The performance traditions examined so far have been confined primarily to European and American theatre. But theatre varies widely from one culture to another. A small sample of other forms can be seen by looking at some of the the- atrical expressions found in Asia and Africa.

Theatre in Japan

At about the time the medieval religious cycles were flourishing in Europe, a very different kind of theatrical experience was being offered halfway around the world in Japan. There, Noh theatre was perfected and codified so thoroughly that it is still performed today much as it was over 500 years ago. It came into being in isolation from Western theatre and rep- resents a wholly distinct theatrical tradition.

To understand Noh theatre, one needs to look at the political and cultural context of its origin. During the sixth century a.d., the Buddhist religion arrived in Japan from India and China. With it came a written language and many nonnative arts and crafts. In the seventh century, an emperor gained power over Japan and took ownership of all land. For some 400 years Japan flourished under this system, but by the twelfth century the emperor had lost most of his political power. In 1192, he ceded his secular authority to a shogun (military dictator), although he retained his status as a near-god in the religious realm. The shogunate became he- reditary, although new families won possession of the title from time to time. Japan was ruled in this manner until 1867, when American inter- vention led to the downfall of the shogunate and the return of power to the emperor.

Under the shogunate, Japan developed a strict social hierarchy. The highest class was the samurai (warriors), with the shogun at their head. Below them were three other classes (each with subcategories): merchants; artists and craftsmen; and farmers and peasants. Each rank had a speci- fied code of behavior and mode of dress. Japanese life became highly structured and formalized. In 1338, the Ashikaga family gained control of the shogunate and retained it for the next 250 years. One of its goals was to eliminate foreign cultural influences and develop native art forms. Of the native forms, Noh was to enjoy special favor.

Noh Theatre

The most significant developments in Noh theatre began around 1375. At this time, the shogun took the Noh performer and drama- tistKiyotsuguKan’ami (1333–1384) and his son Zeami Motokiyo (1363–1444) under his patron- age and granted them samurai status in his court. Working within this refined atmosphere, these two men gave Noh its characteristic form. Zeami, greatest of Noh dramatists, wrote approximately 50 of the 250 plays that still make up the active Noh repertory. He also defined Noh’s goals and conventions. Virtually all the plays in the present Noh repertory were written more than 400 years ago and are still performed much as they were when written. Noh is thus essentially a product of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries. The major influence on Noh’s view of the world was Zen Buddhism, which teaches that ultimate peace comes through union with all being, that individual desire must be overcome, and that nothing in earthly life is permanent. Noh plays typically have as protagonists ghosts, demons, or obsessed human beings whose souls cannot find rest because in life they were devoted to worldly honor, love, or other goals that keep drawing them back to the physical world and its imperfections.

Noh dramas are classified into five types, according to the principal character:

 God plays

 Warrior plays

 Women plays

 Madness plays

 Demon plays

Traditionally, a program was made up of one play of each type performed in the order given here. These make up a pattern that shows, in the first play, the innocence and peace of the world of the gods; then, in the next series of three plays, the fall, repentance, and possibility of redemp- tion for human beings; and finally, the glory

of defeating the forces that stand in the way of peace and harmony. (Today, the more common program consists of two Noh plays with a comic Kyogen play as the interlude.)

Each Noh script is short (often shorter than a Western one-act play) and does not emphasize storytelling. The dialogue serves primarily to out- line the circumstances that lead up to, and cul- minate in, a dance. Above all, Noh is a musical dance drama that evokes an emotional state and mood. Most of the lines (written partly in verse and partly in prose) are sung or intoned. Even the brief spoken passages are recited in a stylized manner. Ordinary speech is used only when a player comes on stage between the parts of a two- part piece to summarize the first part. The performers can be divided into three groups: actors, chorus, and musicians. The ac- tors are trained from childhood and expect to devote twenty or more years to perfecting their craft. The five hereditary schools of Noh per- formance have handed down their traditions and conventions since the fifteenth century. There are two divisions of actors: those who play the secondary character, the waki, and the waki’s followers (whose function is to in- troduce the drama and lead the main charac- ter toward the climactic moment), and those who play the shite, the main character, and his or her followers. Two other types of ac- tors also appear in Noh: kyogen, actors whose primary skill is in performing the short comic plays that are presented on the same bill with Noh plays but who appear in Noh in the role of commoners, peasants, and narrators; and kokata, child actors who, as students, play chil- dren or minor roles.The chorus is composed of from six to ten members (each play specifies the number to be used in that play). They sit at one side of the stage throughout and sing or recite many of the shite’s lines (especially while the shite is danc- ing) or narrate events. Each play requires two or three drummers and one flute player. No other instruments are ever used. The drummers, in addition to playing their instruments, punc- tuate the performance with a variety of vocal sounds. There are two stage attendants, whom the audience is supposed to ignore—one to as- sist the musicians, the other to assist the actors in changing or adjusting costumes or masks and to bring on or remove stage properties as needed. All of the performers and assistants are male.The shite and his companions wear masks of painted wood, many of them passed down for generations. Costumes are rich in color and de- sign, based on the official dress of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Most garments are made of elaborately embroidered silk. Each character has its traditional costume, headdress, hand prop- erties, and positions on stage. The chorus, musi- cians, and attendants wear stiff shoulder boards and divided skirts, the traditional dress of the samurai. The Noh stage, standardized for almost 400 years, is raised about three feet. The two prin- cipal areas, the stage proper (butai) and bridge (hashigakari), are both roofed like the shrines from which they are descended. Four pillars, each with its own name and use, support the roof of the butai. By the upstage-right pillar (shitebashira, or principal character’s pillar), the actor pauses upon entering to tell the character’s name and background. While reciting this speech, the actor faces the downstage-right pillar (metsukabashira, or gazing pillar). The downstage-left pillar (waki- bashira) marks the place where the waki sits when not directly involved in the action. The upstage- left pillar (fuebashira, or flute pillar) marks the flute player’s position.

The stage is divided into three areas, although none is separated architecturally, except by the pillars (see photo below). The largest area, the main stage, is enclosed by the four pillars and is about eighteen feet square. Back of the upstage pillars is the rear stage (atoza), where the musi- cians and attendants sit. To stage left of the main stage is the wakiza, where the chorus kneels on the floor in two rows. There are two entrances to the stage. The principal one, the bridge, is a railed walkway about six feet wide and forty feet long leading from the mirror room, where the actors prepare for their entrances. In front of the bridge three live pine trees symbolize heaven, earth, and hu- manity. The bridge is used as an entrance for the musicians and for all important characters. The other entrance, the “slit,” or “cut-through,” door (only about three feet high and located upstage left) is used by the chorus and the stage assistants. The rear walls of the stage and bridge are made of wood. Painted on the wall behind the orchestra is a pine tree and on the stage-left wall, bamboo, reminders of the natural scenery that formed the background in the earliest years of Noh. There is no other scenery in the Noh theatre. A few stage properties are used, usually miniature skeletal outlines of boats, huts, shrines, and the like, typi- cally made of bamboo. These are set in place and removed as needed by the stage attendant.

The audience views the performance from two sides: in front of the main stage and facing the stage from alongside the bridge. The theatres used today hold 300 to 500 people. Although they are now indoor structures, they retain many outdoor features: The shrine-like roof of the stage is retained in its entirety under the ceiling of the auditorium, and lighting simulates the even dis- tribution of outdoor light.

Every element of performance is strictly con- trolled by conventions that have been established for centuries. Rather than encouraging innovation, Noh seeks to perfect and preserve an art form. The Shrine in the Fields (c. 1400) serves as an example. The Shrine in The FieldS (nonomiya)The Shrine in the Fields (Nonomiya) is usually attributed to Zeami. It belongs to the third cate- gory (woman play) and is based on episodes from one of the most famous of Japanese novels, The Tale of Genji (c. 1021). In the novel, Lord Genji is the lover of Lady Rokujo (she is called Miya- sudokoro in the play) but after a time neglects her. During a festival, attendants of Lord Genji’s wife publicly humiliate Lady Rokujo when they push her carriage out of the procession and dis- able it. Humiliated, she decides to leave the capi- tal and go to Nonomiya, where her daughter is being prepared to become the priestess of Ise, the sun goddess. While at Nonomiya, Lady Rokujo is visited by Lord Genji, who brings her a branch of sakaki (a sacred evergreen tree) as a sign of his trustworthiness and begs her to return with him. Although she does not, she is forever tormented by her humiliation and sense of loss. Lord Genji’s visit and Lady Rokujo’s response to it are the emotional focus of The Shrine in the Fields.Each Noh play is set in a specific season of the year, named early in the drama, and the mood and imagery of the entire play must be in keeping with that season. In The Shrine in the Fields the time is late autumn, the seventh day of the ninth month, the day on which Lord Genji visited Lady Rokujo at Nonomiya. The mood throughout is one of melancholy and bittersweet longing.

As is typical in Noh drama, the introduc- tory scene compresses time and place: An itin- erant priest (the waki or secondary character) travels—almost instantaneously—from the capi- tal to Nonomiya, where his curiosity is aroused by the seemingly perfect preservation of the shrine although it has long been abandoned. When the ghost of Miyasudokoro (the shite) ap- pears in the guise of a village girl, he questions her about the shrine and herself, and gradually it becomes apparent that there is something mys- terious about both her and the place. The first portion of the play occurs at dusk, and when the moon (a symbol of Buddha) appears, she vanishes and then returns dressed as the Miyasudokoro of long ago, having changed both mask and cos- tume. As she recalls the festival at which she was publicly disgraced, her emotion builds, and she prays that the attachments that forever draw her back to this place will leave her.

As in all Noh plays, the climactic moment is expressed in dance. The script does little to indi- cate the length of the dance, which continues in performance for several minutes. In this final por- tion of the play, the conflicting attractions of this world and the next are symbolized by the ghost’s passing back and forth through the gate of the shrine. At the end, the freeing of her soul is indi- cated by her departure from the “burning house,” a metaphor for the world. In Buddhist teaching, en- lightened persons are counseled to leave the world as willingly as they would flee a burning building.

In Noh, a number of devices distance the spectator from the play. The language is stylized throughout; most of the passages are intoned or sung; the lines of dialogue are divided in ways that differ markedly from the practices typical of Western drama, so that a single thought may be divided be- tween the shite and waki or between a character and the chorus; the shite sometimes speaks of himself or herself in the third person; and the chorus frequently speaks the lines of both the waki and the shite. In addition, numerous quotations from or allusions to earlier literary works are embedded in the text.

For The Shrine in the Fields the basic appear- ance of the stage is altered only by the addition of a stylized gate and brushwood fence, and the only property of any significance is the sprig of sakaki that Miyasudokoro places at the shrine gate (as Lord Genji had done long ago). During the per- formance the chorus are seated at stage left, while the musicians and stage attendants are seated at the rear; all are visible throughout, each becom- ing part of the visual picture.The Shrine in the Fields does not seek to tell a story or to develop character so much as to cap- ture a mood, to distill a powerful emotion, and to express an attitude about the physical world and human existence.Other Traditional Japanese Theatre Forms japan developed two other traditional theatre forms: Bunraku and Kabuki. Bunraku, in J which puppets represent the characters, came to prominence in the seventeenth century. The puppets went through many changes. Origi- nally they were only heads with drapery repre- senting the body; later, hands and feet and then movable eyes, movable eyebrows, and jointed and movable fingers were added. Eventually the puppets were doubled in size to their pres- ent height of three or four feet and elaborately costumed.Three handlers, who are visible to the audi- ence, operate each puppet. One handler ma- nipulates the head and right arm; a second, the left arm; and a third, the feet. A narrator, seated stage left on a platform with the samisen player, tells the story, speaks the dialogue, and expresses the feelings of each puppet. Musical accompani- ment is provided by a samisen (a three-stringed instrument with a skin-covered base that can be both struck and plucked) and occasionally other instruments of lesser importance. The stage itself is long and shallow. Unlike Noh, Bunraku rep- resents all locales scenically, and the scenery is changed as the action requires. Bunraku is prob- ably the most complex puppet performance in the world.

The major writer of plays for both Bunr- aku and Kabuki was Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1724), often considered Japan’s greatest playwright. He wrote many kinds of plays but is best known for his five-act history plays and his three-act plays on contemporary life. He was ad- mired above all for his plays about the double sui- cides of lovers, his sensitive characterizations, and beautiful language. Kabuki, long the most popular of the tra- ditional forms, also first appeared in the seven- teenth century. More open to change than the other forms, it has borrowed many of its plays and conventions from Noh and Bunraku but has adapted them to its own needs. Originally, Kabuki was performed on a stage resembling that used for Noh. But as time passed, it under- went many changes and today bears little resem- blance to the Noh stage. The Kabuki stage is now framed by a proscenium opening about ninety feet wide but only about twenty feet high. The auditorium is correspondingly wide and shallow, with all seats facing the stage. A raised walkway (the hanamichi) connects the stage to the back of the auditorium. Most important entrances and exits are made along this walkway, and some major scenes are played there. Thus, some of the action occurs in the auditorium in the midst of the audience. Unlike Noh, Kabuki uses a great deal of scen- ery, although the settings are not meant to be fully illusionistic. White floor mats are used to represent snow, blue mats to indicate water, and gray mats the ground. Relatively realistic build- ings are depicted frequently, but the entry gates to houses are often removed by stage assistants when no longer needed. These and other con- ventions call attention to the fictional nature of the performance. Alterations to sets, changes of props, and adjustments to costumes are made in full view of the audience by stage attendants; by convention these stage attendants are treated as invisible.Most Kabuki plays are divided into several acts made up of loosely connected episodes that emphasize highly emotional incidents. The cli- mactic moment in many scenes is reached in a highly stylized pose (the mie) struck and held by the principal character; the moment is of- ten accompanied by the rhythmic pounding of wooden clappers. Actors in heroic or villain- ous roles are offered numerous opportunities to demonstrate their skill through these mies, which are greatly admired by Japanese audi- ences. One of the most popular Kabuki plays is Takeda Izumo’s Chūshingura (1748); while often produced in shorter versions, the original eleven-act drama requires a full day to perform. A play about honor and revenge, it tells how forty-seven faithful samurai avenge the wrongs done to their master.

Song and narration are important to Kabuki. Those plays adapted from Noh or Bunraku re- tain many conventions of the original forms. Therefore, in some plays a narrator or chorus performs some passages. Since the Kabuki actor never sings, passages that must be sung require a chorus. An orchestra, the composition of which varies according to the origin of the play, accom- panies much of the action. The orchestra often includes flutes, drums, bells, gongs, cymbals, and strings, although the most essential instrument is the samisen.

Kabuki acting is a combination of stylized speaking and dancing. Almost all movement bor- ders on dance, distilling the essence of emotions and action into stylized postures, gestures, and movements. Similarly, the spoken lines follow conventionalized patterns of intonation. Roles are divided into a small number of types: loyal, good, and courageous mature men; villains; young men; comic roles (including comic villains); children; and women. The female roles are called onnagata. All roles, including the onnagata, are played by males. Like Noh, actor training in Kabuki takes many years and is primarily a hereditary profes- sion. Each family has an elaborate system of stage names, some of them so honored that they are awarded (in elaborate public ceremonies) to those considered undisputed masters of their art. Kabuki actors do not wear masks, but some roles use boldly patterned makeup to exag- gerate the musculature of face or body. Each role also has its traditional costumes, some so heavy (up to fifty pounds) that stage attendants must assist the actors in keeping them properly arranged.

Although Kabuki is highly conventional- ized, it includes many elements that resemble, though in exaggerated form, Western usages, perhaps most notably in scenery and light- ing, melodramatic stories, and emotional act- ing. Consequently, Kabuki is the Japanese form that appeals most to Westerners, and many modern European and American direc- tors have borrowed Kabuki conventions for productions of Greek and Shakespearean trag- edies (perhaps most notably Ariane Mnouch- kine’s productions at the Théâtre du Soleil in Paris). Westerners usually understand Japanese conventions only in a general way, and much of what they find attractive they have learned from the Kabuki-derived conventions used in Japanese films about samurai, especially those directed by Akira Kurosawa (1910–1998). Of all the Japanese forms, Noh remains the least understood in the West. Though some may not fully comprehend them, Japanese theatri- cal conventions serve as a reminder that the theatrical experience can vary widely from one culture to another and that the kinds of theatre with which one may be most familiar today do not exhaust theatre’s immense and diverse range of possible forms.

Modern Japanese Theater

By the late nineteenth century, some Japanese scholars, directors, and playwrights became interested in Western drama. It was probably most admired in Japanese universities, where plays by Shakespeare, Ibsen, Shaw, Chekhov, Strindberg, and others were studied and some- times performed. Japan’s best-known playwrights who were influenced by Western forms include Kōbō Abe (1924–1993) and Yukio Mishima (1925–1970); the latter also wrote Kabuki plays and modern Noh plays. Writing plays of the Western type has flourished in recent de- cades, and the Japan Playwrights Association has published a ten-volume anthology of plays in the Western style from the 1950s through 1990s. Some contemporary playwrights include SankaiJuku and Butoh

Butoh is an avant-garde performance form that originated in Japan during the turbulent 1960s. In the 1960s, a new generation of Japanese artists and intellectuals struggled with questions concerning conformity and social values even as the effects of radiation from the atomic blasts at Hiroshima and Nagasaki lingered. A rebellious dance drama or performance art response to these tensions, Butoh was initially often called ankokubutoh (“dance of darkness”) because of its use of grotesque imagery and explicit sexuality to address the mystery of an existence precariously balanced between creation and self-destruction. In the late 1960s, Butoh became a rallying point for avant-garde artists in the ongoing underground countercultural move- ment in Japan.

Founded in 1975, SankaiJuku, a “second-generation” Butoh company led by Amagatsu Ushio (1949–), has achieved resounding international fame; they have performed around the world in over forty countries and more than 700 cities. The all-male company of performers, often dressed only in robes or sarong-like garments, uses white rice powder to cover their shaven heads and near-nude bodies. SankaiJuku’sButoh performances use slow-motion, repetitive movement patterns, and selective isolations of body parts. These movements can be executed so slowly that, at times, it may seem as if the performers are statues. This intense stillness and the slow, ritualized movement patterns are juxtaposed by sharp movements, cries, and facial expressions that may convey intense pain, surprise,

or ecstasy. The scene design for SankaiJuku performance often presents a stark land- scape. This, in combination with evocative lighting, strange music, and the ap- pearance and movements of the performers, conveys a sur- real quality to the audience. The work of Amagatsu Ushio and SankaiJuku ex- presses many of the typi-cal tensions found in earlier

Butoh, while surrounding

them in a mood of calm and

serene detachment suggestive of Zen Buddhism,Juro Kara, Minoru Betsuyaku, and Masakazu Yamazaki.

Among contemporary Japanese directors, the best known is Tadashi Suzuki (1939–), who established his own company, the Suzuki Com- pany of Toga. There he developed a disciplined acting method that synthesized the martial arts, Kabuki, and Noh techniques. He staged several productions that were seen in the United States and Europe, some of them adaptations of Greek myths. Many American theatre departments have begun to offer training in the Suzuki method, de- scribed in his The Way of Acting (1993). In 1992, in collaboration with the American director Anne Bogart (1951–), he established the Saratoga (N.Y.) International Theatre Institute (SITI). Yukio Ninagawa (1935–), another internationally famous Japanese director, has done many produc- tions of Western and Japanese plays. He brought Mishima’s modern Noh plays to Lincoln Center in 2005 and he has staged numerous Japanese versions of Shakespeare in England.

In the past twenty years, Japan has built more than two dozen performance halls. Within Japan, contemporary entertainment forms are more popular than the traditional ones, but Japan is determined to support and maintain its dramatic heritage.

Theatre in China

Records of performance in Chinese territo- ries can be traced back to 1767 b.c. After 1000 b.c., there are references to secular enter- tainments at court, and by 200 b.c. emperors were keeping thousands of entertainers at court who performed what was called the “hundred plays” because of the great diversity of the en- tertainments. One Chinese emperor established a school to train performers and, according to legend, at one time it included 11,409 students. However, a fully developed drama did not begin to emerge until about a.d. 1000. The first ma- jor period of Chinese drama came during the Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368), and about 700 titles of Yuan plays have survived. The most complex literary plays were written during the Ming Dy- nasty (1368–1644). Plays from this period might have as many as fifty or more acts, each with its own title. In the opening act, a secondary char- acter sets forth the author’s purpose and explains the story. Succeeding acts introduce many plot strands, all of which are happily resolved in the final scene. Probably the most admired play from the Ming Dynasty is The Peony Pavilion (c. 1600) written by Tang Xianzu (1550–1616). In fifty- five acts, it tells a story of a girl who pines her life away for a lover she has seen only in a dream. When he finally appears at her grave, she is res- urrected. This play was presented in its entirety (for the first time anywhere) at Lincoln Center in New York in 1999. Although such plays were very popular with readers, they did little to vital- ize theatre as live performance.It was not until the nineteenth century that what has come to be called Beijing Opera emerged as a dominant and truly theatrical form. Beijing Opera is a hybrid that evolved from sev- eral regional forms brought to Beijing in 1790 to celebrate the emperor’s eightieth birthday. Many of these regional companies remained in Beijing and amalgamated with others to create the most widely known Chinese theatrical form—Beijing Opera. It is a theatrical rather than a literary form. Instead of a single work, an evening’s per- formance is usually made up of a series of selec- tions from longer works. These are intermingled with acrobatic displays. A text is merely an out- line for a performance and the author is not even listed on the program. All the plays end happily, and each troupe has its own version of the plays they perform.The traditional Chinese stage was an open platform, usually almost square, covered by a roof supported by lacquered columns. The stage was equipped only with a carpet, two doors in the rear wall (the one on stage right for all en- trances and that on stage left for all exits) between which hung a large embroidered curtain. In the beginning, the theatre was based on the layout of teahouses, but in the twentieth century Western- style auditoriums became the standard. The only permanent properties were a wooden table and a few chairs that could be rearranged quickly to in- dicate a change in place or function. Other con- ventions include using a wall painted on a blue cloth to represent a fort, city gate, or mountain pass; a whip indicating that the actor is riding a horse; and many others that are recognized im- mediately by the audience. Through such con- ventions, many places and actions are indicated.Throughout the performance, assistants help the actors with their costumes and rearrange the stage as needed. The audience is expected to ignore these stagehands. The musicians also remain in full view and play a strong role in all performances.On the relatively bare stage, the actors ap- pear in lavish and colorful costumes and speak, sing, and move according to rigid conventions. In Beijing Opera, the roles are divided into four main types: male, female, painted face, and comic. The male roles (sheng) are subdi- vided into old men (lao sheng), young men (xiao sheng), and warrior types (wu sheng). Ac- tors playing these roles wear simple makeup and (except for young heroes) beards. Female roles (dan) are subdivided into the quiet and gentle (qingyi), the vivacious or dissolute (hua dan), warrior maidens (wu dan), and old women (lao dan). The painted face actors (jing) have brilliant and elaborate patterns painted on their faces. They include warriors, bandits, courtiers, offi- cials, gods, and other supernatural beings. The comic actors (chou) speak an everyday dialect and are free to improvise and tell jokes. They wear white makeup around their eyes and com- bine the skills of a mime and an acrobat. Except for the clowns, characters render their lines in an extremely stylized manner.

Movement is also highly stylized, and ges- tures have been fully codified. Methods of walking or running vary with each role. There are about 300 standard costume items, each in- tended to describe its wearer’s character type, age, and social status through color, design, or- nament, and accessories. The complex conven- tions of Beijing Opera require long and rigorous training, which lasts from six to twelve years. Eventually training becomes very specialized as teachers decide which kind of role the student should master.

After the Communists assumed control in China in 1949, Beijing Opera was subjected to reform and many plays were forbidden. Not until the 1980s and the rejection of the “Cultural Rev- olution” were traditional plays performed once more; in many instances they were revised to fit the Communist ideal.

During the twentieth century, Western drama came to be admired by many in China but it never became a major force. The most important of the playwrights who were influ- enced by Western writers was Cao Yu (1910– 1996), who wrote about contemporary social problems in Thunderstorm (1933) and The Bridge (1945). A number of Chinese direc- tors and playwrights have achieved recognition within China since 1949. Prominent directors of spoken drama include Meng Jinghui and Lin Zhaohua, while notable playwrights in- clude Wu Han, ZongFuxian, Lao She, and Sun Huizhu. In addition, Gao Xingjian (1940–) won acclaim in China and then internation- ally. He writes more in the vein of absurdism and the avant-garde, traits seen in works such as Bus Stop (1983) and The Other Shore (1986); the latter was highly critical of the Communist government and led to Xingjian emigrating to France where he won the Nobel Prize for Lit- erature in 2000.

China has also begun to build major the- atrical complexes similar to those in the West. Opened in 1998, the Grand Theatre in Shanghai cost about $150 million and includes a main

auditorium seating 1,800 and two smaller halls (seating 600 and 200). It is one of Asia’s most advanced theatrical structures. In the large au- ditorium, the main stage, rear stage, and two side stages can be rotated, raised, or lowered; its orchestra pit accommodates 120 instrumen- talists. Opened in 2007, the Grand National Theatre in Beijing cost over $400 million. The egg-shaped building, 430 feet long and 135 feet high, includes an opera house, a concert hall, and a theatre. It will be interesting to see how these new buildings affect theatrical production in China.

Other Asian Countries

While Japan and China remain the best known for their theatrical forms, there

are many other countries in Asia, each with its own performance traditions. In India, a wide variety of entertainments can be traced back at least 2,000 years, and between the first and ninth centuries a.d. drama written in Sanskrit reached an advanced stage before it declined. A number of plays have survived from that period and are available for study. Under British rule from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, India pro- duced diverse types of plays too numerous to trace in detail. The number of languages that are still common in India makes for varied dramatic forms, each of which tends to be popular in spe- cific parts of India.

Other parts of Southeast Asia are noted especially for their work with puppets. For several centuries much of Southeast Asia has been domi- nated by Muslim standards, which discourages drama being performed by human actors. But where human performance has been frowned on, performance using puppets has been more easily accepted. Puppetry has flourished in many parts of Southeast Asia, and shadow puppetry has been particularly popular in Indonesia.

WayangKulit

One of the most distinctive forms of Asian theatre is performed via shadow puppets. In Indonesia shadow puppetry is called wayangkulit. It uses flat puppets, ranging from six inches to three feet in size, made of leather (tradition- ally from the hide of water buffalo). The pup- pets are cut and perforated to create intricate patterns of light and shadow when their images are cast onto the screen. The performances of wayangkulit enact dramas based on particular sections of the great Hindu epics the Mahab- harata (c. fourth century b.c.) and the Ramayana (c. fifth or fourth century b.c.). In most places this form of theatre maintains a spiritual aspect and the puppeteer, called a dalang, is not only a performance artist but also a spiritual figure. The dalang sits between a light source (traditionally a torch or hanging oil lamp) and the screen. The closer the dalang moves the puppet toward the screen, the more clearly the shadow of its outline appears. The entire performance is accompanied by a gamelan, a gong-chime musical ensemble composed of different types of xylophones, percussion and stringed instruments, flute, and singers.

All the puppets used during a single perfor- mance are manipulated by a single dalang who delivers the dialogue (much of it improvised) and narrative passages, sings songs, and inflectionally cues the musicians. It requires great vocal flexi- bility to suggest so many different characters in a single performance and a strong command of the story and all its characters. In some traditional performances, the dalang holds a small wooden striker between his toes and calls forth the char- acter’s spirit into the puppet by knocking on the box or stand holding the puppets. This proce- dure is sometimes referred to as “waking” the puppets and it may last several seconds or sev- eral minutes. Characters are differentiated by the size, shape, costume, and color of the puppets as well as by the quantity and arrangement of their perforations. Typically, the amount of perfora- tions made to the puppet suggests its status; low- class characters have very few perforations, while gods have many. In performance, puppets with numerous perforations seem to flicker into cor- poreal existence as the dalang brings them into the action. Traditional wayangkulit performances last from around 8:30 p.m. until sunrise. The differ- ent parts of the action relate to the passing hours. First, a problem or situation is established fol- lowed by an intrigue, usually in the stronghold of the hero’s enemies. Then, the hero appears ac- companied by clownish servants (this phase of the action usually takes place around midnight). The action reaches its crisis in a battle fought by the hero against powerful enemies. Finally, the conflict is resolved and ends in the triumph of the hero over the forces of evil (as the dawn over- comes the night).

Because Asia’s cultural sensibility honors tradition, Asian theatre forms have proven less susceptible to change over time than those in America and Europe. However, there remains considerable diversity in Asian theatrical forms.

16 mins ago

These are some of the notes

15 mins ago

Noh theatre masks are traditionally made of wood, painted, and handed down for many generations. Whereas there are only five basic types of mask (aged, male, female, deities, and monsters), there are many variations within these types. pictured is a mask for the female character in The Shrine in the Fields.

Masked performer of the Noh Theatre accompanied by musicians. The performer is Kanze Kiyokazu, headmaster of the Kanze Noh School, which traces its roots back to Noh’s founder Kan’ami. He is performing at Tokyo’s National Noh Theatre in the main role of an old man in Zeami’s Akoya no matsu.

A Noh stage. At left, the bridge; at center rear, the pine tree painted on the back wall; at right, the waki-za (the area used by the chorus). The four upright pillars define the principal acting area. Notice the temple roof above the stage.

Noh stage properties. In contrast to Western theatre’s frequent emphasis on illusionism, Noh theatre relies on simplicity and suggestion.

Puppet handlers work their craft in a Bunraku performance of 1,000 Cherry

Trees in Osaka, the city where Bunraku originated.

The arrangement of a Kabuki theatre as shown in this c. 1745 color inked woodblock print.

Japanese actor Ebizo Ichikawa XI performs as spirit of the Wisteria in "FuiiMusume" a famous classic dance from Kabuki theatre Ebizo Ichikawa Xl is the heir apparent of a Kabuki dvnastystretchina back thirteen generations.

Ushio Amagatsu's Japanese Buton company, SankaiJuku, at a performance in Paris.

The Chinese government spent over $400 million to complete its titanium

and alass-covered Grand National

Theatre in Beijing. The structure, which is said to resemble a giant egg floating on a shallow man-made lake, is entered through an underwater transparent walkway connected to the shore