

Noh Matsura Sayohime 松浦佐用姫

(“Princess Sayo of Matsura”)

A travelling priest visits Matsura Bay and meets a young fisherwoman who tells him of a nearby “mirror shrine” and the story of Sayohime who had fallen in love with Sadehiko, an imperial envoy to the T’ang court in China. When the envoy’s ship finally left for China, Sayohime climbed Mt. Matsura to wave a silk cloth. As a result the mountain became known as the “cloth-waving mountain.” When the priest asks about the mirror, the fisherwoman, revealing she was the spirit of Sayohime, promises she will bring the mirror and disappears.

In the second half, the ghost of Sayohime appears to the priest and reenacts her waving the cloth as well as how, distraught by her husband’s departure, she got into a small boat and with her keepsake mirror in hand threw herself into the sea.

Author: Most likely Zeami (1363?-1443?).

Scene: Winter, Matsura Bay in Hizen province, the northern part of the present Nagasaki and Saga prefectures.

Category: Fourth category miscellaneous (devotion) play, phantasm (mugen) noh in two acts, tachimawari (“stroll” dance) piece, without taiko stick drum.

Performance practice: Performed by the Kanze School only. Though referred to in old sources as Matsura no Noh, Matsura Kagami, or Sayohime, there are few records of its performance. In 2000, Kanze school head Kiyokazu upgraded it to a current piece in the Kanze repertoire, releasing an utaibon chant book of the piece.

Characters (in order of appearance)

- Waki (secondary actor): a travelling priest.
- Shite (main actor): a young fisherwoman. Mask: young woman (ko-omote, waka-onna, or zô)
- Ai/Ai-kyôgen (interlude actors): a local man.
- Nochijite (second half shite): The ghost of Sayohime. Mask: young woman (ko-omote, waka-onna, or zô)

Synopsis: scene by scene.

1. Waki entrance: A travelling priest enters to shidai music and sings of the boats going to China which and stopping in Matsura. He announces himself as a priest from the eastern regions and sings of travelling by boat to Matsura Bay. Upon arrival, he mentions the famous places he has only heard of and decides to ask a young fisherwoman about them.
2. Shite entrance: A young fisherwoman enters to issei music carrying a fishing pole and sings of the snowfall and sea mist which cloud the island-dotted coast, the life of a fisher girl in her boat with fishing line and a robe wet with mist, and finally of the moon waiting for the fishing boats to return as night falls.
3. Waki-Shite exchange: The priest tells that he wishes to visit the famous site nearby. The

fisherwoman suggests the “mirror shrine” dedicated to Sayohime who threw herself into the Harbor of Matsura River holding a mirror. She also points out Mt. Matsura, also known as Hirefuruyama, “cloth waving mountain.” One Sadehiko was appointed imperial envoy to the T’ang court and when his ship left Matsura, Sayohime went to the top of Mt. Matsura and waved a silk cloth. This was related in a poem by the great waka poet Yamanoue no Okura. She then sings it: “wishing for the return of the ship sailing out to the sea, Princess Sayo of Matsura could only wave her cloth”.

4. Shite’s narrative: The fisherwoman relates the story of Sadehiko and Sayohime with the chorus, telling how they began an affair. Vowing their love for each other they spent several nights together before he had to leave. Sayohime went up the mountain to wave goodbye.
5. Shite’s departure: The priest asks about the mirror and the woman tells him that it had belonged to Sadehiko and became Sayohime’s keepsake. It is now enshrined in the “mirror shrine.” She asks him if he would give her his sacred vest so she could say prayers. Together they recite prayers. The chorus sings for her saying that in turn she will show him the sacred mirror, and confessing that she is in fact Sayohime, she exits.
6. Ai’s narrative: A local man appears and tells how Sayohime took herself out to sea in a small boat and holding the mirror, threw herself into the sea.
7. Waki’s wait: The priest waits for the ghost of Sayohime to appear and sings of the moon shining on the sea like a clear water mirror.
8. Nochijite entrance: The ghost of Sayohime enters to issei music carrying a mirror and with the chorus sings her own embarrassing reflection in it. A brief iroe “color” dance is sometimes added.
9. Shite-Waki exchange: The priest sings of seeing a man’s form in the mirror and the ghost says her obsession has caused the mirror to reflect Sadehiko’s form. The priest replies that if only one desires it one can obtain buddhahood. Understanding this, the ghost wishes to repent by revealing her past. Together they describe a ship and the yells of those on board and on shore as it sets off. The chorus describes the shaking of the sea and mountain and how Sayohime climbed the mountain and yelled as the ship got farther away.
10. Shite’s action: The ghost dances a tachimawari “stroll” dance and the chorus describes how Sayohime waved her silk cloth wanting the ship to stop. Distraught, she was drawn to the seashore where she took a fisherwoman’s small boat and rowed out to the sea. Holding to her breast the mirror from Sadehiko, she jumped from the boat and sank to the bottom. And thus the priest awoke from his dream with the sound of wind passing through the bay. [Richard Emmert]