

Kusho

901-1548

Kusho II + Ham IV

K A B U K I P R O G R A M

B y

Onoe Kikugoro Troupe

January 2nd - 26th

At Shimbashi Embujo

MATINEE PROGRAM (12 noon)

HIRAKANA SEISUI KI

Old boatman Gonshiro and his daughter Oyoshi are caring for a child which they had brought home from an inn by mistake in place of Oyoshi's own son by her former husband. Her present husband is Matsuemon, who is in reality Higuchi Jiro, one of defeated general Yoshinaka's surviving retainers, waiting in disguise for an opportunity to kill the enemy general Yoshitsune.

By chance the boy they have brought home by mistake is none other than Yoshinaka's son, who had been in the care of faithful Fude, former lady-in-waiting at Yoshinaka's mansion. In an ambush designed to kill Yoshinaka's son, Oyoshi's son had been killed by mistake, and Oyoshi had run off with Yoshinaka's son thinking he was her own boy.

Following clues, Fude finally arrives at Gonshiro's lodgings seeking the lost child. Matsuemon recognizes her. He then reveals to Gonshiro and Oyoshi his true identity, and says that the child is Yoshinaka's son.

In the meantime arrangements had been made that Matsuemon is to instruct two boatmen in a special technique of rowing, under special orders from Lord Kajiwara; and Matsuemon is to have the honor of serving as chief boatman for Yoshitsune's crossing. Matsuemon hopes to kill Yoshitsune during the crossing; but instead he falls into the snare laid by Kajiwara, who is aware of Matsuemon's real identity, and has arranged that Matsuemon be attacked by the two boatmen he is to instruct.

As a result Matsuemon is captured by the enemy; but due to the contrivance of Gonshiro and the benevolence of the enemy, the life of Yoshinaka's son is spared.

RENJISHI (Dance)

The shishi is a sort of legendary "lion" of felicitous nature, often seen in congratulatory dances. Two dancers begin to perform a dance in which one represents the white shishi, the other the red shishi, each carrying a mask representing the legendary creature. The parent shishi kicks the child shishi off the edge of a cliff as a part of its training, and then waits anxiously until the child shishi reappears. Then he dances in wild joy with his son.

After a short interlude the two dancers return to stage, this time as a spirits of the shishi themselves. A spirited and very colorful dance ensues, in which the red and white manes of the respective shishi are flung about in exuberant manner.

SHIMOYO TANUKI

This is a heart warming little fantasy. One cold winter night, an old man in his hut in the mountains hears a knocking on his door. A voice begs to be allowed inside the hut to sit by the warm fire. In answer to the old man's question, the speaker admits that he is a racoon.

Now in Japan the racoon is credited with having the ability to change its form at will and fool people; so the old man refuse to take it seriously. When the voice insists that he is indeed a racoon, the man says in fright that in that case it is out of question that he should open the door.

But when the racoon is heard departing, shivering in the cold, he takes pity and calls it back. But he tells it to take some more welcome form, such as, for instance, that of his son who died many years ago. The racoon does as bid and joins the man by his fireside.

For several years thereafter, every night during the cold winter, the racoon disguised itself as the old man's son and came to join him by the fire. The old man came to regard him almost as his own true son.

One year, before taking his spring leave, the creature asks the man what he would most like to have. The man can think of nothing; but finally says he would like one gold piece to take care of his funeral.

For several winters after that the racoon fails to appear, and the old man is lonely and sad. But one day, just as winter is ending, the racoon comes again. He has a gift of a gold piece, which he had procured through hard honest work in the interval.

As it is spring, he goes off again on his rounds, promising the happy old man that he will be back again to join him on the cold winter nights.

MICHIYUKI YUKI NO FURUSATO

This is based on a famous scene from one of Chikamatsu's plays. Chubei is in flight for having stolen official money, the penalty for which is death. He is accompanied by his

sweetheart, courtesan Umegawa. Together they have fled as far as Ninoguchi village where Chubei's father lives. It is Chubei's desire to see his father's face from a distance once more before he is captured.

This arrangement simplifies the scene and makes it primarily into a dance number.

Evening Program (5 p.m.)

YUME NO HANABI

Oishi lives in a poor tenement district with her daughter Onami. Onami's father is Shinojiro, formerly of good samurai but disowned because of his bad ways. He is fickle and good for nothing, abandoning Oishi and Onami except when he falls on them to act as parasite.

He seldom returns home now, living in with geisha Kotsuma. Oishi learns of this affair and has a big brawl with Komatsu. Soon afterwards, Shinojiro leaves Oishi for good. Widower Kumeichi sympathizes with Oishi's plight, and eventually they are married.

Oishi opens a small hairdressing shop which prospers; and Onami being a studious and bright girl, is sent to study with a scholar in the neighborhood, something unusual for those days. But Kumeichi suffers an accident which deprives him of his memory. As a result he does not recognize either Shinojiro or Kotsuma when they return years later to the neighborhood, and thinks they are perhaps old friends as they claim to be.

But Oishi realizes that Shinojiro's presence threatens the happiness of their little household, particularly because of his attitude to Onami. To protect the family, she kills him. As a result she is sentenced to ten years in island prison exile.

In the interval, Kumeichi dies and Onami is adopted into a fine scholar's family. On hearing rumors of her mother's return after serving her sentence, Onami goes to look for her in the old familiar tenement sector.....

KOTOBUKI SOGA NO TAIMEN

Kudo Suketsune has been accorded a high rank so he is now celebrating the event at his mansion, when brothers Soga-no Juro and Soga-no Goro present petitions for an audience, which is granted. The brothers however are Suketsune's sons. Suketsune had killed their father and they seek to avenge the murder. But Suketsune that until a certain precious sword which had been entrusted to the dead father is found and returned, both father and sons must be suspected of complicity in the theft of the sword. Fortunately, the sword is retrieved by a faithful Soga retainer and returned at just this moment.

Juro the elder brother is diplomatic and restrained throughout the audience, while the younger brother Goro offers a contrast in his rash hastiness and open anger. With the return of the sword, which Suketsune inspects and pronounces as unmistakably the sword in question, Goro insists on the right to strike Suketsune in revenge for his father's death.

But Suketsune says that he has just been ordered to accompany the shogun on a hunting trip to the Fuji foothills, where he must see to matters of protocol. Until this important mission is finished, he cannot sell his life so cheaply. But, he says, he is willing to meet them again after the hunting expedition is over.

With this promise he gives them a gift which turns out to be wooden tablets which are entry tickets to the hunting grounds. The brothers thereby understand that Kudo Suketsune has given them a chance to come openly to the hunting grounds area to seek their revenge at that time against him. They understand Suketsune's gallantry in that respect, and as gallantly take their leave of him for the moment, to meet again, next time on the foothills of Mt. Fuji to win their revenge.

SHIMIZU IKKAKU

This play is concerned with the famous Chushingura vendetta but takes up the story from a slightly different angle, having as its hero Shimizu Ikkaku who was one of the valiant defenders of Kira Kozuke when the Ako retainers broke into the mansion to claim their revenge.

Kira, fearing revenge, is being protected by men sent from Lord Uesugi, including among them Makiyama Jozaemon and Shimizu Ikkaku. But it has been decided that on the following day Kira is to be transferred to the Uesugi mansion for further safety.

This is a great relief to Makiyama Jozaemon, so he has ordered a feast for his colleagues, glad that they have finished their mission safely without incident. Not invited to the party is Shimizu Ikkaku, who is disliked by Jozaemon because he is too much of a heavy drinker.

But Shimizu Ikkaku learns of the party and comes anyway. He partakes of a good deal of the drinks, and remarks cynically on his not being invited. Then he goes on to remark that they are all fools if they think there is no more danger to Kira. Jozaemon has openly said that he believes the leader of the enemy clan, Oishi Kuranosuke, has indeed become so degraded

that he would never attempt a vendetta.

But Shimizu Ikkaku has other opinions. He is sure that this being the last night before Kira is transferred to the much more impregnable Uesugi estate, Oishi will no doubt carry out his vendetta that night. The other members at the party are highly insulted at Ikkaku's attitude and throw him out.

Ikkaku is found by his brother Yoichiro and taken home. His elder sister Omaki worries about his drinking and berates him, but after some drunken brawling, Ikkaku falls fast asleep.

A little later drums start to beat through the snowy night. Drunken Ikkaku is immediately awake. He realizes instantly that it is the vendetta attack, and makes preparations for defense. Jozaemon makes his appearance and apologizes for his earlier attitude. They all hurry to the mansion's defense.

The final scene shows the fight of the defenders against the vendetta seeking invaders. Although Kira Kozuke himself proved cowardly, many of his defenders fought very gallantly, and among them was Shimizu Ikkaku, who disguised himself as a woman in order to draw near the attackers, and then put up one of the most gallant fights of the night, winning fame for his courageous stand.

