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TEACHING TUESDAY

KAGURA

AUGUST 30, 2016

Kagura (神楽), is an ancient type of Japanese dance, which served as a primary influence for Noh. Kagura, which literally means “entertainment for the gods,” was originally performed by Shinto priests and maidens, as part of the ceremonial arts. Now, it has evolved in many different types of folk kagura and thrives primarily in parts of Shimane prefecture, and urban centers such as Hiroshima.

The first mentions of kagura go back as far as the epics of the Kojiki and the Nihonshoki. Originally called “kamikura,” the dances were performed in Imperial court, but were inspired by popular ritual dances called satokagura, practiced in villages all over the country. Kagura eventually developed into a type of storytelling, often involving the reenactment of fables. The most famous types of kagura are miko kagura, shishi kagura, and Ise-style and Izumo-style kagura dances.

Kagura performers are typically divided into two groups: the maikata and the hayashikata. The maikata are the dancers, wearing elaborate, colorfully embroidered costumes. They are accompanied by the haayashikata playing musical instruments such traditional taiko drums, a chochigane cymbal, and a yokobue flute. Much like Noh, the maikata wear wigs and masks, and speak between their dance sequences.