

# Sasago Oiwake Puppet Show

笹子追分人形芝居



## Sasago Oiwake Doll Preservation Society

Designated as an intangible cultural asset  
by Yamanashi Prefecture

91 Kuronoda, Sasago, Otsuki City  
Yamanashi Prefecture 401-0025  
Oiwake Fureai Center (Ningyo Kaikan)  
☎ 0554-25-2545  
Contact / ☎ 0554-25-2339 (Secretariat: Saito)

We, the conservation group, are seeking people who can participate in and work together on the conservation and performance activities of Oiwake Dolls. We look forward to your participation in bringing attention to this precious cultural asset that is unfortunately slowly disappearing. In the name of rich local culture and pride of the region, let's work together to ensure that the puppet plays handed down to Sasago, will continue to prosper on even 100 years from now.

\* We welcome participation in performances, schools, appreciation meetings, workshops etc, so please contact us for more information.

\* We also recruit new members for the society from time to time as well.

## Otsuki Tourism Association

1-1-33, Otsuki, Otsuki City 401-0013  
☎ 0554-22-2942

## THE SASAGO OIWAKE PUPPET THEATRE

**The theatre was like a light of joy  
for the people living in harsh mountains**

During the Edo period (1603-1867), Sasago Village, located at the foot of the most arduous passage of the Koshu Highway, was a town where travelers took off their straw sandals and rested.

The ancestors of Sasago Village learned the art of puppet shows passed down from Awaji and Edo whilst also doing their usual jobs in the mountain to entertain guests heading to the mountain pass the next day.

In those times, the pass would have seemed much higher and the valley would have seemed much deeper, so the existence of the theatre was like a light of joy in the darkness for the people living quite tough lives in harsh mountains and rivers.

In the 300 years since then, the dolls have been protected by the ties of the people in Sasago Village, and they continue to perform the story of their hometown. It all began because of the existence of the mountain pass, and many many years later, the tradition and culture are still preserved.



## "KASHIRA"

### The Head of the dolls

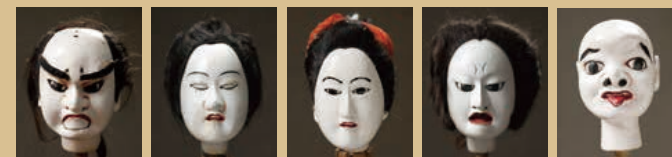


Sanbaso (Kabuki performer) / about 320 years ago

Kashira is considered as the most important part of the dolls.

About 120 kashira have been handed down from various eras and regions.

To keep passing on this precious tradition to the next generations, we are taking great care to old kashira while using them in current plays. We also reproduce old ones if they're needed or restore them carefully when using them.



Kenbishi (Police Officer)  
about 180-210 years ago

Maiden  
by Tengu Hisa

Maiden  
by Ningyo Tomi

Yashio (1st generation)  
by Yurakame

Choji  
about 250 years ago



# Passing This Light on to the Next Century

Encourage rehearsals for the performance.

Firmly carry on a 300-year old tradition, which arose from the climate and history of the Sasago Village, and also brought people joy and harmony.



## Leader

While supporting a heavy doll, the leader also expresses delicate emotions and breathes life into the doll.



## Left-hander/Foot controller

Instantly detects and reacts to the movements of the main puppeteer.



Thanks to the enthusiastic guidance of the troupe members, precious culture is being passed down to small children. Children are having fun and practicing hard with their favorite dolls.

## Costumes

Bring an old kimono, untie it, inherit it, and remake it for a doll. All hand made the old fashioned way.



## Shamisen and Gidayu-bushi

For big performances, we have the cooperation of Kendayu Takemoto and Jinichiro Nozawa. The realism of live performance and talk is exceptional.

## Three-puppeteers

A unique Japanese puppetry method devised in the Edo period. When the head-man, left-hander and food controller are in perfect harmony with each other, it creates movements and expressions on the dolls as if they are alive.

## Decorating the wooden doll

The art of creating kashira is now a traditional technique.

It is done by using valuable materials such as a kiso turret, the baleen of whales, chalk, and hair of yaks while the puppet master engraves life into the doll.



## Training

Since all members have their main jobs during the day, rehearsals start after the sun goes down.



吉窪美人鏡

## YOSHIKUBO BIJIN KAGAMI



The Legend of Ashiga pond, a performance which has been handed down in Sasago for over 800 years, is about a woman drowning in love who throws herself into a pond out of jealousy and becomes a serpent. It was performed over 70 years ago with oiwake dolls as the "Yoshikubo Bijin Kagami - A mirror of a beauty of Yoshi pond".

Once it was discontinued because it was an oral instruction, In 2013, they completed a new edition of the performance. It took around a year to complete and they did so by relying entirely on the old script and by adding new productions to the performance.



When it was performed on stage for the first time at the National Cultural Festival held in Yamanashi Prefecture, it was showered with applause for the vivid revival of the story of this hometown.

We know the joys were shared and felt by the predecessors who protected and handed down the dolls as well.



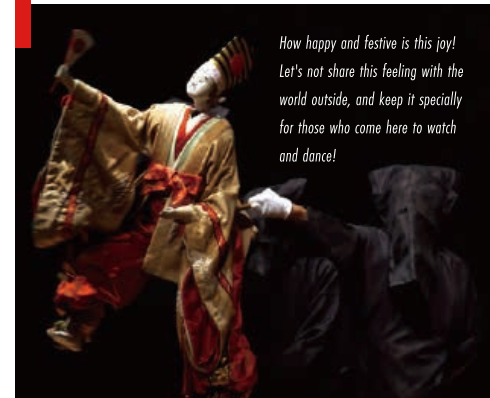
Oyoshi, a girl who lives near Yoshi pond on the banks of the Sasago River, fell in love for the first time with a young monk.

Her innocent and strong feelings for him eventually turn her into a terrifying poisonous snake...



## A classic masterpiece played by Oiwake dolls

The doll's dance represents the history, nature and heart of this hometown.



How happy and festive is this joy!  
Let's not share this feeling with the world outside, and keep it specially for those who come here to watch and dance!



追分人形式三番叟  
SANBASO

The "Oiwakepuppet styled sanbaso", which was revived based on the memories of the elders, is considered to be very valuable in terms of folklore.

The main puppeteer's "Kuchi Shamisen - humming a shamisen (a three-stringed traditional Japanese musical instrument) tune" is a rarity in Japan, and it expresses the natural colors of Sasago with a sense of simplicity and humor in its festive atmosphere.

(Sanbaso is a performance where you can feel the roots of puppet theater which was originally a Shinto ritual. It is performed to pray for a bountiful harvest and is now performed at the beginning of performances and on celebratory occasions such as the New Year.)

