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Hanagumi Shibai

# A KABUKI READER

HISTORY AND  
PERFORMANCE

SAMUEL L. LEITER

*Editor*



An East Gate Book

*M.E. Sharpe*

Armonk, New York  
London, England

## New (Neo) *Kabuki* and the Work of Hanagumi Shibai

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Beginning amid—and partly inspired by—the student activism of the late 1960s, the experimental *shōgekijō* (little theatre) movement saw wave upon wave of growth, development, success, and failure. Several generations of outstanding theatre companies and artists have come and gone during that period, and some of the work—like that of directors Suzuki Tadashi and Ninagawa Yukio—has gained worldwide renown. Although the *shōgekijō* movement met with various critical setbacks during the last decade of the twentieth century, one of its most effective and interesting outgrowths has been a kind of contemporary *kabuki*, variously called “new” or “neo” *kabuki*, which arose in the 1980s.

It is not clear who came up with the anglicized name “new *kabuki*” and it is difficult to define the term distinctively. To borrow critic Ei Norio’s words, new *kabuki* is “a form of theatre that dramatizes *kabuki* themes or presents theatrical works by using *kabuki* techniques and devices. Namely, it is a parody of *kabuki* themes and techniques.”<sup>1</sup> He also defines it as “theatre staging adaptations of *kabuki* or using *kabuki* acting techniques and other stage devices.”<sup>2</sup> As he himself later points out, these definitions are not enough to define new *kabuki*. *Shingeki* (modern drama) troupes also have dramatized *kabuki* themes and staged modern adaptations of *kabuki*. Director Suzuki Tadashi presented several *kabuki*-influenced experimental works.<sup>3</sup> *Kabuki* actor Ichikawa Ennosuke III has directed performances by combining traditional acting techniques with modern stage devices. He calls these productions “Ennosuke *kabuki*” or “super *kabuki*.” A number of other actors have

performed parodies of *kabuki*. However, these approaches should be distinguished from new *kabuki*.

In order to outline its characteristics, I would like to introduce four major companies known for new *kabuki* and clarify the difference between new *kabuki* and earlier approaches, and also to examine the future prospects of new *kabuki*. Following an overview of new *kabuki*, I will offer a close view of the principal exemplar of the genre, the company called Hanagumi Shibai.

### New *Kabuki*: Survey of Companies

There are three major companies known for new *kabuki*: Hanagumi Shibai (Flower group theatre), Gekidan Chōjū Giga (Caricature of birds and beasts company), and Super Ichiza (Super company).<sup>4</sup> Among these three, Hanagumi Shibai is first in scale, reputation, and popularity. The company was founded by Kanō Yukikazu in 1987 with the aim of creating what he called “neo *kabuki*.”<sup>5</sup> Since its foundation, the company has made constant efforts to revitalize the energy of *kabuki*. Hanagumi Shibai’s chief contributions will be discussed in detail later in this essay.

Gekidan Chōjū Giga is another of the major companies referred to as new *kabuki*. Chinen Masabumi founded it in 1975 in order to create original musicals that combine modern and classical, Western and Japanese styles. Chinen named the company after *Chōjū Giga*, an illustrated narrative hand-scroll of the mid-twelfth century. “*Giga*” means pictures drawn in jest—that is, pictures showing entertaining comical stories, like cartoons. The word is also used to refer to pictures drawn just for entertainment. *Chōjū Giga* is an amusing scroll that illustrates birds and beasts frolicking happily. These humorous pictures give full play to our imaginations. Like *Chōjū Giga*, the company aims at creating an amusing entertainment without being bound by a conventional idea. The company has created a variety of musicals that parody movies, Shakespeare, and *kabuki*, as well as straight plays.

Since adapting Ihara Saikaku’s seventeenth-century novel *Kōshoku Gonin Onna* (Five Women Who Loved Love) in 1981, Chinen has revived a number of classical works and has devoted all his energy to “*kabuki* musicals.” He scripted and directed *Kōshoku Ichidai Otoko* (The life of an amorous man) in 1982 and created a *kabuki*-style musical with *Shiranami Gonin Otoko* (Five bold bandits) in 1984. Since then, the company has been known for its *kabuki* musicals. The shows, with their speedy scene changes, comic devices, and witty humor, have attracted young audiences.

Super Ichiza is not as big as Hanagumi Shibai and Chōjū Giga in scale and popularity, but it also has pleased young audiences. The company was founded in Nagoya in 1979 by Iwata Shinichi, its producer-director, who has

created a unique form of performance with his entirely original concept of "rock *kabuki*." This contemporary *kabuki* comically dramatizes *kabuki* themes using the same stylized acting forms and period costumes as traditional *kabuki*, but accompanies them with live rock music rather than the traditional instruments.

Since its first performance in 1979, a comedy called *Ehon Benkei-ki Gohiiki Kanjinchō* (A pictorial life of Benkei, or great favorite subscription list), Super Ichiza has produced a new play (modern adaptations and parodies of *kabuki*) every year. Starting with a rock *kabuki* version of *Macbeth* in 1984, the company has given about two hundred performances in eight countries overseas, mostly in Europe. Its rock *kabuki* version of *King Lear*, performed in Holland and Belgium in 1987, received international acclaim.

### **New *Kabuki*: Characteristics**

The approaches to *kabuki* of these three groups vary in style and concept, so it is hard to find common characteristics in their activities. I would, though, like to examine the major differences between these new *kabuki* groups' activities and previous efforts to modernize *kabuki*.

Stressing the importance of theatricality and pure entertainment, each company tries to attract general audiences, especially young ones who are not familiar with traditional *kabuki*. Mainstream star Ennosuke III, known for his experimentation and spectacular performances, also contributed to the popularization of conventional *kabuki* for general audiences with his unique, new approach. Insisting on the importance of "attract[ing] today's audience by creating a stage with free ideas, new interpretations, and various ways of expression,"<sup>6</sup> he created his original "super *kabuki*" in the mid-1980s. In order to create visually entertaining shows to cater to the masses, he used speedy action and stunning acrobatics. He boldly employed classical staging techniques, such as *hayagawari* (quick changes) and *chūnori* (flying through the air), that had rarely been used since the Meiji period (1868-1912). He also made daring adaptations of the classics and sometimes introduced Western costumes and music. His modernized, spectacular *kabuki* was especially successful in opening up conventional *kabuki* to younger audiences.

In the sense that his shows engage audiences by combining *kabuki* with modern and Western techniques, super *kabuki* is similar to new *kabuki*. The first and chief difference is that Ennosuke is a reformer within the traditional *kabuki* system. Although he makes bold modern adaptations, adopts high-tech stage devices, and opens the conventional *kabuki* world to outsiders, he does not intend to change the system or the traditional acting style. His concern is not to

alter the *kabuki* system but to pass on the great tradition of *kabuki* over to the young generation by educating young performers in the traditional style. With *Ibukiyama no Yamato Takeru* (Yamato Takeru at Ibuki Mountain) in 1986 as a start, he established Nijūisseiki Kabukigumi (Twenty-first century *kabuki* group) with the aim of training young actors who are not from *kabuki* families. He has trained these actors by stressing the importance of inheriting the systematic *kabuki* acting style. Ennosuke directs classics as well as original works so that the actors can learn the traditional techniques and apply them to new plays.<sup>7</sup> Thus Ennosuke's concern is to deepen interest in *kabuki* by introducing original ideas, new interpretations, and modern staging techniques.

Second, unlike *shingeki* troupes, the emphasis in new *kabuki* performance is on acting. New *kabuki* groups stage existing *kabuki* scripts or adaptations, but they do so in a way that differs from the *shingeki* approach to modernizing *kabuki*. *Shingeki* broke a way from *kabuki* by staging translated Western drama and training actors according to Western acting techniques, which stressed realism. But after World War II it realized the value of reinterpreting *kabuki* plays in a modern way. A few *shingeki* actors were trained in *kabuki* acting, but basically they performed in a realistic style. Three new *kabuki* companies focus on bringing the actors' energy to the stage; they regard actors as their priority and try to make their performances as theatrical as possible. In this sense, they inherit the position of the *shōgekijō* groups of the 1960s, which criticized *shingeki*'s text-oriented presentations and sought to privilege performance over script.

The third and most significant difference between new *kabuki* and *shingeki*, *shōgekijō*, and the work of Ennosuke III is that new *kabuki* groups do not create their works based on special performance theories or methods. Ennosuke III directs performances strictly based on traditional acting techniques, and *shingeki* troupes stage their modern adaptations of *kabuki* within the framework of a realistic acting style. A number of *shōgekijō* groups, especially those that emerged in the 1960s, created theatre founded on an original theory or concept; for example, many directors found inspiration in traditional performance and tried to regain its power in their productions.

The director Suzuki Tadashi has been the most successful at utilizing traditional performance methods on the modern stage. He "was not only criticizing the West-oriented realism of *shingeki* and shallow avant-garde modernism, but also revitalizing the tradition-bound possibilities of *nō* and *kabuki*."<sup>8</sup> He did this not simply by imitating traditional theatrical forms such as *nō* and *kabuki*; instead, by capturing the essence of their unique quality, he developed his renowned "Suzuki method" of acting.

New *kabuki* groups also attempt to create new acting styles or forms in

order to create unique and original works. Unlike Suzuki and others, however, these companies pay little regard to creating works based on a specific methodology. They seem to use *kabuki* only for their convenience, playing with it, and using whatever elements they want in order to entertain audiences rather than to create performances rooted in a specific theory. Ennosuke, on the other hand, has a firm mission to reform and open up conventional *kabuki* to more people. *Shingeki* troupes looked at *kabuki* academically for the purpose of studying its tradition. Suzuki attempted to change the consciousness of people who inclined toward Western-oriented performance.

A general lack of performance theory, method, or serious sense of mission was one of the characteristics of *shōgekijō* activity in the 1980s and 1990s. Their productions were often criticized for their shallow interpretations and amateurism, but the popularity of new *kabuki* reveals that it is such an entertainment-oriented approach that continues to attract younger audiences who grew up over the past two decades.

### **New *Kabuki*: Prospects for the Twenty-First Century**

I would like to consider here the future prospects of new *kabuki* through observing the companies' current activities. These companies either started their activities with the idea of *kabuki* as the essence of their creativity or discovered *kabuki* as a way of expression after being founded. Hanagumi Shibai and Super Ichiza belong to the former type and Chōjū Giga belongs to the latter.<sup>9</sup>

Kanō Yukikazu of Hanagumi Shibai has been enthusiastic about *kabuki* since his childhood. He founded the company with the aim of creating "neo *kabuki*." Since its foundation, *kabuki* has been the very essence of Hanagumi's creation. As Kanō himself says, "Our performances are always *kabuki* no matter what texts, forms, and techniques we use."<sup>10</sup>

Like Kanō, Iwata Shinichi of Super Ichiza has seen productions by *jishibai* (local *kabuki*) theatre troupes since his childhood. He was stunned by their performances, full of wild and primitive energy, and their bold and entirely free expressiveness. To bring out this feeling of excitement and entertainment, he has created productions based on *kabuki* themes with rock music and other contemporary devices.

Chinen Masafumi (playwright, director, choreographer, and actor), on the other hand, did not have *kabuki* in mind when he started Chōjū Giga. While studying at Waseda University, he was active as an actor in the Gekidan Shibaraku (Just a Minute Theatre Company), where he directed and acted in Tsuka Kōhei's early plays. Later, he worked at the Tsuka Kōhei Jimusho (Tsuka Kōhei Studio) but left to found Chōjū Giga with the aim of creating

original works. After a long struggle, Chinen finally realized that he could use *kabuki* techniques as a device for creating original musicals. His primary object, however, was not creating works based on *kabuki* but producing new Japanese musicals. In *kabuki*, he discovered the great energy that empowers professionally trained actors. In order to energize his musicals, he has trained actors in *nihon buyō* (classical Japanese dance) as well as in Western acrobatics and jazz dance. His actors are also trained to play the classical shamisen and *kabuki's nagauta* music.

Thus Hanagumi Shibai and Super Ichiza have constantly produced shows with "New *kabuki*" as a slogan, while Chōjū Giga employs *kabuki* merely as a creative method. The current activities of the three companies reinforce this distinction. Chōjū Giga has continued to produce "*kabuki* musicals," but, since its primary concern is not creating *kabuki*, the company does not stick to new *kabuki*. Its current activities include performing at schools and in children's theatre, producing family concerts, and creating original domestic dramas and musicals with themes based on current Japanese social issues. It also promotes a number of events for TV and radio. Super Ichiza started its activities to produce its unique rock *kabuki*, but the company no longer offers such productions.

Unfortunately, the current activities of these companies show that new *kabuki* has not yet been established as a genre. It is a form of theatre that emerged by taking advantage of the "*kabuki* boom" and the "*shōgekijō* boom" of the 1980s, and its unique performances have attracted young audiences. But Hanagumi Shibai now seems to be the only troupe operating under a policy of creating neo *kabuki*. One can say that new *kabuki* has attracted public attention because of Hanagumi Shibai's great accomplishment. Whether new *kabuki* ends up a flash in the pan or realizes its potential of being established as a genre, depends on the achievement of Hanagumi Shibai. In the following section, I would like to look more closely at the new *kabuki* of Hanagumi Shibai.

### Hanagumi Shibai

Kanō Yukikazu (b.1960) founded Hanagumi Shibai in 1987 with the aim of creating original and contemporary "*kabuki*"<sup>11</sup> theatre and to contribute to a "restoration of *kabuki* culture" in today's society.<sup>12</sup> Following the "artistic *kabuki*"<sup>13</sup> of the post-Meiji era, the "academic *kabuki*"<sup>14</sup> of the postwar generation, and the "Japanesque *kabuki*"<sup>15</sup> that has characterized efforts to preserve *kabuki* since the 1980s, Kanō's Hanagumi Shibai represents a new direction in Japanese theatre through his effort to "revitalize the *kabuki* spirit" for the contemporary stage.<sup>16</sup> In order to differen-



tiate his own approach from the “new *kabuki*” of others, Kanō refers to Hanagumi Shibais production as “neo *kabuki*.”

Kanō has set the goal of developing neo *kabuki* capable of transcending the existing *kabuki* system. While Kanō appreciates the well-preserved, centuries-old *kabuki* tradition, he observes that its system has been strictly operated only within families with a traditional lineage, thus excluding outsiders, no matter how talented.<sup>17</sup> Because Kanō has sought to develop his neo *kabuki* independently of the existing *kabuki* system, Hanagumi Shibai represents a direct confrontation with that system.

Kanō’s neo *kabuki* can also be seen as an attempt to go beyond both the style-centered post-Meiji “artistic *kabuki*” and *shingeki*’s text-oriented “academic *kabuki*.” Neo *kabuki* also faces the task of surpassing Ennosuke’s “Japanesque *kabuki*,” which popularized *kabuki* as entertainment mainly by modernizing it through the introduction of high-tech devices.

Thus intending to go beyond other twentieth-century approaches to *kabuki*, Kanō started Kanō Yukikazu Jimusho (Kanō Yukikazu Studio) in 1984 and presented several works modeled after *kabuki*, using only new actors in his casts. Kanō decided to establish a repertory company in order to create his own style of *kabuki*.

### Kanō’s Challenges

Kanō has revealed three key challenges for the development of his neo *kabuki*.<sup>18</sup> First, neo *kabuki* must find a way to revive the wild and primitive spirit that inspired traditional *kabuki*’s development. Second, it must find a way to achieve unity between performers and audiences and thus greater social relevance for contemporary Japanese society. And finally, it must develop an original theatre style, transcending any superficial attempt to update or parody traditional *kabuki*.

In order to reinvent *kabuki* as neo *kabuki*, Kanō has sought to rediscover the energy that produced traditional *kabuki*. Kanō observes that although *kabuki* has been preserved as a rich tradition for nearly three hundred years, this tradition is burden that makes it slow and stuffy for today’s audience.<sup>19</sup> Now that it has become so systematized and refined, it lacks the spontaneity needed to surprise and upset that it once possessed. In order to revive that vital energy, Kanō demands that his actors evoke an aura of thrills, tension, and the unexpected.

The Chinese characters presently used to write “*kabuki*” are a combination of “*ka*” (music), “*bu*” (dance), and “*ki*” (dramatic action). [During the Tokugawa period, the character for “*ki*” was usually another one, meaning “prostitute.” Ed.] But at the turn of the seventeenth century, the word carried

a different meaning. [See Shively's essay, chapter 3. Ed.] Originating from the verb "*kabuku*" (literally, "to incline" or "to tilt"), "*Kabuki*" signified the unusual, unconventional, and excessively unorthodox in relation to social trends or conventional rules of the time. This nonconformity also involved a certain lavishness and eccentricity in dress and behavior, so that "*kabuki*" also hinted at "fashionable" and "in vogue." *Kabuki* actors were called *kabuki mono* because they acted recklessly and their outrageous fashions shocked people. Analogous to the hippies of the 1960s, the *kabuki mono* in the seventeenth century were people who defied the established order by dressing up in highly unusual and shocking ways.

It is this "*kabuki* spirit" that Kanō aims to embody. Hanagumi Shibai's neo *kabuki* defies current ethics and common sense by exaggerating flamboyant manners and fashion. Hanagumi Shibai thus aims to shock and excite audiences used to seeing conventional performances.

Kanō's second challenge has been to confront the apparent lack of social relevancy in traditional *kabuki*. At the time of its original development in the seventeenth century, *kabuki* was a part of people's everyday lives; a performance was a shared experience between the audiences and the performers. However, this unity has been fractured, because rather than being the people's ordinary entertainment, *kabuki* has become limited largely to scholars, connoisseurs, and others who are well informed about it. Thus it can hardly attract general audiences, especially young ones, who find it difficult and boring. In order to restore public interest in *kabuki* as exciting theatre, Kanō introduces overt entertainment values. He brings in contemporary humor, dance, music, sets, and costumes. But more than simply updating texts and stage devices, Kanō combines classical *kabuki* elements with contemporary entertainment in order to achieve audience-performer unity.

Rather than *kabuki*'s technical aspects, such as acting technique and stage devices, Kanō strongly believes that it is the powerful unity between the audience and actors that vitalizes *kabuki*. For example, Kanō points to the stylized *mie* (pose) at climactic moments. At this heightened point, the feeling of the audience is unified with the actor's as if they were breathing together. Kanō believes no other art form can show such a high vitality as *kabuki*, and he wants to bring that powerful energy on stage.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, Kanō has challenged himself to develop originality in his neo *kabuki*, rather than mere imitation or parody. To those conservative critics, who think that Hanagumi Shibai is mocking real *kabuki*, Kanō insists that, he is experimenting to find a way of presenting *kabuki* performance with a wider vision. By trying out various styles and devices, Hanagumi Shibai tests the limits and possibilities of neo *kabuki* as vital and contemporary performance.

Indeed, in conservative Japanese society, it takes plenty of time and labor to change a single system, so it is very difficult to cultivate something new, particularly in the *kabuki* world where the old system has been so well maintained. However, as an outsider to the *kabuki* family, Kanō aims to reform *kabuki*, not by criticizing or changing the existing system itself but by offering his original approach as a supplementary system of its own.

The following discussion is based upon scripts, videotapes, and articles from the clipping file at Hanagumi Shibai. Because of space restrictions, the analysis is limited to two scripts, *Za Sumidagawa* (The Sumida River) and *Tenpesuto: Arashi-nochi-Hare* (Tempest: Storm—later fine); and three videotapes of performances of *Za Sumidagawa*, *Tenpesuto Arashi-nochi-Hare*, and *Izumi Kyōka no Tenshu Monogatari* (Izumik Kyōka's story of Himeji castle).<sup>21</sup>

### Kanō's Dramaturgy

While Kanō's writing seems to reveal no special dramaturgical formulae, his technique resembles that of *kabuki* playwright Tsuruya Nanboku IV (1755-1829), who was famous for writing bizarre scripts with multiple-layered plots and themes. *Kabuki* plays were usually written within a *sekai* (dramatic world), a well-known dramatic context, such as the story of the forty-seven faithful samurai. Frequently, more than two familiar *sekai* were combined to meet the demand for novelty. Nanboku mastered this technique, called *naimaze* (mixture), sometimes using up to five *sekai* to create a new play with fantastically interwoven plots. His *naimaze* was not just a reinterpretation of existing plays or a patchwork of scenes, characters, and dialogue, but a novel concoction of distinct forms, styles, and genres, even mismatched ones.

Like Nanboku, Kanō uses *naimaze* to combine a number of *kabuki* themes; he selects numerous plays as sources, deconstructs scenes, chooses elements and characters he likes, and reconstructs them as if creating a collage. Kanō takes inspiration not only from Nanboku's technique but also from his own interpretation of "*kabuki* spirit," spurring himself on to destroy the established style in order to produce a new one. Just as Nanboku deconstructed the established *kabuki* world and writing in ways that may have been uncomfortable for audiences familiar with conventional plotting, Kanō makes odd and mismatched combinations, often creating surprises by placing unexpected happenings between well-known episodes. Kanō seeks to deconstruct the world of existing plays and reconstruct them, mixing various forms and genres to create his original *kabuki* world in a contemporary context.

## Texts and Structure

Kanō always uses existing *kabuki* scripts or classical or contemporary plays and novels as sources. However, his plays are original in that he not only combines existing plays, but creates his own world by layering various genres.

Kanō's earlier plays, such as *Za Sumidagawa* (1987), *Iroha Yotsuya Kaidan* (ABC ghost story of Yotsuya, 1987), and *Sakura-hime Akebono Zōshi* (Story book of Princess Sakura, 1988), were written by combining scenes from a number of *kabuki* plays. *Kaitan Shintokumaru* ("Monster-birth" Shinto-kumaru, 1988) is an adaptation from a 1773 puppet play, *Sesshū Gappō ga Tsuji* (Gappō and his daughter Tsuji), later adapted for *kabuki*. Kanō also writes plays combining *kabuki* themes with Western works, such as *Kabuki-za no Kaijin* (Phantom of the Kabuki-za, 1989), based on Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Phantom of the Opera*, and *Okujochūtachi* (The maids, 1992), inspired by Jean Genet's *The Maids*.

For the most part, Kanō's plays keep to the language of the original text and story, suggesting at first glance that these plays are patchworks or parodies of existing works. However, Kanō achieves originality in many ways: the plays are fast moving and full of a modern sense of humor with contemporary gags and surprising ironies; serious scenes are often interrupted by funny ones or jokes referring to modern events. Thus Kanō's adaptations allow audiences familiar with the original plot to enjoy the performance as parody, while at the same time reaching new audiences unfamiliar with the classical language and themes through incorporation of modern vernacular and ideas.

Kanō does not consider the text primary. His main concern is not to give new interpretations to the classical plays or to deliver messages. Rather, Kanō regards *kabuki* as an actor's theatre and the scripts only as pretexts for actors. Thus the structure of a Hanagumi Shibai production is sometimes altered during rehearsals. Kanō constructs the main plot, but minor scenes and dialogue are edited and adapted as actors' ideas are tested and then incorporated. Kanō is mostly concerned about how he can keep actors interesting on stage.

In order to observe how Kanō's plays embody his vision for neo *kabuki*, it is useful to examine his approach to texts and structure. For example, *Za Sumidagawa* demonstrates Kanō's effort to revive classical *kabuki* themes, characters, and language through skillful use of *naimaze*. Kanō wrote *Za Sumidagawa* based on *Sumidagawa mono*, a series of puppet theatre and *kabuki* stories about an event that occurred near the Sumida River.<sup>22</sup> [These form a *sekai* of their own. Ed.] Kanō chose four of the stories as his sources: *Futago Sumidagawa* (Twins at the Sumida River) by Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1725),<sup>23</sup> *Sumidagawa Gonichi no Omokage* (Latter-day memories of

the Sumida River) by Nagawa Shimesuke (1754-1814),<sup>24</sup> *Nagare no Shiranami* (Flowing bandits) by Kawatake Mokuami (1816-1893),<sup>25</sup> and *Sumidagawa Hana no Goshozome* (The floral-dyed silk and the Sumida River) by Tsuruya Nanboku IV.<sup>26</sup>

In order to make his neo *kabuki* version purposeful for today's audiences, Kanō modernizes the characters so the audiences can better identify with them. Kanō's *Za Sumidagawa* opens with Hanjo, the heroine of the *nō* play *Sumidagawa*, who appears wearing traditional *nō* costume and introduces a treasure of her family, the Yoshida, a scroll with a picture of a carp. But in Kanō's version, Hanjo, a sixteenth-century, middle-aged woman who has lost her only son, Matsuwaka, is transformed into a young, single, female tour guide who flirtatiously introduces the scroll to a group of high school students making a school trip to the Sumida River. Like a typical Japanese tour guide, she poses for souvenir photos with the students.

One mischievous student draws eyes on the illustration carp for fun, despite his twin brother's warning. The carp comes alive and jumps from the scroll into the river. A series of legends on the Sumida River comes to life on stage. As the two high school students experience the world of Sumida legends in the form of the twin Yoshida brothers, Matsuwaka and Umewaka, the audience experiences the classical world of the play with a sense of intimacy.

Kanō draws his audience in further with humor by comically depicting Hanjo, the tour guide who, using a funny mixture of classical and modern language. With similar effectiveness, Matsuwaka, a wicked nobleman in the original play, becomes a wicked high school student, and Sōta, a robber, shows up as a college student who mugs tourists.

Kanō's skillful use of *naimaze* reemerges in the next scene, which begins with the famous episode from *Futago Sumidagawa* about a number of events surrounding the Yoshida family's disputes. Yoshida Matsuwaka loses the scroll through carelessness and the Yoshida family is abolished. In order to find the lost scroll and restore his family, Matsuwaka disguises himself. Kanō here weaves the play *Sumidagawa Hana no Goshozome*, which consists of two famous *sekai* called *Onna Seigen* (Female Seigen)<sup>27</sup> and *Kagamiyama* (Mirror Mountain), into the action. *Onna Seigen* is an episode about Matsuwaka's fiancée, Hanako, who, upon receiving wrong information about Matsuwaka's death, becomes a nun (named Seigen) to mourn for him. Later, she meets her younger sister's fiancé, who resembles Matsuwaka. (He is actually Matsuwaka disguised as a nobleman in order to search for the lost scroll. In Kanō's *Za Sumidagawa*, he disguises himself as his younger twin brother Umewaka.) Realizing later that he is really Matsuwaka, Seigen (formerly Hanako) becomes mad from jealousy, which drives her to wickedness.

Adding to these multiple layers, Kanō interweaves three famous scenes

from the famous *kabuki* play *Kagamiyama*: “Zōriuchi,” “Nagatsubone,” and “Okuniwa.” In “Zōriuchi” (Sandal beating) the evil court lady Iwafuji has been plotting to swindle the shogunate for some time; because her secret message has been picked up accidentally by Lady Onoe, Iwafuji beats the lower-ranking Onoe with her *zōri* (sandal), an extreme form of disgrace. The maidservant Ohatsu avenges her mistress Onoe by killing Iwafuji. The cruel insult pushes Onoe to suicide. Kanō next weaves in dramatic action from “Nagatsubone” (Lady-in-waiting): The deeply humiliated Onoe returns to her room, describes Iwafuji’s evil deeds in a suicide note, and takes her own life. Her maid Ohatsu vows to take revenge on Iwafuji. In “Okuniwa” (The inner court), Ohatsu kills Iwafuji, Iwafuji’s coconspirators are found out, and Ohatsu is rewarded by being given the name of Onoe II.

Kanō keeps to the original plot and characters for the most part except for transitional elements needed to connect new scenes with the previous plot development. (In Kanō’s version, Iwafuji schemes to get hold of the Yoshidas’ property.) But he uses two popular characters who appear often in *kabuki* plays: Hokaibō and Shinobu no Sōta. The disgraceful and amorous priest, Hokaibō, a popular comic villain in *Sumidagawa Gonichi no Omokage*,<sup>28</sup> appears as a party to Iwafuji’s conspiracy. He plots to poison Onoe at Iwafuji’s urging. An amorous Hokaibō also barges in on Hanako and, after she rejects him, kills her. Shinobu no Sōta, a robber-hero in one of the Sumida plays, also appears as a conspirator with Iwafuji. Requested by Iwafuji to find the scroll, he kills Umewaka (who happened to find the scroll) by mistake.

Kanō’s choice of comically juxtaposing all these characters transforms the heavy tone of the play into one more playful. Kanō ends the play with material taken from *Futago Sumidagawa*. Matsuwaka disguises himself as Hanako, kills Sōta, and gets the scroll back. Umewaka, who was thought dead, comes back. Matsuwaka pulls out the eyes of the carp to restore it to the scroll, tears the scroll down, and throws it into the Sumida River. As everything sinks, the two students come back to reality. Thus well-known scenes and characters from *Sumidagawa mono* are cleverly intermingled in *Za Sumidagawa* and modernized in order to delight contemporary audiences.

Since Kanō keeps much of the language and plot of the original story, the play might seem to be a simple parody or haphazard collage of scenes and characters. Kanō has said that some people may enjoy the play as parody if they know the originals, but it is not his intention to write *kabuki* parody or give new interpretations to these plays. Rather, his intention is to create his own original play by selecting scenes and characters to entertain, surprise, and excite.

Kanō frequently inserts contemporary gags and humor between *kabuki* episodes so the audience can feel at home in the world of the play and enjoy

the play not only intellectually, as parody, but also casually, as entertainment. Serious scenes are often interrupted with elements of comedy. For example, the "Zōriuchi" is tragic in the original but in Kanō's adaptation is depicted as slapstick.

The scene where Onoe commits suicide is traditionally depicted poetically, but it can seem excessively melodramatic and lengthy for impatient modern audiences. In Kanō's lighter, more swiftly paced version, Iwafuji, who has no patience to wait for Onoe to take this last tragic action of her life—writing her suicide note while eating her favorite soft round rice cake and lamenting the sorrow of death—chokes her to death from behind. Iwafuji's rushing Onoe's death provides the scene with comic relief.

Kanō also meets his goal of surprising audiences by making unexpected things happen. In the scene where Hanako performs a solemn ritual to become a nun, the carp that has escaped from the scroll breaks into the ceremony, while all the play characters appear on stage trying to catch it. Matsuwaka, disguised as Hanako, barges in on Sōta in order to get the scroll back and is found out to be a man. Moreover, Sōta turns out to be a bisexual and Matsuwaka becomes his lover.

Thus, in *Za Sumidagawa*, Kanō revived the classical world of *kabuki* by incorporating modern elements to make it relevant. *Za Sumidagawa*, nevertheless, left a number of critics as well as spectators with the impression that it is a revival or parody of classical *kabuki*. From this perspective, Kanō had not yet developed *kabuki* themes to create his own world.

In order to break through people's misconceptions of neo *kabuki* as parody or imitation, Kanō sought with his next neo *kabuki* play to approach *kabuki* themes in a more pertinent and original way. He constructed his original contemporary characters and dramatic worlds by reviving classical archetypes within contemporary contexts. In *Iroha Yotsuya Kaidan* (ABC ghost stories of Suya) (1987), Kanō broke through twentieth-century *kabuki*'s previous limitations by incorporating modern Japanese social and family contexts into the traditional *kabuki* world context, thereby creating his own new world.

As with *Za Sumidagawa*, Kanō wrote *Iroha Yotsuya Kaidan* by using *naimaze*, incorporating scenes from two popular *kabuki* plays, *Kanadehon Chūshingura* (The treasury of loyal retainers) by Takeda Izumo II (1691–1756) and *Tōkaidō Yotsuya Kaidan* (The ghost stories at Yotsuya on the Tōkaidō) by Nanboku IV.

*Chūshingura* is one of the best-known *jidaimono* (history plays) in Japan. The play is based on a famous vendetta that occurred at the beginning of the eighteenth century: *Daimyō* Asano Naganori (Enya Hangan, in the play), unable to control his anger toward the feudal lord, Kira Yoshinaga (Kō no Moronao), attacked him. Accused of violating the feudal code, Asano was

sentenced to commit *seppuku* and the Asano family was abolished. In the second month of 1703, forty-seven Asano *rōnin* (masterless samurai), with Ōishi Kuranosuke (Ōboshi Yuranosuke) as their leader, raided Kira's mansion, slew him, and avenged the honor of their lord. They were sentenced to death, but, in consideration of their noble motives, given the honor of committing *seppuku*. Their sense of loyalty made them national heroes. Many puppet and *kabuki* plays were written about them. The most eminent of all, *Kanadehon Chūshingura*, originally written for the puppets, is Japan's greatest revenge drama.

*Tōkaidō Yotsuya Kaidan* is one of the most popular plays in the *kizewamono* category (nineteenth-century dramas about contemporary lower-class characters). It is *kabuki*'s best-known ghost play. The play has close connections to *Chūshingura* because Tamiya Iemon, a *rōnin* of the Enya Hangan family, is the main character. He lives in poverty with his sick wife, Oiwa. Oume, a granddaughter of Itō Kihei, a high official, falls deeply in love with him. Hoping to marry her to Iemon, Kihei sends medicine to disfigure Oiwa. Iemon, horrified at Oiwa's resulting deformity, divorces her to marry Oume. Realizing that she is a victim of their conspiracy, Oiwa dies with a grudge against Iemon. Iemon kills his servant Kohei and arranges their bodies so that they appear to have been lovers who have committed a double suicide. He nails them to opposite sides of a door, which he throws into the river. At Iemon's wedding ceremony, Oiwa's ghost appears, leading Iemon to kill Oume and her father by mistake. He is haunted by Oiwa's ghost and finally killed.

Kanō keeps to the original story and language for the most part and leaves the characters' names unchanged. Also, as in *Za Sumidagawa*, he modernizes the original text by trimming slow-moving scenes, making the action faster, contemporizing the characters, and inserting timely and appropriate humor. But what distinguishes Kanō's *Iroha* from *Za Sumidagawa* is that his theme and characters are more up to date. Convinced that *Yotsuya Kaidan* can be more persuasive today as a modern drama about Iemon's family, and *Chūshingura* as a modern drama about the corporate battles of Japanese businessmen, Kanō interprets *Iroha* as a drama illustrating family relationships and the modern Japanese business world. While *Chūshingura* dramatizes warriors' loyalty and faithfulness to feudal authority and *Yotsuya Kaidan* dramatizes human love, hatred, and betrayal as seen in the ordinary lives of the Edo period's lower classes, Kanō's *Iroha Yotsuya Kaidan* dramatizes the modern characters' relationships, contemporary themes of homosexual love triangles, the desire for success and promotion, and a character's deep-seated grudge.

Kanō has designed the characters as stereotypical Japanese in order to enhance the audience's sense of intimacy with them. In the original *Chūshingura*, Kō no Moronao is Enya Hangan's superior. After making an



unsuccessful pass at Enya's wife, the lecherous Moronao taunts Enya, who strikes him. Enya is then forced to commit *seppuku* and his family's fief is confiscated. But in *Iroha*, the men are business partners who have a homosexual relationship, and Moronao kills Enya out of jealousy. Ōboshi Yuranosuke, a loyal businessman who works at Enya's office, later leads the vendetta against Moronao. In *Yotsuya Kaidan*, Iemon (a former retainer, although an unfaithful one, of Enya) becomes a *rōnin* after the abolition of the Enya family and endures many hardships with his sick wife, Oiwa, and his mother, Okuma. But in *Iroha*, he is shown as a typical Japanese businessman who becomes unemployed after his office goes bankrupt and as a conventional Japanese husband with a mother complex. Okuma is a typical Japanese mother who dotes on her son and ill-treats her daughter-in-law. Oiwa, like many Japanese wives troubled by their husbands' capriciousness, commits adultery with Kohei, who forces his attention on her. Afterward, she agrees to elope with him. Itō Kihei, Moronao's feudal master, appears as the president of a big corporation who has the authority to force Iemon to marry his granddaughter, Oume.

For entertainment purposes, serious scenes are often interrupted or turned into comical ones. While the scene in *Yotsuya Kaidan* where Iemon kills his faithful servant Kohei creates a ghostly and horrifying atmosphere, in *Iroha*, this is shifted to comedy: Kohei's penis is cut off and Kohei dies in agony, holding his member in his mouth. The farcical performance style makes this potentially gruesome action funny. The following scene, where Oiwa and Kohei's dead bodies are nailed together to the door and thrown into the river, is one of the most grotesque but horrifyingly beautiful scenes in the original drama, but in Kanō's version, it lacks seriousness. The wedding scene, where Oiwa's ghost curses Iemon, is also supposed to create a haunting atmosphere but, in *Iroha*, Kohei appears as a cute angel in a loincloth and dances to the wedding music with the sexily dressed Oiwa, interrupting the solemn mood of the wedding. The scene suddenly becomes chaotic when several businessmen led by Ōboshi arrive to take revenge on Moronao, who is attending, and a battle takes place. The wedding is interrupted by a crowd of partygoers celebrating the coming Christmas holidays. Thus the scene ends with dancing, musical performance, and a cabaret show. Iemon is possessed by Oiwa's ghost and dies in agony in the original, but in *Iroha*, Oiwa and Iemon are stunned by the crowds and remain standing in the street with little hope for their future.

*Kaitan Shintokumaru*<sup>29</sup> is based on the puppet play *Sesshū Gappō ga Tsuji*. Kanō set his version in the Indian kingdom of God and designed the characters as Indian deities. By introducing unusual juxtapositions of dance and comic scenes, Kanō made this play amusing; by dramatizing traditional themes

of love and morality as family relationships, he made the classical theme appropriate for contemporary spectators. Similarly, *Romio to Jurietto* (1990), an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, is a domestic comedy about an interoffice love affair and the competition between two big business enterprises. Thus, by using non-*kabuki* material, Kanō experimented with further possibilities for his neo *kabuki*.

Kanō did not seem to develop his vision of neo *kabuki* in plays written after *Iroha*. In his later productions, he staged plays by others. These included Yamada Shōichi's (b. 1925) adaptation of Shakespeare, *Tempesuto: Arashi-nochi-Hare* (Tempest: Storm—later fine), and plays by Izumi Kyōka (1873—1939), such as *Izumi Kyōka no Kusameikyū* (Izumi Kyōka's Kusameikyū, 1991), *Izumi Kyōka no Yashagaike* (Izumi Kyōka's Yashagaike, 1995), and *Izumi Kyōka no Tenshu Monogatari*.<sup>30</sup> In these experiments, Kanō seems to have used texts as subtexts for the development of a neo *kabuki* acting style.

## Production

*Kabuki* is an actor-centered theatre that places greater emphasis on performance than on dramatic context or theme. Its conventional staging methods, called *kata* (form or pattern of acting), have been perfected over generations. In Kanō's view, *kabuki* has become so beautifully stylized and stabilized that it lacks the novelty and surprise that once inspired its development. As a result, because of its slow action and lack of current relevancy, traditional *kabuki* may seem dull and its actors lacking in the requisite showmanship.

Yet Kanō does not intend to establish a systematized acting style or method. While professional *kabuki* performers have been strictly trained to perform *kata* passed down from generation to generation, the actors in Hanagumi Shibai are not encouraged to have *kata* training. This is partly because they are not descendants of *kabuki* families and partly because Kanō believes that systematized forms lack the spontaneity necessary to startle and disturb viewers. In Kanō's view, actions and movement patterns that spring spontaneously or intuitively from each actor can produce more powerful energy. He has found that amateur *kabuki* groups often give unexpectedly exciting performances because they perform freely under no method or rule.<sup>31</sup>

Hanagumi Shibai's productions are powerful because Kanō makes full use of the actors' "little theatre" energy. Kanō writes with certain images of the characters in mind; he conserves the main structure and dialogue but allows the actors to express themselves and move as they like. As previously

mentioned, some scenes are created in the rehearsal process through improvisation and spontaneous reactions to the script. The company members exchange their ideas and sometimes create new scenes inspired by the rehearsal process, discussions, and even casual conversation. Moreover, with Kanō's encouragement, his actors aim to surprise, shock, and excite by acting recklessly or outrageously.

The acting style for neo *kabuki* is often a unique concoction, a range of action and movement from the classical to the burlesque. The productions also introduce American musical styles that are familiar to younger audiences, including modern, jazz, disco, and hip-hop.

### An Example of Kanō's Neo *Kabuki* Style

Space limitations allow me to describe only one of Hanagumi Shibai's outstanding productions, *Izumi Kyōka no Tenshu Monogatari*, performed in 1997 to celebrate the company's tenth anniversary. It is the best example of Hanagumi Shibai's achievement in creating a truly original theatrical style, one that builds on previous experiments and shows the company at its ripest. As in earlier works, Kanō retains traditional *kabuki* elements in acting, costumes, and music, but he also succeeds in developing a neo *kabuki* style that does not mimic any existing performance styles.

In *Tenshu*, Kanō's actors embody his idea of neo *kabuki* by staging a non-*kabuki* play. The production follows faithfully the original text by Izumi Kyōka: A beautiful princess, Tomi, lives in the tower of Himeji Castle, the secret realm of an illusory woman. One day, a handsome hunter, Zusho-no-suke, comes in search of his lost falcon and is slowly drawn into Tomi's world of supernatural beauty. Kanō changes the classical setting of the Edo-period castle to a modern one, the top floor of a high-rise commanding a distant view of the night scene of a chaotic megalopolis.

He uses dance both for its own aesthetic charms as well as to vary the pace and mood. *Tenshu* is a concoction of various acting and dance forms, such as *nihon buyō* (classical Japanese dance), Japanese folk dance, disco, jazz dance, and hip-hop, as well as *kabuki*-like movement. However, rather than simply juxtaposing the dance forms, Kanō creates an original style by splicing them together. For example, in the scene where Princess Kame (Princess Tomi's monster friend) and Tomi's monster lover, Shu no Banbō (Princess Kame's bodyguard), enter Himeji castle dancing with two little girls, Kanō introduces elements of disco and hip-hop into a traditional folk dance. In the next scene, Princess Tomi and her maidservants perform a vivid group dance to upbeat disco music to welcome Princess Kame. The style resembles *nihon buyō* but it is oddly fused with an amusing cheerleader's dance, creat-

ing a happy and welcoming mood. Thus Kanō choreographs movements that suggest accepted forms of dance without directly quoting them. By modulating the elements of existing forms, he creates an abstract vocabulary of movements that is original to himself, yet flexible enough to extract meaning from the existing forms.

A closer examination of Kanō's use of music in *Tenshu* supports a similarly original effect. Referring to *Tenshu* as a rock musical, Kanō uses electric guitar, bass, and traditional Japanese instruments—*taiko*, *shō*, *hichiriki*, *biwa*, and *koto*—to create a novel amalgamation of jazz, techno-rock, upbeat electric disco music, and traditional Japanese folk music. Kanō again creates a unique style by splicing them together.

In the costumes, Kanō integrates traditional elements with modern ones to offer up the world of classical theatre to the modern audience. The overall design incorporates elements that allude to classical theatre, monstrosity, and modern technological waste. Princess Tomi appears in a beautiful, colorful traditional kimono reconstructed to emphasize her hybrid identity as a monstrous creature and social outcast. The sleeves of the kimono have been altered in such a way as to evoke the wings of a monstrous mothlike being. The traditional *kanzashi* (hair ornaments) are mimicked by an arrangement of objects that appear to be discarded from the technological age. The ear ornaments resemble deathly skulls.

Thus in *Tenshu*, Kanō succeeds in reviving Kyōka's classical world by fusing the modern elements with classical ones and creating his own. The scene in which Princess Tomi first appears is especially interesting. She wears a kimono and a *mino* (straw raincape), hiding her face with a sedge umbrella. Heavy-metal music fused with the sound of *hichiriki* and *shō* is played at full volume. The odd fusion of colorful traditional kimono, contemporary megalopolis, and rock music embodies the chaotic modern world as well as the fantastic and chaotic classical world of Kyōka's play. Kanō's interpretation suggests that this is not only a classical story set in Himeji Castle in the feudal era but also a story about people driven out of the modern social system. The tower of Himeji Castle can be interpreted as a place isolated from reality and the resident, Tomi, as an outcast from modern society. Thus, by blending classic with contemporary elements, Kanō creates a neo *kabuki* world transcending time and space. In *Tenshu*, Kanō has developed an original style imbued with great potential for transcending conventional attempts to update traditional *kabuki*.

The company's future direction seems to be suggested by *Tenshu*; it is likely that Hanagumi Shibai will develop its most original style as it moves further away from dramatizing *kabuki* themes. As critic Senda Akihiko says,

Kanō's choice of staging the non-*kabuki* play is correct.<sup>32</sup> *Kabuki* texts were written to embody its dramatic world through stylized acting. As long as Kanō dramatizes *kabuki* themes, his neo *kabuki* cannot overcome the impression of *kabuki* parody because he cannot move away from *kabuki* style to embody the *kabuki* world. *Tenshu* is a symbolic play that transcends time and space so it enables Kanō to develop his original neo *kabuki* style by transcending *kabuki* without restriction.

*Tenshu* also suggests that Kanō may further seek to revitalize "kabuki spirit" without using *kabuki* acting. In *Tenshu*, Kanō has succeeded in creating an original style by fusing contemporary and traditional elements. The play's success suggests that in order to transform "kabuki spirit," Kanō has to divorce himself from the technical aspects of *kabuki*.

### Conclusion

Kanō has aimed to create an original, contemporary *kabuki* and contribute to a "restoration of *kabuki* culture" in today's Japan. Ever since its creation, Hanagumi Shibai and its unique neo *kabuki* have built a reputation for an irreverent and excitingly experimental *kabuki*, which has become especially popular among a new generation of theatregoers unfamiliar with the traditional form. Hanagumi Shibai has revealed the potential to represent a new direction in *shōgekijō* through Kanō's efforts to revitalize the "kabuki spirit" for the contemporary stage.

Kanō faced three key challenges for the development of his neo *kabuki*: to revive the wild, primitive spirit that inspired traditional *kabuki* development; to achieve unity between performers and audience, and thus greater social relevance; and to develop an original neo *kabuki* style, transcending any superficial attempt to update or parody traditional *kabuki*. As noted above, he has succeeded in meeting the first two challenges, but his neo *kabuki* has had to struggle to overcome the impression of parody or imitation. To solve the problem, Kanō adapted plays and novels based on non-*kabuki* as well as *kabuki* themes. But after *Iroha*, by focusing more on the development of originality in acting, he succeeded in finding an original performance style capable of transcending the image of parody.

However, Kanō's neo *kabuki* reveals several limitations. For example, despite his success at charming audiences, he has sometimes damaged the dramatic quality of the originals by turning tragic and melodramatic scenes into comedy, and he has not completely eradicated the image of *kabuki* parody because he has kept traditional *kabuki* elements in texts and productions.

In order to develop his goal of revitalizing “*kabuki* spirit,” Kanō must transcend the company’s image of imitating *kabuki*. In his view, traditional *kabuki* acting style has been refined to present the Japanese body beautifully and powerfully, but for modern Japanese actors there must be more suitable physical expression capable of transforming their energy more directly and powerfully to a contemporary audience. Kanō has said that his objective for the company’s twentieth anniversary in 2007 is to establish a “Hanagumi style” totally different from that of *kabuki* but uniquely Japanese and Hanagumi’s.<sup>33</sup>

## Notes

1. Ei Norio, “*Kabuki wa Dare no Mono?—New Kabuki no Tōjō ga Imi Suru Koto*” (*Kabuki* is for whom?—what emergence of new *kabuki* means), *Subaru* (October 1988). (Clipping file, Hanagumi Shibai.)

2. Ei Norio, “‘New *Kabuki*’ to Chinen Masabumi no Shire” (“New *kabuki*” and Chinen Masabumi’s future), *Teatoro* (Theatre) (December 1987). (Clipping file, Hanagumi Shibai.)

3. Suzuki directed the series of experimental works “*Gekiteki naru-mono-o-Megutte*” (In search of whatever is dramatic) in the 1960s and the early 1970s. In Number Two of that series, the insane heroine, confined in a room by her family, acts out several roles of heroines from classic *kabuki* and *shinpa* (new school) pieces in her fantasies. Suzuki found that Shiraishi Kayako, the actress who played the heroine, was perfect at embodying his developing acting method based on Japanese body movements. This method is now known as the “Suzuki method.”

4. A group named Chikamatsu Shibai (Chikamatsu Theatre), founded in 1987 within the company known as Bungaku-za, and centered on experiments with the puppet plays of Chikamatsu Monzaemon lasted only a brief time and is no longer active.

5. Kanō names his company’s original *kabuki* “neo *kabuki*” to differentiate it from “new *kabuki*.”

6. Nomura Akira, *Heisei no Kabuki* (*Kabuki* in the Heisei [1989–] period) (Tokyo: Maruzen, 1994), 185.

7. Kani Rika, *Nijūisseiki Kabukigumi Sanjō!* (Here comes the twentieth-century *kabuki* group) (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū, 1996), 9–16.

8. Takahashi Yasunari, “Suzuki’s Work,” in *Suzuki Tadashi no Sekai* (Suzuki Tadashi’s world) (Tokyo: SCOT, 1991), 21.

9. Ei, “*Kabuki wa Dare no Mono?*”

10. Ibid.

11. Here Kanō uses a Chinese character meaning “to tilt,” although the characters *ka* (to sing), *bu* (to dance), and *ki* (to act) are generally used to describe *kabuki*.

12. Ei Norio introduces the company’s proposal for the play *Iroha Yotsuya Kaidan* (1987) in “*Kabuki wa Dare no Mono?*”

13. Starting in the late 1880s, *kabuki* has been gradually recognized as a national theatre of modern Japan and has been preserved as a cultural property. Kanō claims that people have been devoted to preserving only *kabuki*’s artistic beauty while its wild “*kabuki*” spirit has disappeared.

14. After World War II, many *shingeki* troupes, which staged translated Western realistic drama, started to modernize *kabuki* by interpreting the text in modern ways. Kanō criticizes this intellectual approach as “academic *kabuki*,” which made *kabuki* merely an object of study for scholars.

15. Kanō calls Ichikawa Ennosuke’s contemporary *kabuki* “Japanesque *kabuki*.” According to him, today’s *kabuki* emphasizes Japanism too much in order to attract an audience by its exotic elements. Ichikawa Ennosuke’s “super *kabuki*,” which exaggerates *kabuki*’s exotic visual appeal, is a typical example of this Japanism. Kanō thinks that Ennosuke’s *kabuki* approaches the unconventional and the modern by using high-tech stage devices, but it attracts the masses (and many foreigners) because it looks Japanese.

16. Ei, “Kabuki wa Dar no Mono?”

17. Kanō Yukikazu, *Haikai Kabuki-za no Kaijinsama* (Dear phantom of the Kabuki-za) (Tokyo: Kindai Bungeisha, 1994), 12.

18. This analytical framework is my own, based on information from an interview with Kanō and from promotional material.

19. Kanō, *Haikai Kabuki-za*.

20. Ibid.

21. Additional materials were not available from the public library and archives because the company does not publish its scripts and videotapes.

22. *Sumidagawa mono*: The original story is told in the *nō* play *Sumidagawa*, written in the fifteenth century. Later, several playwrights wrote plays modeled after this story. *Kanazōshi* (a kind of novel) *Sumidagawa Monogatari*, written in 1656, became the origin of puppet and *kabuki* versions. Further details are in Moriya Shigeo, *Tsuruya Nanboku “Naimaze no Sekai”* (Tsuruya Nanboku: “The world of his *Naimaze*”) (Tokyo: Sanichi Shobō, 1993), 173–188.

23. In 1720, Chikamatsu Monzaemon wrote this puppet play based on *Kanazōshi Sumidagawa Monogatari*. It has no direct connection with a number of *kabuki* adaptations of the original *nō* play. In his version, Hanjo appears as the mother of twin brothers, Umewaka and Matsuwaka. The story is about the twins and the Yoshida family’s various feuds over the family treasure.

24. The play premiered in 1784. This prominent farce about the Yoshida family’s treasured scroll and a triangular relationship involving Hokaibō is commonly known as *Hokaibō*.

25. This play is one of the *shiranami mono* (bandit plays) category, popular in the mid- to late nineteenth century. Sōta is a robber-hero in it. The play is commonly known as *Shinobu no Sōta* [Sōta disguised. Ed.].

26. Since the Tenmei era (1781–1788), *Sumidagawa mono* have been used in *naimaze* plots. The play was premiered in 1814. Nanboku IV mixed up the worlds of *Sumidagawa mono*, *Seigen mono*, and *Kagamiyama* and created his own world. This play is usually called *Onna Seigen*.

27. *Seigen*, originally a male role, is here transformed into a woman for the sake of novelty. This was a common nineteenth-century dramaturgic device designed to find new life in old scripts.

28. Hokaibō often appears in *Sumidagawa mono*. He commits all sorts of evil deeds, such as dirty tricks, theft, and murder.

29. An Indian Buddhist tale became a source of the *sekkyōbushi* version of *Shuntoku* and the *nō* play *Shuntoku*. *Sekkyōbushi* is an old type of narrative performance, offering morally uplifting tales.

30. Izumi Kyōka was a novelist and playwright whose works are known for their supernatural and fantastic themes. He wrote for *kabuki* and *shinpa*.

31. “Kanō Yukikazu wa Ima Nani o Kangaete Iru ka?” (What is Kanō Yukikazu thinking now?), *City Road* (December 1993). (Clipping file: Hanagumi Shibai).

32. Senda Akihiko, “Hanagumi Shibai-ban *Tenshu Monogatari*” (Hanagumi Shibai version of *The Story of Tenshu*), *Musical* (March 1997): 47.

33. Hanagumi Shibai, producer, and Kanō Yukikazu, director, *Izumi Kyōka no Tenshu Monogatari*, 150-minute videotape (Tokyo: Hanagumi Shibai and Jiyū Kōbō, 1997).