

## Sagariha

The information in this article is based on a translation of a series of articles titled “Shakuhachi koten honkyoku kaisetsu (Commentary on shakuhachi classical honkyoku)” featured in *Hōgaku Journal* (issues 266- 269) by Komusō Research Group member, Kanda Kayu.

**Sagariha** was originally a musical accompaniment in *Nō* for a dance that represented nymphs descending from heaven. It was performed on *fue*, and was accompanied by taiko percussion in a calm *chōshi* called *wataribyōshi*. There are a number of different kanji characters that are used for the title Sagariha, such as 下り端, 下り破, 下り葉, and 降葉.

In Keicho 8-9 (1603-1604), Jesuit missionaries in Nagasaki published *Nippo Jisho* (Japanese-Portuguese Dictionary). The entry on Sagariha reads:

Sagariha is played during *Nō* performances or in dances, when actors enter the stage.

Simultaneously, the title Sagariha may have been used for pieces outside the context of *Nō* and *buyō* dance. A dance performed by Izumo no Okuni (born ca. 1572; died ca. 1613, originator of kabuki theatre) in Kitano Tenmangu Shrine in Izumo (Shimane prefecture) in 1603 was called Sagariha, and the title was also later used for other dances and songs, and in *kabuki*. In instrumental compositions, a similar structure to that used in *Nō* was used for shamisen, and the piece was played to create a solemn atmosphere for moments when characters of nobility would leave the stage. Pieces titled Sagariha reached all corners of Japan and into the folk performance realm, appearing in *matsuribayashi*, *shishi* dances, *sato kagura*, extending all the way to instruments such as the *kokyū* and shakuhachi. Sagariha is still used today as accompaniment in festivals, or during the introduction of scenes in other performance genres. *Hitoyogiri* notation is included in *Shichiku Shoshinshū*, where ヒ-イ-イ-イ is a primary melody that recurs many times throughout the piece,

with the '*hodobyōshi* (an accented backbeat rhythm in *gagaku*) to be played the same way as a *fue*'. The rhythmical shakuhachi version of Sagariha also includes elements of what was performed at festivals.

### **Sagariha 下り葉 (Kinko lineage)**

Kurosawa Kinko I learnt the piece at Myōanji in Kyoto from a komusō monk, Matsuyama, who had performed the piece at the Gion Festival. This is the *fue* version of Sagariha, substituting *fue* with shakuhachi; the melody is repeated twice, and is almost the same both times. The tempo at which it was played at that time is not known, but nowadays the piece is played at a relaxed, calm pace, even though there are many rhythmical and high-pitched sections. Generally, the atmosphere created by this piece is one of *yūga* (grace and refinement).

### **Sagariha 降葉之曲 (Myōan Shinpō lineage)**

Yokoi Kinkoku (1761-1832), who became the head of Myōanji around 1782, was 'taught, and became well versed in, many amusing pieces such as Sandan Jishi, Sagariha, etc.' From this, we know that Sagariha was played for amusement. This version is a very rhythmical piece played in the tuning of *kumojjōshi*, and was also played at festivals in imitation of the *fue*. There was yet another very similar sounding version that was taught and performed, but that version omitted or abbreviated the prelude.

### **Sagariha 下り葉 (Kinpū lineage)**

Among the ten pieces of the Kinpū repertoire, Sagariha is the most frequently played. Structurally, this version appears to be simple, and also features two repeats, but a large proportion of the piece is in the *kan* register, and is played vigorously. I suspect there is a melody from a *shishi* piece that originates in the Tōhoku area in this version.

Orito Nyogetsu (1865-1947), whose students included Yamaue Getsuzan and Jin Nyodo, made a legacy recording at the age of 78, *Kumoichō Sagariha*, on the Columbia record label (TRS-5200).

