This is a recording of Koishimaru Izutsuya (1932–1992), a master of Kawachi Ondo, the little-known genre of epic-based song performed at large Bon Odori festivals popular in the industrial Kawachi plain between Osaka and Nara, Japan. Accompanied by a double-sided taiko drum, a plucked string instrument called the shamisen, and occasional vocal interjections, Izutsuya performs three epic stories in sung verses and dramatic spoken passages. Beautifully recorded in 1991, the timbre and melisma of the singer’s voice and the contrasts between the regular rhythm and melody of the drum and shamisen and their improvised accompaniment during the spoken sections reveal the beauty of a popular art form that continues to evolve in the 21st century. 70 minutes, 16-page notes, full-length epic transcripts in Japanese and English.

This is a previously-unpublished volume of the UNESCO Collection of Traditional Music, which was transferred to the Smithsonian to keep the series publicly available.
1. **Uta Iri Kannon Kyo** (Kannon Sutra in Song) 31:14
   Recorded on June 11, 1991

2. **Hotoke Kuyo Jizo Wasan** (Service for the Buddha: Hymn to Jizo) 17:02
   Original epic text by Koishimaru Izutsuya
   Recorded on June 13, 1991

   Recorded on May 20, 1991
This is a rare recording of Koishimaru Izutsuya (1932–1992), a singer at the forefront of the post-World War II generation that developed the modern Kawachi Ondo, one of a number of forms of popular epic recital still enjoyed today in parts of Japan. The characteristic style of this generation of singers is a fusion of the modernized Hirano Bushi—an ancient style from Kawachi—and the Rokyoku, a form of epic storytelling that is half-spoken and half-sung. From the end of the 19th century onward, the Rokyoku has been performed in variety theaters located in working-class districts, which offered popular musical and theatrical entertainment to locals. Koishimaru Izutsuya became a master of Kawachi Ondo and developed his own unique performance style, which he called Kawachi Rokyoku Ondo. His epic recital proceeds in long melodic sections and is only occasionally interrupted by the customary interjected responses. His vocal register extends from low guttural sounds to entrancing high melismatic singing. His voice moves in long ornamentations around the syllables of the rhyming text. Koishimaru captivates his audience in the magical world of his musical epic recital. He was seriously ill at the time of these recordings in 1991 and died a few months later. Aside from this recording, he left only a single audio cassette of karaoke (Izutsuya Koishimaru: Kawachi Ondo no Sekai [Koishimaru Izutsuya: The world of Kawachi Ondo], Nippon Columbia).

This recording presents three of his epic performances. These notes, first written in 1992 and edited in 1994, 2001, and again in 2013, provide some background on the Kawachi Ondo genre and the context in which it is still enthusiastically performed. For further reading, consult the works in the bibliography.
Kawachi is a plain that stretches between Osaka and Nara. Once a province of Japan, Kawachi was so called because of the many streams that flow in the area (kawa: stream; uchi: within). Today, Kawachi encompasses several cities of the Osaka prefecture, which were founded after World War II: Higashi-Osaka, Yao, Kashiwara, Matsubara, Fujiidera, Kawachi-Nagano, Tondabayashi, and others. The landscape is made up of a jumble of factories, smoking chimneys, expressways, newer settlements, older villages, rice fields, and open land.

Behind this unattractive landscape lurks a remarkable socio-musical phenomenon. Every summer, people from diverse backgrounds turn into resplendent singers who, clothed in kimonos, demonstrate their art on top of high outdoor platforms, while dancers circle around the platforms to the music. It is the time of the “Bon Odori,” the dance of the Bon. “Bon” is the Buddhist memorial day, celebrated annually on August 15th. The dance celebrations are performed in front of temples and shrines, in parking lots, or on school grounds. Although festivities in Japan typically last only three days, in Kawachi they extend from mid-July to mid-September. Kawachi
Ondo, the music to be heard there, rings out simultaneously in hundreds of places on the Kawachi plain.

The present Ondo community, called “community of 100 groups and 1000 singers,” continues to evolve and expand. Younger people learn the Ondo songs from old masters, revitalizing them by arranging older forms of Ondo into newer Ondo tunes. They introduce new instruments, speed up the tempo, and sometimes incorporate rock elements. In this way, the Bon Odori performances transform into a fantastic, free-form dance party.

Ondo

Originally, the word Ondo belonged to the world of Gagaku Music (court music of Japan with Chinese origins); it referred to the director of the ensemble, who, at the start of a performance, initiates a short song that the ensemble members answer in responsorial form. Later, the word became more broadly defined in the realm of traditional music, indicating any folk songs in responsorial form. Not all the Ondos, however, can be simply categorized as folk songs. Some, which may be rooted in folk tradition and point to a responsorial form, are decidedly also related to the Japanese epic storytelling tradition. Kawachi Ondo, a form of Ondo with a strong epic component, is an example and the focus of these introductory notes here.

There are three important characteristics that distinguish Kawachi Ondo, the Ondo of the Kawachi plain, from folk songs. First, Kawachi Ondo is not composed of the simple repetition of a single melodic pattern within a song, but rather uses various melodic patterns, called fushi, within a sung epic story. Second, the Ondo is a type of kudoki rather than nagashi. Kudoki refers to stories, fables, and legends with rhymed verses that are read. By contrast, nagashi refers to the form that is sung. Kawachi Ondo, a kudoki, is read rather than sung, even though it employs a musical structure. Third, while what remains of most folk songs today lasts only a couple of minutes, kudoki, and by extension Kawachi Ondo, reflects the duration of the epic story and can take up to 30 or 40 minutes. Finally, Kawachi
Ondo, in contrast to many folk songs, does not have a fixed text: any text, once rhymed in verse, can be poured into the Ondo’s fushi musical structure. This allows for the epic text-improvisation, and facilitates the incorporation of topics of current interest.

The origins of Kawachi Ondo can be traced to the 18th century, when it was solely performed outside at the Bon Odori festivals. During the second half of the 19th century, the form evolved into a genre which could be performed indoors as well as at outside venues. New texts were set to pre-existing melodic structures, and melodic variations were added to the fushi. Around 1890 the name Kawachi Ondo appeared in Osaka for the first time. Around 1921 the singer Tasaburo Hatsuneya incorporated new stylistic elements into the Kawachi Ondo. He added onomatopoeic syllable “an-, an-” to the last words of each epic sequence, creating the syllabic verse rhyme: 7 7 7 5 . 7 5 . 7 5 7 5. The change allowed smaller sections of fushi to be repeated without a gap in the melody, and lead, without a break, to the next section. Thus the duration of a fushi could be lengthened at will, and the singing attained a new vitality and flexibility that was good for epic narration.

In the post-World War II era, the newly named Kawachi Ondo was mixed with elements of the Rokyoku. Four principal singers moved to the forefront during this period: Mitsusaburo Teppo, Hirosaburo Teppo (same lineage as Mitsusaburo Teppo), Kenji Hatsuneya, and Koishimaru Izutsuya, who is featured on this recording. Together, these four singers created what could be considered the classic style of modern Kawachi Ondo. The masters and their followers employed their own unique fushis, naming them after the creators: Teppo Bushi, Hatsune Bushi, and Koishi Bushi. Izutsuya poetically described the melodic components of his own Koishi Bushi in his opening verses, which could be heard on this recording.

With the folk songs I remembered from the time I loved to sing them when I was young I’ve added a bit of Kawachi Ondo
Mixing in Rokyoku, folk song, and popular songs
To spin the thread of my own song of Koishi Bushi
This post-war *Kawachi Ondo* was more suited for the variety theaters in the city than for the open-air stages. When performed outside, it retained its form, but the tempo increased and the dancers had to adapt their steps to the new rhythm.

**Verse Structure and Performance**

*Kawachi Ondo* is recited in verses in a mixture of Kawachi and Osaka dialects, words and expressions of the ancient epic language, and current Japanese. The fundamental verse structure, indicated here by the number of syllables per line, is: 7 7 5 . 7 5 (similar to traditional haiku poems). The verse sequences are subdivided into a rising and a sinking part between which onomatopoetic interjections are added. These interjections—the *hayashi kotoba* (*hayashi* words)—vary according to the branch of *Ondo*. The verse rhythm of a sequence can vary according to the singer; the interjections of *hayashi* can be reduced or otherwise flexibly altered.

These epic poems have three principal parts: *makura*, the introduction that often incorporates current events (political scandals, baseball news, anecdotes with double meanings, jokes, and so forth); *hondai*, the main text of the epic poem, which usually employs epic stories from the Edo period (1603–1868); and *musubi*, the conclusion. The main text (*hondai*) of the epic traditionally would go on for hours. The modern-day Bon Odori festival performances last about 20 to 30 minutes; these excerpted versions exclude details of the complete epic and often consist of subplots to the central historical plot. This structural progression (*makura, hondai, musubi*) varies according to spontaneous inspiration, as well as the location and date; parts are left out or added. The structural progression of the *Ondo* is newly improvised at every performance.

At the conclusion of his performance at a Bon Odori festival, a singer typically introduces the next singer, announces dates of
the next performances, makes a statement about the present Bon Odori festival and the sponsors, and apologizes for any deficiency in his voice and for the shortage of time to lead the dancers into the actual plot of the epic story. Finally he hands the microphone over to the next singer.

The text of Kawachi Ondo, with few exceptions, derives from various genres of epic storytelling, in particular the Rokyoku. Frequently performed epics include: “The Tale of the 47 Ronin,” “The Slaughter of the Hundred in Yoshiwara” (track 3), “The Samurai Suzuki Mondo,” “The Pilgrim Nareto from Awa,” “The Robber Kinezumi Kichigoro” (a part of this story can be heard on track 1), “The Merchant Kinokuniya Bunzaemon,” and “The Nobleman Shuntokumaru.”

As is typical in this tradition, Koishimaru Izutsuya uses text excerpts from the Rokyoku and adapts them to the verse rhythm of the Ondo, excepting “Hotoke Kuyo Jizo Wasan” (track 2). Very rarely is there “original” text in Ondo. Almost every text is taken from orally transmitted epic stories and legends. The notion of authorship is very loose. The mere adaptation of an existing text is considered “authoring”—an indication of the dynamic nature of this oral tradition. On this recording, only “Hotoke Kuyo Jizo Wasan” (track 2) can be regarded as a Koishimaru Izutsuya “original”: he put it on paper himself and rhymed it to the rhythm of the Kawachi Ondo. To this piece he contributed text as well as some melodic elements from a Buddhist song in memory of children who have died. The other pieces are adapted from Rokyoku pieces made famous by the interpretations of Rokyoku singers like Hiroshi Mikado (famous for singing “Uta Iri Kannon Kyo”) and Yonewaka Suzuki (known for his rendition of “Yoshiwara Hyaku Nin Giri”).

The musical instruments have changed somewhat over the years. Traditionally, only a taiko (Japanese two-sided drum) and responsorial vocal interjections (hayashi) accompanied the Ondo singer. At the beginning of the 20th century, a shamisen (a three-stringed, long-necked lute that is struck with a plectrum) was added; at the end of the 1960s, the electric guitar became part of the performance. The standard instrumental configuration of the Ondo now is the taiko, the shamisen, and
the electric guitar. The hand clapping of the dancers adds to the overall acoustic ensemble. Originally, the dancers shouted out responsorial interjections (hayashi) to enliven and engage the audience during the performance. Since World War II, however, as a result of the acoustic imbalance created by the use of microphones, the amplified musicians now perform the hayashi interjections rather than the dancers. In the 1970s and ’80s, additional instruments not traditionally Japanese have been added to the accompanying ensemble, including bongos, maracas, a percussion set, rhythm machine, piano, synthesizer, and others, depending on the context.

Social Context

*Kawachi Ondo* has been orally transmitted over generations from master to disciple. The name of the master is transferred to the chosen follower at a ceremony. Nowadays it is not uncommon to see names that end with “ninth-” or “tenth generation.” Koishimaru Izutsuya is a second-generation disciple, although this is not clearly expressed in the name: “Ko-Ishimaru” means “Little Ishimaru,” therefore the successor of Ishimaru Izutsuya.

The *Ondo* singers are, with few exceptions, not professionals. Almost all of them have other occupations during the rest of the year. Every week they rehearse the *Ondo* in garages, small factories, communal practice rooms, or parks. There is little publicity about the location and dates of the group performances at the Bon Odori festivals. The mass media pays little attention to this underground traditional culture. It is worth noting that the rapid development of the Kawachi suburbs presents a threat to the availability of rehearsal and performance spaces, and consequently, the number of Bon Odori performances is decreasing every year.
There are two other significant points related to the social context. First, the Kawachi plain is notorious for the visible presence of members of Japan’s organized crime syndicates. According to the local people, they were until recently a common sight at the Bon Odori festivals, and one can still see them here and there, strutting around with their tattoos exposed.

A novel entitled Akumyo (The Cursed Name), written in the 1960s by the author Toko Kon, contributed to the legend of the thugs and gangsters of Kawachi. Toko Kon depicted the godfather Asakichi Oyabun—a man who lived in the middle of the 20th century—against the backdrop of Kawachi dialect, cock fights, gambling, street quarrels, and Bon Odori festivals with their celebrated Ondo singers. The novel was immediately made into a film that met with success, and it brought the raw reality of the cursed hero and Ondo singers into the mainstream consciousness.

As an Ondo singer, Koishimaru Izutsuya identifies with the character Kinezumi Kichigoro, a thief of the Edo period (1603–1868), who put the profit from his robberies to good use by helping the poor. Izutsuya tells this story on track 1. In 1991, he organized a charity concert and gave the profits to the local authority of the suburban city of Yao in the Osaka Prefecture.

Second, inhabitants of Kawachi are primarily members of socially and economically disadvantaged and marginalized communities living in villages apart from mainstream society. They are commonly associated with the world of Kawachi Ondo. This may explain why, combined with the organized crime syndicates scene, the Kawachi Ondo has been, and continues to be, ostracized by both the media and the mainstream cultural milieu. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to make an exclusive link between the marginalized social and economic status of Kawachi inhabitants and the
Kawachi Ondo musical form at large, the latter belonging to the broader tradition of Ondo, whose roots can be found in diverse contexts all over Japan.

Ondo Perspectives

For the first time after the golden years of the post-war star Mitsusaburo Teppo, a young figure, Kikusuimaru Kawachiya, has made his way into the media and onto the international stage. The young artist sings in the shinmon yomi, or “newspaper-reading style,” incorporating into his performances current events and political scandals, such as the controversial “Recruit Scandal” (Rikuruto Sukyandaru) of 1989. And for the first time an Ondo singer is represented by an artist manager, thus entering into the world of mainstream, commercial music. As a result, the peculiar, husky voice of the traditional Ondo singer is gradually being replaced by a “prettier” voice that appeals to a wider audience targeted through the mainstream media and mass advertising. In this way, the Ondo is becoming “just another song,” losing the characteristics that traditionally defined the genre.

Only the future will tell whether Kawachi Ondo will develop in the direction of commercialization and musical generalization, or whether newer impulses from its own powerful roots will enable Kawachi Ondo to continue to evolve within its own realm.

Notes on the Recording Technique

I chose to record in a situation somewhat similar to the live context in which the musicians perform during the annual Bon Odori festivals. In this recording, they perform in the traditional style without an audience or accompanying dancers. The
pieces were recorded several times, each in one take, on April 11–13 and May 20–21, 1991. The microphones for the “spatial” stereo master recording were situated in the middle of the hall, where the audience would normally be. The sound sources of the singer, shamisen, and hayashi (responsorial vocal interjections) were taken respectively by microphones and transmitted through the mixing board to the acoustic space of the hall, where they sounded through the PA speakers system. Only the taiko (drum) was played without any amplification or microphone. It was placed a little bit apart on the stage to avoid dominating the microphones of the other musicians.

The complete acoustic image for the master recording was captured by the two master microphones situated in the middle of the hall. This recording can be described as a “real stereo” recording, as opposed to a “pseudo stereo recording,” which would make use of the intermediate stage of a multi-mono-channel recording (“directed monophony”). With this technique, I intended to capture in its entirety the space-specific and group-specific acoustic image, including the ambient space reverberation.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


Emmanuelle Loubet is currently visiting professor and researcher at the Osaka University of Economics and Law (2013–present). Passionate about sounds, environment, art, and new technologies, she was a DAAD fellow (1981–1982) and conducted post-graduate research in Communication Sciences at Technische Universität Berlin (1981–1985). She holds a doctorate in Musicology from Université Paris-Sorbonne (1985). She moved to Tokyo in 1986 and began conducting research on Japanese contemporary and electronic music and the modern soundscape. In 1989, she made her first visit to the villages in Kawachi, where she started producing documentaries, radio dramas, and acoustic art inspired by the local culture, mostly for German public broadcasters like WDR, HR, and SWF. She also holds a professional certificate in web development from Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers, France.

Musicians

Koishimaru Izutsuya, epic singer; Ishihiro Izutsuya, shamisen; Ishiwaka Izutsuya and Shiro Mitsuneya, taiko (alternating); Milky Sisters (Hitomi and Miyuki), hayashi

Credits

Produced by Emmanuelle Loubet
Recorded, mixed, and mastered by Takafumi Umezaki
Recorded at Silky Hall, Yao, Osaka Prefecture, April 11–13 and May 20–21, 1991
Sound production supervised by Emmanuelle Loubet
Annotated by Emmanuelle Loubet
Japanese transcriptions of epics by Mitsuhiko Ueda
Japanese-English translations of epics by Akira Marc Oshima
Photos by Mitsuhiko Ueda
Executive producers: Daniel E. Sheehy and D. A. Sonneborn
Production managed by Joan Hua and Mary Monseur
Editorial assistance by Anthony Seeger and Joan Hua
Design and layout by Anna Bitskaya
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Additional Smithsonian Folkways staff: Richard James Burgess, director of marketing and sales; Betty Derbyshire, director of financial operations; Laura Dion, sales and marketing; Toby Dodds, technology director; Claudia Foronda, customer service; Henri Goodson, financial assistant; Will Griffin, sales and marketing; Meredith Holmgren, web production specialist; David Horgan, online marketing specialist; Helen Lindsay, customer service; Keisha Martin, manufacturing coordinator; Margot Nassau, licensing and royalties; Jeff Place, archivist; Pete Reiniger, sound production supervisor; Ronnie Simpkins, audio specialist; John Smith, sales and marketing; Stephanie Smith, archivist; Sandy Wang, web designer; Jonathan Wright, fulfillment.

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immense variety of music-making and of the position music holds within cultures around the globe. Between the late 1980s and 2003, 115 albums were issued on CD but went out of print in 2005. In 2010 UNESCO and Smithsonian Folkways Recordings forged an agreement to make the UNESCO Collection of Traditional Music available to the general public again. In addition to the previously released titles, 15 never-released albums will also be available as digital downloads and on-demand physical CDs.

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EPIC TRANSCRIPTS

Track 1 Uta Iri Kannon Kyo (Kannon Sutra in Song)

(E— n)³
Well, to all of you here in this hall
I've just slipped out here
And as you hear, my voice isn't so good (yoho— hoi hoi)²
(a— enyakorase— dokkoise)
I'm not just trying to please you but
With the folk songs I remembered from the time I loved to sing them when I was young
I've added a bit of Kawachi Ondo
Mixing in Rokyoku, folk song, and popular songs
To spin the thread of my own song of Koishi Bushi
I squeeze out this voice that I don't really have
And will sing with all my might
(sora— yo—i tokosassano yoi ya— sassa)

(E— n)
Even someone whose is fated to live in the water trade
Who naps after a night of heavy drinking
Will wake, only to want a drink of water
There is a snatch of shamisen music echoing over the water
A song of lovers who have washed away their scandals by jumping into the big river
When rain falls, the water of the river clouds up
Still, they always call it the Sumida River [“Clear River”]
(sora— yo—i tokosassano yoi ya— sassa)
A bridge extends far across the Sumida River linking two countries
The flower Musashi plain on one side and the country of Shimosa on the other
Ryogoku Bridge, the bridge of two countries, ties them together
Across the bridge from Edo is the Eko-in Temple
Here the gallant thief Nezumi Kozo has his grave
Perhaps praying for prosperity in business, the stream of visitors never ends
Burning incense and making prayers of a hundred rounds

¹ The singer typically makes this onomatopoeic sound to begin a Kawachi Ondo verse. Since it is characteristic of Kawachi Ondo, it serves to differentiate the piece from Rokyoku—the half-spoken, half-sung storytelling form from which the epic texts are derived.
² These are hayashi kotoba (onomatopoetic interjections) sung by the soloist, which are then answered by the accompanying singers.
Circling the grave a hundred times barefoot or in clogs that clatter as they walk
(sora— yo—i tokosassano yoi ya— sassa)
In the distance, the flames flicker
Over there is Kototoi Bridge, here by the river (yoho— hoi hoi)
(a— enyakorase— dokkoise)

[speech]
"Hail to the Amidha Buddha. Namu Amida Butsu, Namu Amida Butsu."
"Hey, old man, you’re really going at it. What do you plan to do with all those stones in your sleeves? You planning to become a dozaemon [a floating corpse]? Hey you, old man!"
"Don’t stop me. I have to die."
"Who said they were stopping you? Who could stop you when you’re in that state? But the river’s deep here and it’s just the time of high tide, old man. If you’re going to jump in, do it big and make the biggest splash you can. Having trouble? Want me to help you?"
"It’s inhuman to be so cold."
"Don’t make me laugh. If I was really inhuman, I wouldn’t have stopped to talk. If I didn’t feel some concern, I would have walked right on by, old man. Now there’s no rush, is there? Old man, your ears are still all right, aren’t they? Listen to that song coming from over there."

The old man looks in the direction that he points.
There is the quiet flow of the great Sumida River (yoho— hoi hoi)
(a— enyakorase— dokkoise)

There a man poles a shuttered pleasure boat on its accustomed course along the river
Inside a geisha strums a shamisen
She raises her voice to the sound of the three strings
“You are too cruel. It’s too cowardly
Don’t be so short-sighted
If you die, will flowers blossom and fruit ever appear?
I beg you, reconsider once more
Endure, (a an an an) won’t you (an aan)³?”

[speech]
“How about it old man? Listen to the words of that song. It’s a terrible waste to throw away one’s life, isn’t it? If there’s some reason you absolutely have to die, tell me about it. There’s not much I can do, but at least it will make you feel a little better."

³ The drawn-out syllables are part of a melodic pattern used at climactic moments.
To a little eating place at the foot of the bridge
He leads the old man
And listens to his story from beginning to end
The old man comes from Shirai in Oshu, the far northeast country, from Kosuga Village
He is a farmer named Jimbei
He carried the yearly taxes for the entire village, fifty gold coins in all
And came to Edo

[speech]
“I was robbed! I was robbed! When I got to the inn I hardly slept a wink. But even so, when I looked, the fifty gold coins were gone and I was left without a cent. What a disaster! What could I do? I thought and thought, but death was the only answer. If I don’t deliver these fifty gold coins to the lord in Edo, the entire village of Kosuga will suffer. I could apologize forever and still never be able to go home. The only solution is death. The only way is to throw myself into the river . . . isn’t it?”
“So that’s what happened. You really are in a tough situation. Fifty gold coins! I seem to have run into a very expensive suicide. Old man, I could give you two or three gold coins, but fifty . . . that’s an awful lot. But if you don’t have those fifty gold coins, who knows how the people of your village will suffer. Now I know why you’re going to the other world. Maybe there is nothing else to do.
Listen old man, take this purse. Inside is fifty gold coins. Here are five gold coins for the road. Fifty-five gold pieces in all. Here. Take it and go.”
“Ehhh!”
“Don’t make such funny sounds.”
“You’ll give me that money?”
“Yeah. Now with that much, you should have nothing to complain about.”
“Thank you, thank you. Master, what is your name?”
“My name, why do you want to know my name?”
“You saved my life. At least let me know your name.”
“Don’t be shocked.”
“Is it that surprising a name?”
“Yeah. I’m one of the forty-two wanted men with warrants issued personally by Edo’s wise judge Ooka, Lord of Echizen.4 I’m Kinezumi Kichigoro, the gold-plated thief.”
“Master, you are a thief?!”
“Shh, keep your voice down.”
“You are a thief. Thank you for your help, but I will have to return this money.”

4 Ooka Echizen no Kami is a legendary magistrate and his exploits appear in Kodan stories, popular fiction, and even on television today. The title “Lord of Echizen” is one of the honors bestowed by the Tokugawa government and was an empty title, having little or nothing to do with the Echizen area.
“So you changed your mind after you heard my name?”
“Thank you, but the punishment for receiving so much money and getting involved with a thief is too frightening.”
“That’s no laughing matter. The burden of my crimes that I have to carry is almost more than I can bear. Go ahead. I won’t ask for anything in return. Go and take that money.”
“Thank you. Your help is like meeting a saint in hell. Thank you. Thank you.”
“Does that make you happy, old man? It makes me feel good too. Ah, what a beautiful moon out there tonight. It even looks good through the window. Old man, just take a look at that fine moon, Hey, what’s wrong? You’re crying. You shouldn’t cry. That will cloud over this rare moon. You know, I didn’t become a criminal because I wanted to. I didn’t want to end up with a criminal record. But I’ve always lived on life’s back alleys. I don’t even know my mother’s face. A solitary man without parent or child. It’s not easy being a yakuza. Old man, I didn’t give you money to try to force you to do this for me, but there is just one favor that I would like to ask of you.”

This year, I am at that unlucky age that everyone fears
I won’t be able to avoid an evil fate (yoho— hoi hoi)
(a— enyakorase— dokkoise)

My legs will never be enough to help me run away from my punishment
After my judgment is passed then
Three feet of earth, three feet of wood
Six feet high, I will be given my end
That’s all that is left at the end of evil
“Let’s do him the favor of laughing at him.” So the crowd will show their contempt
I won’t be able to escape the executioner’s spear
(sora— yo—i tokosassano yoi ya— sassa)
If Edo’s Kinezumi Kichigoro is executed
And you get word of this out in the north country
If you hear that, then
Not in return for today’s favor
But only if you think I’m worthy of pity
Burn some incense for me, even a broken stick will do
And offer even a single branch of dried funeral leaves
Say a prayer for me, will you, old man
Now even the sound of the wind rattling the shutters
Fills me with terror as I think that the police have finally come
As this long-time criminal confesses his torment
Speaking from the heart in tears
Jimbei listens to all this (an aan an aan a—n an aan) and begins to weep
Jimbei, who just accomplished a critical mission in Edo
Watches as though he is in a dream
He goes back, back to the north country
Back to Kosuga Village in Shiraishi
Every day in his heart he prays
He prays for the criminal that saved his life
He prays that if he is arrested at least he will escape execution
Jimbei goes to his temple for advice
The priest listens to his story from beginning to end

[speech]
“Jimbei, thank you for telling me all this. When Nichiren, the great founder of our faith was imprisoned at Yui-ga-hama, he recited a precious sutra, this sutra to the merciful Kannon. Due to the power of this sutra, the life of our founder was saved. I will teach you this sutra, so chant it with all of your might. Chant for the sake of your benefactor, Kinezumi Kichigoro.”
“Thank you, thank you. Old woman, old woman, together will we chant as hard as we can. Thank you.”

Jimbei and his wife leave the temple
“Mama, you mustn’t forget these words
The words of the Kannon sutra the priest just taught us
Sing for the sake of the saver of our lives
I’ll sing the first half
You join in and help with the second half”
So instructed, the old woman laughs
“Papa, listen to me
I may be as wrinkled as a pickled plum now
But when I was a girl, I had the prettiest voice in the village
At the time of the Bon Odori
I stood on the center platform with all the young men to lead the singing for the dance
Papa, I won’t let you get the better of me
So sing and try your best.”

[speech]
“Old woman, stop talking such nonsense.”
Jimbei steps forward
And raises his raspy voice in song
“Nenpi Kannonbi Tojin”
As he starts to sing, the old women
Opens her mouth wide, and exposes her blackened teeth, thrusting out her jaw resolutely as she sings
“Tojin Dandanne”

[speech]
“That’s it, keep it up, Mama!”

Jimbei and his wife sing with all their might
Singing as they walk about
The young men of the village watch them as they sing

[speech]
“Moju”
“What is it, Jiro?”
“What is it that old Jimbei is singing?”
“That song? I don’t know.”
“I know, old man Jimbei went to Edo a while back. It must be the latest song from the big city. Let’s copy him.”

Not knowing that it is a song for the Kannon
Thinking that it must be a popular song from Edo
One after another, everyone copied it
Finally, everyone in the entire north country
Went around singing the Kannon sutra
It even became a song for babysitters with their little charges on their backs
A lullaby to put the babies to sleep
“Don’t cry, it’s all right. Go to sleep. Baby, where has your mother gone? Gone beyond the mountains, gone to her home. What presents will she bring you? A toy drum and bamboo flute. What sounds do they make? (an aan an an)
Try blowing the flute. See, it made a sound! How wonderful. Nenpi Kannonbi Tojin.”

The song is a well-known lullaby.
(sora— yo—i tokosassano yoi ya— sassa)

(E— n)
In heaven and hell, no matter what tricks you use
There is no example that has prospered from evil
Even for a virtuous thief like Kinezumi
The time came when he
Had to pay for his crimes
He sat on the white gravel of the magistrate’s court
The Lord of Echizen himself presided

[speech]
“Are you Kinezumi Kichigoro? I am the Lord of Echizen. Lift up your face.”
“Haa—”
“Kichigoro, you cannot escape the punishment for your many crimes. However, something
strange has happened. The seal on the document listing your crimes has disappeared. By
law, if the document is not marked with a seal properly, the accused is to be released im-
mEDIATELY. All it needs is my approval. How about it? Will you repent? It is a shame for such
a fine man to be a thief. What do you say?”
“Yes I will, magistrate. For the first time in my life, I have truly learned what human kind-
ness is. I, Kinezumi Kichigoro, will repent as of this day.”
“Kichigoro, what a fortunate event. How fortunate indeed. Look at that blue sky. It is clearer
and more beautiful than ever, as though to celebrate this event.”

Repenting his former crimes, Kichigoro changes his name to the priestly name Sainen
Shaves his head and enters the way of the Buddha
He travels from province to province
Wandering on a never-ending pilgrimage
The months and years pass, how many days of frost and stars
Finally he reaches the northern country
And comes to Kosuga Village in Shiraishi
He meets Jimbei again, the farmer whose life he saved
As they say
If there is hidden virtue, it will be publically rewarded
And this story is remembered for ages
As a prayer to the Jizo for averting misfortune
Who is honored with never-ending offerings of incense and flowers
So the story has been handed down
A hymn to human kindness
Known as “A Sutra to the Kannon in Song”
With your help I’ve been able to sing the whole story
There must have been moments difficult to listen to
As it lasted so long. But you listened without tiring
And I thank you for your kindness
And here, say farewell to you all
(sora— yo—i tokosassano yoi ya— sassa)
Track 2 Hotoke Kuyo Jizo Wasan (Service for the Buddha: Hymn to Jizo)

by Izutsuya Koishimaru

(E— n)
Well before all of you here in the hall I’ve appeared
And as you can hear, my voice is not so good (yoho— hoi hoi)
(a— enyakorase— dokkoise)
I’m not singing just to please
With the songs I’ve loved since childhood
A string of Kawachi Ondo
Woven together with Rokyoku, folk song, and popular song to make Koishi Bushi
I squeeze out this raspy old voice
And sing with all my might
(sora— yo—i tokosassano yoi ya— sassa)

(E— n)
Blossoms are but illusions
And fruits are only dreams
Which will fall; what will make them scatter?
As the saying goes, meeting is but the beginning of parting
The flow of time never stops
And a heart must always live embracing sadness
The Buddha was once but a man
When we die, we shall all become Buddhas¹
Our beings all have the nature of Buddha within us
To separate from ourselves is sad indeed
Although I am not worthy, I, Izutsuya Koishimaru
Will pray for the lives of men
In a song I’ve woven together
Like singing a hymn to Jizo
I will sing with all my might
(sora— yo—i tokosassano yoi ya— sassa)

(E— n)
Although there are many prayers to the Buddha
At the temple of my long-ago ancestors
I clasp my hands morning and night (yoho— hoi hoi)

¹ In Japanese, a dead person is often referred to as hotoke (Buddha).
(a— enyakorase— dokkoise)
Safety and security in the home
Although one prays for it, in this world
A wind of impermanence always comes beckoning
And some go to travel in the land of the dead
There are those who lose father and mother to illness
A child may die in an accident
Although one sends him off with the most caring funerals
Emotions gather when one remembers him
Making one feel as though one’s chest would split
(sora— yo—i tokosassano yoi ya— sassa)
Good fortune and bad are nothing but two sides of the same thin sheet of paper
A parent’s momentary inattentiveness invites misfortune
Through the gap of the heart’s carelessness
Comes an accident that lasts but an instant
The accidents of traffic and war surround us always
Too cruel to look at, the figure of my child
There is no way to treat him
Quietly he breathed his last
(sora— yo—i tokosassano yoi ya— sassa)

(E— n)
Daily, every day, what fills my mind
Are thoughts of my dear child
I wonder why he had to die as I face the Buddhist altar
Looking at his picture, speaking to myself
The cry of neighboring children playing
How like my child’s voice, the sounds outside
When I hear them, unbidden, tears run down my cheeks

(E— n)
Every seventh day, every seventh day, full of memories
I light a candle and burn incense (yoho— hoi hoi)
(a— enyakorase— dokkoise)
My chest chokes up at the hymn
The hymn to Jizo
This tale is not of this world
It tells of the mountain road of the dead
At its foot is the sand of the river of the dead
Every time I hear it this song, I am filled with sadness
Two, three, four, five
Infants not even ten
Gather on the riverbed in the land of the dead
Loving for their fathers; longing for their mothers
In love and longing, their crying voices
Are not like the voices of this world
Their sadness pierces one to the bone
What those little children do
Is to gather stones from the riverbed
Piling them up to make memorial towers
The first stone is for the sake of one’s father
The second stone is for the sake of the mother
The third stone is for those in my homeland

My brothers who mourn me
Even though the child plays alone in the day
When the sun goes down
The demons of hell appear
The demons of hell appear
A mother sings and suddenly breaks off here
With a wail, she collapses in tears
Crying out her child’s name uncontrollably
In the dark room there is no answer
The flickering candles weep
The flames of the memorial lights weep

Kimyo chorai[2] Kurodani’s great teacher Enko said
A human life is but fifty years
They are like flowers
Human beings are more fragile than dew on the morning glory
Why do you not pray for salvation?
Even if one lingers in this floating world
Even if one follows one’s heart of pleasure

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2 The song describing children piling up stones on the riverbed in the land of the dead is a well-known counting song.
3 Kimyo chorai is a common beginning to a prayer or sutra reading.
Old and young, wife and child  
Sooner or later all will go; this is the way of the world  
The cherry blossoms and colored autumn leaves last but for an instant  
Ten, fifteen buds and flowers  
Nineteen, twenty, the flourishing of these plants  
Even people blessed with home and family  
Rest on their pillows at evening for an instant  
And then are gone  
(sora— yo—i tokosassano yoi ya— sassa)  
A young child who smiles in the morning  
May become smoke by evening  
How sadly transient we all are  
Day by day, the mortal world grows more and more distant  
Year by year, dying grows closer  
Today this may be someone else’s suffering  
But tomorrow this will become one’s own suffering  
Thinking about this, for all people, parent, brother, husband, and wife  
For all those who go before, I pray in memory  
Praying to the Amidha Buddha in full faith  
How precious the Amidha Buddha is  
Namu Amida Butsu, -mida Butsu  
So praying, giving comforting funeral prayers  
All those people to whom I am linked  
Go onto the petals of the lotus  
And they are embraced by the merciful Kannon  
Gaining Buddhahood  
Praying for their salvation is for my sake as well  
Observing funeral remembrances is the way of human beings  
Let us comfort their souls  
Let us pray to the Buddha to comfort their souls  
(sora— yo—i tokosassano yoi ya— sassa)
Track 3 Okon Koroshi (The Killing of Okon)
from Yoshiwara Hyaku Nin Giri (The Slaughter of the Hundred in Yoshiwara)

(E— n)
In the west is Mt. Fuji; in the east is Mt. Tsukuba
Mt. Fuji and Mt. Tsukuba; between these two mountains
Is what is called the capital of the east
Above it is the Arakawa River Flowing down to Shinagawa
In the offing are birds called seagulls everywhere else
But if they fly and glide here, even the names of birds change
Here they are called “capital birds”¹
(sora— yo—i tokosassano yoi ya— sassa)

(E— n)
The time was the Kyoho period [1716–1736], the sixth year of that era
The fifth day of the fifth month, the night of the monthly festival
On that night, a hundred people were killed²
Another time. We are now on the 27th-to-last day of the year
A man leaves Edo behind him
Traveling down the Nakasendo road to the Todogawa riverbank
He arrived. This man
Was named Sanoya Jirobei
(sora— yo—i tokosassano yoi ya— sassa)

[speech]
Suddenly a solitary beggar appeared, aged 40 and 5 or 6. The hair hanging loose, that is, what was left of it; the nose having fallen off. On the left hand, two fingers were gone, leaving three. On the right hand, the three middle fingers were gone, leaving two. Put together, the two hands had five fingers between them. These two hands were placed respectfully on the ground in front as the beggar bowed.

¹ This is a reference to an episode in the 10th-century poem, “The Tales of Ise,” in which the poet Ariwara no Narihira is exiled to the east and encounters seagulls called miyako dori, or “birds of the imperial capital in Kyoto.” Narihira recites a poem asking the birds to tell him if his lover back in the capital is still alive. The poem is also used in the Noh play Sumida Gawa, which is about a mother driven mad with grief as she searches for her son. Not only is the theme of lost loved ones relevant to this piece, but later, the handsome young Jirozaemon—who conducted the massacre—is compared with Narihira, one of the most celebrated lovers of his time.

² The story of Sanoya Jirozaemon killing large numbers of people in the pleasure quarters is an old folk tale that also appeared in several kabuki plays, of which the latest, Kagotsurube Sato no Eizame (1886), is the most well-known. The story of Sanoya Jirobei (Jirozaemon’s father) murdering his former wife Okon forms the preluding background of the most famous scenes of this play.
‘I beg for your kindness to grant me a copper. Illness has brought me to this sad state.’
‘How awful. Are you man or woman?’
‘I am a woman. Once I made small birds in spring cry out in song at my beauty.’
‘Well, well. This is not much but go ahead and take it.’
‘Thank you. You have saved my life.’
As she looks up, face meets face
‘It’s Jirobei, it’s Jirobei, it’s Jirobei. Jirobei, it’s you!’

How could you have deceived me so
We are related as husband and wife
I am what is left of Edo-bushi Okon
The samurai supervisor of Sendai in the remote northeast country
Inoue Sukezaemon, kept me as his mistress
In a fine house with a wooden fence with tall pines that could be seen from the outside
I lived without the slightest desires
But I dropped my ornamental comb
And you picked it up and returned it; that was the beginning
After that, you and I
Were pulled together like the ropes on the fishing nets at Akogi bay
Time and time again you came visiting
After a while, my benefactor heard about it
Together we should have become rust on his sword
But instead, the master was kind and generous
And let me go with the gift of thirty gold pieces
Giving me leave, once and for all
After that, you and I
Lived together openly as husband and wife
What is more, in Akasaka, in Denmacho
We had a home that was the envy of all
How happy I was, but it was so brief
From what evil karma, I do not know
On my face and head, blisters grew
Soon no one could look at my face
Our deep love of three years vanished in an instant
Fading as the cherry blossoms in spring
(sora— yo—i tokosassano yoi ya— sassa)
You abandoned me and disappeared
Due to my illness
To this day, how much I have suffered
How I hated you
(sora—yo—i tokosassano yoi ya—sassa)
Okon, Okon listen to me
I did not leave you because I lost my love for you
I had things to stake my future on
I too struggled and suffered
But my suffering bore fruit
Now I have become a man
Okon, I will never make you worry again
I will take you home with me
Once more we will be husband and wife
He speaks sweetly and Okon responds

[speech]
"Is that true Jirobei? I am ashamed to have hated you for so long."
As her eyes cloud over with tears of joy, Jirobei looks all around. In the distance a temple bell tolls six times. Evening falls and the shadows gather ominously. The place is none other than the lonely Todogawa riverbank. He watches intently for Okon to let down her guard. Without a word he comes from behind. He aims at Okon and strikes. Okon staggers under the unexpected blow. With a splash she falls over backwards into the Toda River. As she tries to crawl out of the river, Jirobei twists back and slashes her shoulder.
"You have deceived me again. Now are you going to kill me? How I hate you. How I hate you Jirobei."
Her face is a terrifying mask of pure hatred. Jirobei turns his face away.

I did not kill you out of hate
Since parting from you
I have a new wife. Between us
We have had a child, a fine son
Next march, there is to be a wedding
The date is already set
How could I bring you home and say that you were my former wife
How could I do that and go against all the morals of the social world
(sora—yo—i tokosassano yoi ya—sassa)
All of this came as punishment for sins in a former life
Resign to your fate
And find salvation. May your soul not be lost in darkness
He wipes the blood from his sword and slips it back into its sheath
And Jirobei flees that place, aiming at the river crossing

“Chobei! Boatman, boatman, Chobei!”
“Who is it?”
“It’s me, Sanoya.”
“Oh, Master Sanoya. My goodness, you look pale!”
“It’s nothing! It’s . . . it’s nothing. Take me to the opposite bank. Quickly!”
“Yes, yes. Please get into the boat. Watch out! Be careful, don’t get in so roughly. Remember, as they say . . . there is only a thin boat bottom between you and the hell below. Careful as you board. We’re off. Master, that’s a nice breeze, isn’t it?”
“Blow river wind; roll up the blind on that pleasure boat. Let me see the customer inside.”
So he sings (an aan a—in an aan) and begins rowing

The stage turns, revolving creakily, and the scene changes.
How terrifying the power of human hatred is
The sins of the fathers are visited on the sons
Once the handsomest man in Japan
Celebrated as the Narihira of today
Jirozaemon, Jirobei’s cherished son
Changed his face and form in a single night
Turning into a hideous monster that no one could face with two eyes
When he lost his looks, his disfigurement caused
The marriage with the daughter of the wealthy Yorozu-ya
To be cancelled immediately
After many different events, through some tragic chance
Jirozaemon started visiting the Manjiro brothel in the flowery Yoshiwara pleasure quarters
Obsessed with love, he visited constantly for two years
But then suddenly, he could no longer endure
He drew his sword, the precious Kagotsurube, from its sheath
And killed a hundred
This is the conclusion of this history of the workings of karma
But my allotted time is gone
Thank you for patiently listening for so long
And listening quietly
With all my gratitude, I thank you for listening to this poor song, which comes to an end here

 Although the dramatic climax of the piece is the killing of Ōkon, these drawn-out syllables create musical excitement and form another culminating point in the piece. They help to speed up pace of the story of Jirozaemon, which is the most well-known part of the legend but only a minor part of this Kawachi Ondo piece as a whole.
JAPAN: Koishimaru Izutsuya: Master of the Kawachi Ondo Epics

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江戸の木鼠青五郎が
住居書きになったということを
風の便りで、奥州に
もし聞けた。その時に
今日の次は、返せじゃないぞ
衰れな奴に思い召し
折れた紙の一枚でも
手向けてもおくよ。
とうつまん

（ソーラー）
（ヨーネイト・サッサロ
ヨーヤ・サッサ）
未完成の為、共に読む為に、お軽けする

先に立つる、仁兵衛たち。皆さん、落ち着いて。

明らかに声を、張り上げて。

いま、はがれと、観音一日、心に日々。

누이다したか、観音一日、心に日々。

まだ、たけと、観音一日、心に日々。

何をこく、このばば、てさきかがって。

「前に、立つる、仁兵衛たち。皆さん、落ち着いて。」
前非を悔いた 吉五郎は
名もザイギンと改めて
御門を丸めて 仏門へ
巡り着いたは 奥州の
白石在は 小菅村
助けの姓 仁兵衛と
二度目の 目立たび 移りましたのが
世のたとえ ことわざに あるごとく
陰徳有れば 陽報有り
さまに陰徳有れば 阳報有りと
花と緑の 語り継がれた 物語
人情美談の一席は
題して 唄入る 観音経
どうやる詠みきり出来ました
長々と 飽きもいたさず
開く御礼 奉り
それでは皆様 ごきげんよう

（ソーラー）
ヨーグリットコッサッサノ
ヨイャー サッサノ

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エーン

花も笑いし夢ばかり

誰が散るのか散らすのか

一期一会のたえの通り

時の流れはとどまらず

霧の向こうに心は

エーン

供養も数々あれど

供養したこととき

遠き祖先と菩提寺に

朝なたならば

手を合わせ

ソーラー

ヨーヨーコサッサノ

ヨイヤーサッサ
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JAPAN: Koishimaru Izutsuya: Master of the Kawachi Ondo Epics

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(ソラ)
ヨーイトコサツサ
ヨイヤーサツサ

（ソラ）
ヨーイトコサツサ
ヨイヤーサツサ

（ソラ）
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（ソラ）
ヨーイトコサツサ
ヨイヤーサツサ
吉原香奈（おまけ役）

井筒家

小石丸・文七（佐三）

頃は享保 六年の 五月五日は 聖倉の夜に

かつて弟死を 見る 東の 郡といって

沖で海といはれ

どこ飛べ来りや 鳥の名も

いきゑもし に

やで来ました この人は

中間道は 戸田川港 へ

お戸戸を あとにして

並野次郎兵衛といえる

（ソラー ヨーヨッコツササノ ヨイヤーササ）

（ソラー ヨーヨッコツササノ ヨイヤーササ）

（ソラー ヨーヨッコツササノ ヨイヤーササ）

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ここに破談となりまして
あれやこれやの手違いよりも
事情の縁せを切って
花の向風、万事無に
通い詰めたる
百人斬りを
移りました
果は受け持ち
時間です
もはや受け申し
御長々
厚く厚く
御礼奉り
まますます

夜に変わる顔かたち
二目と見られぬ
化物面に
変わりましたる
万屋娘の
縁談も

まずこれまで