

Masked Drama Dance
Video (“Great Tales in Asian Art”)
Segment on the drama dance is approximately 15 minutes

The masked dance drama was popular in the Choson (Joseon) period (1392-1910) and is considered representative of the height of Korean vernacular culture. It is a form of play or dance performed while wearing masks. By dressing up as a nobleman or shaman, a wife or a concubine, or a servant, the common people could express their resentment of the oppression they suffered or laugh at themselves. The dramas have no story line or plot. They are a series of satirical skits, independent of each other, portraying, for example, the foibles and misadventures of a renegade Buddhist monk, a pompous aristocrat, a stupid nobleman and his clever servant or a unfaithful spouse.

In the 1980s the masked dance dramas enjoyed a widespread revival in connection with the people’s democratic movement that spread through Korean university campuses. Today it is popularized as a form of folk entertainment enjoyed by people of all walks of life. Instructional programs are offered to anyone who is interested in making masks or learning to perform the dramas. The goal of these programs is to give ordinary people a taste of Korean tradition.

Masks vary by region and some are more realistic than others. When worn, the masks seem to change with the movement and the viewing angle. Nobleman masks are apt to have exaggerated eyebrows and cheek bones as the mask moves up and down, while a servant’s mask has a mouth that changes from a smile to a frown as it moves from side to side. Noblemen have deformed features and aristocrats have gaping or crooked mouths. They are made to seem abnormal in their appearances as well as their speech and behavior. There are also zodiac masks that represent the animals of the Oriental zodiac. Dancers will wear the mask of their own zodiac animal.

For information on Korean masks, go to Yahoo and search “Korean Masks.”

To order the video, “Great Tales in Asian Art,” e-mail: orders@cheng-tsui.com

Website: www.cheng-tsui.com

The video also includes famous stories from India, Indonesia and Japan. The approximate cost is \$15.00.

