



Rakugo: Performing Comedy and Cultural Heritage in Contemporary Tokyo

By Lorie Brau



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An introduction to the theatrical art of comic storytelling that originated in the Edo period, Rakugo sheds light on Japanese culture as a whole: its aesthetics, social relations, and learning styles. Enriched with personal anecdotes, Rakugo explicates the art's contemporary performance culture: the image, training and techniques of the storytellers, the venues where they perform, and the role of the audience in sustaining the art. Laurie Brau inquires into how this comic art form participates in the discourse of heritage, serving as a symbol of the Edo culture, while continuing to appeal to Japanese today. Written in an accessible manner, this book is appropriate for all levels of student or researcher.

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Editorial Review

Review

A brilliant ethnography of an exquisite Japanese performance genre by one who has not only studied it but also been a fan, apprentice, and performer in her own right. This luminous account of the art of storytelling is everything Walter Benjamin could have hoped for and more. (Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, author of *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museum, and Heritage*)

Lorie Brau's intimate knowledge and expertise illuminate her vivid account of a traditional comic art that remains immensely popular in today's Japan. Rakugo deserves to be better known abroad, and this book is a superb introduction to it. (Howard Hibbett, Harvard College)

Lorie Brau's *Rakugo* is a significant piece of scholarship...and contains a detailed history and several translated stories...This study is detailed and at times fascinating. (*The Japan Times Online, November 2008*)

Japan scholars, students, and those interested in traditional performing and narrative arts, early modern and modern history, popular culture, media, humor and heritage...will surely want to have *Rakugo: Performing Comedy and Cultural Heritage* by Lorie Brau on their shelves, for both research and enjoyment.... Thanks to Brau's unique position as an insider in the *rakugo* world, readers are exposed to its realities and excitement. Her language flows beautifully as she tells her story, and she presents her subject in an instructive, yet warm and welcoming manner. (Matthew W. Shores, University of Hawai'i at Manoa)

The reader is able to get a very clear idea of what it is like to go to a rakugo performance without being there. It contains an index and a glossary of selected terms which is particularly useful to anyone interested in building a solid foundation of knowledge for further research on the topic. Brau's book will be interesting and useful for several kinds of readers.... (Till Weingartner, Freie Universitat Berlin)

Rakugo is the 'sit-down' comedy of nimble narrative performed on stage in vaudeville-like halls. With erudite textual analysis and unusual participant-observation, Brau sure-handedly takes us into this small world of Japanese 'culture' and shows us quite vividly what is at stake in its performance and its perpetuation, both for rakugo itself and, by inference, for heritage performance genres generally. (William W. Kelly, Yale University)

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About the Author

Lorie Brau is assistant professor of Japanese in the department of foreign languages and literatures at the University of New Mexico.

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