

# Kabuki



## What is Kabuki?

Kabuki is a form of Japanese drama which originated and was developed in the Edo Era (1603-1867). It is a traditional performing art which consists of music, dance, and acting. It has been designated a Japanese important intangible cultural property and was inscribed on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List in 2009.



## The History of Kabuki

The history of kabuki is said to have begun in 1603 when Okuni, a *miko* or female attendant at Izumo Taisha Shrine, began performing a new style of dance drama called *nenbutsu-odori*, later called *kabuki-odori*, in Kyoto in 1603. She danced in the colorful and original costume of the *kabuki-mono*, who rebelled against the established order of society of the time, and she became popular with the public. However, the female kabuki was banned in 1629 for disrupting public morals, and afterwards only male actors performed in kabuki plays. Even now, kabuki has only male actors. Those who play female characters are called *onnagata* or *oyama*.



## Kabuki Theaters

Kabuki is performed year-round at the Kabukiza in Tokyo and is frequently performed at other theaters. Kabuki is also frequently performed at the Shochikuza in Osaka, Minamiza in Kyoto and Hakataza in Fukuoka. The Kanamaruza at Kotohira in Shikoku is a restored playhouse from the Edo Era.



## *Hanamichi, Kakegoe, Yago*

The kabuki stage features a projection called a *hanamichi*, a walkway which extends

into the audience and via which dramatic entrances and exits are made. When a main actor appears on the *hanamichi* and strikes a dramatic pose, you'll hear a loud cry of "so-and-so *ya*" from expert audience members, for example, "Naritaya" for Ichikawa Ebizo. This is the actor's house name or *yago*, which has been passed down from generation to generation since the Edo Era.



### Types of Kabuki

Kabuki plays can be roughly classified into three types with regard to their connection with *ningyo joruri* (Japanese puppet theater) and dancing:

1. *Honmarumono*

A script originally written for *ningyo joruri* and arranged for kabuki:  
*Kanadehon Chushingura, Yoshitsune Senbonzakura, etc.*

2. *Jun kabuki* (pure kabuki)

A script written for kabuki: *Narukami, Tokaido Yotsuya Kaidan, etc.*

3. *Shosagoto*

Dancing dramas: *Musume Dojoji, Renjishi, etc.*



### The Future of Kabuki

Kabuki and *ningyo joruri* captured the hearts of the Japanese people about 400 years ago. Today, some kabuki actors perform in movies or TV dramas as well, which has increased kabuki's popularity. Kabuki has also been performed in foreign countries and has impressed foreign audiences. Kabuki will no doubt be even more captivating in the future.