

JAPAN DIARY – 2008

January 20, 2008

In 2005 we began the daunting task of researching women's theatre herstory for our play "History of women in theatre: Condensed". Rather than go to the existing text books, which relegated much of women's work in theatre to the back pages and footnotes, we combed old book stores and searched the internet for tidbits about women in theatre. One of the little known facts we recovered was that the now all male Japanese theatre form called Kabuki had been created by a woman, Okuni of Izumo. While Okuni's form of kabuki rose in popularity, women were eventually banned from performing it by the order of the shogun in 1629 and men took over and developed the form. After that time, women's kabuki went underground, and continued to be performed privately in the homes of wealthy nobles. At the end of the 19th century the ban was lifted and women were once again allowed to perform kabuki in public. Due to a variety of reasons, including poor critical response, women were never able to compete with male kabuki actors and the all female troupes faded away. Since then the tradition of women's kabuki has been carried on by a few all-female troupes, the most current being Nagoya Musume Kabuki which celebrated its twentieth anniversary last year.

Since 2005 we have been communicating with Nagoya Musume Kabuki about a collaboration where they would teach us some female kabuki techniques that we could incorporate into our performance. We finally got an email from "Shin" who was not connected with the company but served as an interpreter for us and we arranged to travel to Nagoya the last week of January to take a few workshops and to see a performance. Those plans changed, however, when Ohka decided that one experience of performing kabuki was worth a hundred workshops and so decided to put us into the performance.

Gracie Allen and I take off for Nagoya Japan on January 20th not knowing what parts we would play or the schedule or what would be expected of us. A professor in New York City who is writing a book about women's kabuki (Lauren Edelson) and who knows NMK has reassured us that it will be a challenge but well worth it and full of many surprises. We arrived the following day, Monday January 21. The first surprise was a phone call from Shin that night who we assumed was a woman but sounded just like a man. Maybe he would turn out to be a transgender person. Anyway, we met him the next day and he turned out to be a young cute Japanese guy.... born in

Japan but lived in Australia for a while so he had an Australian accent. He took us to the rehearsal the day after we arrived which was in a community room at a local arts center. We walked into 6 women all in kimonos practicingspeaking in a very exaggerated form of Japanese and working to a tape of music and dialogue.

Soon Ohka arrived and began by giving us (via Shin's interpretation) a quick background in Kabuki and what we would be playing. She said we both needed to have strong centers and to act from our center. Then she told us that we both would be playing Samauri...I would be playing an older samurai and a very important part of the story and Gracie would be my second lieutenant. Here is the plot of our play *Kamakura Sandaiki*:

Nagato, mother of the young Genji warrior Sakamoto Miuranosuke Yoshimura, is ill in her cottage at Kinugawa Village on Lake Biwa, not far from where her son is engaged in the battle of Sakamoto Castle. Miuranosuke is engaged to Princess Toki, daughter of his current enemy, the Heike general Hojo Tokimasa. Tokimasa sends for Toki to leave the household of her enemy, but Nagato, who is being cared for by Toki, does not allow her to depart. Moreover, Toki, believing her duty is to her future husband and not to her father, refuses to leave. When two ladies-in-waiting, who have come to fetch her, see the kind of menial work she does for Nagato, they decide to force her to return with them. The outstanding Genji general fighting at Sakamoto Castle, Sasaki Takatsuna, passes himself off to the ladies as a farmer named "Adachi Tozaburo," who wears a tattoo on his head that marks him as a friend to the Heike, although his alliance is a pretense. He has come from Tokimasa to bring Toki home and sends them on their way. He hides nearby after they depart.

Ohka then showed us how a samurai would walk....we had to lean up against a wall, bend our knees slightly and then make fists and with arms akimbo glide forward. Ohka then showed me how to slightly bite my tongue in order to achieve a more masculine face. She said that my look had to encompass the entire room and that I should not focus on one person on stage....very different from western acting where eye contact is very important. We practiced the walk and the look for a while and then she instructed me to sit in a chair and for Gracie to sit on my right. Then we began the scene. Whenever I would speak Ohka would play a tape of my lines. I guess someone is going to say my lines for me....standing behind me or to the side of me. I had to

hold a fan which represented a baton and snap it on my knee several times.

We moved the rehearsal to Ohka's studio because the rehearsal room was not available after 6pm. She has redone her studio recently and it is a small replica of a kabuki theater with wooden floor boards that make a huge sound when you stomp on them...a very important part of kabuki. Ohka explained to us that we must enter the stage from down right and bow before stepping onto the stage. Gracie and I did so and went over our parts again but it is difficult for me as I have lines and I have no idea what they mean and am waving this baton up and down and pointing but I'm not sure why. But we went over it for about another 30 minutes and then it was the end of rehearsal. We went upstairs to see Ohka's husband give a Shamisen (three string Japanese guitar) lesson and listened to a young girl play. Ohka said via Shin, our interpreter that she felt very relieved to have met us and seen what we could do with our parts and seemed to have confidence that we would be able to pull it off. We left with Shin who showed us the way back via subway. Rehearsal the next day for us was not until 8pm but we were welcome to show up anytime from 6pm on to watch.

FOOD day one was breakfast at a diner type place...one boiled egg and toast. I was hoping for a Japanese breakfast but we couldn't find any. Lunch was Ramen noodles and tempura shrimp and for dinner we walked around the neighborhood and were intimidated by all the places with no English on the signs which was basically everywhere so finally chose a well lit place with long communal tables. Unfortunately, no one could speak English and we forgot our Japanese food book so ended up ordering from photos...corn, tofu in broth and what we thought were French fries but ended up being deep fried and breaded sardines!

WEDNESDAY, Jan 22

It rained hard all day so Gracie and I (who were up at the crack of dawn.....5am) got breakfast in the hotel buffet and decided to go shopping because the weather was so bad. We went to a few department stores and stumbled upon a 99 cent shop where we got a lot of Japanese kitch items. We had lunch at the underground shopping mall...found the famous Nagoya noodles which I had with tempura shrimp....really yummy. Then back to the hotel for long naps. We woke up and I decided to work out. Then we headed for rehearsal and had a hard time finding the place. On the way we stopped at the rail station and got our shinkansin train tickets to Hiroshima for Monday. It will take us only two hours to get there. We got to

rehearsal about one hour early and they were doing a run through of the second piece...there will be two plays on the bill on Sunday. Our piece is first and then a second act of about an hour that will feature all of Ohka's students....from about 3 years old to 50, in traditional kabuki dances and scenes. I wish I had a video because the kids were so adorable. We met more of the students....two of them actually speak English very well. Then we got to go over our scene ONCE! Ohka changed it and I got so confused because I have no idea what anyone was saying including myself...all my lines were on a tape again. Now I have more movements..more slapping of the baton and a few nods and looks and oh my god can we go over it all again and can someone tell me what is happening in the scene already!? I feel more tense in my body today but maybe I am trying too hard. Anyway, we end at 9 pm and Shin takes us to his favorite wine bar and treats us to wine and onion soup au gratin....from a French restaurant attached to the bar. We find out more about Shin...he works in the fish market buying tuna at auction for a company his grandmother started. His father is a neurosurgeon and he has his own restaurant and also was a DJ and reps a few musicians. He seems to be a real entrepreneur and treats us to three bottles of wine and then pays for our cab back to the hotel...what a gentleman! We don't get to bed until after midnight so perhaps tonight we will sleep through to daylight. The next day plans are to find a video camera shop and a used kimono store to stock up on what we will need to recreate our Japanese adventure back in the US.

THURSDAY, Jan 23

Manage to sleep until 7AM! Worked out and then had our concierge help us find where we can get a camera, used kimonos and some soba...something I have been dying for . Today I try Soba with rice cakes....two gluey masses of white that taste like a carb lovers paradise with lovely soba and broth. Then off searching for a camera which was too expensive. But it was fun looking at all the cool Japanese phones in the local electronics store. Then off to a section of town that has a lot of used clothing shops...in most of them the kimonos are over 200 dollars. Then we spot a small used clothing shop and meet two young sales girls who are very helpful showing us how to tie the obis...we end up with three kimonos and three obis all for 100 bucks! I have to have a coffee after that. In the lobby of the Hilton there is a starbucks like coffee stand and while I love drinking the green tea at every meal I am feeling a bit of jet lag so I splurge on a cappuccino for 3 bucks. It is all very expensive here which is why Gracie and I are looking for the cheap but good small restaurants. So far so good. Shin has promised to introduce us to the local and

seasonal blowfish....poisoness if you don't prepare it correctly. He also says he will show us the fish market...but we have to get there at 7am to see the action. As a foodie I am really looking forward to both of these future events.

Rehearsal today is at 5PM. Shin writes down the location (it changes every time.....rooms in cultural centers, universities and community centers). Kabuki needs lots of space to rehearse which is why she must get these large rooms.

We arrive early and help the young 18 year old Fugi move the desks and chairs back to make a large clear space for rehearsal. Soon Ohka arrives and because no one is there yet she shows us three walks...young woman, middle age woman and old woman. She also shows us a Kabuki warm up that involves a lot of poses. Wish I had my video camera because I don't remember any of it.

The show will actually be two acts... the first our play *Kamakura Sandaiki*. We are in the first scene (thank god) and as I have mentioned the plot is very complicated and convoluted. But when we rehearse I manage to remember all of my moves. Ohka directs me, telling me I have kind eyes but that won't work for my part. I understand a bit more about the posture, and she keeps telling me to have wider vision...I am just grateful that I have remembered all the moves even though I have no idea what I am saying. Shin promises to translate the text for me by the next day so that I will know the lines. Gracie has a harder time...she must get up from a sitting position and it is difficult for her to do so by remaining super still. She's is given several "cheats" for her position but isn't allowed to go over them (we all rehearse just once through a day) and all of what we do is changed constantly so you really have to go with the flow. Part of this rehearsal (with just the young adult girls and older women) is several very beautiful dances...one with fans, one with white cloth and one with sticks. The sticks one is a woman who is trying to get a spirit to come down from a bell in a shrine. She turns into a snake to try to entice the spirit. I do manage to video a bit of the dances. We end at 9:30 and go with Noa to her father's pub....Poor Richards....where we drink beer and eat pizza. Shin joins us for a bit and we stumble to bed at midnight.

FRIDAY, Jan 24

Got up around 7 and again worked out. We are in a hotel with a great gym, pool, personal trainer. They even have these Japanese pools where you soak in hot water and then jump into a cold pool. The older Japanese women spend hours in the morning in these tubs. Today we decide to go to the Nagoya castle. First we stop at the camera store so that I can buy a bigger memory card for video taping with my

cannon powershot. Then we are off to Nagoya station JR train to buy tickets from Hiroshima to Kyoto and back to Nagoya. While there we have Nagoya noodles again for lunch.....I love this lunch of fish broth and noodles along with a few pieces of vegetable and shrimp tempura on top. Then we go to the castle for many photos ops. The castle is a recreation of a 16th century one that was destroyed during WWII. Next stop is the kabuki theatre we will be performing in. Ohka has told us that there is a library with info on kabuki in the basement and we should go there to look at books on kabuki. The theatre is called Misono za, one of the biggest in Japan. We find the library and a woman gives us several picture books to look atI am really getting to love this style of theatre. Music, dance and acting...all that the GGOT shows consist of and my brain is working as to how to incorporate some of these techniques into our performances. Rehearsal is again at 5 in yet another location. We arrive and it is a full run of both shows. The second has many children in it. They are adorable in their small kimonos and obis. They seem to have much more concentration than American children would. After much rehearsal of many different parts, dances, we are on and I manage to do my entire part without a note or interruption from Ohka. I see out of the corner of my eye that Seiko, the member of NMK who plays all the men, nods in approval at all of my movements. Here is a list of the NMK company members and the parts they play.

Seiko – plays men
Hisago – princess
Sakurako – Toza/takasuni
Ricki – fake wife
Kume – real wife (she is still in high school and is 18 years old)
Izumida – older woman
Noa – umbrella dancer and extra
Narita – umbrella dancer
Noriko – a servant - washing rice
Haruna – umbrella dancer
Nagato - Mother who is dying
Cheza – woman who gave me the name of shamisen music CD

Again, we only get to do our part once. But I feel much better. Shin has brought me a translation of the scene and I am grateful to finally know what I am saying.

After rehearsal at 9 Shin offers to take us to his friends sushi restaurant and we go with Noa. The sushi is FABULOUS.....first sashimi of tuna, squid, octopus, flounder, clam then sushi of sea urchin,

salmon roe, tuna, conger eel and we also get an egg soup that is more like a delicate custard....and the best sake served in beautiful etched crystal cups...all very over the top but the best sushi I have ever had.. I am learning that Shin is not only a real gentleman but a fabulous host. The name of the restaurant is Isuzu

SATURDAY

January 25

Dress rehearsal Day

We have soba around noon and then decide to go check out rehearsal even though we are not due there until 3PM. It is at the theatre but when we get to the theatre we can't find it. The women in the lobby of the theatre keep telling us that the show is tomorrow. Finally we pull out a program and point to our names. Then she tells us it is not until 1PM. So I go across the street to a kimono shop and buy some belts and an under belt type thing for our kimonos. I get back to the theatre and see one of the actors in the hall and she shows me where the rehearsal is. It is in a large room in the basement of the theatre. All of the props and costumes have arrived and there are many, many boxes all around the space. The room is carpeted and where the stage will be many, many tatami mats have been placed including for the side stage right ramp entrance (the hanamichi or "Flower path") The musicians have also arrived...there are about 15 singers, 10 shamasin players, 6 drummers, a block player and another who does sound effects with his voice. All of the musicians are women except for the sound effect guy and the block player. Also present are costume experts, music directors, wig masters, and Ohka's master...an older woman in a kimono is there as well. Lots of people of all ages and now I know why we never see kabuki in the US....they would have to travel with 200 people and a mass of props, costumes and musical instruments.

Again, the rehearsal begins with the children and the dances of the second piece. Fans are replaced by drums, tambourines, umbrellas and other props although it seems that costumes are not used today. Ohka's master directs the dancers and Ohka seems to be put off to the side. The musicians are all skilled and play together as one even though there seems to be no conductor. After about an hour and a half the second piece is finished rehearsal and the women musicians and children leave. There is a break and Noa brings us a bento box to eat. Shin shows up and I get my prop. The baton has a big tassel on the end of it made of gold paper and it is a bit wobbly. When it is our turn to rehearse I meet the man who will be my voice. He seems to be excited to meet me as he points to himself and then to me....expressing via sign language that we will be playing the same

part. Another man looks at me and says "Tokimasa?" I say yes! We do our scene...at one point I think I mess up but Ohka looks at me with an OK signal. Again, they change Gracie's movement...now she does not have to get up at all. After we rehearse Shin tells us that I did well. Ohka explains a bit about how to hold the baton. One male observer asks Shin our names because he plans on calling them out during our scene! (This is a tradition in kabuki....if the audience likes your performance they call out your name after you make a large movement) Amazing! After our scene is over we watch the rest of the play....with just one singer (Shintu) and one Shamisen player who also does a lot of guttural sounds with his throat to accompany the scenes. There is narration, music and scenes.....all telling the story of a princess (my daughter) and her husband...for the enemy side and Tozu...the guy I gave the tattoo to who reappears out of a well in the end as a powerful spirit.

At the end of the rehearsal Gracie and I go to the British pub where the food is horrible....I have a "Bagel sandwich" which is basically a ham and cheese. We have a few pints and get to bed at 11...so we will have enough energy for the performance day tomorrow.

SUNDAY

January 27

We wake up to Obama winning South Carolina. We are due at the theatre at noon so we take our time getting up, working out, eating and then head to the theatre which is just a 5 minute walk from our hotel. When we get there Acura (the one who teaches Shakespeare and speaks English) says that it has been chaos all morning and where have we been? She tells us that our run through is to begin at 1pm and we have to get into costume, make up and wigs. We find out where our dressing room in....on the 4th floor. All three dressing rooms are square rooms with tatami mats on the floor and sinks and shoe racks outside. Since they are running the second piece and there is no one in wig or make up or costume departments (located on the second floor) so we wait. There is a TV in each dressing room that gives you live action from the stage. Finally the second act is over and the dancing girls come off the stage drenched in sweat and not looking very happy. Acura tells us that is because it is not very well organized and that technically there is no "director" for the show. We finally get into wig caps and then make up arrives and I am made up in white face with dark brown lines all over my face to look old and mean. Then costuming. We have none of the special undergarments you are supposed to wear in kabuki...we were not told to get them. So I wear my leggings and black t-shirt and that seems to be OK for the three costume people. Gracie, however is wearing a GGOT T shirt and that

is a no no...the writing is not good so she has to borrow some undergarments. We are also supposed to have ties to tie the kimono type costumes with and Nariko loans us some of hers. I meet one of the male kabuki actors who are the sponsors of NMK and he instructs the costumers as to exactly what my character – Tokimasa – is supposed to wear. Layers and layers are put on me.....and tied around the waist. Sleeves with tight wrists....then wide pants and then a cummerbund type sash is wrapped and wrapped and tied around my waist and cinched so that I can hardly breathe. They say that it is necessary for it to be very tight and that while the costume is being put on I should be getting into character. Acura says that I will not be able to go to the bathroom for 5 hours so I should empty out now and not drink too much. Between dress and the show the costume can't come off. More layers and layers are put on and tied and finally I have a huge gold and white costume that is very wide....makes me look like I am about 200 pounds heavier and I have to walk sideways through doorways. Then the wig and the costume is completeGracie can only get half her costume on before we are called to the stage for the beginning of the dress rehearsal of Act I. The man beats sticks behind the drawn curtain that signal to the audience that the curtain is about to open. We get into position and one final beat of the stick he draws the curtain. The narrator sings and then the stick is beat for the signal that the spirit of kabuki is to come into our bodies. Of course my baton tassel gets stuck on my first beat and I try to wave it to be correct to no avail. The kabuki master actor changes some of the actors positions....the stage is huge...very wide. We do our scene and it is over. Ohka comes and give us the OK. My only note is that if the baton tassel falls wrong don't try to fix it. I am such a powerful character that I would leave it as it was.

Ohka makes us then watch the scene change. There is a tremendous turntable on the stage that has the set for the following scene and it revolves. The theatre must seat about 2000. We walk around...take some photos and then are advised to take our wigs off at the costume department so they don't get messed up. We are given bento boxes in the dressing room to eat. We wander the theatre taking photos and listening to the show...we can't go into the house but we do get to go to the back of the hanamichi entrance and watch a bit from there. There is really not much to do...it is just 2pm and we have a long wait.

At 4:30 I go to get back in my wig but the guy says he has not fixed it yet...seems like he had to add a head band to it...I should come back at 4:45....this is cutting it close.

I go back in five minutes because I don't like to wait and get it on....suddenly we are called to the stage....it seems that you have to be in places 15 minutes before curtain and that kabuki begins on time. We get there and I am so hot...the costume is really hot and the wig and the stage is also hot so I pace outside the stage in the hallway for a bit. About 5 to 6 of the singers and the Shamisen player all climb into their box on stage up left and we get into places. The stage manager or director begins to beat the blocks....counting out the time till the curtain will rise but he uses no clock or watch. I sit on my stool but soon feel I am slipping off.....yikes. Just before the curtain is pulled aside I readjust and the curtain opens...the audience immediately applaud. The narrator sings and when the block is slammed for the beginning of the play and I make my first move to let the spirit of kabuki enter my soul someone in the audience yells out "Aphra!". Wow! The lights are so bright on me it is hard to tell if I am keeping my eyes open all the way but I manage to keep still and just sit and listen. When I have to hit the baton the first time...the tassel miraculously falls back into place and the guy again yells' Aphra!". This is fun....I can see that the audience is packed. I manage to do all my moves correctly....it seems as if I have more control and am in the spirit of they play. Right before my last move I think...wow...this is going fast and will be over soon....and I don't want it to be. But the scene ends, the curtain is drawn and the audience claps. I am pleased and relieved. Shin says it was great...all moves hit at the right time. I have to go right back to the costume department where they strip the costume off me on one minute....And that's it. Now I have to scrub my face about 5 times to get the make up off...and now we will wait until the second act to go down to the audience to watch.

During the intermission we meet Shin's mother who is gracious and has gifts for us both. For the second act we sneak into empty seats and watch the three girl dancers do fabulous and colorful dances...complete with costume changes assisted by women who change their kimonos and hairall very simple but it all looks like complicated special effects. There is a bell hung from the top of center stage and the girls do ghost dances....a dance with drums, a dance with tambourines, with pieces of cloth, with fans....all with women singers, shamisen players and drummers behind. There are a lot of calls from the audience throughout for Sakuriko, Kume, and Hisago. The show ends but there a no bows in kabuki. The curtain is drawn and it's over. We head backstage and send our congrats to those we can find . We see Ohka sensei and give her our gift...she invites us to visit her at her studio at 5 pm on Wednesday when we return. We say goodbyes to some of the women....Noa, Izumide, all very gracious

and all of those involved in the show who are not performers stop by to tell us what a great job we did. Every one is extra gracious and makes us feel good. We get gifts of flowers and tea towels but there is no after party and so we take Shin back to the Hilton bar at the top of the hotel.....windows on the world,....and have a few beers and talk for an hour or so. We fall asleep exhausted but satisfied in a job well done.

January 28, 2008 Monday

We get up around 7 to pack, check emails, write in our diaries, and pay our Hilton check and head out around 11. Our train to Hiroshima is at noon. I find a shop to buy some Shamisen music and purchase two cd's. We eat Nagoya noodles for lunch and then board our train - a Nozomi to Hiroshima that will get us there in 2 hours. I doze on the train as does Gracie and when we get to Hiroshima it is snowing.! We check into our hotel...the Ana Crown plaza...a very nice hotel and then head over to the Peace Park.

JANUARY 30, Wednesday

We return to Nagoya to have dinner with Ohka, Shin, Hisako and Sakurako. Of course Shin takes us to one of his friends traditional Japanese restaurants and we have a feast of the seasons best blow fish...served raw and poisonous if not prepared correctly, sardines, tempura, sushi, oysters, sake and green tea ice cream for dessert. We meet at Ohka's studio where she tells me what a great job I did and how she has been getting emails about how well the performance went...how no one knew who the New Yorkers were! She explains that my character was a very important one to the story and if I did not set up the story right the play would have failed. She seems to be very pleased with my performance. We sit seiza style in her studio and drink green tea. I tell her how much I have learned and how well I think everyone did.

At dinner I find out that it was her birthday the day after the show. I ask her how she thinks the show went and she tells me (via Shin) that she always sees ways to improve but that she is pleased. She feels that the new generation of women in kabuki really shone that night..all her young students were really spot on.

I ask her why she started doing kabuki and she told me that as a young girl she was drawn to traditional Japanese arts, mainly music but that her parents also wanted her to play the piano and she didn't like that as much. So with her sisters and some friends she started

NMK. And here it is 25 years later! I ask her about women and kabuki and how long ago they reclaimed the art and she said...and I will never forget this...that 'women have never really given up on kabuki...they have always performed it". I am glad to hear this...and convey that I think it's because of women's strength. I ask the young women how long they have been doing it...not very long. Hisako was discovered by Ohka in another art form and Sakurako about 10 years. They have been rehearsing their dances for about 2 months.

We laugh and Ohka puts her arms around me and I feel very close to this woman....I do want to share her with a US audiencedon't know how I'll to that but perhaps if Shin want so produce and Lauren can help we can drum up some interest for a US tour....I would certainly love to reprise my role at Tokimasa and told her if she every needed a General again to call me. She laughs. We hug at the end and I get the feeling that she does not like goodbyes. The young women and I all hug and kiss...they are open to the traditional western good bye and embrace us. It is over too soon. But it is an experience I shall never forget...it will remain with me always. I am already thinking of how to turn some of the GGOT plays into kabuki performances. Kabuki – music, dance, actor.

Love, [Aphra](#)

Dear Diary,

January 2008

Gracie here with the story of GGOT Japan Kabuki exchange. Enjoy!

Sunday/Monday: 21 hours travel door to door, taxi to NYC airport to Detroit to Nagoya Japan to train to taxi to hotel. Wow. Hotel is very nice, lots of English speaking employees make the first day easy to adjust. Try to go to bed and set our clocks to Japan time, tomorrow will be a busy day! Put on the kimono and fun slippers the hotel provides and go to bed.

Tuesday: Had Ramen for Lunch for the first of many restaurant adventures. Then met our interrupter Shin. He is Japanese and learned English in Australia with gives him a wonderful accent. He will go with us to all rehearsals and performances to translate the directions and teachings of Ohka, our female Kabuki master teacher.

First rehearsal is a blast. We are going to be doing a "Jidaimono" or historical Kabuki about a General who is trying to get his daughter back. She is married to his enemy who has just been injured in battle. She won't leave his side or her sick mother in-law. The General sends a newly made samurai to bring her back "or else". Aphra will be the General with an actor doing her voice from the musician's box. I am the second in charge samurai who will give the new samurai his weapon. Ohka teaches us a few "kata" poses for "misuya" or male expert actors. We learned how to walk like a man. After rehearsal we get the thumbs up and find out that the male kabuki troupe that sponsors Ohka's Nagoya Musume Kabuki has given us the A-OK to be the first female westerners in a Japanese staged kabuki since the shogun era! What an honor.

Subways here are very clean and easy to use. We go to a fun dinner and I accidentally ordered fish French fries instead of regular fries and eat them because I am so hungry.

Wednesday: Rainy, went to some shopping centers. Had the Nagoya noodle "kishime" for lunch very good! Hand made flat noodles served cold or hot.

We rehearse in the evening but only get to go through our scene once. We are presented with our "tabi Socks" which are the toed socks you can wear with sandals. We are to wear them on Saturday and Sunday. Once we got the thumbs up from Ohka the rest of the actresses in the troupe begin to work with us too. All are so generous and kind. May speaks English; she started Kabuki at 17, which is considered a late start. Kume, one of the leads started at 3 and is 18 now. Hisago and Sakurako are the other leads. Sakurako, May, Riki and Kume are in our scene. Seiko helps me be more samurai like with May translating. Seiko is the company's male character expert, so her help is great. She talks about making a mountain out of my hands and arms to give the impression of male size. My character should look strait out at the audience no matter what as a show of strength and power. My big moment is presenting the sword to the new samurai; they keep changing how I should do it which makes me worry. We watch the second half of the show, which is a dance kabuki and really wonderful to watch. All rehearse in full kimonos. You bow to the teacher or sensei when you start rehearsals and finish rehearsals and you enter the acting area with a bow as well as a sign of respect. There are children in the second piece ages 3-14 as well as adults. The kids are so cute.

Thursday: Rehearsal 5 pm. Went to Osu District in the afternoon saw the Osukannon Temple, which was very nice. Bright colored with lots of incense. People take the incense and "wash" themselves with the smoke and then pray. A big donation of coin gives you the right to hit the gong. In the Osu district there is a great out door east village type market with lots of bargains. My favorite area in Nagoya so far. Aphra wanted to buy some used Kimonos for our GGOT shows. We had a ball trying on different ones with matching "obis" (the tie that secures the kimono around your waist). Aphra ends up with three kimonos and three obis.

In rehearsal Ohka did some beginning body character work with us before rehearsal started. We learned:

1. Young Lady Character, cover their hands with the sleeves of their kimonos, folded over the heart body bent forward at the waist, knees touching, feel pigeon toed. Hand points to self, finger bent way back look. Walk almost like figure 8, shuffle, quick steps.
2. Adult Women/Wife, less pigeon toed, and legs less extreme, body lean back to show confidence. Hand points to face strait pointer finger. Straighter steps still shuffle not as fast.
3. Old Woman/Grand Mother, legs apart hands at waist finger bent when pointing at self. Older steps slower. Bent a little bit over to show age.

Izomida brings us rehearsal kimonos and fans. You use the fan to represent all props that you will use until tech. rehearsal when you will get your actual props. We are instructed to wear kimonos at all rehearsals and to bring our tobi socks and fans. My blocking gets changed again; I am worried I'll end up not doing anything.

We ended the night with a Kabuki Strong Man exercise that you follow the leader on. The strong man's legs are apart, knees pointed out. Push an imaginary wall to show strength, hop energy going down not up, more like modern dance as opposed to ballet. Hold the stomach in at all times and keep your head hanging like a puppet on the string pulling you from the ceiling. At the beginning of a Kabuki play there is a loud wooden clapping noise that signifies the start of the show and you stop being a puppet and the sprit of the character comes into you and you come to life.

Went to Noe's father bar " Poor Richards" for dinner, very nice. Fun time. Noe has been a great help, talking me through the changes they are making in my blocking and helping me understand the ins and outs of kabuki culture.

Friday: Rehearsal at 5. Went to Nagoya Castle and checked out the theatre we will be performing in and also looked at their kabuki library. Nagoya Castle was reconstructed after WW 11, but the design is from around 1600. 2 large moats, very high walls with the famous golden dolphins on top that are the mascots for Nagoya. I got a real feel for how powerful the builders of the castle must have been and how difficult it would have been in the 1600 to breach the castle walls.

At rehearsal that afternoon we do a run through. The entire cast is here including people from 2-55 years of age. Some have big parts and some small walk-ons. The children in the cast are so cute. Izumida helps me a little with the walk of a samurai. It doesn't seem like it would be hard, but it is quite a job to sit very still on the floor for 15 min with out moving. At the 10 min. mark I felt like a spider was crawling up my arm. Now I know there was no spider, but still... Ohio gozyemass is the way theatre people greet each other. It means good morning. The idea is in the theatre you never go out side, so you never know what time of day it is. I love that. I also just learned that there is even a special traditional way to take your sandals off with out touching them. Awesome.

Saturday: We are finally at the Misonoza Theatre's in the down stairs rehearsal rooms. The musicians and props are added to the mix. About twenty string lute players and 3 different kinds of drums and gongs. Many voices sing together and the effect is really moving. Most of the cast is female, including the musicians. There are a few men in the mix as singers and musicians. We meet the wig expert and are fitted for samurai wigs. I am giving a "how to handle" a sword lesson. Samurai's only hold the sword by the handle when they are going to attack, so watch out for that. We do a run through that is not quite a dress rehearsal, but a lot of elements are added. All make adjustments for new props and proper stage space. Ohka and the music director give a lot of notes about where to stand and when music should come in. We meet the man who will be Aphra's voice. He is very impressive. Lots of amazing sounds out of rather nice looking mild-mannered man. They give us Bento Boxes for the break. They are tasty and so cute. Yummy rice and vegetable tempura. My "acting" in my scene is getting better.

Sunday: Big Day. 12:00 call for dress, then a break and then the big show.

Well what a whirl wind. We arrive on time and we are late. No one remembered that we would need time to get ready so we get there only a half hour to get ready. In a hurry we get ready Kabuki style. 1. Go to the wig guys, they put on your wig cap made just for you. 2. Make-up ladies, they know just what your character should look like, you just close your eyes they put on a Vaseline like under coat then they cover my eyebrows with a very thick paste that make them disappear, then base light for me white for Aphra. I get big dark angry eyebrows a red mouth and red around my eyes. I look mean. 3. Put on special underwear, bloomers and a kimono top (some one has to lend me a set). 4. Stand still with your arms out while the costumers dress you. 3 or 4 layers of very heavy brocade fabric. Every piece wraps around you in some way. By the time They are done it feels like you are wearing a corset and I worry if I will be able to bend enough to sit cross legged for 15 min. 5. Put on Wig. I have a great three pony tailed black wig with a gold crest wrapped around my head on a white cloth.

Then we are rushed to the stage with zero minutes left. I don't have proper shoes to wear and there is some confusion. We do the dress with everything, lights, music set props. This is the only rehearsal with everything and in 2 hours the audience arrive. Wow, no pressure! I sit like a samurai and present the sword. The lights make it very hot under the costume and I think I might melt away.

The theatre is huge and beautiful. Red seats with a balcony and lots of side box seats. 2,000 seats, at least. Long stage with special section in the audience for long entrances. The stage revolves and there is an elevator trap that elevates Ohka at one point in the show so it looks like she appears out of no where.

Then we are whisked away to our dressing room to rest for an hour before we get ready for the show. Bento boxes are waiting again for us. A little pre-show snack. It is Japanese tradition for the audience to send well wishing gifts and soon we all get big bottles of cold green tea as a present from the audience. In the lobby there are three big tables of orchids and other beautiful flowers for the lead actresses. Another tradition. The flowers are left out for all to admire with the cards readable so everyone can see who got the flowers and who sent them. I didn't get any. (next time) As everyone is re-setting we are running around taking pictures with each other and exchanging gifts. A traditional gift seems to be a tea cloth. We receive two that have the company's logo and name on them. They are wrapped in paper that

are printed with the name of the actress who is giving the gift and good luck wishes.

Then a loud buzzer goes off and everyone looks busy, it is the 30 min. warning. Then the buzzer goes off again it is 15 min. and "places" we are whisked back on to the stage. Shin has helped me get some shoes, so I am not a shoe-less warrior. As we take our places people come around and add final touches, make-up retouches. Costume tightening and the like.

The stage "director" who is an expert on Kabuki changes the way I present the sword one last time. No one tells the Lead actress that we are changing it. I'm sure it will work out.

Then the stage "manager" who operates the loud wooden blocks hits them to alert the actors and the audience that it is 5 min. to show. The lead actress is still no where to be seen. He hits the blocks again to say 2 min. to show. She shows up out of breath and very apologetic. He glares at her; we all bow to each other. He hits the blocks one last time and the curtains are opened. The audience greets us with a huge round of applause.

It is a Kabuki tradition to shout out the name of the actor when they do something great.

I love this and think America should adopt it. The stage manager hits the blocks one last time which is suppose to signify the spirit of Kabuki entering the actors and the lights come up. It was a real magical moment. Once in a life time experience. Aphra does her first move with the wand and some one yells "APHRA!". When I pass the sword to the actress I hear "GRACIE" from the crowd. I feel very proud. We sneak into the theatre to watch the second half. This is the dance section and it takes my breath away, I join in the yelling and yell out some of my new friends names. The dancers perform these quick costume and wig bits revealing newly colored kimonos under ones they rip off in seconds and hair that flows down after they take out elaborate combs. It all seems like magic. The crowd goes wild. At intermission we meet Shin's mother who bought us lovely gifts because she felt bad no one sent us flowers. So sweet. I feel like I have had Andy Warhol's 15 min. of fame Japanese style.

A few days latter we have a celebratory dinner with Ohka, Shin, Hisago and Sakaroko.

It is a wonderful chance to go over the show and what we all thought of it. We are all pleased with each other and Aphra and I sincerely hope they can bring the show to NY and America. It would be

awesome and we hope to help if it happens. Ohka says we really did a good job and I tell her I felt the spirit of Kabuki when we did the show. I feel a little Japanese now, and I like it.

Well that's all for now. So Goodnight Diary...

Goodnight,
Gracie Allen 2008