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## Innovation in Nō: Matsui Akira Continues a Tradition of Change

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# Innovation in *Nō*: Matsui Akira Continues a Tradition of Change

*Mariko Anno and Judy Halebsky*

*Within the practice of Japanese nō theatre, there are tensions between preserving the art and allowing change. However, innovation through performance has been central to nō throughout its long history, from the variant nō of the Edo era (1603–1868) to the more recent emergence of revival nō and new nō. The long career of nō master Matsui Akira (1946–) offers an individual perspective on the history of change in the tradition of nō. Based on a series of interviews with Matsui and research conducted at the Kita School of Nō and the Hōsei Nō Research Institute, this article examines Matsui's innovations, his unusual path toward becoming a professional, and his transnational collaborations.*

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Matsui Akira is a *shokubun* (full-ranked performer) in the Kita *nō* school. In 1998, the Japanese National Department of Cultural Affairs named him a Mukey Bunkazai Sōgō Shitei (General Designation, Intangible Cultural Property Holder). He actively performs *nō* throughout Japan and has trained numerous students. Matsui also enjoys a celebrated international career and performs and collaborates frequently in Asia, America, and Europe. His work includes traditional *nō*, vari-

ant *nō*, revival *nō*, newly created *nō*, and English *nō*. This article, which is based on interviews and personal conversations from May 2009 to March 2013, seeks to reflect Matsui's viewpoint as accurately as possible and to provide a context for his work within the history, development, and contemporary practice of *nō*. In interviews, Matsui explained his unusual background, his involvement in revival *nō* and new *nō*, and his rejection of the video and print reproduction of *nō* materials. He demonstrates his commitment to the forces of change within *nō*. As a professional *nō* actor who works with influences from outside of *nō*, uses improvisation and personal interpretation, cultivates *tsuchigusasa* ("smell of the earth," or a raw and unrefined style), incorporates "new movements," and works internationally, Matsui embodies the tradition of change through performance that is central to the history of *nō*. He defines *nō* as residing in the *nō* actor's trained body, and he supports this definition with his own performances. Matsui's approach to *nō* allows him to innovate in the form and collaborate across disciplines and thereby expand the boundaries of *nō*.

Leading *nō* scholar Yamanaka Reiko defines *nō* through its clearly established performance techniques that have been sustained historically. *Kata* are prescribed movements that function as individual units in *nō* dance. There are also established musical structures and vocal techniques. For the *nōkan* (*nō* flute), for example, there are prescribed melodic patterns. Yamanaka argues that in order for a performance to be called *nō*, it needs to be constructed exclusively from these preexisting units of both movement and musical structure: "To be called *nō*, a performance needs to be constructed of traditional well-known, preexisting units. With few exceptions . . . wearing *nō*-style costumes and masks or adopting the concentrated posture and distinctive movements of the *nō* actor is not sufficient to make a *nō* play out of a performance that employs newly composed music or movement that are not based on traditional kinetic units [*kata*]" (Yamanaka 2008: 79).

This definition does not necessarily limit *nō* to the existing repertoire of *nō* plays. *Nō* plays that have fallen out of the active repertoire can be revived. These plays are called *fukkyoku nō* (revival *nō*). There are also new pieces being created, *shinsaku nō* (new *nō*). In both cases, these *nō* plays are created and staged using the existing structures and movements of *nō*. The arrangement might be new, but the units used are drawn from the surviving tradition. Defining *nō* by the use of the traditional performance patterns reflects a commitment to the aesthetic power of *nō* as it is traditionally practiced. The propagation of *nō* as defined by its preexisting units is grounded in a belief that traditional *nō* works artistically and can be rewarding for a contemporary audience.

However, there is a fundamental limitation to this stringent definition of *nō* as various combinations of preexisting units, since it does not account for the importance of innovation *within* the tradition, seen in the live stage performance of *nō* throughout its long history. *Nō* scholar Yokomichi Mario (1916–2012) considers this tradition of change through performance to be the reason why *nō* is still being performed today.

*Nō* has been transmitted from one generation to the next for hundreds of years and is a traditional performance art. An image exists of *nō* as a rigid form that cannot be altered, in even the minutest ways. However, *nō* can be changed in multiple and various ways to the performer's creative disposition. With this freedom, the performer is able to imbue the performance with their individuality and emotionally connect with the audience. As a result *nō* has been able to survive for hundreds of years. Because of the freedom within the performance of *nō*, it continues even today to draw in audiences and speak to their hearts. (Yokomichi 2007: 30)

Yokomichi may be referring only to individual expression that takes place within *nō* that meets Yamanaka's preexisting units. But if creative expression is central to the tradition of *nō*, then a definition of *nō* should allow for the possibility that the preexisting units may themselves be changed by performers.

In the history of *nō*, various mechanisms have attempted to limit change. However, there is extensive evidence that professional *nō* actors saw change in *nō* as desirable and wanted to perform *nō* for their own time and sensibility. Even during the Edo period (1603–1868), when the government censored and controlled the techniques, chants, and structures of *nō*, actors found ways to imbue the form with their personal innovations despite resistances. During this period, *nō* became part of the *shikigaku* (ceremonial performance) of the *shōgun* (military commander) and *bakufu* (military government), who were protectors and controllers of the art. This government demanded strict training, as well as accurate transmission, and these demands impacted the performance length and style in ways that are still evident in today's performances. Furthermore, the government did not allow the *shite-kata* (main actor) to openly include his interpretation and creativity within the play, as had been possible during the Muromachi period (1337–1553). Instead, the *shōgun* instilled the mentality of “preserving the art” rather than “developing the art” (Omote 1978: 73).

“Preserving the art” also meant that new *nō* could not be produced. By preventing the creation of new *nō*, the *shōgun* was undermining creativity and change. But under these strict conditions develop-

ment in the art was still seen, particularly during the second half of the Edo period in the work of Kanze Motoakira (1722–1774), the fifteenth head of the Kanze school. Motoakira modified existing *nō* plays to create what are known as *kogaki* (special performances)—variant performances of existing *nō* plays that still allowed creative change within the limits of the Edo era's strict controls (Omote 1978: 75).

As Yamanaka states in *Nō wo Omoshiroku Miseru Kufū* (Methods to Increase the Visual Impact of *Nō*), there are more than two hundred of these variant plays written by Motoakira (Yokomichi, Yamanaka, and Matsumoto 2009: 71). Some of these plays reflect Motoakira's scholarly interests in literature; others are shorter in length than the original *nō* plays. Within these variant plays, Motoakira imprinted his personal interpretation on particular plays by changing the storyline, characters, costumes, props, entrance and exit of characters, dance, lead actor's movements, music, and so on (p. 71). If the preexisting units that are required by Yamanaka's definition of *nō* were subject to change in Motoakira's time, then it is difficult to argue that they must remain static in the present. Innovation through performance has always been part of *nō*.

It is in the context of this debate that Matsui Akira's contributions can best be understood. Matsui strongly aligns himself with the tradition of innovation through the performance of *nō* that can be traced back to the creation of variant *nō*. His work includes performing the variant versions of *nō* plays developed during the Edo era, but he is more interested in the ongoing possibility for change always present in the live performance of *nō*. Matsui defines *nō* not through the use of preexisting structures and *kata*, but through the idea of the trained *nō* actor's body. This encompasses the external techniques of *nō* song and dance as well as the inner concentration that is key to *nō*. For him any performance of a *nō* actor can be an example of *nō*. Even when Matsui performs in productions (discussed below) with tango dancers in *Burning Passion* (2008) or on the grass in front of a historic Denmark castle in Eugenio Barba's *Ur-Hamlet* (2006), he is performing *nō*. Matsui's external performance is shaped by *nō* movements, such as straight-line physical actions and a low-grounded stance. This external performance is paired with an internal tension, sense of time, and quality of concentration cultivated through years of *nō* training. While other performance forms (e.g., ballet, modern dance) have informed him, his movements are mostly *nō kata*. In the interdisciplinary collaborations discussed below, his performance stands in obvious contrast to the other performance traditions on stage. Matsui believes that through his embodied mastery of the art, he performs *nō* regardless of the particular context of a production. Matsui's contribution is *nō*.

Matsui's perspective may be related to his unusual route to *nō*. Matsui (1946–) was raised in Wakayama Prefecture, a rural area of southern Japan. Because he was sickly, the doctor recommended that he take up *nō* singing to improve his health. At the age of six he began training with Wajima Tomitarō of the Kita school. It is auspicious for a student to begin training, as he did, on the sixth day of the sixth month (6 June) of his sixth year. Matsui quickly took to *nō*; it improved his health, and he eagerly learned the chant and dance.

Matsui's career has been shaped by the fact that he was not born into a *nō* family and lacked a father within the *nō* world to train him and advocate for his professional development. Training in *nō* happens one on one, teacher to student. This is based on a family relationship of training father to son. For example, the Kanze school family performed a variant of *Shakkyō Ōjishi* (Stone Bridge, Big Chinese Lion) on 23 May 2009 at the Yokohama Nō Theatre. The standard version of *Shakkyō* features a red lion and a white lion, but in this variant there were three lions. Three generations of the Sekine family performed together: grandfather, father, and son. Both the father and son are first-born sons (Fig. 1). This is the ideal of *nō* lineage. The father passes on the *nō* tradition to his firstborn son, who goes on to have a professional career and lead his firstborn son to *nō*. This ideal, however, is often unfulfilled. When a biological son is not available, a substitute is sought. Wajima was Matsui's link to the *nō* world. When Wajima's own son decided not to pursue a career in *nō*, it created an opening for Matsui to be the main student of Wajima's. Even though Matsui was not from a *nō* family, he had the opportunity to be in Wajima's succession line. As a result, Wajima invested more of his time and energy in Matsui's *nō* aspirations (Matsui 2009).

When Matsui was thirteen, he went to Tokyo to train full time as an *uchi-deshi* (live-in student) at the Kita Nō Theatre in the Meguro neighborhood. He became the student of the head of the school, and Wajima was no longer his main teacher. Live-in students learn all aspects of *nō* performance, support the work of the troupe, and clean the theatre. They work through a learning hierarchy that goes from basic performance-related tasks, such as dressing actors, to the highly trained skills of performing the chants and dances. As students move through this learning hierarchy, they also move through the ranks toward professionalization. Matsui spent almost seventeen years at the Kita stage as a live-in student—considerably longer than many of his peers. His progress was hindered because he lacked a father in the *nō* world who could advocate for him. Kita Minoru (1900–1986), the fifteenth *iemoto* (head of the school) of the Kita school, did not favor Matsui, which further limited his advancement toward professional status.





FIGURE 1. Flyer for *Shakkyō Ōjishi* (Stone Bridge, Big Chinese Lion) at the Yokohama Nō Theatre (2009). Three generations of the Sekine family in the Kanze school performed this variant version of the *nō Shakkyō*. On the right is the reverse side of the flyer, which shows portraits of the three generations of the Sekine family that performed on stage together.



関根 祥六

観世流シテ方。昭和5年生まれ。兄・関根直孝及び25世観世左近に師事。重要無形文化財総合指定保持者。昭和52年、56年文化庁芸術祭優秀賞受賞。平成8年紫綬褒章受賞。平成14年日本芸術院賞受賞。



関根 祥人

観世流シテ方。関根祥六の長男。昭和34年生まれ。父・祥六及び25世観世左近、26世観世清和に師事。重要無形文化財総合指定保持者。平成10年文化庁芸術祭新人賞受賞。平成17年松尾芸能賞優秀賞を受賞。



関根 祥丸

観世流シテ方。関根祥人の長男。平成5年生まれ。祖父・祥六及び父・祥人に師事。学習院高等学校在学中。



山本 東次郎

大藏流狂言方。昭和12年生まれ。故三世山本東次郎の長男。重要無形文化財総合指定保持者。昭和39年度芸術祭奨励賞受賞。平成4年度芸術選奨文部大臣賞受賞。平成6年度観世寿夫記念法政大学能楽賞受賞。平成10年紫綬褒章受賞。

The extended delay was a career hurdle that Matsui needed to overcome. In 1972, at age twenty-six, Matsui traveled to North America to perform in California and British Columbia. While still officially a student of *nō*, he took the initiative to tour internationally and perform *nō* in a professional context. This annoyed Minoru and led to further difficulties for Matsui in becoming a professional *nō* actor. This travel was, however, one of the actions that marked his independence as an actor and began to conclude the training phase of his career. In the period that followed Matsui's return from this first trip abroad, he was given the title of *jun-shokubun* (junior professional), a designation that created specifically for Matsui (Matsui 2009). His live-in peers were becoming *shokubun* (full professionals) at the same time. It acknowledged his accomplishments in *nō*, but also signaled a fear of handing the power of *nō* lineage to an actor who had shown himself to be less than strictly traditional.

At the age of thirty, Matsui returned to Wakayama and began building a group of students and an audience for *nō*. He also continued to find international performance opportunities. In 1986 the fifteenth *iemoto* of the Kita school passed away. The same year, at the age of forty, Matsui danced *Shōjō Midare* (The Disorderly Tipster Sprite). This Kita school performance signaled an end to Matsui's lingering apprenticeship and the beginning of his professional career in the *nō* world. Favored by the new head of the Kita school, the sixteenth *iemoto*, Kita Roppeita (1924–), Matsui became a *shokubun*. With the support of the *iemoto*, Matsui was recognized as a holder of Important Intangible Cultural Property at the unusually young age of fifty-two; this event stood in contrast to Matsui's long struggle to become a professional.

Matsui's difficulties with the traditional *nō* establishment may have been related to his willingness to explore the boundaries of *nō*. Since becoming a professional, he has continued this exploration by performing a number of *nō* plays that fall outside the active repertoire. The active repertoire of *nō*'s five schools consists of 180 to 250 plays, mostly written during the Muromachi period, with three-fifths of this repertoire credited to Kan'ami and Zeami (Emmert 1997: 21). The repertoire is defined by those plays that are currently in the living knowledge of professional *nō* actors. The staging of a *nō* play requires actors and musicians with a living knowledge of that specific play. There are many *nō* plays that have some extant written record but are not in current practice, because with *nō*—an art that combines text with acting, movement, costume, and musical structures—a surviving script of the chants is not enough information to bring the *nō* back into the active repertoire. A *nō* is considered part of the repertoire when it is actively performed by at least one of the five *nō* schools. According to their



extensive research, Yokomichi, Nishino, and Hata estimate that from the beginning of the Muromachi period in 1338 until the end of the Meiji period in 1912 there were between 2,500 and 3,000 plays created (Yokomichi, Nishino, and Hata 1987: 301). It is evident that the majority of *nō* plays have fallen out of the repertoire. But a chosen few, particularly the plays associated with the renowned *nō* founder Kan'ami and his son Zeami, remain in the repertoire and continue to define *nō*.

A recent development in *nō* performance has been the joint efforts of *nō* actors and *nō* scholars to revive plays, some of which have not been performed for the last 400–550 years. When such a play is brought back to the stage, it is called *fukkyoku nō* (revival *nō*). The play is redeveloped through extensive research that connects extant documentation of the play with surviving *nō* techniques. Matsui points out that many of these plays fell out of the repertoire because they were not popular. He aims to revive these plays in ways that will engage contemporary audiences through dynamic performance techniques and, if possible, themes that are relevant to contemporary issues.

Revival *nō* is not a new practice. Shogun Tokugawa Tsunayoshi (1646–1709) initiated these revivals during the Edo era. Both during and after the Meiji period (1868–1912), the heads of schools and other actors revived plays according to their own interpretations. The practice has continued; for example, in 1982 the Hōsei Nō Theatre Research Institute revived *Unrin'in*<sup>1</sup> (Nishino and Hata 2011: 316). The attention garnered by this performance became a catalyst, and since then there has been a marked increase in revival *nō*. Some performances have been sparked when professional *nō* actors found old *utaibon* (chant books) of *nō* plays. In the past, only professional *nō* actors were involved in the revival of these plays, but recently, in an exciting shift, professional *nō* actors have included *nō* scholars, engendering a rich reciprocal relationship to revive and interpret past performances found in old writings (Murakami 2009: 6), resulting in successful performances.

Multiple difficulties arise in the revivals. The primary hurdle is the lack of comprehensive documentation in the chant book. Surviving chant books often lack important elements such as (1) *kata-tsuke* (movement notation of the actors), (2) *fushi* (musical notation indicating pitches, movements, and rhythms of the chant), (3) *hayashi* (instrumental ensemble) patterns, or (4) instructions on appropriate costumes or masks to be used. Furthermore, some sections of surviving chant books may have deteriorated over the years to the point where writing and notation are no longer legible. In a careful process of working from extant sources of a particular *nō* and then integrating educated guesses from other extant resources and living *nō* plays, a revival *nō* is created.

The 2011 edition of the *Nō/Kyōgen Encyclopedia* details three general approaches for reviving plays (Nishino and Hata 2011: 316): historicity, contemporaneity, and creative adaption. One approach is to stage the *nō* as similarly as possible to the way it would have been performed in the past, using historic if dated performance practices. One example of this method is the 2002 production of *Hideyoshi ga mita Sotoba Komachi* (The Komachi on the Stupa that Hideyoshi Saw), which used scholarship to recreate this play as it might have been presented for the military commander Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–1598) in the Momoyama period (1568–1600). Another approach is to bring the *nō* into contemporary practice, as though it had not fallen out of the repertoire. The chant books and other extant sources are interpreted through current *nō* performance practices, staging the play in a way that accounts for the changes in form and style that have taken place over time, based on both contemporary traditional *nō* models and historical *nō* scholarship. This *koten nō* (traditional *nō* as currently performed) is by far the most popular way of reviving *nō*.

The third approach is not limited to tradition and takes creative liberties in composing new structure and materials, comparable to a *shinsaku nō* (newly created *nō*). While it draws on established *kata* and melodic patterns and revives an extant chant book, it also claims the creative space to depart from these structures.

For actors, part of the appeal of revival *nō* is imagining how *nō* has changed over time and drawing from the existing possibilities in making decisions about movements, music, costumes, masks, and other aspects of the performance. It is important to note that these three approaches to reviving *nō* often are not clearly delineated in productions and performances. A particular production of a revived *nō* may include aspects from all three of these approaches.<sup>2</sup>

Yet another area of innovation in *nō* is another kind of *shinsaku nō* that pairs a new story text with existing units of movement and music, such as the productions discussed in the following paragraph. Both revival *nō* and *shinsaku nō* with a new text aim to intentionally combine aspects of the surviving practice of *nō* with material that is either not currently in the active repertoire or new. Newly created plays allow the repertoire to reflect our time and potentially grow.

A newly created *nō* considers how a *nō* should be adapted according to contemporary issues of style, aesthetics, performance technique, and audience. For example, some *shinsaku nō* have been designed to appeal to younger audiences. Umewaka Genshō (1948–), a Kanze school *shite-kata* (main actor), created a *shinsaku nō* based on a popular *shōjo manga* (girls' comic book) by Miuchi Suzue titled *Garasu no Kamen* (Glass Mask). The resulting *nō* play, *Kurenai-tennyō* (The Crim-

son Maiden), was performed in 2006 with multiple sold-out shows in Tokyo (two runs) and Osaka at both *nōgakudō* (*nō* theatres) and non-*nōgakudō* venues. This show appealed to the young female audience, who grew up reading the comic books. Many *shinsaku nō* attempt to address contemporary life: child abuse, the bombing of Hiroshima, Albert Einstein, Saint Paul, the Buddhist monk Kūkai (774–835), the Christian convert Hosokawa Garasha (1563–1600), and other subjects.

Scholars Nishino Haruo and Hata Hisashi point out that reviving plays illuminate the history and development of *nō*, not only in terms of the plays that are revived but also in terms of their relationship to the active repertoire and to contemporary issues (Nishino and Hata 2011: 316–317). Matsui has participated in a number of revival *nō* plays. Generally, *nō* schools have 240 plays within their active repertoire and consider revival *nō* to be a separate category. For example, many of the schools use the word *fukkyoku* (revival) or *haikyoku* (pieces that are no longer performed), generally recognizing they were dropped because they were not popular with audiences. However, Matsui's Kita school handles revival *nō* plays differently: plays are called *sankōkyoku* (referenced *nō*) and can be rehearsed occasionally by the school.

In the Kita school, 200 plays are in the active repertoire and fifty are referenced *nō*, although the numbers can vary according to the preferences of the head of the school. It is easier to revive these referenced *nō* because, while performed infrequently, living members of the school have some familiarity with specific *kata* and melodic patterns.

In the Kita school, referenced *nō* may be placed within the active repertoire and/or performed at the monthly Kita-kai, which is also called *jishu-kōen* (independent performance). At these monthly presentations, professional Kita performers gather to perform and help as part of their duty to the school. The professional *nō* actors themselves are responsible for selecting the monthly plays, rather than the *iemoto*. If *sankōkyoku* are performed at the Kita-kai, *utaibon* (chant books) are created so the audience may follow the story with the performance; published by the school, these works are sold alongside other chant books at Kita school performances. By creating a chant book, the professional *nō* actors are then able to teach the movements and chants to their amateur and professional-track students (Matsui 2011). Despite the many other *nō* plays in the repertoire, there are students keen to learn these rare *sankōkyoku*. Thus, one incentive for staging a *sankōkyoku* is that the professional *nō* actor can generate potential income by connecting with students seeking lessons that introduce them to these more obscure works.

For example, *Raiden* (The God of Thunder and Lightning) is one of the more popular referenced revival *nō* plays that Matsui has

performed. It was staged on 20 November 2011 at the Ōshima Nō Theatre in Fukuyama City, Hiroshima Prefecture. *Raiden* is a fifth-category *nō* play based on the story of Sugawara no Michizane (845–903). Michizane, a scholar and poet, is celebrated as the god of literature, and students pray to him for success on their exams.

*Raiden* exists in four out of the five *nō* schools and is performed occasionally. However, as Matsui stated in his interview on 17 December 2011, it is important to remember that many of these revival *nō* plays have fallen out of the repertoire because they were not popular with audiences at the time or because their performance was prohibited by the government. Their unpopularity may have been due to uninteresting *kata*, a lack of engaging emotion, or other issues in the performance. Therefore, Matsui argues that it is vital for contemporary professional *nō* actors to supplement the performative aspects of these plays in order to interest contemporary audiences. Altered elements may include new *kata*, music, or interpretation—all performed with today's audience in mind. Matsui's dedication to contemporary audiences and his ambition to appeal to contemporary tastes demonstrate that *nō* lives within the performers and with performer creativity can change from generation to generation.

For Matsui, reviving a *nō* play is more than bringing it back to the stage the way it was performed hundreds of years ago. Not only have *nō* performance techniques changed, but culture has also altered the way actors communicate emotions. Matsui offers the example of how the expression of love between a husband and wife differs today from the Edo period. A more demonstrative expression of love in contemporary society affects performances of romantic love on today's stage. Matsui also discusses the fact that modern professional *nō* actors are able to express their emotional feelings more on stage than *nō* actors in the Edo period. He attributes this to the improved technique of today's professional *nō* actors and increased access to the material goods needed to perform the plays. The shift also reflects cultural changes over time that allow contemporary actors to connect to internal and external expressions of emotion, which gives them the means to create a performance that Matsui finds more interesting.

While the active repertoire of *nō* plays may be limited to fewer than 250 plays, there are thousands of plays that have fallen out of the repertoire. Professional *nō* actors, in searching for *nō* to revive, consider not only how a particular *nō* might enhance understandings of existing plays in the repertoire but also how the themes of the play to be revived might connect with current societal concerns. This is in keeping with the decision-making process for choosing the *nō* plays from the repertoire that will be performed at a given event. On 18 February 2011, the

Kita school staged the fourth-category (miscellaneous-type play) revival *Take no yuki* (Snow on the Bamboos) at the National *Nō* Theatre. In the story, while the father is away, the stepmother locks a boy outside and forces him to remove snow from the bamboo (Nishino and Hata 2011: 98–99). As child abuse has become an issue of concern in Japan, this revival *nō* has gained attention. For Matsui, the potential connection with contemporary issues is one of the rewards of revivals, and he savors the challenge of creating performances that will resonate with current audiences (Matsui 2009). Revival *nō* is evidence of the innovations and changes that have taken place in the tradition of *nō*. By connecting *nō* actors with *nō* scholars, revival *nō* creates a rich and complex conversation about the history of *nō* performance techniques and how the form has changed over time.

Newly created *nō* plays offer creative opportunities, but also professional challenges, for Matsui and other *nō* actors. Since the Meiji period (1868–1912), many new *nō* have been written. This trend in particular has gained momentum since the 1980s. However, most of these new *nō* plays are performed only once or twice and do not become part of the active repertoire. In addition to newly created *nō* plays performed in Japanese, new *nō* plays have recently been created in other languages (especially in English).<sup>3</sup> In 2004, Hōsei University hosted the *Nō* Theatre Seminar, which included Nishino Haruo's presentation "*Shinsaku nō wo kangaeru*" (Considering Newly Composed *Nō* Plays). Nishino produced a list of plays created from the Meiji period until the present day, in Japanese and other languages.<sup>4</sup> *Shinsaku nō* plays have not yet garnered much scholarly notice, but this 2004 seminar might indicate that *nō* scholars are beginning to shift some of their attention toward new *nō*.

To create and stage new *nō* requires a great investment of time and creative energy for *nō* actors, particularly considering the limited performances these new plays generally receive. An actor must create new chants and movements for a newly created *nō* and teach them to his performers. Thus far, learning these new roles has not generally led to expanded performance opportunities for professional actors. In contrast, when a *nō* actor is known to be skilled and capable at performing a familiar *nō* play, that actor may have numerous lucrative and prestigious opportunities to perform that particular *nō* over the years. Established structures of the *nō* world, such as the Nōgaku Performers Association and a ready audience for traditional *nō*, reinforce the ongoing performance of existing *nō* plays and performance styles. But for creative reasons, Matsui chooses to work on new *nō* plays as well as many forms of interdisciplinary and transnational performance. When asked if he prefers to perform new *nō* plays or plays from the *nō* rep-

ertoire, Matsui responded, “It’s more interesting to do new things and to start at zero. If you don’t have any time or money, you end up doing traditional *nō*” (Matsui 2009). Matsui is an example of a *nō* actor who enjoys newly created *nō* as a creative opportunity and pairs it with the performance of traditional *nō* as a means to gain both income and respect within the *nō* world.

While Matsui sees revival *nō* and new *nō* as creative opportunities, he sees the technological reproduction of *nō* materials very differently. He sees video recordings of *nō* performances and the widely available print reproductions of written instructions on the performance techniques of *nō* as forces counter to innovation and change in *nō*. The written record of treatises on the art of *nō* gained authority in the twentieth century as a helpful way to define the art and influence the performance. Forces that shape the performance qualities of *nō* include the Nōgaku Kyōkai (Nōgaku Performers Association), interpretation of performance techniques within the *nō* houses, and the body-to-body transmission of *nō*. In addition to these forces, written treatises on the performance aspects of *nō* also influence the art. Written works on the performance aspects of *nō* are held in secret by *nō* schools and passed down through schools over generations. The most revered teachings are the treatises recorded by Zeami. He recorded his secrets on the art of *nō* when he feared he would not have a creative heir to carry on his lineage. Zeami’s treatises, including *Fūshikaden* (Teachings on the Flower), were published and became available to the public for the first time in 1907 (Pinnington 2006: 5). The publication provided wide access to an extensive written record on the performance practices and aesthetics of *nō*. Suddenly, the organic body practice that breathed in contemporary air and culture and interpreted *nō* for new environments and situations had a written record. Not only was this a written documentation of the art of *nō*, but it also contains the words and performance techniques prescribed by the most celebrated *nō* actor and playwright of all time.

In the 1950s it became popular for performers to read Zeami’s treatises on *nō*. Kanze Hisao (1925–1978), a lead actor of the Kanze *nō* school, helped found a study group for performers that based its activities on Zeami’s writings. This group was called the Zeami Densho Kenkyūkai (Research Group on Zeami’s Treatises). Performers in this group engaged themselves in the theories and philosophies of Zeami’s written treatises with the goal of applying them to the living practice of *nō* (Rath 2004: 236). This helps to explain the importance of Zeami in contemporary investigations of the living practice of *nō* theatre: he is revered not only for his historical role in the creation of *nō*, but also for the more recent influence of his writing on contemporary practi-



tioners. For Matsui, however, there is a conflict between the embodied practice of *nō* and the written record provided by Zeami's treatises.

Matsui sees the publication of these treaties as having a negative impact on *nō* and particularly on the improvisational qualities of *nō*.

Will the performance actually be appropriate for this audience? An actor needs to include that kind of information. He'll look around and ask: What are the needs of the current audience? Like Zeami, when he thought that something was necessary, he changed it for the audience. He put more time and effort into making it good. In the Meiji period the voices of the critics infringed upon *nō* actors. Before that time, there was more freedom. In the past, even for *Izutsu* [a play in the *nō* repertoire that is often cited as an ideal example of the beauty of *nō*], they could change the performance . . . In the Meiji period *Teachings on the Flower* came out and the form hardened,<sup>5</sup> it became more rigid. Now we're just tied down by *Teachings on the Flower*. (Matsui 2009)

Matsui implies that *Teachings on the Flower* establishes particular ways of performing *nō* as correct, thereby inhibiting *nō* actors from creating innovation in *nō*. This is in some ways a surprising critique, because *Teachings on the Flower* does not contain specific instructions on how to perform individual plays. However, it does provide extensive guidance on how to train a student in the art of *nō*, how to entertain particular audiences, and how to perform *monomane* (dramatic imitation) (Hare 2008: 26–37). Matsui is suggesting that the written record disrupts the power of a living art held in the body. Without the wide availability of these treatises, the actors and their interpretations of *nō* could define the art. The written record, and perhaps even the idea of a widely available written record, creates a baseline against which performances can be measured in degrees of correctness. For Matsui, the embrace of a written record of Zeami's art hinders new conceptions for the possibilities of *nō*.

Matsui's unique relationship to the art of *nō* is demonstrated by his unusual path to becoming a professional *nō* actor, his deep involvement in both revival *nō* and new *nō*, and his renunciation of the written treatises on *nō*. In each of these cases, he has rejected those forces that work toward capturing and preserving *nō* in a particular state, and embraced those forces that allow *nō* to evolve through performance. This dedication to change and innovation that we have examined in Matsui's relationship to the body of art called *nō* is perhaps even more striking in his relationship to performing *nō* as an actor. His definition of *nō* is any performance made with the *nō* actor's body and is elucidated by his personal approach to the performance of *nō*.

Matsui's study of *nō* began in early childhood, and *nō* is his pri-

mary performance mode. But his performance technique and philosophy are also influenced by other traditional Japanese art forms such as kabuki, *bunraku*, and *gagaku*, as well as modern dance, classical ballet, and music composition. In particular, he cites the work of Martha Graham and Vaslav Nijinsky as key influences on his understanding of performance. John Oglevee, a Tokyo-based actor and founding member of Theatre Nohgaku, describes the result of Matsui's diverse influences: "Because of his many experiences in work outside of *nō*, his approach to performance more closely resembles that of a contemporary theatre artist than most other *nōgakushi* reaching beyond the *nō butai* (stage). He has an insatiable appetite for all kinds of theatre and rather than being limited by the minimalistic movement of *nō*, he uses his knowledge and experience to enhance his experimentation with other forms" (email communication with authors, 14 March 2013). These influences inform Matsui's willingness to innovate *nō* and collaborate with artists internationally. "I've always liked performances more than *nō*, because I was never supposed to be a *nōgakushi* (professional *nō* actor). I went to *kabuki* theatre and classical ballet. Because of that, I'm able to do my current activities" (Matsui 2009). His distinctive work reflects a synergy of transnational and interdisciplinary influences interpreted and performed through the *nō* actor's body.

Wherever he performs, Matsui strives to make each show distinctive by performing with a unique *tsuchigusasa* ("smell of the earth"). This concept—unpolished or unrefined qualities specific to a certain place—emerged during the Edo period when feudal lords had their own *nō* troupes and the lord's preferences in style and movement encouraged differences among the troupes, even when they were performing the same *nō* play. Matsui points out that this "smell of the earth" has now largely disappeared. He attributes this to DVDs and visual aids that unify movements and styles within the schools, resulting in a lack of variation. This is compounded by the reading of written treatises discussed earlier. The vitality of Matsui's performance is due in part to his commitment to keep this "smell of the earth" alive by tailoring it to specific audiences.

One part of Matsui's "smell of the earth" in his English *nō* performances is to make what he calls "new movements." These new movements are an interpretation of movements from ballet and other performance forms through his *nō*-cultivated performance technique. Due to the codified *kata*, it is relatively straightforward to distinguish *nō* movements from non-*nō* movements. In September 2002, Matsui performed in an English *nō* version of William Butler Yeats's *At the Hawk's Well* with the English *nō* troupe Theatre Nohgaku. When Matsui performed the hawk in this production, he incorporated ballet move-

ments, such as a plié with the legs while the hands are above the head. He also included horizontal movements across the stage, with his body facing the audience, which is never seen in *nō*. Other non-*nō* movements included crossing his right leg in front of his left leg and tilting his body toward the left with his arms raised.

Matsui argues that even when he includes ballet movement and other non-*nō* movement in his performance, he is still performing *nō*. Because he does not have training in ballet, he would never be able to successfully imitate a ballet dancer. His performance is *nō* because of the way he uses his body—his hip movements and center of gravity, for example—and because of the internal aspects of his performance. “I did perform [*At the Hawk’s Well*] interestingly [by moving sideways], but my movements are still *nō*-like. I don’t carry the same kind of weight that ballet dancers carry, nor do I perform the hip movements of ballet . . . The difference is in how I bring forth the movement, how I reveal and communicate [the art with the audience]” (Matsui 2009). Matsui is a bearer of the form of *nō* both internally and externally. Even when he adapts some ballet movements, he is performing with the artistry of a professional *nō* actor, and this makes the performance *nō*.

Matsui creates and employs these “new movements” to grab the attention of the audience and is interpreting non-*nō* movements through his *nō*-cultivated body and aesthetic sensibility. Matsui employs *kata* that he thinks are appropriate, carefully chosen and specific to different productions; Matsui points out that while he employed “new movements” shaped by ballet in *At the Hawk’s Well*, he expressly avoided ballet influenced movements in the newly created *nō* about noted author Murasaki Shikibu (978–1014?). However, only those aware of these varying dance forms are able to identify the lineage of movements. Matsui points out that in these works he is in a liminal space of balancing *nō* aesthetics with non-*nō* movements. For Matsui, these non-*nō* movements are interpreted through his *nō*-cultivated body, which brings the performance into the category of *nō*.

One example Matsui gives of this liminal space between *nō* and non-*nō* movements is his recent performance of Samuel Beckett’s *Rockabye* on 18 July 2011 (Fig. 2). This performance celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of Jonah Salz and Shigeyama Akira’s NOHO Theatre Group. In *Rockabye*, which Matsui performs on an ongoing basis, Matsui wears a *nō* mask and costumes to play the old lady in the rocking chair. On stage with him is a woman narrator in black, reading the text in Japanese. When Matsui performs this work abroad, the narrator recites the story in the local language. In this way, the hurdle of connecting with an audience that does not speak Japanese is overcome. In *Rockabye*, Matsui incorporates a number of non-*nō* movements, such as sit-

ting in a rocking chair and dropping his head to represent his character's death. He also includes *kabuki* hand movements according to the position and shape of the hands on the legs while sitting *seiza* (on his knees). Again, for Matsui, when he incorporates these new movements from outside of *nō*, they are brought within the realm of *nō* (Matsui 2011). Yet they challenge the boundaries of *nō*, bringing a dynamic tension to the performance. The “smell of the earth” or distinctive quality that Matsui brings to these performances is created in part by embracing multiple performance traditions.

But even when Matsui is performing traditional *nō*, he approaches his work on stage with a similar spirit. He points out that although new variant performances like Motoakira's are rarely created these days, there are modifications, additions, and surprises within the



FIGURE 2. Matsui Akira in *Rockabye*. (Photo: Courtesy of Matsui Akira)

plays, which are planned by the lead actor in advance. Matsui describes the audience of traditional *nō* as a sophisticated audience, the majority of whom are amateur students of *nō*. This audience is familiar with both the song and the dance of the plays. Matsui makes alterations to the prescribed movement patterns of a *nō* in order to surprise the audience and bring his subtle changes to the form of *nō*. He both devises these changes himself and draws from changes other *nō* actors have made.

Matsui's approach is well demonstrated by the following examples. He often retells the story of a performance from twenty years ago at a *shimin nō* (community *nō* performance) in Wakayama Prefecture, where he danced as the *shite* (main role) of the *nō* play *Semimaru* (Matsui 2013). An *iguse* (where the body is still while the thought or chanting continues) requires the lead actor to hold a seated position during a *kuse* (central narration portion of a *nō*). During the *iguse* of *Semimaru*, Matsui suddenly got up from his seated *seiza* position and danced. He had previously seen his teacher Kita Minoru dance during the *iguse* of the same *nō*, and by watching he had memorized the *kata*. While he did not devise the dance pattern, he had learned the dance and was able to decide on the spur of the moment to get up from his seated position and perform it. Matsui tells this story with the punch line that he made the on-the-spot decision to get up and dance because his feet, sitting *seiza*, started to hurt.

At the monthly Kita school performance on 24 May 2009, Matsui performed the *shite* (main role) in *Nue* (Monkey-Headed Monster) and surprised the audience with an unexpected movement sequence. Just before exiting the stage, near the *agemaku* (curtain), Matsui jumped, turned, and landed on the *hashigakari* (bridgeway) with his legs crossed over one another. Kita school performer and Living National Treasure Tomoeda Akiyo (1940–) popularized this sequence of movements and performed them in a different *nō*.<sup>6</sup> Matsui knew Tomoeda's movement sequence and decided to apply it to *Nue*. In this way, Matsui shows support for the innovations other *shite* actors bring to *nō* and demonstrates that the form is flexible.

When asked whether it is possible to do new things within traditional *nō*, Matsui replied, "You can. It's only about the issue of the heart. When I perform traditional *nō* there are times when I think about the opposite, I playfully taunt the audience."<sup>7</sup> Since professional *nō* actors sell tickets to their students, the audience has a high level of familiarity with *nō*. So, I put some work into it and think of these things before the performance, but I also improvise on the spot" (Matsui 2009). Through both planning and improvisation, Matsui brings creative change even to the performance of traditional *nō*, tailoring each performance to its audience.

In addition to performing traditional *nō*, variant *nō*, revival *nō*, newly created *nō*, and English *nō*, Matsui also engages in interdisciplinary collaborations and transnational performances. With interdisciplinary works staged in Japan, Matsui navigates the internal politics of the *nō* world at the same time as he explores the creative challenges of working across disciplines. On 10 October 2008, Matsui performed in *Burning Passion*, a *Tale of Genji*-based show in which Matsui performed *nō*-based movements on stage with dancers doing tango movements at Yūport Hall in Gotanda, Tokyo. Posters advertising this event showed Matsui's picture, but the alias Suda Fūsetsu was used in the place of his name (Fig. 3). This was to avoid censure from the Nōgaku Performers Association, which wishes to exercise some degree of control over the venues, types of performance, and activities of professional *nō* actors. Performing under an alias successfully avoids criticism from the *nō* world, but it also comes at a cost. Matsui is a respected and admired performer whose name can sell seats in a theatre. Performing under an alias detracts from ticket sales. It also diminishes the professional opportunities, such as additional performances, positive reviews, and greater recognition that a well-received performance might engender.

The use of an alias in promotions for the *Burning Passion* is evidence of the careful balance between Matsui's work as an independent artist and his professional *nō* career. His eagerness to collaborate internationally is due in part to an interest in finding opportunities for greater creative freedom. *Nō* actors performing abroad can collaborate, collage, and stage excerpts of *nō* in ways that would attract criticism in Tokyo. While not being from a *nō* family was a hurdle for Matsui in the early phases of his career, it can also be seen as an opportunity for creative freedom; Matsui is not pressured to uphold a family name or reputation. Oglevee explains:

Beneficial to his relative freedom within the *nō* world, is the fact that he does not come from a prominent *nō* family. Therefore, beyond the typical expectation of performing at an acceptable level for a professional *nōgakushi*, he has never had to live up to his father's expectations. To compound this, when he left Tokyo to return to Wakayama in the 1970's he was no longer under the constant scrutiny of his peers. If we look at many of his contemporaries who have ventured into contemporary performance, most have the burden of representing both the reputation of the form and the name of their family. (email communication with authors, 14 March 2013)

In 2011 Matsui performed in another innovative collaboration that joined *nō* units of technique with flamenco dance. The advertisement for this production used Matsui's real name and noted his *nō*



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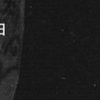
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FIGURE 3. Flyer for *Burning Passion* (2008). This performance, based on the *Tale of Genji*, incorporated both tango and *nō*. This flyer uses two images of Matsui, one in the center in a *nō* mask and the second image in the right-hand row of portrait shots. The flyer uses the alias Suda Fūsetsu to refer to Matsui.

affiliation (Plate 5). However, this performance was in Wakayama, far from the watchful eyes of the *nō* establishment.

Matsui understands that just as the limits of acceptability in *nō* begin to shift outside of Tokyo, the definition of *nō* begins to shift outside of Japan. For example, the term *nō* is employed and understood differently in North America than it is in Japan. Theatre communities and artists in North America employ the term *nō* broadly. Works that connect with the tradition of *nō* or that employ the *nō kata* in radically different contexts and situations are sometimes referred to as *nō*, “*nō*-inspired,” or “*nō*-influenced.” Theatre of Yugen in San Francisco, founded by Yuriko Doi and now run by Jubilith Moore, offers lessons and training in *nō* and *kyōgen*. Their recent production of Eric Ehn’s *Cordelia* retold Shakespeare’s *King Lear* by focusing on the third daughter’s perspective. Moore has extensive training in *nō* and played the lead role. Her movement, acting, and vocal style reflected units of *nō* with some changes. There were significant departures from *nō* in the lack of a *waki* (supporting actor) and in the use of Western musical instrumentation. A description on the company website names the production a “modern *nō*” and states that “*Cordelia* continues the tradition of *nō* as much as it transforms it” (Theatre of Yugen 2011). Another recent Theatre of Yugen production, *Minor Cycle: Five Little Plays in One Starry Night* by Greg Giovanni, employs aspects of multiple Japanese performance forms to tell children’s stories and poems from Western European traditions. In *Theatre of Yugen: 25 Years, a Retrospective* (Ehn 2004), the company describes its work as “*nō*-influenced.” Contemporary poet Leslie Scalapino was part of a 2004 collaboration with Kita school *nō* actor Uchida Anshin (1936–). She later wrote a three-voice poem that she describes as “a *noh*” (Scalapino and Grinnell 2008). However, the poem shows only the most tenuous connections to *nō*. To varying degrees, the term *nō* in these cases is used to differentiate other kinds of performance from Western spoken drama. It is used to indicate otherness and difference from Western theatre traditions, without a strict concern for how closely (or distantly) the work adheres to the tradition of *nō* in Japan. However, in Japan, scholars and members of the *nō* establishment do not consider theatre that employs only certain aspects of *nō* to fall within the tradition of *nō*. Rather than being constrained by these differences, Matsui uses them as an opportunity to explore the boundary between *nō* and non-*nō*. He performs *nō* outside of Japan and performs in collaborations that are not strictly *nō* inside of Japan, all the time feeling that, for him, whatever he performs on stage is *nō*.

Matsui’s ability to push the edges of *nō* allows him to adjust his acting according to the rhythm and movements of other genres. When

collaborating with other genres such as tango, flamenco, *kathakali*, and Balinese dancing, he is able to help other dancers move by dancing to their rhythm. For many of the international dance genres, dancers need a specific rhythm (tempo) to dance, which makes it a challenge for them to feel and understand the internal sense of time and space informed by the Japanese aesthetic called *ma* (space). Furthermore, dancers in most of these genres are unable to dance to the rhythm of *nō*, which can be too slow for them. In these collaborations Matsui's versatility can be profoundly displayed. "To me, the movement of *nō* is flexible and able to adjust to different genres, which I realized as I began to collaborate with performers in other genres" (Matsui 2011). These collaborations also changed how Matsui views *nō*. "I used to think *nō* was a boring form that didn't move much, but by working with other genres, I have learned about *nō*'s flexibility and potential" (Matsui 2011). Moore, the artistic director of Theatre of Yugen, states that Matsui "recognizes *nō*'s inaccessibility for a Western audience" (telephone conversation with authors, 13 March 2013). Matsui draws on his understanding of the flexibility of *nō* to make a connection.

Matsui's embrace of the dynamic potentials of *nō* within collaboration makes him a rare find for international directors. Theatre director Eugenio Barba (1936–) is well known for contemporary productions that combine multiple performance traditions from various world cultures. Matsui collaborated with Eugenio Barba in *Ur-Hamlet*. The project was developed through Barba's International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA) and staged in 2006 at the Elsinore (Kornberg) castle in Denmark (Schino 2013). Matsui performed with a cast of ninety international performers that included a large *gambuh* group from Batuan, Bali, organized by Cristina Wistari Formaggia (1945–2008) as well as performers from Switzerland, the Netherlands, Brazil, Turkey, Mexico, Colombia, Denmark, and so on. Barba's *Ur-Hamlet* was based on *Vita Amlethi* (Life of Hamlet, ca. 1200) by Saxo Grammatucus, which is thought to be a source for Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In this case the *Ur* marks the story as a precursor to *Hamlet* and also evokes Barba's concept of intercultural performance that unearths a basic and preexisting shared emotional language (Barba 2009).

Matsui performed aspects of *nō* in *Ur-Hamlet* in his roles as both the Queen of Rats (see Plate 6) and Hamlet's foster brother (Fig. 4). The performance took place outdoors on grass, which precluded one of the most central and basic movements of *nō*, the *suriashi* (walking step where the foot slides on the wooden floor). Matsui did, however, use movements of *nō* such as the basic *kamae* (*nō* stance). The internal energy and subtle movement of *nō* gain intensity through eliciting the focused attention of its audience. This attention is customarily chan-



FIGURE 4. Matsui Akira as Hamlet's brother in Eugenio Barba's *Ur-Hamlet* at Kornberg Castle, Denmark, 2006. (Photo: Tommy Bay)

neled in part by a sparse set and a contained stage area limited by a roof and side pillars of a traditional stage. But here, performing *nō* outside, without this contained stage, generally limits the ability of the actor working with the stage space to control the energy of the performance. However, the multiple performance forms, particularly the more ornate and externally energetic costumes and movements of the *gambuh* group from Batuan, Bali, contrasted with Matsui's *nō* in a way that created a different kind of frame. This contrast of Balinese brightness and activity against Matsui's *nō* in the same production helped to emphasize the subtle movements and internal qualities of *nō*.



While much of the meaning and affect of traditional *nō* is lost in this kind of performance, Matsui always maintains the inner focus of a *nō* actor. At the same time, he draws from a diversity of influences to create a dynamic performance in this new context. Matsui's *Ur-Hamlet* performance would not fall within a strict definition of *nō* as cited earlier by Yamanaka. Matsui, however, manages a tenuous balance: he offers a performance created through his cultivated *nō* body, but he is also responsive to the energies of performers in other genres who share the transnational stage.

Matsui's ongoing creative relationship with Barba requires him to perform at the edges of *nō*'s formal qualities, interacting with the other performance traditions sharing the stage. Matsui describes a conversation with Barba in the development of *Ur-Hamlet*. "Eugenio Barba said to me, 'Akira, I don't want to see you act. The other performers want to see you do *nō*. However, I don't know *nō*, so I don't want to see *nō*. I want to see you walk that fine line [between *nō* and non-*nō*]' " (Matsui 2011). This method of collaboration requires Matsui to maintain his internal aesthetic of *nō*, but with enough flexibility to merge with other performance traditions. Oglevee articulates Matsui's approach—that of maintaining internal aspects of *nō*—as "applying *nō*'s concepts to different forms, rather than applying the form of *nō* to different concepts" (telephone conversation with authors, 13 March 2013). Matsui describes this challenge as walking a fine line between *nō* and not-*nō*. If he leans too far one way, his performance becomes an excerpt or a quotation from *nō*. If he leans too far the other way, he becomes an actor rather than a *nō* actor. His goal is to perform in a way that can support interdisciplinary work, while still having his performance embody the aesthetic values and performance energy of *nō*. This is a creative challenge that Matsui embraces (Matsui 2011).

The directors Matsui works with internationally might be interested in *nō*, but their knowledge of the art is generally limited. By working internationally, Matsui employs his knowledge of modern and contemporary European and American arts as a means of communication: "Specifically when I am working with a director internationally, I can verbalize performance aspects by citing these works. I can describe something as 'similar to *Swan Lake*' for example" (Matsui 2009). In Matsui's work with Barba, the shared knowledge is through a Western art vocabulary. However, in order for an artistic collaboration to be successful, there needs to be an exchange. Matsui is teaching his collaborators about *nō* while using their theatre vocabulary to make new work.

Matsui is sensitive to the creative process of working with a director, a role that is not part of traditional *nō*. "When I do fusion work, there is always a director, and the director always teaches me

something. He looks [at my movement and acting] from an amateur point of view and comments on my performance since he doesn't know much about *nō*. He or she is knowledgeable about movies and theatre but isn't knowledgeable about traditional Japanese art forms" (Matsui 2009). Matsui's role becomes one not only of performing but also of educating the director and other performers about the possibilities of *nō*. This requires patience, diplomacy, and flexibility from Matsui.

In this situation, I say that I am a *shōgi* (Japanese chess) piece. According to what is said to me, I can flip over and become gold. I can be stronger, I can be weaker, or I can be taken away. From my side, I don't say "This is how it is, this is how *nō* is." After the director tells me how to do it, I do as instructed. He or she says, "Oh, this is *nō*, this is what you have in *nō*?" and I say "No, this is not what we have in *nō*." The director then says, "Well then, what do you do in *nō*?" and I show them. (Matsui 2009)

In this chess piece metaphor Matsui reveals his view of the *nō* actor's body as a versatile tool that can change in strength, value, and presence as it adapts to direction.

Matsui's approach to the performance of *nō* is a living force made up of the many elements that have been discussed here. He employs the *nō* concept of "smell of the earth," tailoring every performance he does to its audience and using improvisation and personal expression to imbue it with a distinctive flavor, whether it is squarely within the tradition of *nō* or far outside it. Drawing on the dance and theater forms outside of *nō* that have influenced him as a performer, he incorporates "new movements" into his *nō* that he performs as *nō*, though they are not traditional *nō* movements. Matsui participates in collaborations across forms and national boundaries, both learning from non-*nō* forms and directors and influencing them by teaching them about *nō*. Yet because he believes that *nō* resides in the *nō* actor's body, all of his performances are *nō*. He is a living example of this concept, and he performs his definition of *nō* every time he takes the stage. In this way, Matsui personally embodies the tradition of change through performance that has always been a part of *nō*, but he also advances this tradition, expanding the boundaries of *nō* in all of his work. By inhabiting the liminal space between *nō* and non-*nō* Matsui transforms, like a flipping chess piece, the values, meanings, and locations of multiple performance traditions, including *nō*. He is making something new that is nonetheless shaped by the long tradition of *nō*, and by the ways that the form of *nō* is imprinted and carried in his body.



## NOTES

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1. The play is named after the Unrin'in temple in Kyoto.
2. Royall Tyler (1998) discusses issues of reviving *nō* and provides descriptions of two revival productions.
3. The company Theatre Nohgaku specializes in English *nō* and has staged new plays in English based on the structures and *kata* of traditional *nō* in the United States, Canada, Australia, and Britain. Matsui Akira regularly performs with Theatre Nohgaku.
4. Nishino compiled this list for *Nōgaku-kenkyū* (*Nō Theatre Research*), published by Hōsei Nō Theatre Institute (Nishino 2005, 2006).
5. *Teachings on the Flower* was published in 1909 by Yoshida Tōgo (Nishino and Hata 2011: 315). At this time small changes were made to the text to make it accessible to modern readers.
6. Post-performance conversation, 24 May 2009.
7. Matsui used the term *akkanbe* to describe this playful taunting. *Akkanbe* is a funny face made by pulling down one eyelid and sticking out the tongue.

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