

# KABUKI ACTORS

Masterpieces of Japanese  
Woodblock Prints

from the Collection of  
The Art Institute of Chicago  
June 6 - July 31, 1988



東洲齋寫樂画稿



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**K**abuki theater and *Ukiyo-e* prints developed side by side during the Edo period (1603-1868). Both were designed to appeal to the newly prosperous urban merchant class in Edo (now modern-day Tokyo), Sakai, Osaka, and Kyoto.

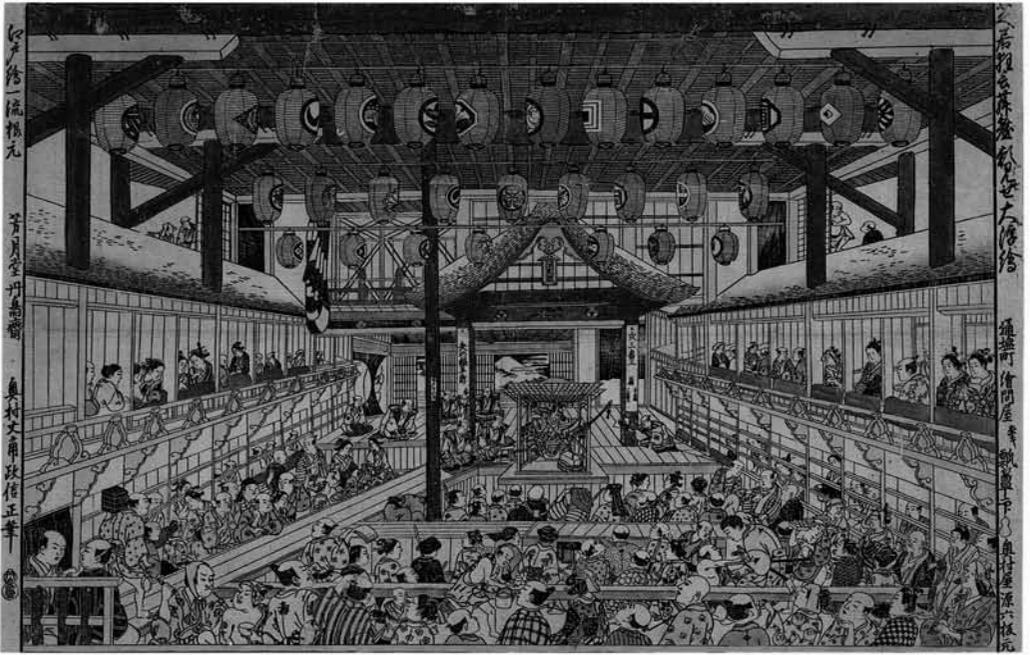
**T**he Tokugawa shogunate (feudal government) had stratified most of Japanese society into four classes: the *samurai* (warrior elite) at the highest level, followed by farmers, artisans, and merchants. By the eighteenth century, this theoretical ordering of society no longer corresponded to economic reality, as the merchant class had come to control a considerable proportion of the nation's wealth. Denied access to political power, urban merchants spent their money lavishly on both culture and frivolity. This extravagant young culture became a separate world in itself, and was dubbed *Ukiyo* – the “Floating World.” The word *Ukiyo*, which originally alluded to the Buddhist term for the transient “Sorrowful World,” aptly characterized this ever-changing world of fashion and entertainment.

**W**oodblock printing, which produced inexpensive and therefore disposable images, was ideal for the depiction of this fashionable and sensual city life. Many artists and publishing houses in the urban centers produced *Ukiyo-e* (“Pictures of the Floating World”) for a public whose tastes differed from, but were no less discriminating than, those of the aristocracy. Entertainment districts filled with brothels were licensed by the feudal government. These red-light districts, along with Kabuki theaters, Sumō wrestling rings, and restaurants, provided all manner of entertainment for the pleasure-seeking bourgeoisie.

**K**abuki actors and the *Ukiyo-e* artists who portrayed them continually influenced one another. A memorable play, performance, actor, role, or pose inspired woodblock prints, which, in turn, established the use of certain gestures, costumes, hairstyles, and make-up for future *Kabuki* performances. They also influenced every aspect of contemporary fashion. The prints served as advertisements and souvenirs, and the actors – due in great part to these *Ukiyo-e* – enjoyed fame and popularity comparable only to that of today's film and rock stars.

**O**f the three widely known forms of Japanese theater (*Kabuki*, *Nō* and *Bunraku*), *Kabuki* is the most lavish and flamboyant and appeals the most to Western audiences. Unlike the courtly *Nō* tradition, or the *Bunraku* puppet theater, *Kabuki* combines sheer spectacle, expressive artistry, opulent costume, violent dramatic action, and sometimes vulgar comedy into an intricately interwoven pattern of acting, singing, and dance. While many of the plays were adapted from the older *Bunraku* repertoire, some were written specifically for the *Kabuki* stage. Many of the stories came from historical or mythological sources. Others were derived from current events. Most are heroic tales, stories of chivalry, tragedy, romance, and exemplary behavior, populated by larger-than-life characters torn between contradictory duties and emotions. Such plots exemplify some of the problems inherent in Japan's strictly ordered feudal society, conveying both the fascination and uneasiness with which the urban merchants regarded the severe moral codes of the ruling warrior elite.

**T**he term *Kabuki*, which originally implied something shocking or out-of-the-ordinary, has since adopted the characters *ka* (song), *bu* (dance), and *ki* (act) – a more descriptive, if less colorful appellation. *Kabuki* evolved from an all-female theater that began on the banks of the Kamo River in Kyoto. The shogunate banned women from the stage in 1629, and young men in 1652, both for reasons of promiscuity. It is a testament to generations of dedicated actors that *Kabuki* has risen from its lowly beginnings to become one of the world's most celebrated theatrical traditions.



OKAMURA MASANOBU, *Interior of the Nakamura Theater* (checklist no. 1)

There are many aspects of a *Kabuki* performance which may seem new and exotic to a non-Japanese viewer. These include the long auxiliary stage (*hanamichi*) on which performers make grand entrances and exits, the numerous trap doors concealed beneath the revolving stage through which villains make surprise appearances and escapes, and the traditional music and stylized manner of speech that enliven every performance. A group of professional clappers boosts the star's morale by shouting his name enthusiastically during climactic scenes. Female roles are portrayed by *onnagata* – men specially trained to play women's parts. Young boys who are the real or adopted sons of *Kabuki* actors also perform, displaying phenomenal discipline throughout extraordinarily lengthy scenes. Colorful costumes, elaborate choreography, and daring acrobatics provide a feast for the eyes. A single *Kabuki* program contains plays of many types (comedies, tragedies, dances, and ghost stories), and can last all day and well into the evening. It is because of the length of these performances, the concentration, and the years of rigorous training required, that the actors live almost all their lives on and behind the stages of *Kabuki* theaters. Most theatergoers do not sit through every scene of the many plays that are performed daily, but take time out for meals, snacks, conversation, and napping. The theater buildings are equipped with many floors of restaurants, shops, and souvenir stands, and the door remains open throughout the day. Strangest of all to the Western viewer is the notion that real *Kabuki* aficionados fight for seats at the premier of a season, and then leave the theater after the dramatic highpoints, but before the entire program is over.

Many of the characteristics of the *Kabuki* theater are vividly documented in the *Ukiyo-e* prints of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. This lively interplay between the fine and performing arts is grandly portrayed in the Art Institute's superb collection of Japanese woodblock prints, one of the foremost assemblages of such works in the world. Artists such as Toyokuni, Kunimasa, Shunshō, and Sharaku exemplify the high point of this vigorous marriage of art and theater in the late eighteenth century – the impact of which has been felt in other Japanese media, and even in the art of the West.

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# CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

**ARTIST:** Name of print designer with life dates or known period of activity.

**TITLE:** Subject of print. In the case of actor prints, this includes the actor's name, the role portrayed, and the play title with English translation.

**DATE:** Year of the play production or print publication.

Artists' names appear in traditional Japanese order, family name first. Translations are approximate rather than literal, intended to convey the flavor of the original Japanese title.

**1. OKAMURA MASANOBU**  
(1686-1764)

Perspective view of the interior of the Nakamura theater during the introduction of Ichikawa Ebizō as Yanone Gorō

In the premier of *Miyabashira Taihei-ki* (Account of the Central Column of a Shintō Shrine)

Dated 1740

Clarence Buckingham Collection, 1925.2285

**2. IPPITSUSAI BUNCHŌ**  
(active c. 1760-1770)

Sakata Sajūrō I as Funayado no Sabu (?)

In *Shuen Soga Ōmu-gaeshi* (Polite Exchange at the Soga Banquet)

Performed 1768, second month

Clarence Buckingham Collection, 1928.999

**3. IPPITSUSAI BUNCHŌ**  
(active c. 1760-1770)

Arashi Hinaji I as Yuya-gozen(?) being welcomed by his audience upon his return to Edo

Debut of *Ima o Sakai Suehiro Genji* (Turning Point of the Future Prosperity of Genji)

Performed 1768, eleventh month  
Clarence Buckingham Collection, 1928.998

**4. RANTOKUSAI SHUNDŌ**  
(active 1780-1792)

Ōtani Hiroji III as Satsuma Gengobei, and Nakamura Sukegorō II as Sasano Sangobei

In *Iro-moyō Aoyagi Soga* (The Green Pattern of the Soga Willow)

Performed 1775, second month

Frederick W. Gookin Collection, 1939.851-852

**5. UTAGAWA TOYOHARU**  
(1735-1814)

Perspective view of the interior of the Nakamura theater

c. 1776

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Harold G. Henderson, 1962.998

**6. KATSUKAWA SHUNSHŌ**  
(1726-1792)

Ōtani Hiroji III in *otokodate* (cavalier) attire

From the print series *Azuma Ōgi* (Fans of the East)

c. 1775

Clarence Buckingham Collection, 1928.987

**7. KATSUKAWA SHUNSHŌ**  
(1726-1792)

Nakajima Mihouemon II as the minister Saidaijin, and Ichimura Uzaemon IX (left), Ichikawa Ebizō III (center), and Ichikawa Yaozō II (right) impersonating the triplets Umeō-maru, Matsuō-maru, and Sakura-maru

In *Sugawara Denju Tenarai Kagami* (Sugawara's Secrets of Calligraphy)

Performed 1776, seventh month

Clarence Buckingham Collection, 1938.498

**8. KATSUKAWA SHUNSHŌ**  
(1726-1792)

Sawamura Sōjūrō III in his dressing room conversing with the *onnagata* (female impersonator) Segawa Kikunojō III

c. 1781

Clarence Buckingham Collection, 1938.496

**9. KATSUKAWA SHUNKŌ**  
(1743-1812)

Onoe Matsusuke I as a mendicant priest

In *Keisei Ide no Yamabuki* (Courtesan: Lovely as Wild Roses of Ide)

Performed 1787, fifth month

Clarence Buckingham Collection, 1952.365



Left: RANTOKUSAI SHUNDŌ, Ōtani Hiroji III and Nakamura Sukegoro II (checklist no. 4)

10. KATSUKAWA SHUN'EI  
(1762-1819)  
Asao Tamejūrō I as the drunken  
Gotobei doing a *sambasō* (dance  
prelude to a theatrical  
performance)  
In *Yoshitsune Koshigoejō*  
(Yoshitsune's Petition to Cross the  
Barrier)  
Performed 1790, ninth month  
Frederick W. Gookin Collection,  
1939.912
11. KATSUKAWA SHUN'EI  
(1762-1819)  
Ichikawa Komazō III  
impersonating the princess  
Nyosan-no-miya, the Blind Man  
Ukare Zatō, and Sakata no Kaidō-  
maru  
In *Natsu Matsuri* (Summer  
Festival)  
Performed 1791, eighth month  
Frederick W. Gookin Collection,  
1939.921
12. KATSUKAWA SHUN'EI  
(1762-1819)  
The fox-woman Kuzunoha doing  
a posture dance  
From a print series of *Oshie*  
(Pressed Paper and Cloth  
Collages)  
c. 1792  
Clarence Buckingham Collection,  
1925.2372
13. TOSHŪSAI SHARAKU  
(active 1794-1795)  
Iwai Hanshirō IV as the wet-nurse  
Shigenoi  
In *Koi-nyōbō Somewake Tazuna*  
(The Chosen-wife's Multicolored  
Leadrope)  
Performed 1794, fifth month  
Clarence Buckingham Collection,  
1934.198
14. TOSHŪSAI SHARAKU  
(active 1794-1795)  
Ōtani Oniji III as the manservant  
Edohei  
In *Koi-nyōbō Somewake Tazuna*  
(The Chosen-wife's Multicolored  
Leadrope)  
Performed 1794, fifth month  
Clarence Buckingham Collection,  
1934.207
15. TOSHŪSAI SHARAKU  
(active 1794-1795)  
Bandō Zenji as a Namazu-bōzu  
and Sawamura Yodogorō II as  
Kawatsura Hōgan  
In *Yoshitsune Senbon-zakura*  
(The Thousand Cherry Trees of  
Yoshitsune)  
Performed 1794, fifth month  
Clarence Buckingham Collection,  
1934.209
16. UTAGAWA TOYOKUNI I  
(1769-1825)  
Arashi Ryūzō (Toraya) as the  
monk Toji-bō  
Print entitled *Hatsu Akebono  
Kaomise Soga* (The First  
Daybreak: Premier of *The Soga*)  
Performed 1794, second month  
Clarence Buckingham Collection,  
1935.415
17. UTAGAWA TOYOKUNI I  
(1769-1825)  
Iwai Hanshirō IV as Katanaya  
Ohana  
In *Irokigisu Ukina no Yozakura*  
(The Colored Pheasant: Romance  
While Viewing Cherry Blossoms  
in the Evening)  
Performed 1794, third month  
Clarence Buckingham Collection,  
1928.1075
18. UTAGAWA TOYOKUNI I  
(1769-1825)  
Iwai Hanshirō as the peasant girl  
Otoma of Inamura-ga-saki  
In *Matsuwa Misao Onna  
Kusunoki* (Steadfast Woman of  
the Kusunoki Family)  
Performed 1794, eleventh month  
Clarence Buckingham Collection,  
1925.3141
19. UTAGAWA TOYOKUNI I  
(1769-1825)  
Sawamura Sōjūrō III as Satsuma  
Gengobei, and Arashi Ryūzō as an  
extoller  
In *Edo Sunago Kichirei Soga*  
(Golden Sands of Edo: The Time-  
Honored Customs of the Soga)  
Performed 1795, first month  
Clarence Buckingham Collection,  
1925.3151
20. UTAGAWA TOYOKUNI I  
(1769-1825)  
Sawamura Sōjūrō III as the hero  
Ōboshi Yuranosuke, leader of the  
Forty-seven Loyal Retainers  
In *Edo no Hana Akō no Shioyama*  
(Flowers of Edo: The Salt Pot of  
Akō)  
Performed 1796, fourth month  
Clarence Buckingham Collection,  
1925.3142
21. UTAGAWA TOYOKUNI I  
(1769-1825)  
Kataoka Nizaemon VII as Iyo no  
Tarō, and Iwai Hanshirō IV as  
Kojirō-gitsune of Okazaki (a  
female fox)  
In *Seiwa Nidai Ōyose Genji* (An  
Assembly of Emperor Seiwa's  
Second Generation)  
Performed 1796, eleventh month  
Clarence Buckingham Collection,  
1925.3152
22. UTAGAWA TOYOKUNI I  
(1769-1825)  
Sawamura Sōjūrō III as the  
packhorse-man Muchizō  
In *Miyamairi Musubi no Kamigaki*  
(Worship at the Fence of the  
Shintō Deity of Birth and Growth)  
Performed 1797, eleventh month  
Clarence Buckingham Collection,  
1925.3136
23. UTAGAWA KUNIMASA  
(1773-1810)  
Sawamura Sōjūrō III as Kiyomori-  
nyūdō  
In *Genpei Hashira-goyomi* (Block  
Calendar of the Rival Genji and  
Heike Clans)  
Performed 1795, twelfth month  
Clarence Buckingham Collection,  
1929.730
24. UTAGAWA KUNIMASA  
(1773-1810)  
Ichikawa Ebizō as Usui Aratarō  
In the *Shibaraku* (Wait a  
Moment!) act of *Seiwa Nidai  
Ōyose Genji* (An Assembly of  
Emperor Seiwa's Second  
Generation)  
Performed 1796, eleventh month  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. James A.  
Michener, 1958.145

25. UTAGAWA KUNIMASA  
(1773-1810)

Kataoka Nizaemon VII as Iyo no Tarō

In *Seiwa Nidai Ōyose Genji* (An Assembly of Emperor Seiwa's Second Generation)

Performed 1796, eleventh month

Frederick W. Gookin Collection, 1939.940

26. UTAGAWA KUNISADA  
(1786-1864)

Ichikawa Ebizō (Danjūrō VIII) as Shirafuji Genta

Print entitled *Ōkuni-iri Soga Nakamura* (The Return of *The Soga* to the Nakamura Theater)

Performed 1825, first month

Gift of Mrs. Everett D. Graff, 1972.381

27. TOYOHARA KUNICHIKA  
(1835-1900)

Ichikawa Udanji I as Kanshōjō (Sugawara Michizane)

In *Shinrei Sugawara Jikki* (Account of the Divine Sugawara Spirit)

Performed 1883, fourth month

Gift of Nathalie Gookin in memory of Frederick W. Gookin, 1983.587

28. TOYOHARA KUNICHIKA  
(1835-1900)

Onoe Kikugorō V as the villain Daiba no Jinzō (right), and Ichikawa Sadanji I as Itamiya Jūbei (left)

In *Sayo Kinuta Utsuya-toge* (Beating a Pounding Block at Utsuya Pass)

Performed 1883, eighth month

Gift of Nathalie Gookin in memory of Frederick W. Gookin, 1983.589

29. TOYOHARA KUNICHIKA  
(1835-1900)

Onoe Kikugorō V as the loyal retainer Torii Tsuneemon

Print entitled *Go-fūdoki Kabuki no Hon'yomi* (Reading a Play on the History of the Region)

Dated 1884

Gift of Nathalie Gookin in memory of Frederick W. Gookin, 1983.590

30. TSUKIOKA YOSHITOSHI  
(1839-1892)

Ichikawa Danjūrō IX as Musashibō Benkei

In *Kanjinchō* (The Subscription List)

Performed 1890

Frederick W. Gookin Fund, 1984.569



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## THE JAPAN FESTIVAL

*The Japan Festival is presented by The Consulate General of Japan, The Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Chicago, and the Japan America Society of Chicago. The Festival is sponsored by Arthur Anderson & Co., Hitachi, Japan Air Lines, Matsushita Electric Corp. of America, Mitsubishi Motors Corp., and Northwest Airlines. The local sponsor is Canon U.S.A., Inc. The event is sponsored by the law firm of Katten Muchin & Zavis.*

Left: UTAGAWA KUNIMASA, *Ichikawa Ebizō* (checklist no. 24)

Cover: TŌSHŪSAI SHARAKU, *Ōtani Oniji III* (checklist no. 14)