

<Workshop Text>Resurrecting the Noh Play Tsuna in the Reiwa Era with a Special
Performance at the Expo May 14, 2025

About Noh

☆A Noh play tells a story.

Noh is a theatrical play. It is the world's oldest stage art that is still performed today.

Originating as a musical in around the 14th century, Noh comprises songs, dances, instrumental parts, and stories on eternal themes.

When Noh represents supernatural themes, the actors often wear masks. Even when masks are not used, the actors perform as if they were wearing masks. They do not apply makeup. In Kyogen, the characters are usually living people. In such cases, the actors do not wear masks, but when they play the roles of non-humans, they wear masks.

☆Characters

***Shite*:** Principal actor Wearing a mask, *the shite* plays the role of a supernatural being, such as a deity, ghost, avatar, spirit, or monster.

***Waki*:** Subordinate actor As a counterpart of the principal actor, the *waki* plays the role of a monk, minister, etc. As a living man, the *waki* listens to the inner voice of the main character (*shite*).

***Tsure*:** Attendant There are two types of attendants: one attending the principal actor and the other attending the subordinate actor.

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Ai: While *kyogen* is a program independent from Noh, sometimes a *kyogen* actor appears on the Noh stage. This actor, known as an *ai*, describes the story in a comical manner.

☆Masks

Noh actors treasure masks, which they call “*omote*.”

Wearing a mask is the privilege of principal actors. In some programs, however, they do not wear masks. Even in such cases, the actors perform, as if they were wearing masks, which they call “*hitamen*.”



☆Costumes of artistic value

Noh actors wear priceless costumes, some of which were made 200 years ago.

You may believe that such old fabrics can be seen only in museums, but you can really see them on a Noh stage.

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Relationship between Yao and Noh

☆The Takayasu School of Noh

Noh is performed by professional Noh actors and musicians. They are divided into several groups, each having a long history. It is believed that the Takayasu school of Noh, comprising subordinate actors* and hip drummers,** was founded by a priest of Tamanooya Shrine in Takayasu, Yao.

* Subordinate actor:

As a counterpart of the principal actor (*shite*), a subordinate actor (*waki*) plays the role of a living man and describes the scene.

** Hip drummer:

The hip drum, also known as a large drum, usually sets the pace. The instrument features a high-pitched, tense sound.

☆Yao and Takayasu Mentioned in Old Stories and Documents

Mt. Takayasu, at the eastern end of Yao City, is mentioned in the *Kojiki*, a history book written more than 1,300 years ago. Since ancient travelers from Osaka to Nara had to go over the mountain, Takayasu was a traffic node, where various cultural forms were produced.

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Just as with village festivals, Noh (initially called *sarugaku*) originated in religious rituals. In request for a good harvest, villagers offered dances to the guardian deities of their village. Eventually, the dance began to be accompanied by flutes and drums, which led to the development of professional dancers and musicians.

In 1347, a couple of Noh actors, Kan'ami and his son Zeami, performed in front of Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu. Impressed by their performance, the Shogun began to support Noh, which led to the spread of the performing art among high-ranked warriors.

There is an old document describing a group of Noh actors called Takayasu Dayu, who held performances at Onji Shrine. Moreover, an old house in Yao City kept masks of an old man and other characters. This indicates that at the foot of Mt. Takayasu, Noh was popular even among ordinary villagers.