

Music and dance performance from Okinawa (South of Japan)

27 April 2024 15-16h at Theater Basel (foyer public)

Okinawa Island: Eisa dances and poetry

Tanabata, which is mentioned in the lyrics of *Chunjun Nagari*, is the seventh month of the lunar calendar (around mid-August). This is when the Eisa dances take place to bid farewell to the spirits of the ancestors who returned to this world during the *Bon* festival.

Ahabushi

The song is about a place called Aha in the northern part of the island of Okinawa. It was born through the tradition of *Mo-Ashibi* which is a playful singing with calling and responding between young women and men. It talks about the calmness of the place and of the joy of celebrating together.

Chunjun Nagari

This famous song that accompany Eisa drumming and dancing refers to the legend of *Chunjundaishu*, who had three sons: to decide who would inherit the rule of the family, he decided one day to test them by pretending to be ill.

Kudaka Manjushu

Often performed right after the previous *Chunjun Nagari*, this other famous Eisa song is making fun of Lord *Kudaka Manju* who was in search of a beautiful concubine in Naha.

Aki no Odori

One of the rare Okinawan songs that is written in Japanese. It is very poetic and depicts the beauty of the nature and landscape of mainland Japan in autumn. It is part of the Okinawan Court Music and Dance repertoire.

Danju Kariyushi

It was believed in the Ryukyu islands that singing this song was a way to pray for the safety of people sailing to the sea.

Tenyobushi

This uplifting song that is cheering the arrival of the long-awaited *Tanabata* season in August invites everybody to participate in the Eisa dance. It states that there is no limit to the joy of dancing.

Ume no Kaori

While plum trees bloom in March in Japan, they already start in January in Okinawa. *Ume no Kaori* sings the plums' beauty and sweet scents, but also the importance of caring for the tree that you're growing and watering it every day.

Yaeyama Islands

The Yaeyama Islands are located far to the South-West of Okinawa and each has its own customs and languages. The culture is influenced by the Ryukyu dynasty as well as neighbouring southern cultures.

Asadoya Yunta (from Taketomi island)

Kuyama from the house of *Asadoya* was born a beautiful woman. She was admired by the official *Mizashi*, who came from the island of Okinawa. The village chief also liked her. However, *Kuyama* did not want to go with the government official, she decided to rather serve the village chief.

Mayaagwa (from Yonaguni island)

This very popular song from Yonaguni island has been sung for various celebrations. In the verses, we can hear the light story of a naughty cat tricking mice and fighting with the neighbour's dog. But it is actually a satire on how bad the relationship was between the government officials - compared with dogs here - and the female cooks - compared with cats.

Tsuku nu Kaisha (from Ishigaki island)

This old lullaby likens the beauty of a girl about to become a woman to the beauty of the moon just before the full moon.

Kiyugahi (from Yonaguni island)

Local rituals praying for the good harvests culminate in a highlight called *Dunta*. *Kiyugahi* is performed at the beginning of that highlight. Participants sing and play percussion until late in the night.

Eisa Dancers:

tr'ensemble (labonneheure.ch/trensemble) under the artistic guidance of Ana Riciard and Emanuel Han

Singers and Sanshin players:

Yomo Tagami
Giuseppe Ardiri
Mina Mermoud
Emanuel Han