TRADITIONAL DANCES OF JAPAN

RECORDED BY MARY L. EVANS
INTRODUCTORY NOTES BY MARY L. EVANS

SIDE I, Band 1: KASA ODORI
(Kokubu, Tottori Prefecture)

About the end of the Tokugawa Era there was a long draught in these districts. The soil was parched and cracked, and the farm-products were doomed to complete destruction, when an old farmer named Gorosaku thought of praying for rain. He prayed to Gods for three days day and night, dancing with a kasa - an umbrella made of paper and bamboo - in his hand. His supplication was granted, and on the third day rain came down in torrents to the great excitement of the villagers. A dreaded famine was evaded. But Gorosaku was made ill by his excessive toil and died. Since that time the villagers, men and women, young and old, have performed this dance during the Bon Festival period every year to honor the memory of the laudable old farmer. The dance was designated as an Intangible Cultural Asset by the Government in 1952.

This is one of the unique local dances in the country, in which young men wearing white head bands with their sleeves tucked up with tasuki, or a long piece of white cloth, dance, each twirling a 'kasa' with many small bells hanging from its rim. Various songs such as Inaba-ōtsue, Inaba-osobushi, Naniwa-bushi, Gidayu, Yasuki-bushi, Oryokkō-bushi, are sung on the occasion. The dance is very spirited and colorful.

SIDE I, Band 2: SUMIYOSHI ODORI
(Sumiyoshi-cho, Osaka City)

This dance, widely known as 'Kappore', was first played as 'Ujimai' (a dance of a clan) by Sumiyoshi natives, in the presence of Empress Jingū (170-269) who had just come back from an expedition against ancient Korea. The dance was a supplication for peace and good crops. From the end of the Tokugawa Era to the Meiji Era, the players traveled all over Japan, receiving money or food for the performance. And they returned to their home on June 14, when a rice planting ceremony was held at Sumiyoshi Shrine. About 30 years ago when the Empress Dowager Shōken (Emperor Hirohito's grand-mother) visited these districts and worshiped at the Shrine, she had the chance to see the dance performed. Since then it has been danced regularly on the occasion of the rice-planting ceremony, and of other divine services.

Merry are the dances given in honor of the God of Sumiyoshi. Iyahoe!
We pray for the peace of the world, the welfare of our country, and rich harvest,
So long as the heaven and earth endure. The pine trees around the Sumiyoshi Shrine are flourishing,
Just as the country is thriving, with people enjoying their life.

People dance in a circle, wearing white coats, black pleated skirts, white mittens and gaiters; they have on their heads sugekasa (sedge grass sunshades) with several red cloths hanging from their rims, and carry fans in their hands. At the center of the circle a man, with a large long-shafted umbrella in his hand, plays the accompaniment tapping its shaft and beats time singing. The umbrella means a canopy. The shout 'Iyahoe!' is the corrupted form of 'In-yo-ho-ei' ('in' in it means 'passive, negative, darkness, wet, etc., while 'yo' means 'active, positive, light, dry,' etc. 'Ho' means 'rice ears' and 'ei' means 'flourish.' The whole represents their wish that 'in' and 'yo' would be in harmony with each other, thus bringing a rich harvest of rice). The accompaniment 'kappore, kappore' is said to be the emphatic form of 'hore', which literally means 'Dig!' Now the members of the Sumiyoshi-kai (17 children) perform this dance at the garden of the Shrine on occasion. They hop forward once, and back once, beating their fans with each hop.

SIDE I, Band 3: MUGIYA-BUSHI ODORI
(Jo-no-hana, Toyama Prefecture)

In the old era of Juei, the Heike clan, then in all its glory, was defeated in the battles of Kurikara, Yashima and Dan-no-ura. Forlorn and in bitter disappointment they took refuge in Gokayama, a lonely place among the mountains in the Province of Etchu. They learned to use hoes and spades instead of bows and arrows, sowed barley and rape-seeds, grew hemp and worked at looms. The...
fugitives were reluctantly settled there, but in their despairing life they yearned for their past splendor. Sorrow and yearning filling their hearts, a song was born. They sang it with bitter hearts to the sound of the clear water of the Sho river. The song came to be known as 'Mugiya-bushi.'

Every year on the 15th and 16th day of September the 'Mugiya Festival' is celebrated merrily, and the dance is performed all through the night. The melody and the movement are both touching and beautiful, reminding us of the old days of Juei. The dance is designated by the Government as an Intangible Cultural Asset.

The dance is performed by five or seven boys and girls. The boys in kimono with their family crest, tucked up with 'tasuki' and white tabi, or foot-cover, carry a sword half a yard long, and wear 'suge-gasa' (a large hat made of sedge-grass). The song 'Mugiya-bushi' is accompanied with samisen (a three-stringed instrument), kokyu (another three-stringed instrument), shakuhachi (a kind of flute made of bamboo), yotsudake (a simple musical instrument composed of four pieces of bamboo, used in the same way as castanets) and drums. The note is tragic and plaintive especially to those who are familiar with the pathetic legends about the fall of the Heike clan.

Barley and rape can be harvested in the next year. But how can hemp? Abandoning the stormy Yashima, our last foothold, we cast away 'eboshi' and 'kariginu' (a head-gear and garment worn by noblemen in olden times).

We are not only woodcutters among high mountains in Etchu province.

We feel lonely listening to the sound of the stream and the voice of deer.

Let us bring our looms to the riverside, bid the waves weave, and dress up the rocks with the cloth.

SIDE I, Band 4: MEMBURYU
(Mikazuki-mura, Kojo-gun, Saga Prefecture)

About four hundred years ago, at Imayama in these districts Ryuzoji Takanobu of Higo Province who was defeated by the great army of Otomo Sorin of Bungo Province asked Nabeshima Han-emon to help him. Nabeshima had only a small handful of soldiers, but, a man of resources, he ordered his men to disguise themselves in grotesque masks of Oni (Devils) with long hair on them, and then made an onset on the enemy. The enemy was taken by surprise and routed in every direction.
victorious soldiers danced in their disguise to celebrate their well-deserved victory. This is said to be the origin of 'Memburyu.' The dance is usually performed to pray for rain or to offer thanks to God for a bumper crop. It is an Intangible Cultural Asset.

The dance is played by forty or fifty male dancers in devils' masks, white underwear, black happy-coats with the designs of a carpfish swimming up torrents, etc., black gaiters, white tabi, waraji (a kind of straw sandals). The movements of the dance are brisk and active. The drums are beaten by masked men, while the bell is rung by gaily dressed girls with headgears decorated with paper flowers.

The masks have red demon faces and long plumes of hair. Each man beats a drum and dances fiercely, brandishing his limbs.

SIDE I, Band 5: SADO OKESA
(Ebisu-machi, Ryotsu City, Niigata Prefecture)

A legend says that a spinster named Okesa living in Ojya, Niigata, first sang this song while working at a spinning wheel. Another legend has it that 'Hanya' (prostitute, literally 'half-night') first sang it, and a geisha girl by the name of Okesa introduced it to Yedo (now Tokyo) and named the song 'Okesa-bushi.' A third story runs as follows: Long ago a rich family in Niigata met with a declining fortune, and a cat which had been kept in that family changed herself into a girl named Okesa. Then singing a song, she earned a lot of money, and with it saved her master from the distress. Since then her song has been known as 'Okesa-bushi.' We have many other stories concerning the origin of the song. The dance is perhaps the most popular in Japan. The dance and the song have many varieties.

All yearn for Sado; even grasses and trees bend to Sado.

Query! Is the Island nice and cosy to live in?

I dream of the black hair of a maid on the Island. Would I were there to see her.

The wind is blowing through the pine-woods around the old Emperor's tomb in Mano on the Island.

My sleeves wet with my tears get wetter in a drizzling rain.

Niigata is getting duskier in a snow-storm. And no lights are invisible on Sado Island. Is the Island sleeping, I wonder?

SIDE II, Band 1: IWASAKI ONI KEMBAI
(Waga-machi, Waga-gun, Iwate Prefecture)

About one thousand years ago this dance was originally performed by some Buddhist ascetics near Mt. Haguro, Dewa Province. About that time, the dance became popular in the Hiraizumi districts in the south, and the Iwate districts in the north. On the whole the dance is said to keep its ancient form.

Six or eight dancers take part in the dance. They wear four-color masks of Oni (Ogre) with long hairs, and carry swords and folding fans. Music is played with three flutes, one drum and one bell. The performance is grotesque but full of interest.

Namu-amidabutsu, Namu-amidabutsu. (Buddha be praised, Buddha be praised)

Senyōha. Mt. Fuji, the best in the three countries. (The three countries' means India, China and Japan).

Namu-amidabutsu, Namu-amidabutsu.
Sen-yōha, Kimyō Chōraiha, Mt. Fuji.

This dance is very exciting and martial. The men are dressed in black and white and their clothes seem to imitate the pattern of armor. They carry real swords and at one point circle rapidly, holding each other's naked sword blades, then they imitate the dueling of warriors.

SIDE II, Band 2: AWA ODORI
(Showa-chō, Tokushima City, Tokushima Prefecture)

This is one of the best-known folk-dances in the country, and has once been introduced abroad.

Hachisuka Iemasa, the first lord of the Awa clan, defeated the ambition of the Chōsogabes to lord it over the whole Shikoku districts, and in the fifteenth year of the era of Tensho he was awarded the province of Awa for his meritorious act by Toyotomi Hideyoshi. He built a new castle at Tokushima. To celebrate the completion of the castle the townspeople marched into the castle, singing and dancing. Since then the dance has been performed every year for three successive days during the Bon Festival period according to the lunar calendar.

Lord Hachisuka left 'Awa Odori' behind him. Those who join the dance are supposed to be fools. So are the on-lookers.
If I am bound to be called a fool either way, Better dance and be a fool.

If you pass the Great Valley, you'll see nothing but rocks.
If you pass the Bamboo-grass Hills,
You'll see nothing but bamboo-grass,
And boars devouring beans. Scare them away,
'Hōi, hoi, hoi!'

If you dance at all, dance well.
I will take for my wife the girl who dances best.

A dried gourd is not the only thing buoyant.
Buoyant is my heart also.

Look at me dressed up for the Bon Festival.
Whom shall I dance with under the Evening Star?

The bridge over the Yoshino River is long.
But the lines of the dancers are by far the longer.

The cries 'Hōi, hoi, hoi!' and the movement of the dancers are supposed to be the copy of those of boar-scarers around Sasa-yama—the Bamboo-grass Hills.

Since the era of Tempō, various musical instruments, such as samisen, flutes big and small drums, tsuzumi (a kind of drum), and chimes, have been used.

The dance is known by another name of 'Ahō Odori'—Fools' Dance, because of the excessive excitement of the participants.

This was danced by people of all ages, from little children to oldsters. The movements are very simple but very gay. It's still performed annually in the summer; when the whole town dances and is carried away by the excitement of the music. When this was recorded during the festival in Ojaka, the villagers began dancing back stage long before their turn and were quite excited by the time they went on stage.

SIDE II, Band 3: OKUBO ODORI
(Mihara-machi, Hyogo Prefecture)

In the era of Temmei a great famine visited these districts, when a peasant named Saizo living in a village in this region complained to the 'Daikan'—Magistrate—of the distress of the whole village. But he was on that score arrested and executed. The villagers pitied him, and secretly designed a dance in his memory and played it on the anniversary of his death. Kyoun Shonin, a famous Buddhist priest, improved the dance steps and postures. It is performed every year during Bon Festival period. In 1952 it was designated by the Government as an Intangible Cultural Asset.
The dance is very simple, performed to the accompaniment of one big drum. It is divided as follows:

1. Te-odori, literally 'Hand Dance', is also called 'Kakka Odori.' This is a dance of an old style performed clumsily with no special theatrical properties by male dancers in 'yukata' and 'suge-gasa.'
   A part of the song:
   
   The mill on the Yodo River is going round and round,
   Waiting for--whom?
   A girl is expecting the day when she will be back home,
   And she yearns for the clear water of the stream Running through her home village.

2. Tsukue Odori, literally 'Desk Dance' is performed by a male and a female dancer. It represents a scene from the well-known Kabuki drama 'Terakoya'.

3. Kasa Odori is performed by male dancers in kimono with their family crests. Each has three 'kasa', one on his head and the other two in hands.
   A part of the song:
   
   Now, O-tusuji, wife of Yamagata Magojuro, though she had a child born to them, Fell in love with a man called Tojuro. How could she have been stopped?

4. Kusari Odori, literally 'Chain Dance'. The scene is taken from Kabuki 'Hikoza Gongen.'

5. Karakasa Odori, literally 'Sunshade or Umbrella Dance'. The scene is taken from Kabuki 'Sendai Hagi.'

6. Yari Odori, literally 'Spear Dance.' The dance is taken from Kabuki 'Chushingura.'

SIDE II, Band 4: GUJO ODORI
(Hachiman-machi, Gujo-gun, Gifu Prefecture)

About three hundred and fifty years ago Aoyama Yamato-no-kami, who had been the lord of the Miyazu Castle, came to live in the Hachiman Castle here. The new lord was very generous and warm-hearted, and started this dance with a view to promoting friendship and familiarity among his subjects including the samurai rank. At present around Hachiman-machi every year from July till September almost night after night this dance is performed, reaching its climax around the Bon Festival period. Many of the visiting spectators participate in it. In 1956 the dance was designated as an Intangible Cultural Asset.

Many dancers, men and women, sometimes numbering from three thousand to five thousand dance in one circle. The dance has many varieties, but on the whole the movements are rather simple, and so you can learn how to dance it within a few minutes.

When you leave Hachiman-machi, You'll leave it with your sleeves all wet Even when it is not raining.

Moon's wife has eloped, And he calls her name from above the clouds.

The songs have no end; the dance has no end; Nor has this moonlight night.
What we boast of is the grand castle,  
Which reflects itself in the eyes of the ayu-fish.

SIDÉ II, Band 5: MORIOKA STAG DANCE  
(Morioka, Iwate Prefecture)

This dance is performed by men wearing masks with great plumes representing stag horns and carrying drums. Their dancing represents the combat and the mating customs of stags. Musicians play bamboo flutes, samisen, drums, and small gongs.

In the summer many festivals and dances are held in Japan in connection with the O-bon season, when the spirits of the dead are honored and are believed to visit their former homes. The stag dance takes place during this season. The dancers wear a drum, masks, and horns to represent a deer. They dance to the quick tempo of music played on a large drum, a small drum, and a flute. Originally there were eight people, one to represent the leader, so to speak, of the stags (Tayajika), one to represent the female deer (Meijika) and seven to represent the other male deer.

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