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(1) Contemporary <u>Onnagata</u> <u>Tamasaburo Bando</u> : "<u>Tamasburo</u> disguises himself by his will, discipline and method. There are two dreams being enacted. One is to transport himself to another world as a fairy or apparation. The other is to become the opposite sex. That is the essence of drama itself."

<u>Tamotsu Watanabe</u> (1)

(2)(3) In the 16th Century Japanese theatre, the technique of a man playing the role of a woman was developed to a surprising degree. The woman played by <u>Onnagata</u> were more womanly than real women. The audience saw on the stage the quintessence of womanhood which went beyond real woman.

Kabuki is made up of three words or characters, Ka (song), bu (dance) and Ki (performance).

Basil Stewart (2)

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the *bugaku* court dances; the *No* theatre; *Bunraku* the puppet theatre and *Kabuki*, are the four classical performing arts that have survived in Japan today, where the characteristic entertainments of each age reflect the tastes and culture of the audience to which they catered. Among the classical stage arts, the *bugaku* had its survival guaranteed by its position within the culture of the court, and the nobility furnished the audiences that made it thrive. In the same way, the growth of *No* was fostered by the *samurai* class.

The *Kabuki* and puppet theatre, which developed in *Tokugawa* times, differed from these earlier forms in that they were encouraged chiefly by the merchant class. The term "merchant class", however, covered a section of society that differed considerably from period to period in its education, economic status and general culture, and the nature of *Kabuki* fluctuated correspondingly. Even within a single period, several levels can be distinguished in the merchant class, it varied from district to district within the city, and there was a great difference between the merchants of *Edo* and those of the *Kyoto* - *Osaka* area.

The merchant class became highly developed with many modern aspects to its economic structure, despite the wide range of varying tastes which embraced this level of society, *Kabuki* thrived in it and became influenced by the aesthetic ideals that governed the other arts of its day, both fine and decorative. Thus its ties were particularly close with the

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ukiyo-e wood-block print, and shamisan music. There was a considerable exchange between Kabuki and the ukiyo-e in both subject matter and use of colour, and it was in the Kabuki and Bunraku theatres that Shamisan music underwent its greatest development, acting and production methods came to be determined to a great extent by the nature of the music used.

The musical and pictorial element form in fact, the two great mainstays of the Kabuki. The sensitive feeling shown for pictorial beauty largely derives from the necessity to transmute the common people's taste for the grotesque and the erotic into something on a higher aesthetic plane. Both colour and movement are less restrained in Kabuki than in the ukiyo-e print, a sign of a greater need to pander to the public. Shamisan music in the same way, was condemned by officials and scholars of the Edo period as "licentious" It can be sensual and suggestive in a way unknown to the music of No for example, yet that is not to say that in Kabuki it achieves a very great artistic refinement. In Kabuki tragedy and comedy, realism and romanticism go hand in hand. Elements of the musical and of the realistic drama exist side by side within the same play, creating a rich and varied beauty.

Having completed my diploma thesis on Bunraku, the puppet theatre, many interesting and intriguing aspects of Japanese Culture have since become a continuing source of inspiration

for my work. The colour, glamour and excitement of Bunraku has spurred me on to further research into its sister art, Kabuki. In the following thesis I have covered the art of Kabuki theatre from its inception in the 16th Century through to contemporary performances.

(4) Koinotayori yamatoorai Ninokuchimura

The onnagata, Umegawa started on a journey with her lover, because he embezzled public funds for her. The woman was a courtesan bound in a house of ill fame and needed a huge sum of money to be freed. The man embezzled the money for this purpose and was chased as a criminal by the authorities. In 16th Century Japan, embezzlement of public funds was punishable by death.

(5) (6) "Koinotayori yamatoorai Ninokuchimura

(7) (8) "Koinotayori yamatoorai Ninokuchimura"

(9) "Narukami"

The Onnagata Kumonotaemono-hime, has been sent by the order of the Emperor to break the spell of a high priest by seducing him. In the scene depicted in this plate her success is apparent as she lets the priest's hand slip into her Kimono to touch her bosom.

(10 (11) "Iromoyo Chotto Karimame"

The Onnagata Kasane on the left plate displays her beauty to the audience, on the right she is about to be killed by her lover after she has been maimed and disfigured by the spirit of the dead.

(12) Sakura-hime-azumabunsho

This play is a story of Samsara in Sanskrit (transmigration of the soul). The idea of the transmigration of the soul is that a man keeps being reborn in cycles from the previous world to the present world, and on to the future.

(13) (14) Sakura-hime azumabunsho

(15) (16) "<u>Satomoyo azamino ironui</u>"

This is a story of doomed love. The lovers meet by a river and, despairing of the future, throw themselves into the river. This is a famous love scene in the <u>Kabuki</u> repertory.

(17) "Yowanasake ukinano yokogushi"

As a Geisha, mistress of two men, and lover of an outlaw she was always the object of men's pleasure, for this very reason, she always has a sensual charm.

(18) "Shunshoku umegoyomi"

Adakichi, a Fukagawa Geisha, is the heroine of this play. Once captivated by a handsome man, she develops all her arts in taking his love from another woman. Finally she fights a duel with the woman. Her strong will, pride, and fiery love remind us of the lives in that special world of fukagawa Geisha, who were especially proud of their hari (pluck) and iki (chic).

The History of Kabuki

The most primitive form of Kabuki is said to have made its appearance during the 16th Century, just after Japans period of civil war had ended. It was largely the creation of a curious group of people called Kabuki-Mono; wearing rather garish apparel and behaving in an outrageous fashion, they eventually began to attract large crowds of townspeople.

When Okuni, a shrine maiden at the Grand Shrine of Izumo came to Kyoto to perform on the dry banks of the Kano River, she capitalised on the notoriety the Kabuki-mono had achieved, and began to incorporate their extraordinary conduct and outfits into a popular religious dance called "Nembutsu Odori". By 1603, Okuni's dance, which had gradually taken on suggestive erotic overtones, was widely known as Kabuki Odori. Before long similar troupes of women were performing Kabuki Odori all over the country, and Kabuki at this stage in its history is known accordingly as "prostitute Kabuki"(Onna Kabuki). It was at this stage that the Shamisan, the three-stringed, plucked instrument, so closely associated with the Kabuki today made its first appearance on stage. It was with this instrument that the prostitutes who performed the early Kabuki chose to accompany their performances, and this has continued as the mainstay of Kabuki music to this day.

The total effect of the displays in Kabuki Odori was rather erotic and seductive with every gesture conveying some subtle sexual nuance. Men were naturally drawn to these

exhibitions and as they became more and more explicit in nature, its audience grew in size as well as in unrestraint. As a result, many performances soon degenerated into drunken brawls, with men grabbing at the dancers and fighting one another. It was not long before these disruptive gatherings came to the attention of the Shogunate, and in 1929 all female dancers and performers were banned on the grounds of their being detrimental to public morality.

With the prohibition of the onna Kabuki its place was taken by a type of Kabuki odori, performed by troupes of youths (wakashu) and known as Wakashu Kabuki. Although there were, naturally differences between the "woman Kabuki" and the "boy Kabuki", they were basically similar in nature, since in both cases art was a secondary consideration to the troupe's fundamental purpose, which was prostitution. Realising that it had merely allowed the substitution of one vice for another, the government banned these boy actors, and after 1652 all female roles were assumed by male performers. In the Edo period, a man was considered to have reached maturity, and showed off his front hair as a sign of it, at the age of twenty. The boys who performed Kabuki were accordingly forced to "mature" before their time by having their front hair shaved off. Because of this it proved possible to continue Kabuki performances once more. This renewed Wakashu Kabuki is referred to as yaro Kabuki, yaro being a term for an adult male.

It was decided at the same time to drop the term Kabuki, which had come to acquire overtones of the forbidden, and to make a fresh start under the name, "Monomane Kyogen-Zukushi". This new "official" name did not succeed in supplanting the word Kabuki in the popular parlance, where it has remained firmly fixed to the present day. But the change of name was accompanied by a conscious effort to change the content also, as the history of Kabuki as a dramatic art in the sense in which it is familiar to us today, must be seen as differing quite clearly in its nature from the Onna Kabuki and Wakashu Kabuki that preceded it.

Monomane Kyogen-Zukushi :

The word monemane here means something like "imitation" or "mime" and as such hints at a course of development different from the pure dance of the Kabuki Odori, while Kyogen signifies a spoken drama in the manner of the No and Kyogen. The change in name meant that the form and content was to be basically a dialogue drama relying on mime for many of the side effects, in short an up-to-date version of No and Kyogen. What was happening in practice was that the No and Kyogen plays that had been perjected in the previous age were being made over into Kabuki, and this process inevitably meant great strides forward for the Kabuki as a drama. As the Kabuki thus grew to maturity in its dramatic aspects, the need to fill all kinds of different feminine roles grew more and more pressing, and, in the enforced absence of the

genuine thing, men were increasingly obliged to take over specifically feminine roles. As a result, there emerged the type of female impersonator unique to Kabuki known as Onna-gata*. At the same time, in order to reassure officialdom that the "woman" who appeared on the stage was not real, it was necessary to register in advance all the actors who were to play such parts. Troupes began to register certain actors with the local magistrate as onnagata to distinguish them from the otoko-gata, who played exclusively male roles. The characterisation division of Kabuki actors into types specialising in particluar kinds of roles can be said to have begun with the registration of the Onna-gata.

A constant feature of Kabuki ever since the days of Okuni, a feature that distinguished it from No, had been its portrayal of the contemporary world. The Kabuki and the gay quarters, the two most up-to-date and glamorous sources of inspiration for the culture of the common people in the Edo period, had been in close rapport from the very beginning.*(2)

*(1) See plates 1,2,3, on page 2, 3

*(2) see plates 17,18, on page 19, 20

Genroku Kabuki :

The Genroku era, culturally speaking one of the most brilliant epochs of the whole Edo period, saw the emergence of popular arts of a remarkably high level in the fields of literature, painting (the print) and the decorative arts. Kabuki and puppet drama (Bunraku) likewise reached a kind of peak, and a special term "Genroku Kabuki", is given to the Kabuki of the era. Its chief characteristic is an extremely well-balanced overall development in which the plays themselves, acting and productinng techniques and dramatic criticism all made great strides hand in hand. Where the plays themselves are concerned, the most important step forward was the emergence of the first true "dramatists". In 1680, Tominaga Heibei was officially listed as "playwright" in a theatre programme, thereby proclaiming the existence of the dramatist as a profession in its own right. He was followed by Chikamatsu Monzaemon, although usually known primarily as a writer of plays for the puppet theatre, he also, during his earlier years, produced a number of first rate works for the Kabuki stage.

In their themes the plays of the Genroku era were plays based on some dispute or other within a high-ranking family, and their principal scenes derived from the "gay quarters" type of play gave plenty of scope for the development of Yatsushu (meaning "disguise"). This Yatsushi usually involved some character of high rank - e.g. a Samurai, who

was reduced in circumstances due to some dispute and went into the gay quarters in humble garb ("disguise") to call on a courtesan whose patron he had once been. This gave great scope for an amourous scene between the two*(1). The style of acting called for in the latter type of scene was known as yatsushi-goto or Wagoto, the Wagoto meaning something like "gentle stuff" or "romantic stuff". The Wagoto style of acting flourished particularly in the Kyoto-Osaka area. Edo, on the other hand, was known for its aragoto or "rough stuff", which usually involved a tremendous amount of swaggering about by some superhuman hero, his face was usually painted bright red and he made a great display of dispatching villains with the utmost ease. Actors perfected these styles of acting and became celebrated for their particular roles. Both styles have survived to the present day as two of the standard techniques of Kabuki acting.

This realistic tradition of acting gave rise to the type of Kabuki play known as sewa-mono, translatable as "social drama". This type of play usually consisted of a dramatisation of actual incidents that had occured in the society of the day, especially the more sensational type of incident involving murder or love-suicide. Apart from the purely sensational appeal of their themes, however, these "social dramas" also reflected popular religious beliefs to a cer-

*(1) See plates 4,5,6,7,8, Pages 11,12,13

tain extent, as their performance was looked on as a means of praying for the peace of the souls of those who had died unhappy deaths in the incidents portrayed.

During the Genroku period the establishment of the authority of "dramatic criticism" developed. Criticism of a kind had been in existence for some time already in the form of the yaro hyobanki ("Actors reputation reports"). These, however, had been based on the yujo hyobanki, and for the most part merely did for actors what the latter had done for the popular courtesans of the day, i.e. provide a kind of illustrated booklet extolling the virtues of the subject for the benefit of his or her fans. However a work entitled Yakusha Kuchi Jamisen, published in 1699 contained what can be classified as genuine dramatic criticism. It consisted of three volumes, one devoted to each of the great cities of the day - Kyoto, Osaka and Edo, and became an annual production devoted to criticism of plays and acting. It appeared right up until the early years of the meiji ere (1868-1911), a period of nearly three centuries.

(19)(20) "<u>Sonoomokage Ninin Wankyu</u>", is a dance performed by <u>Matsuyama</u>, a high ranking <u>courtesan</u> with her former lover <u>Kyubei</u>, who is in the form of a puppet.

(21) Matsuyama, a beautiful figure of Tayu in all her splendour. Taya is the highest rank among courtesans awarded in recognition of beauty, culture and personal traits. The holder of the rank is almost like a queen in the society of yukaku (red-light district).

(22) Matsuyama and Kyubei dancing together. This scene depicts the interesting overlap that developed between the puppet theatre Bunraku and Kabuki

(23) "Koken", the character yaegaki - mime acts in the stylised manner of a puppet. There are three "puppeteers" who go through the motions of "manipulation the doll". Of these, the chief puppeteer is known as Koken and wears the formal kamishimo, while the puppeteers managing the left arm and legs are played by Kurogo

The Confluence of <u>Bunraku</u> and <u>Kabuki</u> :

During the first half of the 18th Century, the <u>Kabuki</u> changed its cource of development and began to show signs of having reached a point of rest. It is largely as a result of developments during these years that it came to exhibit the type of stylised beauty that is so characteristic of it today. <u>Kabuki</u> began to develop certain signs of rigidity that ultimately were bound up with the perfection of the feudal system under the rule of the <u>Tokugawas</u>. Following the death of several of the best actors, members of the "second generation" carried on the techniques that they had developed and the tendency for acting to settle into fixed patterns began. The <u>Shogunate</u> even began to interfere with the content of plays themselves and it became impossible to present plays dealing with many contemporary themes ; for example in 1722 the <u>Shogun</u> banned all plays dealing with "love-suicide", <u>Shinju</u>, which had considerable romantic overtones and cleared that couples who had attempted double suicide should be reduced to the level of outcasts and put on public show. With one of the principal themes of the <u>Sewa-mono</u> officially banned and the theme itself deprived of much of its romantic appeal for the public, <u>Kabuki</u> popu-larity weakened giving rise to the puppet theatre.

The puppet theatre is by it very nature artificial and indirect compared with <u>Kabuki</u>. The latter relied for much of its effect on human movement, posture and speech and it

seems likely that the restrictions placed on its topicality that had been one of the Kabuki's strongest points helped divert public interest towards the more "artistic" or at least, artificial puppet theatre, Bunraku. Popular puppet plays were adapted for the Kabuki theatre with the natural result that large importations were made from Bunraku into Kabuki. These affected production, acting, music and even things such as stage machinery, for example the uneven jerky movements of the manipulated dolls, were imitated by Kabuki actors*(1). The Gidayu music of Bunraku was even developed into plays that were originally written for the Kabuki, this served to emphasise still further the nature of Kabuki as a kind of music drama, which in turn encouraged the tendency to stylize the Kabuki in all its aspects.

*(1) See plate No. 23, page 32.

(24) "<u>Kumonimago uenon hatsuhana</u>"

"Vigorously opening the sliding door at front, the woman slightly bends her right foot to step into the room, with her left hand leaning on the pillar and her head turned about the the right of the stange. Her hand, foot and expression of smile with a slightly opened mouth vividly depicted a slovenly prostitute, <u>Michitose</u>"

<u>Tamasaburo Bando</u> (3)

(25)(26) "Oriki" the Courtesan Oriki is the story of the hapless life of a plebian woman, doomed to die by an evil destiny with her lover, whose business and marriage have failed die to his association with her.

(27) "Oriki" in her agony after being killed by her lover

(28) "Tsumorukoi yukinosekinto"
People in ancient Japan had a firm belief that flowers and trees, like human beings, had their soul and lived their lives. It was only natural then in this play, that the spirit of a cherry tree, came out to this world in the shape of a courtesan and loved a man.

The Golden age of Edo Kabuki :

Until the middle of the 18th Century the development of Kabuki took place in Kyoto and Osaka, rather than Edo. But from (1751-1788) the characteristic culture of Edo began its own unique development, in which Kabuki was to play a prominant part.
LOng years of freedom from civil strife had turned the Samurai's thoughts away from war giving them time to develop a taste for the theatre. This was the age in which voice and Shamisan music made its greatest strides and reached the very peak of its popularity. Samurai were known to play the Shamisan in broad daylight and frequent the Kabuki theatre.

In Edo, it was the custom to give one title to the whole of a day's performances, but to divide the actual content into two, a "first piece" and a "second Piece". The first of these would be a period piece and the second a contemporary piece but elaborate parallels would be drawn between the characters in the two plays, who were supposed to be the same persons appearing in different ages and under different guises. Some dramatists started to do away with fanciful Edo methods of presentation and present the two worlds - the historical and the contemporary - as entirely separate entities. Tsuruga Namboku (1755 - 1829), one of the leading dramatists of the Kabuki, developed this less "rational method which enabled him to portray more frankly than would otherwise have been possible the wretched lives led by the

lower classes of the day, as well as the world of crime.

Namboku's portrayal of the villains and streetwalkers of low-class society produced a whole new category of plays on the same lines, which were known as Kizewa. The generally decadent atmosphere of the late Edo period gave rise in the Kabuki to a definite taste for sentimental scenes of killing and torture, and for the grotesque and supernatural. The popular novels of the day were also heavily influenced by the Kabuki. Their content often consisted of a reworking of well known plays, their illustrations were based directly on scenes fropm the theatre, and even the faces of the characters in the illustration were likenesses of popular actors. The Kabuki in its turn often drew its material from these "theatrical" novels, and a lively exchange took place between the two. There was also a remarkable increase in the number of woodblock prints portraying actors, or scenes from the theatre. The same period saw an astonishing spread in the popularity of the Kabuki, extending from the great cities to smaller towns and even into the country.

Before long, however, the social, moral and economic impasse into which the country was drifting prompted the government to attempt widespread reforms. These, known as the Tempo Reforms (1841-43) were an attempt to return to the healthier, more austere regime of the early feudal period. In line with this aim they at first set out to eradicate the

Kabuki theatre, potentially the most influential of all the amusements of the common people. In practice, the attempt was abandoned, yet, even so the theatres were driven from their home near Nihonbashi in the centre of Edo, and re-established themselves on a new site at Saruwaka-cho, on the northern edge of the city near the Yoshiwara (pleasure quarters). The three theatres newly built at Saruwaka-cho consisted of the same officially licenced theatres as before - Nakamura-za, Ichimura-za, and Morita-za, together with two theatres for the performance of Bunraku.

The drama in the Kyoto-Osaka area during these years was in a decline compared with its counterpart in Edo; there were two theatres in Kyoto and two in Osaka, but most of the new plays were written by Edo playwrights. The Tempo Reforms soon petered out, and the inevitable reaction against them actually encouraged the tendency towards decadence.*(1) Eventually new pressures both in and outside of Japan were to bring about the gradual collapse of the Shogunate, and at the same time Kabuki itself began to show signs of a tendency towards diffusion rather than integration as before. Kabuki, originating from the three largest cities in the nation - Kyoto, Osaka and Edo - had been characterised by a high degree of urbanity and sophistication. Now, however, it began to be affected by a new and more provincial flavour. In Ukiyo-e artists such as Hokusai and Hiroshige started to expree in a series of prints new interest in the

*(1) See Plate no. 24 Page 35

provinces and in travel. In Kabuki of these later years, an increasing number of plays came to deal with country people and farmers. These developments represented a tendency for Kabuki to become more diversified and diffuse than before, actors who had specialised in a particular type of role began to undertake all kinds of different roles.

Kabuki in the Meiji Era :

With the collapse of the shogunate, the restoration of the Emperor in 1868, and the emergence of Japan into the modern age, the theatre world, so long relegated to the lowest rank in the feudal hierarchy and restricted by an obligatory hereditary system, found itself suddenly free from restrictions and from the old social stigma. A new age of free competition in the entertainment world began. The first modern theatre was established in 1872 in the centre of what was now Tokyo, the nation's capital. The following year, the Tokyo metropolitan government officially licenced ten theatres, and one by one the remaining restrictions on theatrical activities were removed.

In a sense, Kabuki actors had always been outcasts, at the very lowest level of society, since they were not incorporated into any of the four classes - Samurai, farmer, artisan, merchant - into which feudal society had been divided. Now, for the first time, they found themselves ordinary members of society, and their social position was

still further improved when, in 1887, the Emperor himself went to see a Kabuki performance for the first time. The Tokugawa Shogunate's policy toward the Kabuki had always been one of suppression and prohibition. The Meiji government, on the other hand, correctly perceived the social potentialities of the art, and launched a campaign for its improvement. Kabuki as an entertainment previously directed primarily at the common people began to develop with the upper classes also. The official culture of the Meiji era derived largely from that of the west, and looked to the west for all its standards, its view of the drama, thus quickly came to reflect western attitudes. The type of play that mixed the historical and the contemporary was dropped, and even the words used to express such basic ideas as "actor", "theatre", "play" and "libretto" were changed to unfamiliar "modern" terms, many of them direct translations from western languages.

(29)(30) "Kanadehon Chushingura"

In "Chushingura", the Onnagata Okaru appears on three scenes in three different figures, a lady's maid, a devoted wife and a courtesan. Those three figures amply tell the life of a woman.

(31) "Hime" ("young woman of Noble birth")

The Onnagata Sakura-hime in the play "Azuma Bunsho" shown here, is a difficult role, since at a late stage in the play she becomes a prostitute in a wayside brothel.

(32) "Komochi Yamamba"

The courtesan Yaegiri, dressed in a paper Kimono, symbolising a change in social status is summoned to the residence of Kanefuyu, a nobleman. A scene in which she tells of her past is a famous example of Shaberi. It is followed by a swordfight with a band of men who come to capture the young noblewoman daughter of the house. The name of the character yaegiri is taken from that of Ogino Yaegiri, a very famous Onnagata of the day

(33)(34) "Osome Hisamatsu Ukinaro Yominuri"

In this play the Onnagate Hanshiro plays seven roles and makes more than thirty quick costume changes. In one scene he changes back and forth many times between the three roles of Hisamatsu, his lover Osome, and Osome's mother by using the partition of only a folding screen. The play is designed to make the audience enjoy everything the Onnagata has white watching him constantly changing the role.

(35) "Osome Hisamatsu Ukinaro Yominuri"

(36) Old woman and young boy character

(37) Jitsuaku-l

The Jitsuaku role is a villain pre-occupied with power, and the actor who plays him must have an impressive bearing. Shown here is the character Nikki Danjo in Meibsku Sendai Hagi about to commit his final murder.

Kabuki Actors

The traditional name for a Kabuki actor was yakusha, a word taken over from the No. The word itself originally signified someone who officiated at ceremonies or religious services. When the word was taken over by the Kabuki, it lost these relious overtones. The modern word haiyu, often used of stage actors and always of movie actors, did not come into use until after the Meiji Restoration.

The society of Kabuki actors was extremely concerned with rank and social status. The leader of a troupe (za) was known as Zagashira. He not only handled the theatre personnel but allotted roles and occasionally even produced the plays as well, since the Kabuki maintained no "producers" as such. The post of Zagashira was most often filled by the troupes leading actors of male or female roles. There were many ranks of actors beneath these two chief actors.

What might be called typecasting" or specialisation" - the division of all roles into a number of standard types or yakugara that were always played by actors specialising in that type of role - was common to the drama of both east and west in classical times. The original reason behind this specialisation of roles in Kabuki was administrative stemming from the edict banning the appearance of women on stage that was issued in 1629. This marked the beginning of the pro-

fession of onna-gata, and also of specialisation in particular types of role.

To distinguish them from the onna-gata, actors, specialising in male roles came to be referred to as tachiyaku. In the first dramatically primitive plays (1661-1673), three types of parts developed - the "hero", who visited the gay quarters, (the tachiyaku), the courtesan, played by a (Waka-Oyama), and the master of the house, a comic role played by a (doke-yaku). It was these three types of roles that formed the basis for the whole of the subsequent Yakugara system. Somewhat later, the type of role known as akunin-gata (which later became known as Katakiyaku) came into being. This made it possible to base stories on an opposition between "good" and "evil", plots became more complicated, and the Kabuki as a drama made an important stride forward*(1).

These basic divisions developed with time into a large number of subdivisions, for example : the tachiyaku, included Wakashu-gata ("youth role"), Aragoto-shi in jidai-mono ("romantic lead"), Wagoto-shi in Wagoto pieces ("soft, effeminate lead"). In the same way the Katakiyaku included such categories as jitsuaku ("power-seeking villain"), Kugeaku("wicked nobleman")

*(1) See Plate no. 37, page 51

and <u>tedai-gataki</u> ("clerk villain"). The <u>onnagata</u> included <u>Musume</u> ("young girl"), <u>tayu</u> ("high ranking courtesan"), Katahazushi ("woman of a high ranking <u>Samurai</u> household") and so on*(1). The actors in these specialised fields all kept to their own type of role, which they expressed in its typical stylised forms.

This extreme specialisation also gave rise quite naturally to theatrical families that specialised from generation to generation in the same roles. The characters in a play would be fitted into these different "types" - or in some cases, even, a play is deliberately written in such a way as to provide opportunities for showing them off.

One of the most unique roles in the <u>Kabuki</u> theatre is that of the <u>Onnagata</u>. The term <u>Onnagata</u> firstly means the acting of women's roles by men and secondly the actor whose profession it is to perform these roles. It is no easy task for a man to act the part of a woman and to look like a woman, or rather, to appear more feminine than a woman. What makes it possible is the unique world of fiction which the <u>Kabuki</u> theatre creates. The following excerpt shows how this role is possible.

"Actresses who have acted with <u>Kabuki</u> actors for the

*(1) See plate no. 29,30 page 45.

first time in the unique Spatial setting of the Kabuki stage confess to a curious feeling of role reversal. They say that they cannot play the roles of women in Kabuki unless they first think of themselves as man. In this fiction, numerous codes and devices are used to make men appear like women. They range from the hairstyle, makeup, dress, stage-properties to highly contrived elocution and gestures. For example, when an Onnagata smiles, she hides her face behind her sleeve. The audience can see by the force of imagination. When an Onnagata performs a woman in a jealous rage, that rage is not depicted by psychological sketches or facial expressions. Instead, first the hair gets dishevelled, the costume is changed, and the body motions change. The face must always preserve the beauty of a woman. If facial expressions were used to depict the change of moods, they would only reveal the face of the man, which lies underneath. These are the codes of Onnagata which make it possible to sustain the image of a beautiful woman on stage."
Tamotsu Watanabe (4).

In the attempt, not just to expree femininity, but to become a woman, there is a kind of irrational realism that transcends ordinary common sense. The daily lives of Onnagata of the Edo period were lived in the same way as women in almost every detail. This intense effort

to become a woman served to create for other men a kind of abstract of femininity that somehow summed up its essence better than any individual woman ever could.

The way of life of a comparitively high-ranking actor was luxurious in the extreme and his salary, which depended on a yearly contract, rose from one thousand *ryo* to two thousand and then three thousand as the *edo* period progressed. (A male servant's average yearly wage was three *ryo*). Where society at large was concerned, however, his position was very low. He was not allowed to live outside the theatre district, and when he went out he was obliged to wear a wattle hat as a badge of his profession. With the *meiji* Restoration, the actor for the first time became an ordinary member of society, and made a fresh start as an artist in his own right.

(38) Kabuki dance : Sagi Musume

(39) "Sukeroku"

It is the duty of the Kurogo to handle all kinds of props. In one scene in Sukeroku, the hero places a wooden clog on the head of the villain Ikyu in order to insult him. The clog does not in fact rest on his head, but is held just above it by a Kurogo who lurks behind Ikyu's back. This technique illustrates the Kabuki characteristic of creating beautiful poses rather than expressing literal "realism".

(40) "Futaomote" ("Twin faces")

This type of dance is performed by two actors in identical costumes. In the course of the dance, it proves that one of them is the ghost of, for example a former lover that has taken possession of the others shape and has come to torment him or her. In the version shown here the ghost of Hokaibo, a wicked priest who fell in love with Okumi, appears in the same costume as Okumi, and torments her.

(41) "Kuramajishi"

The mad scene is an important ingredient of the Kabuki. In such scenes, the actor whether the role is male or female, wears a purple band around his head as a sign that the character is sick. The play "Kuramajishi" is a dance-drama in which yoshitsune's mistress Shizuka Gozen goes mad and rushes about brandishing a sword. Her movements are interwoven with a "lion dance" performed by one of the popular entertainers who formerly went about the streets wearing large "lion" masks.

(42) "Ashiya Doman Ouchi Kagami"

Kuzo no Ha is on her way back to the Shinoda forest when Akuemon and his followers attempt to take her prisoner. She is saved by the foot-soldiers Yokambei and Yakambei (a fox in reality). Shown here is the climax of this scene, in which Kuzu notta is rescued by them, and Akuemon on his palanquin is lifted into the air.

(43) "Kosode Soga Azami no Ironui"

The monk Seishin who is hopelessly in love with the courtesan Izayoi tries to commit double suicide with her in the Inase river, but he lacks the will to die and in despair turns to a life of evil. In the scene shown here, Izayoi has slipped out of the gay quarters one moonlit night to meet the fallen priest, and together they lament their unfortunate lot.

Plays and Playwrights

The libretto of a Kabuki play is most commonly known as daihon, or "basic book". This implies that a Kabuki libretto is not a final, definitive text, but a kind of design or blueprint for the performance, and as such subject to amendment and addition. Significantly no Kabuki libretti were actually published until the Meiji era. The puppet plays, written from the first with the idea that they would be published, can stand in their own right as "drama", i.e. as words of literature. It is difficult, however, to view the Kabuki texts as complete, independent works of literary value. They should be considered rather, as being by their very nature fluid and subject to change at each performance, and this is doubtless the major reason why they were not published.

The scope left for improvisation is regarded as one of the positive characteristics of a Kabuki text. Most of the famous plays have passages where it is recognised that the actors will ad-lib, with topical references, or comments on the performances of the chief actors. Such passages will change with each performance of a particular play, or even sometimes from day to day. In some cases they will become an accepted part of the play, in others go on gathering new material as time passes. Most of the dialogue spoken by the chief characters is well written and of literary value, but that of secondary and minor characters is often left to those responsible for a particular production, or even to the actors themselves, who will carry on a more or less

impromptu conversation. Such impromptu conversations are known as sutezerifu, and in the libretti one often comes across the direction "Koko wa Sutezerifu ari" ("impromptu dialogue follows here"). There are even some cases, such as the tsurane (a passage in which the actors introduce themselves to the audience).

Compared with the puppet theatre, it takes a very long time for anything approximating a definitive version of a Kabuki play to evolve. Before the Genroku era, there was even a system known as Kuchidate-Shiki, whereby the actors would arrange details of the plot among themselves before going on stage, then indulge in a kind of verbal free-for-all with each other once they got before the audience. However there is one story told by Donald Keene in his book "Kabuki", where an actor who was so deeply insulted by something that another actor had ad-libbed on stage that he refused to appear in the next performance. The inventiveness of the actors themselves played a large part in the creation of the libretti. In the Genroku era, the majority of playwrights were also actors, and even later when independent authors came into existence they were more often than not completely subject to the wishes of the actos. One of the principal characteristics of Kabuki, in fact, is the persistant idea that it is not the actor who performs in order to give expression to what the author has written in his libretto, but the author who writes the libretto in order to provide a

vehicle for the art of the actor.

Edo period volumes of Kabuki libretti, which survive today in the form of hand-written copies, consist of three basic parts. First, there are the togaki; which lay down the basic movements of the actors. Secondly, there are the butai-gaki, which occur at the very beginning of the libretto, and lay down what scenery is to be used. Thirdly the most important part of the libretto was of course the dialogue, which was customarily given, not under the names of the characters appearing in the play but under those of the actors themselves.

Kabuki plays can be classified into "pure" Kabuki, i.e. plays that were created expressly for performance as Kabuki, and the gidayu-Kyogen taken from the puppet theatre. A third category is provided by the Shosa-goto or dance dramas. Each of these three categories in turn can be divided into historical pieces (jidai-mono) and contemporary pieces (sewa-mono). Of the true Kabuki plays most of what are known today as the "Eighteen favourite Kabuki plays", are jidai-mono; these pieces were gathered together and set in order for posterity by the actor Ichikawa Danjuro (1791-1859), who chose them from among plays traditionally performed by the Ichikawa family, as representing the cream of true Kabuki.

Kabuki plays were typically constructed of two elements :

Shunko and Sekai. Shuno means something like the basic "plot" or "idea" of the play, i.e. the period and physical environment in which it takes place, or the character around which it evolves. The day's performances were divided into a "first piece" and a "second piece", traditionally a jidai-mono and a sewa-mono, the two being cross-related so that they shared the same plot. The jidai-mono - the "first piece" - would be of great length in most cases and consist of a prologue plus five or six acts. The Sewa-mono - the "second piece" - usually consisted of a prologue, a middle scene, and a denouement, known as Ogiri.

In the early days of Kabuki, the authors who wrote the libretti of Kabuki plays worked as individuals. Later, however, from the Kyoho era on (1716 - 1738) the Kabuki followed the practice of the puppet theatre, where a number of playwrights would co-operate to produce one piece. The head of such a team of playwrights was known as tate-Sakusha, he was responsible for the basic conception of the piece as a whole, but allotted individual scenes among his pupils, matching the importanceof each piece to the ability and seniority of particular pupils.

Nowadays, new works for the Kabuki are written by playwrights working outside the theatre, so that the man filling the traditional post of playwright within the theatre are reduced to writing out individual parts for the actors, assisting the prompter, and making any necessary

revisions in the performance.

There seem to have been subtle differences between Edo and the Kyoto-Osaka area, both in the plays produced and in the things that audiences looked for in the plays. The authors were well acquainted with the distinctions between Kyoto, Osaka, and Edo, and were apparently obliged to take account of them in their work. The tases of the Edo public were coarser and the plays written for it had to be spectacular jidai-mono with plenty of fighting, gambling, typifying the outlook of the average Samurai. On the other hand the Osaka audiences found the same plays to stiff and inhuman, they were fond of abstract theory revolving around questions of social obligation etc. so the plays had to be more rationally worked out.

(44) "Musume Dojoji"

This piece is the celebrated No play Dojoji turned into a Kabuki dance-drama.

(45) "Shimpan Utazaimon"

There are two types of Musume role in the Sewa-mono play - the town girl and the country girl. The part of Osome in Shimpan Utazaimon is that of a daughter of a prosperous merchant, a young woman of considerable grace and refinement.

(46) Flying through the air Iwafuji, who has died once, comes to life again and in the brilliant costume she wore in her heyday flies through the air chasing a butterfly with a fan. She holds a parasol as she flies above the massed cherry blossoms of spring.

(47) "Shibaraku"
Some good characters are about to be beheaded by a a band of outlaws when the youthful hero appears crying, "Shibaraku!" ("one moment"). Brandishing a great sword he sweeps off the heads of the villains, then after the curtain has been drawn makes a leisurely exit along the hanamichi. Here the hero has just shouldered his sword and is striking a mie.

(48) The character <u>Sukeroku</u> appears for the first time on the <u>hanamichi</u>. Preserving the <u>Edo</u> period style of entry, he approaches wearing a purple band around his head and carrying an umbrella in his hand, an idealisation of the style affected by dashing young man-about-<u>Edo</u> of the day.

(49) "Yoshino-Yama Michiyuki"
Tadanobu and Shizuka strike a pose reminiscint of the doll festival figures.

(50) "Daimotsu no Ure"

Character Tomomori and the anchor.

(51) The actor is aided before going on stage by his assistant known as Kurogo ("black fellow") as he is dressed in Black.

(52) Young boy actor waiting for his cue.

Production, Performance and Costume

In a Kabuki performance the action on the stage is governed by a special set of conventions and a special type of formalisation. The insistence on the conventions of everyday life is only one of the various factors that contribute to what is often referred to as the "stylised" quality of Kabuki. Another possibly still more important factor is the strong influence of the puppet theatre on Kabuki, yet another is the large part played in the Kabuki ever since the origins, by the dance. Whichever is the most important, the stylisation itself is undeniable. One of the chief considerations in the acting is that the picture formed by the actors should be beautiful, and a great deal of thought is devoted not only to the colours and costumes, but to the postures of individual actors and the composition as a whole. Every scene, for example, invariably ends with a general "pose" that creates a visually pleasing picture.

As the conventions of Kabuki acting became an integral part of Kabuki and were passed on by generations of actors in turn, there gradually emerged what are known as Kata - distinct styles, or patterns of acting. One of the most celebrated of these is what is known as Kimari or Mie, in which a conventionalised series of movements culminates in a picturesque pose that is held for a few seconds.*(1) Characteristically this pose requires intensely energetic motion, just before a mie, there will be a crescendo of

*(1) See plates 47,48,49 Page 75,76,77

of violent emotion at the very peak of which the actor or actors freeze with stillness. The mie is effective in conveying extremely strong emotion to the audience. However violent the emotions expressed, it is characteristic of Kabuki acting that its primary aim is always to entertain. It is also laid down that in speaking some particularly important piece of dialogue an actor must always face the audience. In modern drama, for example, the actors engaged in an argument will quite naturally face each other, but in Kabuki, the more important the matter the more essential it is that the speech should be addressed to the audience.

One of the main aims of Kabuki production is to highlight important climaxes in the performance, the part is emphasised rather than the whole, and interest is focussed on the handling of each individual "situation". The general pattern of acting in each situation, known as Kata, is laid down, but different families of actors have different traditions as to how the details should be handled. The true test of an individual actor is his ability to use the predetermined Kata as a means of gripping the audience and swaying it emotionally. All kinds of conventions govern the performance of Kabuki, yet the outstanding characteristic is the important part played in response to the requirements of successive Kata by colour, costume, and sound, which blend together to compose a series of visually beautiful scenes.

Colour and Form :

Some of the colours used are simple and strong, the black curtain that signifies darkness, for example, or the red cloth covering the floor or the dais on which the musicians sit.*(1) They have a kind of bold refinement that is characteristic of Kabuki, and at the same time provide a background against which the shapes and colours of the actors costumes form a subtle variation. These costumes can be loosely classified into two types : those that reproduce realistically the everyday clothing worn during the period in question, and stylised exaggerated costumes such as were never seen in everyday life. Generally speaking, the former appear in the sewa-mono, the latter in the jidai-mono. An example of the stylised type of clothing is the costume symbolising a feudal lord in a period play. Its chief feature is an outer Kimono of brocade with a large,bib-like appendage at the back of the collar. In the same way, a princess conventionally wears a red embroidered costume and a wig done in a special hairstyle known as fukiwa. Fixed types of character, in short, wear fixed types of costume and hairstyle, the same is true of its sister art. Bunraku.

Sometimes, the costume and hairstyle undergo a quick change on the stage. There are two methods of effecting a quick costume change, known as hikinuki and bukkaeri. With bukkaeri, a thread holding the garment together at the

*(1) See plate no. 44, page 72

shoulders is pulled out, so that it falls off the shoulders at both back and front. Hikinuki involves an arrangement whereby the clothing on the upper half of the body pulls out of the obi. Bukkaeri is used to indicate a change in the nature of the character, while hikinuki is used solely for the visual appeal of the costume change. A good illustration of bukkaeri is seen in the play "Narukami". "This includes a scene in which a holy recluse, finding himself morally corrupted by the charms of a woman, is seized with a fit of anger and transformed into a devil, the change being marked by the application of blue Kumadori make-up and bukkaeri change." These changes take place, in Kabuki, on stage in full view of the audience. The actors are aided in making these changes by assistants known as Kurogo ("black fellows"), who are muffled in black from head to foot. Black is the colour of non-existence, and according to Kabuki tradition, although they appear on the stage they are not in fact there *(1).

With most of the plays half the value of the piece would be lost without the elements of colour and spectacle. The colours - which represent the taste of the common people of Edo - are often rather garish, yet the result is a spectacle of richness and brilliance. The attitude to colour of the popular ukiyo-e artists of the same period has much in common with that of Kabuki, but the Kabuki is bolder in its colours, richer and more dynamic.

*(1) See plate 39, page 60 and plate 51, page 79

(53)(54) A contemporary <u>Kabuki</u> actor in his dressing room preparing before a performance.

(55)(56) <u>Kumadori</u>

When an actor of male roles puts on <u>Kumadori</u> or similar make-up he strips to the waist. At the same time he prepares the foundation for his wig. In the application of the make-up, he uses a flat brush, a line brush and his fingertips.

(57)(58) Finished make-up of <u>Kamakura Gongoro</u> in "<u>Shibaraku</u>"

(59) "*Sugawara Denju Tenarai Kagami*"

This scene is often presented independently as a typical representation of the stylised acting and production of the *jidai-mono*, and of the *aragoto* style of acting in particular. The villain *Shikei* is a *Kuge-aku* role. Of the three brothers (from left to right), *Sakuramaru* is a *Wakashu - gata role*, *Uneomeru* an *aragoto-shi*, and *Matsuomaru* a *tachiyaku*. Since they are brothers they wear matching outer kimonos, and their individual undergarments have designs of cherry blossoms, plum blossoms, and pine trees symbolising their names. In the scene shown here the checked outer kimonos are thrown off the shoulders in preparation for a fight.

(60)(61) Two examples of the Kumadori style of makeup used in jidai-mono (historical plays) no. 60 Sarugama, no. 61 Shibaraku is worn by the hero of Shibaraku in the plates 55 56, on page 86

(62)(63) "Kuruwabunsho"

Courtesan yugiri is a woman who really existed in Shinmachi Osaka. She was one of the most famous women in the 17th Century Japan for her beauty, solicitude and elegant sensuality. She died of an illness at the age of twenty-seven on Jan 6, 1678. Many legends were born after death. She represented the culture of Osaka, a commercial city, by her mysterious hairdo called Tatehyogo, with ornamental combs and hairpins, costumes embroidered with golden and solver threads.

(64) Kabuki dance : Kagamijishi

Wigs and Make-up

Changes of costume necessarily involve changes of hairstyle also. The expression Katsura ("wig" in modern japanese) is used to refer to the whole hairstyle with any added accessories. In the early days of Kabuki a piece of purple cloth was frequently worn over the front of the head in order to hide the portion which all adult males were required to shave. This was known as Katsura, and the name was retained even when the cloth came to be replaced by a wig of real hair.

Prehaps to make up for any monotony of colour in a country where everybody's hair is black, the Kabuki employs a great variety of hair styles. The wigs can be divided, like the costumes, into those that approximate the actual hairstyles of the day, and those that are stylised and would never be worn in real life. These hairstyles change on the stage along with the costumes. For example, a style known as Shike, which is a little of the hair sticking out at the ears, undergoes subtle change depending on the type of character. There are many different varieties, and when it is pulled the hair falls out long. The result is known as obake-ge ("ghost-hair") and indicates that the character has become a supernatural being.

There is another device known as gattari which involves pulling a fastener out of a carefully done hairstyle so that the piled-up "superstructure" tilts to one side. If the

fastener is pulled out still further, the hair falls about the head in disorder - a process known as <u>Sabaki</u>, used in battle and death scenes. <u>Sabaki</u>, sometimes leaves the front hair in place, sometimes not. When the whole head of hair falls loose, it is known as <u>So-Sabaki</u>. In this way changes in costume and hairstyle, as well as in makeup, help greatly in giving the <u>Kabuki</u> visual variety. Various hair ornaments are used known as <u>Kakemono</u> ("stuck-on"), <u>Sashimono</u> ("poked through") <u>Kanzashi</u> ("large ornamental hairpins") and spotted bands, all differ according to the age and nature of the characters portrayed by the actor and the costume he is wearing. In the case of a female character, a glance at the hairstyle is enough to tell whether it is a princess, a married woman, a single woman, a courtesan and so on. With male characters similarly, the social status, type of occupation etc. Can be told at once by the hairstyle.*(1)
The men who dress the actors' hair are known as <u>tokoyama</u>.
Changes in costume and hairstyle also necessitate changes in makeup. The most characteristic form of makeup in the <u>Kabuki</u> is known as <u>Kumadori</u> (literally "making shadows")*(2). The two basic colours are crimson and dark blue, but black, terracotta, bronze and gold are also used. Generally speaking red signifies justice or strength, and blue evil of the supernatural. A character with a completely red face is either a superman of some kind or an evil man.

*(1) See plates no. 62,63, page 90.
*(2) See plates no. 55,56, page 86

(65)(66) "<u>Sagimusume</u>"

In this play the <u>Onnagata</u> plays the spirit of white heron. She casts off her white costume, transforms into a beautiful city girl, tells her joys of love, but also tells her sorrow of love. At last, she unmasks herself into a heron and tells her agonies in hell. People in ancient Japan believed that birds descended to hell.

(67)(68) "Sagimusume"

When the white costume was pulled off, there appeared a city girl dressed in gay costume.

(69)(70) "Tenshu Monogatari"

This is a 20th Century play by novelist Kyoka Tsuruya, about a fairy living in the tower of an old castle. The costumes as seen in the plates above have an etheral quality which reflects the theme and mood of the play.

(71) "Tenshu Monogatari"

(72) "<u>Shinpan Utazaimon</u>"

This play depicts the plight of a young well bred girl Osome, who has an affair but her lover is banished from her life. The costume and hair ornaments in this plate show off beautifully the elegance of a well bred girl.

(73)(74) "<u>Shinpan Utazaimon</u>"

Writhing with her longing for her lover, <u>Osome</u> collapses toward a plum tree.

(75)(76) "Kyoganoko Musumedojoji"

This is the story of the beauty of woman's love. For about two centuries since its first performance in 1752, people have grafted onto the dance a variety of their fantasies about women. That is why the woman at one time takes the image of a gay entertainer, at the other a lovelorn innocent girl, a refined courtesan, and a jealous woman. Yet they have something in common; they all depict woman in love, as well as the pleasure, fraility, eroticism, jealousy, pain and solitary despair of love.

(77) Atsuita Karaori robe from the No theatre.

The Kosode was formerly an undergarment, that emerged from beneath layers of voluminous outer robes and was transformed into the early decorated Kimono characteristic of the Edo period. During the Heian period (794-1185) ladies of the court donned twelve layers (juni-hitoe) of Kimono for ceremonial occasions. The actual number might have been more or less - even up to twenty layers weighing eight kilograms. Some roles in Kabuki would require this number and weight of costumes if their character necessitated a costume change on stage.

If a kimono is taken apart it can be resewn into the shape of the one piece of material it originally was. From the most formal to the most casual they all have the same form. It is the wearer who, according to his proficiency creates the form. In the 17th Century the narrow sash worn above the hips was replaced in women's dress by the broad, stiff sash bound beneath the breasts, known as the obi.

"An expression of beauty fastened to a womans back".

Norio Yamanaka (5)

Both the Kimono and obi emphasise the beauty of straight lines when the Kimono is worn, the lines are free falling. One important influence on the obi bow came from Kabuki actors who would appear on stage with their obi tied in a new way. These innovations influenced the ordinary townspeople and many still exist today.

A unique and deep appreciation developed of colours and their combinations in matching and harmonising the colours

of the Kimono. The material, design, and decoration of the Kimono developed along with the development of new weaving and dying techniques. The shape of the Kimono and the way it is worn has undergone changes in response to the changing patterns of living, and the physique of women. The kimono can be described from the way in which the textiles are woven or dyed, though a particular Kimono may incorporate more than one technique. Another way of classifying a Kimono derives from whether they are worn by single or married women and the kind of occasion on which they are worn. Today however the majority of Japanese regard the Kimono as a ceremonial costume to be worn, at most, two or three times a year and for the younger generation the Kimono is little more than a relic of old Japan having no connection with their daily life. Some connoisseurs hang Kimono on a straight-armed hanger to appreciate their design and pattern, just as paintings are hung on the wall to be enjoyed. Contemporary Japanese designers like Issey Miyake and Yohji Yamamoto use the pure unstructured form and beauty of the Kimono as inspiration for thei work.

(78)(79) Inner Scene of Kabuki Theatre

By Kunisada Ichiyosai (1785-1864)

Ukiyoe

There is an interesting comparison between the Ukiyoe wooblock print and the photograph of a contemporary japanese theatre both with a play in progress. In the photograph, one is looking from a side view at two actors on the main and secondary hanamichi delivering speeches. The print shows a full frontal view of the stage.

(80) The facade and entrance to a contemporary <u>Kabuki</u> theatre.

Theatres and Stage Machinery

The use of the word butai, still used of the stage itself, dates from the introduction of bugaku, the ancient court dances. The bugaku stage became standardized as a platform twenty four feet square with a dias eighteen feet square standing on top of it. In medieval times the No stage came into being. The most distinctive difference between it and the old bugaki stage was the addition of a roof, which made it resemble the dancing stage of a shinto Shrine. This was the stage that was to give birth to the Kabuki stage, which would gradually develop into the characteristic Kabuki stage we know today.

Whenever theatrical performances were given in temple or shrine grounds, a square wooden boxlike structure would be set up at the entrance, it was known as yagura, ("tower" or "turret"). It was on top of this yagura that the big drum was beaten to announce the commencement and close of a performance. Originally, the purpose was to provide a place for the Gods to come down to earth so that the performance could be held in their presence. It was adorned with strips of white paper in the manner of a shinto shrine, and a curtain was hung around it to signify that it was the temporary abode of a God. In the early days there was no roof over most of the audience only the stage had shelter. It was not until after Genroku times, in the Kyoko era, that theatres came to have roofs.

In the Edo period, the yagura became a kind of symbol of a

theatre's special priviledge to give performances. Even today, a square boxlike structure, the last vestige of the yagura, stands over the entrance of the Kabuki-za in Tokyo, and the Naka-za in Osaka also makes a similar gesture. In the past, however, the yagura had a vital significance for a theatre, since it was a sign that the theatre had been officially licenced by the magistrate representing the Shogunate. What was known as yagura-Ken ("yagura -right") was in fact the right to give public performances.

The theatre was known in Japanese as Za. The word is still used today in the names of some Tokyo theatres - Kabuki-za, yuraku-za, Haiyu-za - but it is also used in the sense of a company or troupe of actors, one well known example being the Bungaku-za in Tokyo.

Since in the early days of the Kabuki the greater part of the audience sat on the ground, it was customary to spread out carpets or straw mats as protection against the damp. At first, people brought their own, but later the practice arose of hiring out mats half the size of a tatami for people to sit on. A member of the audience who took a strong dislike to a particular actor's performance would sometimes pick up his half-mat and hurl it onto the stage. The expression hanjo oireru ("to throw in half-mats") is used even today in the sense of "to heckle" or "to jeer". There are any number of similar idioms that have come into

everyday conversation from the world of Kabuki - so closely was the Kabuki theatre at one time bound up with the lives of the common people.

The most outstanding characteristics of the Kabuki stage are the hanamichi (literally "flower way") and the revolving stage. Something known as hanamichi had existed from around the early Kabuki, but at this stage it was used, not to permit the entrance and exit of actors through the audience during a performance, but to give the audience itself access to the stage. The "flower" of "flower way" originally signified a gratuity, and referred to gifts of money, presented to an entertainer. The "flower way" was the route members of the audience took in presenting such gifts. The original hanamichi ran from the front of the audience to the centre of the stage. It was after Genroku, at the beginning of the Kyoho era, that the hanamichi began to be used in actual performances and actors first made their exits and entrances along it.*(1)

As the functions of the hanamichi changed, its position gradually shifted from the centre towards the left-hand side of the stage, and to balance it another, narrower hanamichi put in its appearance on the right hand side. This extra hanamichi was known as Kari (temporary) hanamichi, while the original hanamichi was referred to as hon-hanamichi ("main hanamichi"). The use of the twin hanamichi had the effect of making the acting and production much more complex and

*(1) See plates no. 78,79 page 106

before. One typical case of the use of the hanamichi is in a play, "Imoseyama", where the chief male and female characters advance towards the stage along the two hanamichi, exchanging conversation as they go, the hanamichi in this case being intended to represent the two banks of the yoshino river, with the audience in between as the river.

The possibilities of more varied effects were increased still further by two more characteristic features of the Kabuki stage - the revolving stage and the curtain. The revolving stage, a unique product of the Kabuki rivals the hanamichi as one of the twin glories of the Kabuki theatre. The idea that inspired the inventor, Namiki Shozo, was that of showing at the same time two events that occur simultaneously in different places. Its invention had a great effect on the construction of plays.

The No theatre has no curtain and it was the Kabuki that first discovered and exploited its uses. Its whole nature is different from that of the curtain in the theatre of the West, where a drop-curtain is either raised in one piece or else divided in two down the centre and raised in two pieces. The Kabuki curtain is drawn aside horizontally from the left of the stage to the right.

The Kabuki curtain, like western curtains serves the purpose of marking off divisions in time and space, yet it possesses the added characteristic that it is, in itself, an integral part of the performance, one of the "props". It is not

simply a piece of machinery that opens and closes mechanically in response to a bell, but is utilised positively in the production. The opening of the curtain is always accompanied by the beating of the clappers at the side of the stage, which steadily mark its progress, the whole process being timed so that the curtain finally disappears into the wings on precisely the last beat.

There is an intimate relationship in Kabuki between techniques of acting and production on the one hand, and the special nature of the stage machinery and scenery on the other.

(81) Utagawa Kunisada (1786-1864)

The actor Ichikawa Danjuro Vll as a townsman holding a helmet and a suit of armour. Surimono print in the Chester Beatty collection.

(82) Utagawa Kunisada (1785-1864)

Suguwara Denju Tenarai Kagami

(83) Utagawa Toyukuni (1800)

Two actors in male roles.

(84)(85) Toshusai Sharaku (1794)

The actor Ichikawa Ebizo as Takemura Sadaoshin

Ebizo (Ichikawa Danjuro V) was a leading kabuki actor of his time.

(88) Toshusai Sharaku (1794-95)

The Kabuki actor Ichikawa Komazo exhibited at the Great Japan Exhibition 24 October 1981 - 21 February 1982 Royal Academy of Arts.

(87) Utagawa Kuniyoshi

"Ota Sukenaga and the Maiden"

(88) "The defeat of Bankei by Yoshitsune on Gojo Bridge"

(89) Shunkosai Hokushi (active 181o-1830)

The actors Arushi Rikan and Nakamura Shikan.

(90)(91) <u>Shunksoai Hokuei</u>

Scenes from the drama <u>Suikoden</u>. Sheet from a tetraptych 1830.

(92) Katsukawa Shunsho (1726-1792)
"Ehon Butai Ogi"
("picture book of fans for the stage") published in 3 volumes in 1770.

(93) Portrait of the actor Enjaku Jitsukawa in the part of "Danshichi".

Shunsen Natori (1886-1960)

(94) The Actor Sojuro Sawamura in the part of "Reizo Narichira".

Shunsen Natori

(95) Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1798-1861)

Chusin Gishi Komyo Kurabe" Surimono print.

(96)(97) Utagawa Kuniyoshi

"Honcho Kendo Kyaku Den"	Surimono print
"Taiheiki yeiyu den"	Surimono print

(98) (99) <u>Utagawa Kuniyoshi</u>

"<u>Inugawa Sosuke Yoshito</u>" <u>Surimono</u> print

"<u>Shiranami Gonin Otokko</u>" <u>Surimono</u> print

Japanese Theatre Prints

"All the world's a stage
And all the men and women merely players
They have their exits and their entrances
And one man in his time plays many parts".

Shakespeare (6)

The words of the noble bard are very apropos when applied to the world of the Ukiyo-e. The term Ukiyo-e meaning "pictures of the floating world", refers to a school of art which flourished from the mid-17th Century and concluded with the Meiji Restoration in 1868. The "pictures of the floating world" produced by Japanese artists, were the popular art of the land, and thanks to the media of woodblock prints were made available to many. One of the main reasons for the great popularity of Ukiyo-e prints in Japan of the Edo period, (1603-1868), was that they served as a sort of gazette, providing information that the general public was curious to know, such as, how did the actors of Edo compare with those visiting from the old capital of Kyoto ? What costumes did they wear in a certain role? What were the interiors of the theatres like? What was happening in the entertainment district? Who were the most popular Courtesans?

Ukiyo-e played an important role in popular culture. News and gossip were transformed by artists into prints that were quickly and widely distributed to an eager public. Every day many prints were published, one after another, in great

quantities and variations. This was the true spirit of Ukiyo-e woodblock printing.

Art prior to that was intended for but a few - religious orders, groups of wealthy nobles at court, scholarly literati. Ukiyo-e reached out to the lower levels of society - wealthy merchants and middle class tradesmen and eventually down to the man in the street. The tradition of Ukiyo-e is a long one, it is a continuation of the old yamatoe, a purely japanese style of painting which flourished in the heian and kamakura periods. The great picture scrolls which relate the stories of the foundings of temples, romances, historical events and miracles are executed in the yamatoe style. Ukiyo-e is a modern interpretation of the same style. They are representations of the current scene in Tokugawa Japan and as such they serve as an excellent pictorial record of life in the great urban centres.

As the literacy of the middle classes increased, they began to develop sophisticated standards of criticism alongside their taste for an art that was gay, avant-garde and inexpensive. Whether they purchased portraits of famous theatre idols or landscapes of popular tourist spots, discriminating customers expected each print to be exquisitely executed. Competition for society's approval often became heated, and though the demand for Ukiyo-e was prodigious, artists felt compelled to produce prints of the finest quality for fear

that their work would decline in popularity. New editions were often awaited with intense anticipation since they were a valuable indication of what was in Vogue. Women scanned them for the newest styles and fashions, while men looked forward to them for ravishing portrayals of actors or courtesans who had lately captured the public's imagination.

While certain artists drew their inspiration from landscape, or from natural objects such as birds and flowers, the great majority took the popular theatre for their province; also landscape as a subject of illustration only made its appearance during the closing years of Ukiyo-e. Popular art and popular drama were in the closest relationship for nearly the whole period of the former's existance. The close affinity was due to the fact that both arts appealed solely to the masses and both came into existance within about 15 years of one another during the first half of the 17th Century.

The Ukiyo-e school produced the only purely japanese pictorial art and the only graphic record of contemporary japanese life and customs, while the stage presented scenes from the lives of national heroes and historical events, thus proving an all important element in the social education of the masses. Education in this period, for the people at large was of a very primitive nature. Almost the sole aim of the popular theatre, as expressed in innumerable plays, was to impress upon the masses the duty of obedience and

self sacrifice at all costs. On stage the chief actors were idolised by the populace, while their portraits in their favourite characters sold by thousands, and were in as much demand as those of the accomplished courtesans of the Yoshiwara pleasure district. Kabuki was above all, a visual experience, and the lavish costumes, fantastic make-up, and magnificent sets which transfixed its audiences could be effectively captured by the medium of Ukiyo-e.

Three schools are prominent in Ukiyo-e as exponents of the theatrical prints, the Torii, Katsukawa and Utagawa. The theatrical print had its origin in the large posters displayed outside the theatres as advertisements of the plays. Their first appearance at the close of the 17th Century is attributed to Torii, Kiyomoto from Osaka, said to have been both an actor and designer of posters and playbills. No prints by him, however, are in existance today. His was the first of the immense number of theatrical prints which were to exercise the talents of so many successive artists, and which raised the level of actor-potraiture to the position of a permanent subject for the wood engraver, an art which came to be looked upon as the special perogative of the Torii school throughout the whole of its career. For three generations, the Torii school occupied itself chiefly with the liaison between print and stage producing some of the most powerful works in the history of japanese woodcutting.

In the Katsukawa school developed by Katsukawa Shunsho (1726-1793)*(1) the representation of actors and theatrical subjects reached its highest level. Originally a painter of beautiful women in the Ukiyo-e style, Shunsho found his true province in theatrical prints. It was not long before Edo's avid theatre fans came to identify his work on the basis of its unmistakinably unique approach. Whether Shunsho chose to depict an actor performing on stage, or lounging in his dressing room, he would be sure to give him the individual traits and features that set his personality apart from all others. For the first time in history, Kabuki audiences thrilled to the prospect of being able to recognise their idols in a print. Shunsho's bold departure from the traditionally stereotyped representation of actors was regarded with overnight fame.

At the closing years of the 18th Century, there came on the scene an artist who was destined to create a stir in the artist and theatrical world. This individual was Sharaku, himself an actor of the aristicratic No drama. His compositions are generally full figure portraits, shrewd and incisive they reveal a relentless, almost merciless eye for detail. No quirk of behaviour or personal idiosyncracy is left unrecorded and the merest arch of an eyebrow or downward plunge of the mouth is made to convey the elusive substance of the character. Sharaku is a brilliant master

*(1) See plate No. 92 page 123

of innuendo and while some of his prints express a whimsical affection for his subject, most are permeated with a sardonic wit. No other artist took greater advantage of the characteristics of Japanese acting, nor portrayed dramatic emotion with such vehemence as did Sharaku. This vehemence brought down upon him the indignation of the theatre loving population of Edo, angry at seeing their favourites treated with so much malignity, so he was obliged to cease work after but a very few years. His prints are consequently very rare, he is also credited with the invention of the mica print in which powdered mica is applied to a coloured as distinct from a plain background.*(1)

As the last gleams of the "Golden Age" began to fade from the scene of Edo's cultural resurgance, there began to emerge a school of artists whose sudden, powerful wave of productivity would carry the Ukiyo-e print through the 19th Century to its final inevitable decline. The Utagawa school was to become the most prolific in all the Ukiyo-e history. In the Utagawa school founded by Utagawa Toyoharu (1733-1814) we find the greatest number of artists who strove to satisfy the ceaseless demand for theatrical prints and actor portraits.

Toyoharu himself, whose prints are rare, was mainly a designer of figure-studies and landscape, though he painted theatre posters. He was the first Ukiyo-e artist to treat

*(1) See plates No. 84,85,86 pages 118,119

landscape as a subject in itself, and not as a mere setting for figures. He is particularly noted for his successful employment of european perspective, especially in the representation of buildings such as theatre interiors. He evidently learnt perspective from a study of Dutch pictures. One of Toyoharu's chief pupils, Utagawa Toyokuni, became absorbed in Kabuki portraiture. With the advent of Toyokuni came the actor-print wherein actors are depicted otherwise than in character on the stage, in picnics, or in the company of beautiful women.

Though the actors of the popular theatre wore no masks, they frequently painted their faces with red streaks as a substitute in order to enhance the effect of facial expression, while their elaborate and strikingly designed costumes afforded excellent material for colour print artists. It is often the magnificent costumes so peculiarly adapted to the technique of the colour print that form the chief attraction of the colour prints for many. Actor portraits are found full and ¾ length, in character or as head studies only, singly and in pairs. Generally, the name of the actor is given and the character in which he is represented, at other times the only identification is by the mon, or crest on his sleeve.

Prints were also privately commissioned on a limited editions basis by exclusive clubs of poets, artists or scholars. They are called surimono prints, the word Surimono

means "a printed object" and could refer to a text, a picture or both. In time wealthy merchants began to order these prints to commemorate special occasions such as the opening of a new Kabuki drama or the announcing of an actor's change in name, which usually meant a rise in the ranks of a theatre company. The production of Surimono was a collaberation between an artist, a poet and a craftsman. By the beginning of the 19th Century the production of Surimono had become a profession in its own right, the craftsmen calling themselves Surimono-shi or Surimono makers. Many of the full-colour actor portraits designed by artists of the Katsukawa school were probably commissioned by theatre patronage groups and distributed privately to patrons and admirers. *(1)

As the first half of the 19th Century drew to an end, it became increasingly apparent that the collapse of the mighty Tokugawa regime was at hand. The last of the Shoguns struggled to maintain control of an empire torn apart by inner strife and the inexorable pressure of the modern world, a fate it could no longer escape. The gloom and apprehension of these years, inevitably left a scar on the cultural life of Edo, which brought about the slow degeneration of all the arts. It was not long before the Ukiyo-e print began to show signs of stress and deterioration.

However it is in this realm of Ukiyo-e that the two names

*(1) See plates 95-99 incl., pages 125-127 incl.

most universally associated with Japanese art are encountered - Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) and Ichiryusai Hiroshige (1797-1858) the great masters of the landscape print. Both were without question the most important Japanese artists of the 19th Century. Their unerring sense of line, colour and form, produced flawless works that left a deep impression on the art of their contemporaries and even today continue to exert a strong influence on artists around the world.

(100) Geisha chic!

Summary

A new school of modern drama known as the Shimpa movement, began in the late 1880s and 1890s, originally inspired by political ideals, it used traditional Kabuki techniques in order to portray the contemporary Meiji scene. Quite apart from Shimpa however the drama of the west began to be imported under the name of Shingeki ("New Drama") in the closing years of the Meiji era, and had an immediate appeal for intellectuals seeking for a drama more in tune with the new age. All these developments combined to give Kabuki more and more the air of a "classical" drama incapable of further development.

One method that was adopted in Kabuki to counter the tendancy towards rigidity was to present on the Kabuki stage plays written by authors other than the true Kabuki playwrights who were traditionally attached to one or the other of the Kabuki theatres. These plays came to be known collectively as "new Kabuki", they were the first conscious attempts to create a Shakespearean type of drama in Japanese. One actor Ichikawa Sadanji 11 even went so far as to travel to London with a playwright accompanying him, to study western dramatic techniques at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. On his return he applied what he had learned at the Meiji-za theatre, he also revived some of the old dramas. The new ideas abroad in the theatrical world also led to the construction of new theatres. A National Theatre was built in 1965, its aim being the preservation of the

classics, and in particular a revival of the practice of performing Kabuki plays in their entirety rather than in isolated scenes. A review of theatrical history of the world shows that an ancient dramatic art, once its form has been stabilised in a near perfect state, has been capable of surviving the test of time even when its history elements were no longer contemporary. The truth of this statement is borne out by the present state of Kabuki. It does not depict contemporary life in Japan, a country whose whole civilization has undergone a great degree of Westernisation, but it commands a certain popularity. Having said that I come to a very exciting form of contemporary Kabuki theatre, lead by Kabuki actor Ennosuke 111 who has brought Kabuki into the 20th Century with his acrobatics and sensational stagecraft. He is against the tradition of dragging out each play for the sake of "authenticity", believing that this is keeping the audience away in droves. He wants to put Kabuki back in touch with its roots as a popular theatre appealing to the populace.

"The audience has gotten smaller" he frets. "Kabuki" is not a hide-bound, single-style art like Noh, it can't survive playing to tiny houses of devotees. From now on we have to spread Kabuki to both the young Japanese audience and the non-japanese audience. There are some widely interesting things in Kabuki. That's what we've got to show them, then they'll come". Ennosuke 111. See from page 143 for complete article from Japan Pictorial Quarterly Magazine

It is in anticipation of such theatrical spectacles that I would love to experience at first hand the beauty and magic of _Kabuki_. As I have mentioned in my diploma thesis on _Bunraku_, I would hope that my research in the near future would enable me to travel to Japan to experience a live performance of _Kabuki_.

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Notes

(1) "Onnagata" : Tamasaburo Bando, page 2

(2) "Subjects Portrayed in Japanese Prints" : Basil Stewart,
page 4

(3) "Onnagata" : Tamasaburo Bando page 35

(4) "Onnagata" : Tamasaburo Bando page 56

(5) Shakespeare page 129

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