



JAPAN INFORMATION
AND CULTURE CENTER
在米国日本大使館広報文化センター

TEACHING TUESDAY

BUNRAKU

One of the three major classical theatres of Japan, Bunraku (文楽) is a traditional Japanese type of puppet theatre. It started during the Edo Period (1603–1867) in Osaka as a popular form of entertainment for commoners, and became artistic theatre in the 17th century. It is recognised by UNESCO as one of Japan's Intangible Cultural Heritages.

Originally known by the name Ningyō jōruri (人形浄瑠璃, puppet drama), bunraku features large puppets controlled by puppeteers dressed completely in black, who move the puppets around the stage. Only the main puppeteer will have his face uncovered. The puppets themselves are rather large, usually about one-half to full life-size., so main characters are often operated by three puppeteers. The movement of the puppets are accompanied by a narrator who chants the story and music from a 3-string shamisen. The narrator also provides the voices for all the puppets, so must have a wide range of vocal expressions to represent both genders and all ages. The synchronization of the puppets, chanter and shamisen create an intense dramatic effect for the audience.

The National Theatre in Tokyo and the National Bunraku Theatre in Osaka both still host bunraku plays frequently. Some bunraku troupes have even toured in the United States. If you even have a chance, be sure to check out these amazing puppet plays!