

## FOCUS ★ CULTURE/SCHOOL

# NIHON BUYO – DANCE IS A MIRROR INTO JAPANESE CULTURE

**W**atching Sachiyo Ito dance is like observing the life cycle of the cherry blossom: delicate and graceful, she captivates your attention and takes you on a journey of self-awareness and deep insight as you follow her throughout the story you see unfolding before your eyes. Blink but once and you will miss meaning and subtlety - a fan transformed, a glance, an expression - all critical to driving the plot further and culminating in the story's conclusion.

"Japanese dance is an introduction to Japanese culture," Ms. Ito, the world-renowned performer and well-respected teacher, explains. "Dance is a prayer and dance is an offering." and she has been offering herself to the audience-at-large for over 50 years - forty of which she has also been teaching students at her NYC-based school, where students also learn contemporary choreographed works and Japanese classical dance, such as **nihon buyo**.

Nihon buyo dates back to the 17th and 18th centuries and originated in Kabuki theater repertoire. With acting as its base, this dance form uses choreographed, theatrical means to follow a character in a story through dance. People exposed to nihon buyo gain a deeper appreciation for classical literary texts (the basis for the Kabuki stories), traditional music such as the common stage instruments of koto and shamisen and art as expressed through the intricate and complex costumes and decorations.

In addition to viewing Japanese culture through the lens of dance, observers and dancers also learn about themselves and apply the valuable lessons learned on the dance floor to their own, everyday, modern lives. Through acquiring graceful movements, students gain good posture, good manners and the ability to be centered; one of the first lessons any dancer learns is how to walk properly, with a firmness anchoring them to the ground. Dancing in a kimono tied by an obi, dancers become graceful as their bodies learn to remain straight while expressing

a variety of emotions. The fan is a prop with originally religious significance but is used for expression within the context of nihon buyo. Thus, students learn the importance of respect and dealing carefully with both things and people. The practice of dance also teaches important life skills of patience, dedication and solidifying each lesson with practice.

Over the last forty years, students of a variety of ages and backgrounds – including Peruvian, Taiwanese, Russian, Japanese and American – have gravitated to nihon buyo under the tutelage of Ms. Sachiyo Ito. Seiko Carter sees her lessons as "meditation practice, a way to slow down" from the typical, busy NYC lifestyle. Twelve-year old Felicity Richards - who has already been dancing for four years - "likes to tell a story" through her dancing. For Daliene Majors, nihon buyo "is a style of dancing that takes me away from myself." Nihon buyo requires only two important skills, Ms. Ito explains: (1) to know the difference between right and left and (2) "an eagerness to learn." Ai Kiyono admits to initially being intimidated - like many students - of dancing in public but through her love of artistic expression and perseverance, she now views dance as a way to "communicate with others."

To witness nihon buyo is to be moved by its grace and beauty; to dance nihon buyo is to embody that grace and beauty. You will find more information at [www.dancejapan.com](http://www.dancejapan.com) about dance lessons and public performances where you can experience the magic of nihon buyo for yourself.

— Reported by *Lisa Birzen*

### Sachiyo Ito & Company

Sachiyo Ito and Company often gives performances at popular local events such as the annual Cherry Blossom Festival in early spring. In addition, Ms. Ito holds a Salon Series program where guests can learn about various topics relating to Japanese performing arts, interact with guest speakers and enjoy dance performances.

405 W. 23rd St., Suite 4G, New York, NY 10011  
TEL/FAX: 212-627-0265  
[www.dancejapan.com](http://www.dancejapan.com)



1. During dance lessons, students also learn how to properly put on kimono and yukata by themselves. 2. A form of expression, the fan denotes a variety of objects depending on the dance. 3. You can meet Sachiyo Ito and her company at various cultural events around NYC. 4. Sachiyo Ito holds Salon Series events to share the beauty of Japanese performing arts.