Lord (Shogun) at that time.

About 80% of Noh scenario we can see on the stage, is created or revised by him.

After Zeami, the Establishment (dominant class) all over Japan loving Noh and then warrior class adopted Noh play and Noh chanting as their cultural education. About 300 years ago, at the middle of Edo era, Noh chanting and Noh dance spread wide among common people.

Today, we have 5 schools of Noh chanting and dance, have about 200

scenario remain.

(This is a Noh chanting Textbook, published 340 years before,)

(3) Stage & Scenery

Noh is performed on the special stage which has 4 section.

One of them is main stage that is 5.5meters square covered cypress plate. Connect with this main stage, bridge stage from which actor coming through curtain. Other stages are musical band stage and chanting stage. The background of stage is painted pine-tree on which the god will come and rest, our ancestor believed.

Scenery is very simple and symbolic. For example, house on the stage is only thin bamboo frame structure.

One more unique point of Noh stage is it has several clay pot under the stage plate in order to make effective the sound of foot-beat.

(4) Performer (Shite, Waki, etc.)

Casting or character is rather unique in comparison with the other theatrical play, because in Noh play, leading character, 'shite' is absolutely important to the other character. And supporting actor called 'waki' is the second important position.

At least 20 persons contribute to one shite.

(5) Musical Instrument

Four musical instruments are necessary for Noh play. One is for melody to dance and the other three is for rhythm. By the way, Noh rhythm is 16 beat.

Noh player must play without notation for every different Noh scenario.

(6) Costume

Playing Noh, actor put on special costume. Costume of shite is basically gorgeously in the color, embroidered, and made from silk.

(you can see by this picture calender)

So, it cost usually over 6,000pounds, and more antique value joins the one that looks even simple when becoming old.

It's weight is about 10kg or more, adding many undergarments.

(7) Mask&Fan

The most of the characterization of unique of Noh is Noh is the mask play.

The Hoh mask used now is said about 200 kinds.

The Noh mask is also very expensive. Some old one is estimated over 2million pounds.

I took 3 kinds of masks for you. You can put on your face if you have interested in.

(Show them lady's, oldman's, and mad woman's one)

And fan is indispensable tool for Noh dance.

(This is sample one for Noh dance)

(8) Other features of Noh as theatrical play

One time, one performance. Never play again with same members.

As I said previously, Noh chanting school separated to 5 school and supporting actor(waki), each musical instrument players are belonging to several school.

When they decided to play Noh, one combination is formed for one time performance.

Noh player never use microphone.

Noh audience must not clap or applaud before shite fade out over the curtain.

And, of course, no curtain call. I'm sure you feel funny.

4..Recitation(Utai) and Brief dancing(Shimai)

Next, I would like to explain to Utai and Shimai which we want to act and show you here.

Utai and Shimai are essence from Noh.

Without mask and costume, the one do Shimai need much concentration as he or her dance technique is clearly appear.

Utai and Shimai are very popular until in 1960's. At that time, almost every company or government office has amateur Utai and Noh Dance Club. But today, most of companies do not spend money for these club.

Today, professional Noh player playing Noh on the Noh stage as ever. On the other hand, amateur Noh lover spend money for observing their play and they are enjoying practice or exercise Noh chanting or Noh dance at their closed private stages.

Usually, Shimai is played by back chorus, but sometimes it played with musical instrument.

5. Demonstration of Shimai (Part 1)

- (1) Naniwa by Mrs. Kameda
- (2) Aminodan by Mrs. Tatuta
- (3) Kasanodan by Mrs. Osaki

(DVD II, Kakitubata)

6. Demonstration of Utai

- (1) Sasanodan by Mrs. Kunihiro, Mrs. Matumoto, and Ms. Suzuki

7. Demonstration of Shimai (Part 2)

- (1) Hanagatami by Mrs. Tutumi
- (2) Unrin-in by Mrs. Harada
- (3) Akogi by Mrs. Nakao
- (4) Tenko by Mrs. Kato

(DVD III, Kumasaka)

8. Q & A