



# Obihiro Pioneer

Tourism and Goodwill Exchange Section Newsletter

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## Japanese Performing Arts

## 日本の伝統芸能

*Pioneers, brace yourselves, winter is coming! As the weather heads towards the negatives, I suggest you check out some past issues of Obihiro Pioneer to learn about how to stay warm. This time, we'll warm up our hearts (hah) by learning a bit about Japanese performing arts!*

Japanese theatrical arts are a profound expression of the nation's culture, history, and philosophy. Rooted in ancient traditions and having evolved into modern times, Japanese performing arts encompass a variety of styles, each with its own unique characteristics, meaning and significance. From the elegant movements of Noh to the vibrant performances of Kabuki, Japanese theater offers a glimpse into the country's artistic heritage.



### Noh

Noh is one of Japan's oldest yet theatrical forms, dating back to the 15th century. It draws upon history and mythology for its themes. A specially designed theater with a wooden stage and a minimalist aesthetic is typically used. The performers include the main actor, who wears a mask and costume, and supporting actors, who don't wear masks, and a chorus. The performances feature very slow but deliberate movements, portraying an eerie, almost otherworldly atmosphere.



ner, matching the movements. There is atmosphere-setting music played by a small ensemble including a flute, drums, and a shamisen. There are intermissions as well where Kyōgen is performed. Kyōgen is essentially traditional Japanese comedy where a comedian recites jokes and stories where oftentimes an actor acts those stories out in exaggerated performances.

What really makes Noh stand out are the (creepy) masks. Often made from lacquer wood, they have no obvious facial expression, but with the slightest tilt of the head or a change in lighting, they can convey deep emotions. One famous mask is the komachi mask, which represents an elderly woman. Depending on its tilt, it can express emotions such as sadness or enlightenment. Another famous mask is the hannya mask, which represents a female who has become a demon due to an obsession or jealousy.



### Kabuki

Kabuki, dating back to the 17th century, is the complete opposite of Noh in terms of energy—it is loud, colorful, and dramatic, and has exaggerated movements and over-the-top face paint and wigs and flashy costumes. A typical performance includes several actors on stage, oftentimes having large casts for grand scenes like battle reenactments.



The performance itself is a combination of chanting and singing, with the actor and narrator often reciting lines in a slow, rhythmic man-

Actors use kumadori, a traditional face

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## Japanese Performing Arts

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paint, to express character types and emotions. The colors have specific meanings: red, for instance, represents strength and heroism, often used while the lead hero, while blue or indigo signifies villains or negative emotions.

Kabuki is also known for its dramatic poses, called mie. During key moments, actors freeze in exaggerated poses, often crossing their eyes and staring intensely. These poses typically emphasize a powerful part of the story, intensifying the drama of the moment. Eye crossing is done to portray a pose done when the character is agitated. Audiences typically cheer for the actor and call out their name during mie.

**Ningyō Jōruri—Puppet Theater**

Also known as Bunraku, Jōruri actually predated Kabuki as a new way to tell dramatic stories using puppets and music together with actors on stage. It is represented by the slightly creepy yet captivating puppets that are the main actors of the performance. They are controlled by a number of stagehands, with the main stagehand dressed in traditional Japanese clothing and being the main controller of the puppet. The assistant stagehands wear black from head to toe to “blend in” to the background and help with props and additional movements. There is a narrator who sings the entire performance and the play is accompanied by music played by shamisen as well as drums and flutes.



The puppets range in sizes with some being almost life-sized at 1.5 meters tall. They are made of wood and are

painted and dressed in elaborate costumes. Their facial features allow for a whole range of expressions similarly to Noh masks. While clearly not being real, they do move in a relatively realistic way by skill of the main stagehand.

**Other Well Known Performing Arts**

There are many other performing arts that came into Japanese culture throughout the centuries. One such is Rakugo, a Japanese comedy performance. Unlike slapstick humor like manzai, it consists of a comedian sitting on a cushion and using wordplay and cultural references to get the audience laughing. Another is karakuri, a performance that uses clockwork dolls for actors. Another more modern performing art is the Takarazuka Revue, a theatrical troupe that consists entirely of women (Japanese traditional performing arts are typically done only by men). While more modern in themes and theatrics, the actors are known throughout Japan for their dramatic performances.

**Where Can I Watch?**

Tokachi is kinda... not the big city... but sometimes Noh is performed at the Obihiro Shimin Bunka Hall. You can typically find information on the Obihiro Noh Facebook group (search 帯広能楽同好会, おびひろのうがくどうこうかい). There are often Noh and Kabuki plays at the Sapporo Education and Culture Hall as well. For the true Kabuki experience, you can't miss Kabuki-za in Tokyo. Joruri and Noh are readily viewable in many theaters in Kyoto.

*Many Japanese theatrical stories never get translated into English. In future issues, I will be translating and showcasing some of these Rakugo skits!*

## Modern Japanese Inventions

## 日本の現代的な発明品

The Japanese have invented many things that have pushed technology and modern life into the era we live in now. Here are a few of these inventions.

**Walkman**

You youngins probably don't know what a cassette is, but this tech developed by Sony allowed people to listen to music on the go by



putting in tapes with a few songs recorded on. Sony also developed the portable disc player.

**QR Codes**

Love 'em or hate 'em, these useful scannable links help people like me get info out to people like you! How they work is an article on its own. Invented in the 1960s by Masahiro Hara at Denso



## Modern Japanese Inventions

## 日本の現代的な発明品

Wave Inc. QR stands for “quick response”!

## Hybrid Cars

So while the technology was not technically (heh) invented in Japan (credit goes to Ferdinand Porsche in the early 1900s), hybrid cars became a part of society when commercialization was pioneered (hah) by the Toyota Prius in 1997. Let's save the world one gas guzzler at a time!



electricity is quite a technological feat! Fujio Masuoka at Toshiba developed this system in the 1980s and it is what is used now in USB sticks, hard drives, SSDs, and many other things.

## Emoji

Back in my day, our emoji were ascii faces! ^\_^ Essential to modern communication, these faces were developed and used by Docomo phones in the late 1990s :O As you probably know, these little guys are a language all on their own :D There is actually a lot of linguistic research revolving emoji usage and culture can often be expressed through emoji and even ascii characters to this day :)



## Quartz Watches

Watches used to work off a mechanical spring system where they used wound up springs and gears to keep track of time. However they need to be rewound often and weren't too accurate. In comes Casio and develops a watch that uses a battery and a small quartz crystal, which resonates at a stable frequency, to perfectly keep track of time!



## Flash Memory

We take USB sticks for granted, but being able to store memory on a device not powered by



## Instant Ramen

I mean, some of us can't fathom life a world where instant ramen never existed!

Invented by Nissin, these dried and preserved noodles can be eaten anywhere as long as there is boiling water. There is a cup noodle museum in Osaka where you can make your own custom instant noodles, give it a shot! This leads me to



## Movies @ Cinema Taiyo Obihiro

Nishi 3 Minami 11, Obihiro Tel: (0155) 20-1525



Not all movies are listed. Times and movies are subject to change.  
To confirm, call or check online at: [www.taiyogroup.jp/movie/obihiro](http://www.taiyogroup.jp/movie/obihiro)

Title	Lang	Dates
<b>Venom: The Last Dance</b> <i>Venomu: Za Rasuto Dansu</i>	EN, JP	Until 12/12
<b>Gladiator II</b> <i>Guradiētā Tsū</i>	EN, JP	Until 12/19
<b>Moana 2</b> <i>Moana to Densetsu no Umi Tsū</i>	JP	From 12/6
<b>Mufasa: The Lion King</b> <i>Raion Kingu Mufasa</i>	JP	From 12/20
<b>Oshi no Ko</b> <i>Oshi no Ko</i>	JP	From 12/20

EN = English dub with Japanese subtitles JP = Japanese dub with no subtitles



Moana 2



Mufasa: The Lion King



## Did you know?

Many place names in Hokkaido end with 'betsu' and 'nai' (ex. Honbetsu, Satsunai). This is because they come from the Ainu words for river, 'pet' and 'nay'!



'Pet' refers more to a larger river and 'nay' refers more to a mountain stream. Both are reflected in modern place names. How many do you know?

## Events in Tokachi

Please be aware that these and other events are subject to changes. To find out the latest information about these events, please contact the respective organizers or check out their webpages online.

When	What	Where/Contact
12/7 (Sat) 15:00-17:30	<b>2024 Multicultural Festival</b> 第17回国際文化祭 Come one and all to Obihiro's yearly multicultural festival! This is a talent show where Tokachi residents from all over the world perform cultural dances, songs, and more on stage. There will be a traditional clothing fashion show as well as world crafts displays and a raffle where you can win fun prizes!  Fee: Free	Tokachi International Relations Center @ Obihiro  帯広市観光交流課 0155-34-0122 tirc@city.obihoro.hokkaido.jp
12/8 (Sun) 9:00-13:00	<b>Hiro'o Crab Festival</b> 広尾毛がにまつり Come celebrate Hiro'o's fishing culture at this festival. You can have soup made with horsehair crab boiled in a giant pot as well as a large array of seafood, food from sister cities, and a raffle.  Fee: Free entry, food will cost money	Seaside Park @ Hiro'o  広尾町観光協会 01558-2-0177
12/8 (Sun) 10:15-11:30 14:15-15:30	<b>Waku Waku Christmas in Tokachi Plaza</b> わくわくクリスマスinとかちプラザ Fun event for parents and young children where you can make Christmas crafts, dance, and receive a present from Santa!  Target: 1~7 year olds and parents Fee: 1000 yen/group Max Visitors: First 50 to register Registration: Fill out the form at the QR (morning (left) and evening (right) forms are separate)	Tokachi Plaza 5th Floor, Kei Undo-shitsu @ Obihiro  株式会社オカモト 0155-22-7890   
12/14 (Sat) 10:00-14:00	<b>Chinese Dumpling Cooking Class</b> 餃子づくり体験 Obihiro CIR Lin Li hosts a cooking class where she will teach everyone to make traditional Chinese dumplings!  Fee: Free Max Visitors: First 20 to register Registration: Call by 11/30 (you can register after the deadline if spaces are available)	Tokachi International Relations Center @ Obihiro  帯広市観光交流課 0155-34-0122 tirc@city.obihoro.hokkaido.jp
12/14 (Sat) 16:00-18:00	<b>International Potluck: Finland</b> ポットラック・パーティー:フィンランド Bring a dish and make new friends from all over the world! This time, Tuomas from Finland will be preparing Finnish-style carrot casserole and potato salad. Please bring a dish or drink to share.  Fee: Free	

Obihiro Pioneer is a newsletter published monthly by the Obihiro City Tourism and Goodwill Exchange Section for residents of the Tokachi District and related parties. The contents of this newsletter do not necessarily represent the official views or opinions of the City of Obihiro.

Obihiro Pioneer can be found at the following locations: Obihiro City Hall, Tokachi International Relations Center, JICA Obihiro International Center, and Cinema Taiyo Obihiro. The digital version can be found on Obihiro City's homepage at [www.city.obihoro.hokkaido.jp](http://www.city.obihoro.hokkaido.jp) (search for "Obihiro Pioneer") or by scanning the QR code on the right.

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