

## Nagahama Hikiyama Festival 2023 Kabuki Plays

Nagahama, Shiga Prefecture, Japan

長浜曳山祭 子ども歌舞伎の英文あらすじ

The four kabuki plays to be performed at Nagahama Hikiyama Festival are all well-known *kabuki* or *bunraku* puppet plays.

Most of the plays are only a single act in a longer kabuki/bunraku play. Therefore, the story may not have a final ending.

The festival's kabuki plays in 2023 are about samurai at war. The stories are about loyalty, love, war, and tragedy. A synopsis of the four child kabuki plays are provided below. The characters appearing in the play are in boldface.

On April 15, 2023, the kabuki performances will be held in the following order:

Float No. 1: Tokiwa-zan (常磐山)

Float No. 2: Banzai-ro (萬歳樓)

Float No. 3: Okina-zan (翁山)

Float No. 4: Kujaku-zan (孔雀山)

### Float No. 1: Tokiwa-zan 常磐山「鬼一法眼 三略の巻・今出川菊畑の場」

Kiichi Hogen's Book of Military Strategies – The Chrysanthemum Garden at Imadegawa

*Kiichi Hogen Sanryaku-no-Maku – Imadegawa Kikubatake*

English reference: <https://www.kabuki21.com/kikubatake.php>

Sample video (Tarui): <https://youtu.be/MPMwKoEF48w>

In 12th-century Kyoto, the Taira Clan ruled Japan after defeating the Minamoto Clan. The Minamoto Clan still wanted to rise up against the Taira Clan.

The play is set in the Chrysanthemum Garden of **Kiichi Hogen's** mansion in Imadegawa, Kyoto. Kiichi Hogen with white hair was a retired military strategist for the ruling Taira Clan. He wrote a secret "Book of Military Strategies."

The enemy Minamoto Clan wanted this book. **Chienai** and **Torazo** were Kiichi Hogen's house servants, but they were actually Minamoto Clan members in disguise. Chienai and Torazo wanted to obtain or steal this "Book of Military Strategies."

While talking to them, Kiichi realizes that they are from the Minamoto Clan. Chienai was actually his younger brother Kisanta, and Torazo was Ushiwakamaru, the son of the Minamoto Clan leader Yoshitomo.

Although Kiichi was born into the Minamoto Clan like his two younger brothers and father, he switched to the Taira Clan for some reason.

Kiichi's beautiful daughter **Minazuru** was in love with the handsome Torazo who rejected her even when she offer him a chrysanthemum. She also knew Chienai and Torazo's real identities. Chienai decides to kill her to protect their disguise.

However, **Tankai** stops Chienai from killing Minazuru. Tankai is a messenger for Taira Clan leader Kiyomori. Tankai overheard Chienai and Torazo talking and also knew they were Minamoto members. So Torazo kills Tankai with his sword. Chienai wipes off the blood from Torazo's sword.

Minazuru then takes Chienai and Torazo to the Inner Garden to obtain the military strategy book. This Act ends here. It actually continues in the next act called "Inner Garden" (*Okuniwa*).

**Float No. 2: Banzai-ro 萬歳樓「御所桜堀川夜討 弁慶上使の場」**

Imperial Palace Cherry Blossoms and the Horikawa Night Attack – Benkei the Messenger  
*Gosho Zakura Horikawa no Youchi – Benkei Joshi*

English reference: [https://www.kabuki21.com/benkei\\_joshi.php](https://www.kabuki21.com/benkei_joshi.php)

Sample video (Tarui): [https://youtu.be/ce\\_TV00gwKs](https://youtu.be/ce_TV00gwKs)

This kabuki play features Musashibo **Benkei**, a very famous samurai warrior. You can see his fierce-looking costume. He is tough and never cries, but he cries in this kabuki play.

The shogun was Minamoto Yoritomo in the 12th century in Kamakura. His younger brother and military commander Minamoto Yoshitsune helped to defeat the rival Taira Clan.

However, Yoshitsune had a wife named **Kyo-no-Kimi** who was the daughter of Taira-no-Tokitada, an important Taira Clan member. The Taira Clan was the enemy, so Shogun Yoritomo did not trust Yoshitsune because of this connection.

To prove his brother's loyalty, Shogun Yoritomo wanted Kyo-no-Kimi beheaded and her head brought to him. He ordered Benkei to deliver a message demanding Kyo-no-Kimi's head.

Kyo-no-Kimi was pregnant and was staying with **Jiju Taro** and wife **Hananoi**'s mansion to care for her pregnancy.

Benkei visits Jiju Taro's mansion and delivers the message. However, Benkei and Jiju Taro did not have the nerve to behead Kyo-no-Kimi and decide to sacrifice her personal attendant **Shinobu** instead.

Shinobu's mother **Owasa** happened to be visiting Shinobu. Jiju Taro and wife Hananoi beg Owasa to sacrifice Shinobu.

Shinobu agrees to sacrifice herself out of loyalty and duty to Kyo-no-Kimi, but her mother Owasa opposes and does not want her to die without meeting her unknown father who disappeared 18 years ago.

Owasa explains that 18 years ago on that intimate night during a moonrise festival, the man ran off before she could see his face or hear his name.

She shows his left red sleeve which tore off when he ran off. It is the only thing she has to identify him.

However, Jiju Taro goes after Shinobu with his sword, and Hananoi holds back Owasa. Shinobu is cornered against the paper sliding doors.

In the next room, Benkei overheard everything and stabs Shinobu from behind through the paper sliding door. Shinobu screams and collapses, and Owasa cries.

Benkei shows his right red sleeve matching Owasa's left sleeve. Benkei turned out to be Shinobu's father.

Owasa wakes up her dying daughter to tell her that her father was Benkei. Shinobu awakes, but cannot see or hear anything. She expresses joy in fulfilling her duty to die for Kyo-no-Kimi. She also wishes her parents a long life. She dies without ever seeing her father and knowing who killed her. Owasa expresses her grief and cries.

Benkei normally never cries, but he cries loudly over his dead daughter.

Jiju Taro beheads Shinobu, then commits seppuku to offer his head together with Shinobu's head to erase suspicion that Kyo-no-Kimi's head is fake.

Benkei beheads Jiju Taro. Shinobu's head is wrapped in red and Jiju Taro's head is wrapped in white. Benkei takes both heads to Kamakura to fulfill his mission.

### Float No. 3: Okina-zan 翁山「信州川中島一幕輝虎配膳」

Battle of Shinshu Kawanakajima – Terutora Serves a Meal

*Shinshu Kawanakajima – Terutora Haizen*

English reference: [https://www.kabuki21.com/terutora\\_haizen.php](https://www.kabuki21.com/terutora_haizen.php)

Sample video (東白川村): <https://youtu.be/MYFIVB39fBc>

The play has dramatic scenes of anger, defiance, loyalty, and apology.

In the 16th century, **Nagao Terutora** (later renamed Uesugi Kenshin) was the daimyo of Echigo Province which is now Niigata Prefecture. And Takeda Shingen was the daimyo of Kai Province which is now Yamanashi Prefecture. Terutora and Shingen were enemies at war.

Shingen had military strategist Yamamoto Kansuke serving him. His enemy Terutora wanted Kansuke to switch to his side.

To gain Kansuke's favor, Terutora invited Kansuke's mother **Koshiji** and Kansuke's wife **Okatsu** to his residence. The mother was wary of visiting because Terutora was her son's enemy.

But her daughter **Karaginu** (Kansuke's sister) was the wife of Terutora's samurai retainer **Naoe**. So Koshiji's son Kansuke and daughter Karaginu were on opposing sides.

Karaginu welcomed her mother and sister-in-law Okatsu visiting Terutora's residence.

Naoe gives Koshiji a gift, a coat gifted by the shogun to Terutora who wore it once. However, Koshiji rejects the gift, saying it was used clothing. She knew it was a trick. Naoe panics and orders the food to be served.

The servant bringing the food was Terutora himself. Koshiji tells Terutora that using an old mother like her as bait to catch Kansuke like a fish was a ridiculous trick and laughed at him. Without touching the food, she dumps it on the floor.

Terutora explodes and grabs his sword. Karaginu urges her mother to apologize, but she does not. Naoe tries to stop Terutora, but he cannot stop him.

Kansuke's wife Okatsu then carries her koto instrument and goes between Terutora and Koshiji. Since she could not speak well, she plays koto music to express her apologies. She begs Terutora to kill her instead of her mother-in-law Koshiji.

Terutora thought she was pathetic and backed down. Koshiji apologizes for her rudeness and goes home with Okatsu. Okatsu is happy she was able to save Koshiji whom she admired greatly.

#### **Float No. 4: Kujaku-zan 孔雀山 「神靈矢口渡 頓兵衛住家の場」**

Spiritual River Crossing at Yaguchi – At Tonbe'e's House

*Shinrei Yaguchi Watashi – Tonbe'e Sumika*

English reference: [https://www.kabuki21.com/yaguchi\\_no\\_watashi.php](https://www.kabuki21.com/yaguchi_no_watashi.php)

Sample video (Maibara): <https://youtu.be/hmsBuRcs6ro>

This story happened during the 14th century near Tokyo when the Ashikaga Clan and Nitta Clan were enemies.

On Rokugo River (Tama River) at Yaguchi, **Tonbe'e** was the boatman at the river crossing. He was an ally of the Ashikaga Clan and once killed Nitta Yoshioki by sinking his boat crossing the river. Yoshioki was a high-ranking samurai in the Nitta Clan and enemy of the Ashikaga.

Tonbe'e was well rewarded by the Ashikaga for his help in killing Nitta Yoshioki. He lived in a nice house.

One day, Yoshioki's younger brother **Nitta Yoshimine** and wife **Utena** visited the Yaguchi river crossing and prayed for his brother's soul.

They also visited Tonbe'e's house to cross the river. But Tonbe'e was out and Tonbe'e's daughter **Ofune** met them at the door.

Ofune fell in love with Yoshimine at first sight. It was too late to cross the river, so she let them stay at Tonbe'e's house.

She found out Yoshimine was a fugitive wanted by the Ashikaga Clan, but she let him and Utena escape. Tonbe'e's servant **Rokuzo** went after Yoshimine for the big reward, but Ofune stops him by distracting him seductively. (Rokuzo was in love with Ofune.)

Tonbe'e heard about Yoshimine and returns home to capture Yoshimine. He thrusts his sword, but stabs daughter Ofune by mistake. She confesses that she already let Yoshimine escape. Tonbe'e scolds her.

Ofune desperately tries to stop Tonbe'e, but he runs out with his sword to chase Yoshimine.

Ofune beats the drum to falsely signal that Yoshimine was captured. So people would stop chasing Yoshimine. Rokuzo returns and tries to stop her from beating the drum. In the scuffle, she grabs his sword and stabs him.

Meanwhile, Tonbe'e almost catches Yoshimine at the river, but Tonbe'e is suddenly killed by the Nitta Clan's magic arrow shot by the spirit of Yoshioki.

One kabuki highlight is Ofune moving stiffly like a doll as she is wounded.

This story is one of Hiraga Gennai's most famous works about the hardships of the Nitta Clan due to the death of Nitta Yoshioki. He was an 18th-century writer.

Today in Tokyo, there's a train station named Yaguchi-no-watashi Station on the Tokyo Tamagawa Line. It's near Tama River and near the river crossing location where Nitta Yoshioki was ambushed and killed when his boatman unplugged a hole in the boat. Near this location is also Nitta Shrine dedicated to Nitta Yoshioki.

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