

Bunraku



Four Elements

- Puppets
- Operators
- Chanter
- *Shamisen* accompaniment

The puppet heads

The puppet heads, or *kashira*, are classified according to age, sex, social class, distinguishing personality factors and the role they play.

Here is a sample of a few out of the 50 some types of *kashira* currently used in Bunraku.



Kenbishi - a samurai, ronin or chivalrous townsman in a strong-willed, supporting role



Oodanshichi - a big-hearted supporting hero



Bunshichi - a tragic hero with bold, masculine features and a hidden grief



Kiichi - a strong, straightforward and merciful elder samurai



Matahei - a ruggedly honest townsman



Yokambei - a somewhat humorous, not-totally dislikeable sort of bad guy



Darasuke - a minor bad guy, idiosyncratic and disagreeable



Ofuku - comical maiden



Keisei - the most gorgeous *kashira*, portrays a courtesan of the highest class; well-educated, sensuous, with self-respect and pluck



Fukeyama - a woman between the ages of 20 and 30



Musume - a cute and lovely girl or young wife of 14 or 15



Kintoki - manly and large-minded samurai



Komei - a deeply thoughtful samurai with refined appearance and a hidden sadness; in his forties



Wakaotoko - a handsome young man in his teens, usually the object of another character's affections



Genta - a handsome and sensuous young man of about 20





◀ Retired narrator, Living National Treasure, Takemoto Koshijidayu, uses his whole being to express the essence of a character.



An older narrator is often paired with a younger shamisen player to create an artistically heightening tension. Here, the unforgettable combination of Takemoto Koshijidayu and Tsuruzawa Seiji.



Narrator and shamisen

While the narrator tells a story, of course, his main job is to convey emotion, motivation, the essence of each character—his 'kokoro'.

The shamisen is not simply his accompanist. He expresses each emotion, each mood, musically, giving the drama emphasis, punctuation and texture.

The shamisen and narrator's art is the result of rigorous training based on some three hundred years of tradition.

It is never a question of who leads. The shamisen and narrator play off each other, creating a tension which heightens the dramatic setting. When the puppeteers join and play off this tension, it results in a solid, dynamic and moving performance.

(Sonezaki Shinjyu)



from *The Love Suicide at Sonezaki*

Scenes from some of the best known works of Chikamatsu Monzaemon, whose plays still speak to modern audiences and are loved for their literary refinement and direct emotional appeal.



The Kawasho Tea House at Kitanoshinchi from *The Love Suicide at Amijima* (*Shinju Ten No Amijima*)



Kikai Island from *The Priest in Exile* (*Heike Nyogonoshima*)



The Misappropriation from *The Courier of Hell* (*Meido No Hikyaku*)



from *The Murder at the Oil Store* (*Onna koroshi Abura No Jigoku*)