

Attending a performance

Kabuki theatre fulfilled an important cultural role in Japan during the 18th century. This section addresses the question of who attended these performances, and what sort of experience they could expect to have when attending a live Kabuki performance.

The print at Figure 9 illustrates the Nakamura-za theatre in Edo during a performance of the act 'Kikaigashima' from the play 'Shunkan futatsu omokage' in the 3rd month of 1800 which is currently on display in The British Museum. This print closely depicts features of a typical Kabuki performance of the time. The curator's comment which accompanies this print provides us with some insight into the scene we see before us; The large skylights at the end of the theatre were essential for illuminating the stage, hence Kabuki performances took place during daylight hours. The musicians are discreetly hidden behind the black screen to the back of the right-hand panel. The cheapest entry in the theatre was sold to anyone who was willing to stand for the duration of the performance in the rakan-dai ('arhat gallery'), located to the back of the left panel.

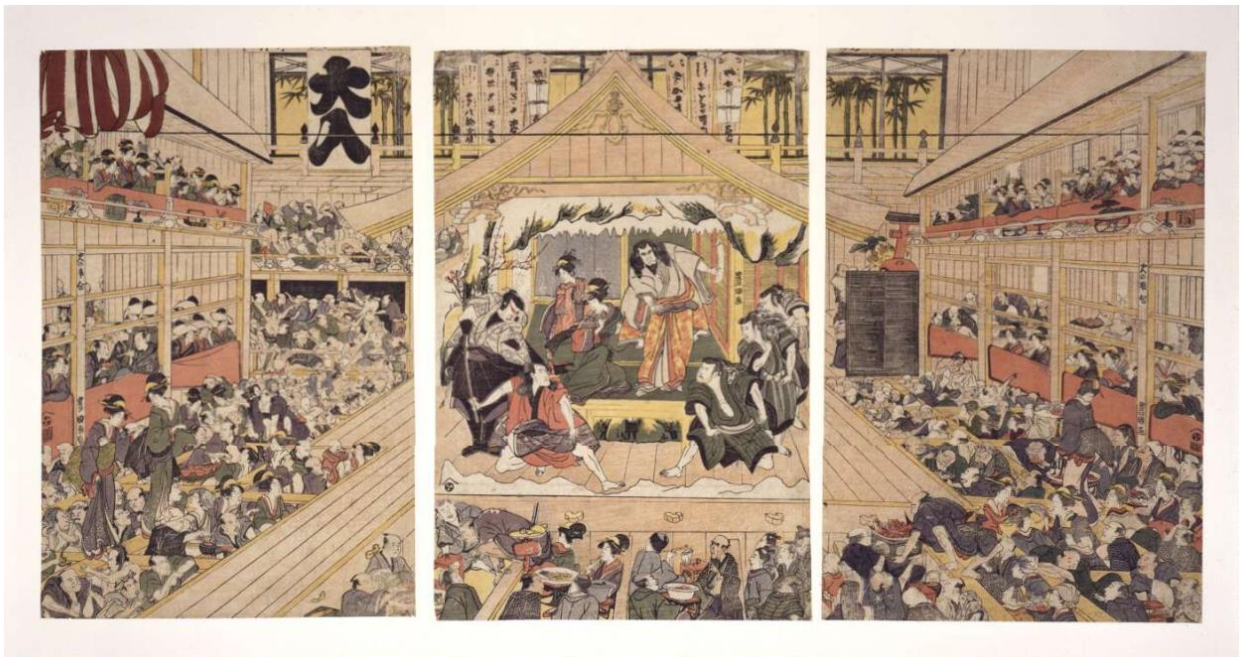


Fig.9 U. Toyokuni, 1800, Interior of a Kabuki theatre, coloured woodcut triptych, The British Museum, London