

# Travel Scene and *Kuse* Notes

A noh play comprises a number of building blocks, or segments (*shôdan*).

The **travel scene**, which follows, has four such segments.

The ***kuse*** is a large segment by itself and is the central song in a play.

# Travel Scene Components

A 'sense of place' is very important in noh. The travel scene mainly features the *Waki* (the traveller(s)) and precedes the main part of the play. Through the travel scene we arrive at the place where events of the play occur. The travel scene establishes the important relationship between the place and the key characters.

1. **Shidai** (Opening three-line poem sung by the traveller(s).) The first two lines are the same; the third line is different. Each line uses 7+5 syllable poetic structure. The *shidai* hints at the whole essence of the play.
2. **Nanori** (Short 'name announcement' in stylised speech/prose form.) The principal traveller introduces themselves, tells where they are going and why.
3. **Michiyuki** ('road going' i.e travel song segment) Sets out where the traveller begins their journey, describing places they pass on the way, hinting at some of the deeper reasons/meaning for the journey including their feelings and their arrival at their destination. When sung it generally begins in the upper melodic register and ends in the lower. For each line it often follows a 7+5 syllable poetic structure and is about 8-12 lines long.
4. **Tsuki-zerifu** ('Arrival lines') Short prose statement telling of the traveller's arrival at their destination.

See examples.

# Central Song (*kuse*)

- **The *kuse* is the central poetic segment in a noh play and is an important emotional highpoint with its beautiful poetic sensibility.**
- It is one of the most distinctive sections of a play. It is sung by the chorus while the main actor (*shite*) dances. Both are accompanied by the flute and drums.
- The chorus is generally describing the scene, as well as the thoughts and feelings in the mind of the main actor.
- The main actor might sing a short line in the middle of the *kuse*.
- The *kuse* often starts with lines having a 7 & 5 poetic structure. However, it becomes more complex as many lines break away from that strict structure. This gives the rhythmic flow of the song a stronger depth of feeling.
- A short *kuse* might only be 12-15 lines, while a longer *kuse* could be as many as 30 lines or more.