

### Lecturer's profile

Michiko Hirama received her master's degree in history from Ochanomizu University, Tokyo, and a PhD in musicology from Tokyo University of the Arts. She is currently a lecturer at both the Music Department of Toho Gakuen College in Tokyo and Seitoku University, Chiba, and has also been invited to universities and institutions in Europe, Africa and the Americas to give presentations on aspects of Japanese music. Her major areas of interest are Japanese music history and the philology of seventh- through eleventh-century Japanese documents, especially those dealing with music and dance performances in court rituals.



Noh: *Motomezuka*

Bogaku (dance with Gagaku): *Ranryo-O*

Kabuki: *Musume Dojoji*

## FOUR MAJOR GENRES OF JAPANESE CLASSICAL PERFORMING ARTS



Bunraku: *The Courier for Hell*

**Oton Župančič Library (3<sup>rd</sup> Floor)**  
28 August 2014 at 19:00

Organizers:  
Embassy of Japan in Slovenia  
Ljubljana City Library

## **Gagaku**

**Gagaku** is the oldest form of Japanese classical music and was introduced into Japan together with Buddhism and political systems from the Asian continent around the eighth century. Serving mainly as Japanese imperial court music, *gagaku* is performed in the Imperial Palace at several court functions, at state banquets, and on the occasion of the spring and autumn garden parties. Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines have also played highly important roles in preserving this music. There are three forms of performance in *gagaku*: *kangen* (instrumental music), *bugaku* (dance with music), and *kayo* (music with chanted poetry). *Gagaku* ensembles include wind, string, and percussion instruments.

## **Noh**

**Noh** is a major form of classical Japanese musical drama, which has been performed since the fourteenth century. It consists of dance together with instrumental and vocal music; all the musicians appear on stage. Generally, only the main characters are masked, with men playing both male and female roles. The contemporary *noh* repertoire consists of a specific set of approximately 250 historical plays. Today, *noh* performance is often presented along with another shorter, humorous genre, called *kyogen*. Both are performed on a very special type of set, known simply as a “*noh* stage,” which resembles a shrine or temple building, with a main stage open on three sides and having no curtain separating the stage from the audience.

## **Bunraku**

**Bunraku** is a form of traditional Japanese puppet theatre, established in the city of Osaka in 1684. Three types of performers take part in a *bunraku* performance: the puppeteers, a chanter, and a *shamisen* (a three-stringed, plucked instrument) player. Typically, the single chanter not only recites the dialogue for all the characters, but also relates the spectacle of the scene, and explains the background behind the events taking place. Unlike other types of accompaniment, the *shamisen* used in *bunraku* must “play the strings of the heart,” that is, it must assist in conveying the actual emotions of the puppet characters. All but the most minor characters require three puppeteers, who perform in full view of the audience, generally covered by black robes, except for the main puppeteer, whose face remains visible.

## **Kabuki**

**Kabuki** is a highly stylized, classical Japanese dance-drama. *Kabuki* theatre is known for its heightened drama and for the elaborate make-up worn by some of its performers. The *kabuki* stage features a projection called a *hanamichi* (literally, flower path)—a walkway that extends into the audience, and by which dramatic entrances and exits are made. The origins of *kabuki* can be traced back to 1603, and it remains relatively popular, even today. *Kabuki* is the most popular of the traditional styles of Japanese drama, and its star actors often also appear in television or film roles.