

KABUKI ABROAD



Kyozo Nakamura (red hair) takes a curtain call at the Suzanne Dellal Centre for Dance and Theatre Tel Aviv, September 2012.

2012 marked the sixtieth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Israel. To celebrate the anniversary, the Japan Foundation organized kabuki performances in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Osamu Sawaji of the *Japan Journal* spoke to **Kyozo Nakamura**, a kabuki actor who has been a prolific participant in lectures and workshops about kabuki outside Japan, including Israel.

My grandmother loved kabuki and she used to take me to see kabuki for as long as I can remember,” says kabuki actor Kyozo Nakamura. “The kabuki stage and the costumes were beautiful and I was excited when I heard the music, and even as a young child, when I could not understand the story, I was drawn to kabuki.”

The art of kabuki is handed down through the families of kabuki actors. Kyozo is, however, one of a small number of kabuki actors who were not born into a family of kabuki actors. After graduating university, Kyozo studied at the Kabuki Actor Training Center of the National Theatre of Japan, and then became an apprentice with the leading *onnagata* actor Jakuemon Nakamura IV.

One of the features of kabuki is the presence of *onnagata*, male actors who perform the roles of women. *Onnagata* used to be present in all kinds of drama and dance forms from around the world, but only in kabuki has the *onnagata* tradition survived intact into the present day. *Onnagata* do not just use cos-

tumes and makeup to achieve the realistic expression of females.

“One of the things my Master taught me was the way *onnagata* use their bodies. My Master told me to move my insides and, at first, I was completely confounded, wondering what kind of movement he meant. After a long time, I eventually realized that he meant lithe body movements originating from the inside,” says Kyozo. “*Onnagata* do not simply mimic women, they perform the roles of women while retaining the body and emotions of a man. The *onnagata* is a symbol of femininity as seen from a man’s point of view.”

Kyozo performs kabuki both in Japan and abroad. So far, he has toured forty-one cities in nineteen countries and regions around the world, including Asia, the United States, Europe and Central America (sometimes performing in collaborations with contemporary drama as well as kabuki).

Overseas, it is rare to see kabuki performed in the same environment as Japan, which makes perfor-

mances difficult. For example, the floor of a kabuki stage in Japan is laid with wooden boards and is flat, whereas overseas Kyozo often performs on a raked (angled) stage used to perform opera. In Central America, he once performed in hot, humid conditions without air conditioning, which left him dripping with sweat; in Denver in the United States and Mexico City in Mexico, which are located at high altitudes, he also struggled in the rarefied air.

“In Mexico City, I performed with an oxygen cyl-



Kyozo Nakamura performs “Sagimusume,” one of the kabuki dances.

Kyozo Nakamura

inder backstage and it was really hard. But when you hear the thunderous applause from the audience you forget how hard it is,” says Kyozo. “Coming up with ways to create a kabuki space on a stage that is not usually used for kabuki is also fun.”

When performing overseas, Kyozo runs kabuki workshops to try to promote a better understanding of kabuki. People are particularly interested in onnagata. Kyozo teaches the elegant gestures of onnagata through the acting of smiling and crying, performing these gestures along with the audiences.

“I think kabuki has become a universal language thanks to the great efforts of my predecessors,” says Kyozo. “I would like to perform kabuki in the countries and cities I have not toured yet, to convey the wonder of kabuki to as many people as possible.”

Kyozo appears in the evening performance (starting at 4.00 p.m.) of *Kotobuki Hatsuharu Grand Kabuki* at the Shimbashi Enbujo Theatre in Tokyo, until January 26.

The main theatre of Kabuki is the Kabuki-za Theatre, located in Tokyo’s Ginza district. The Kabuki-za Theatre is currently undergoing reconstruction and will reopen on April 2.



MASATOSHI SAKAMOTO

Kabuki as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in 2003. As of December 2012, 148 countries are parties to the convention. The Convention defines “intangible cultural heritage” as “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills—as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith.” Japan became a party to the convention in 2004, and twenty-one intangible cultural heritage elements from Japan are inscribed in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. In 2008, Kabuki Theatre became one of the first intangible cultural heritage elements from Japan to be inscribed into the Representative List, along with Nogaku Theatre and Ningyo Johruri Bunraku Puppet Theatre.