



Performing Community:

Japan's 50th *Kōhaku* Song Contest

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VOLUME ONE

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Abstract

Japan's traditional performing arts have long been of interest to ethnomusicologists, yet contemporary forms have, until recently, received comparatively little attention. The nationally televised *Kōbaku utagassen* ("The Red and White Song Contest") is one neglected topic of scholarly research despite being a thriving contemporary tradition firmly centred in the popular consciousness. By way of addressing this gap, the following study considers the 50th *Kōbaku*, held on New Year's Eve 1999, as a landmark but yet representative edition of *Kōbaku*.

In this light-hearted contest, Japan's most prominent teen idols, middle-aged rock stars and elderly ballad singers are divided into men's and women's teams, alternating performances until one team is declared the victor at the end of the evening. Although the rivalrous, 'battle of the sexes' format is intriguing in itself, the most captivating aspect of the programme is the sense of unity, congeniality and camaraderie conveyed by the song performers. Taking this observation as a starting point, the study considers the performers as members of a community—the 50th *Kōbaku* Community—and argues that song performance provides a key to understanding this group and the broader implications of community at a significant moment in *Kōbaku* history at the turn of the millennium.

The thesis is presented in two volumes. Volume One consists of two parts, the first of which establishes the *Kōbaku* tradition and provides the context for the song performances of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community. It begins with a chronological overview of *Kōbaku*'s developments throughout its history, interpreted from sources such as archival television footage and official publications. The focus then narrows to the milestone 50th *Kōbaku* and the various activities held before and after the broadcast, in order to demonstrate the contest's sense of occasion and status as an important event. Having established the context, the second part looks closely at the song performances of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community. Using fieldwork observations from the live setting in conjunction with television footage, key aspects are examined: the performance of the

music and lyrics, lyrics themes, staging, and performing relationships. This analysis offers insight into the ‘performing community’, revealing how the singers simultaneously retain their status as individuals, as members of the collective and as alumni of the historical *Kōbaku* tradition while ultimately promoting national unity through this ‘song contest for Japan’. Volume Two contains extensive appendices pertaining to *Kōbaku*, including a variety of television ratings data, profiles of the 50th *Kōbaku* song performers, an overview of the televised programme and the song lyrics in translation. A DVD of selected song performances from the 50th *Kōbaku* is also provided.

Declaration

This thesis is the original work of Shelley Dorothy Brunt.

It contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text of the thesis.

I give consent to the text components of my thesis to be available for loan and photocopying when deposited in the University Library. It should be noted that permission for copying does not extend to the DVD without consultation with the author.

Shelley D. Brunt

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Major Historical Periods

Relevant to this Study

Nara period	(710–794)
Heian period	(794–1185)
<hr/>	
Muromachi period	(1336–1573)
Momoyama period	(1568–1600)
Edo (Tokugawa) period	(1600–1868)
Genroku era	(1688–1704)
Meiji era	(1868–1912)
Taishō era	(1912–1926)
Shōwa era	(1926–1989)
Heisei era	(1989–)

Introduction



Weaving through the dark and narrow streets of the suburban Minami Tanaka district, I see few signs of life. It is early evening: stores are closed, Christmas decorations have been removed and up-tempo carols no longer blare from the public speakers. Although it is peaceful now, I know that in a few hours time thousands of people will brave the cold to meet in the upmarket Ginza district and count down the last few seconds of the year on the Wako building's historic chiming clock. Crowds will also gather at Odaiba Kaibin Koen (seaside park) to gaze at the Rainbow Bridge over Tokyo Bay and admire the orange lanterns adorning yakatabune (festive boats). Meanwhile, the affluent will celebrate in style in venues such as at the Park Hyatt hotel in the Shinjuku district for the 'One Night in a Millennium' themed parties, and younger generations will count down the minutes to 2000 at DJ clubs in the hip Harajuku district. It is New Year's Eve in Japan, 1999.

Across the globe, people will commemorate the arrival of the alleged 'new millennium' in similar ways, many of which will be documented on camera and televised to worldwide audiences via direct satellite. Initially, cameras will focus on the central Pacific nation of Kiribati—the first to greet the year 2000—where a beachside ceremony will take place. As the New Year sweeps across the time zones, attention will then turn to Sydney where crowds of people will assemble along the shore to view the spectacular fireworks display along the Harbour Bridge. Television audiences will then hear London's Big Ben toll at midnight and observe Queen Elizabeth II lighting the Millennium Beacon. Afterward, viewers will see the dropping of the crystal ball in Times Square, New York, and hear thousands of voices cheer the arrival of the New Year. Perhaps later in the night I will witness these events on a giant screen in the Tokyo streets. For now, however, I head toward my friends' house to watch a different New Year's Eve television programme.

I pass low-rise apartments and free-standing houses where auspicious kadomatsu (pine and bamboo ornaments) adorn entrance gates in preparation for the coming shōgatsu (New Year period). Alongside one okazari (straw decoration) is a street vending-machine which displays a colourful neon advertisement for hot coffee-in-a-can. The stark contrast of old tradition and new technology, evident throughout Tokyo, seems heightened during this special time of year. Indeed, in the weeks preceding 1999's ōmisoka ('grand last day' of the year), people were engaging in time-honoured rituals such as susuharai (cleaning and spiritually purifying one's home), preparing osechi-ryōri (special New Year's food) and writing nengajō (New Year's greeting cards). Many Japanese, furthermore, travelled to their hometowns to be with family for New Year's Eve and the subsequent holidays. Others, by contrast, travelled overseas or stayed behind in Tokyo to make certain Japan's financial capital was safe from the potentially destructive Y2K computer bug. Earlier today, however, no matter where people were or what they were doing, the bustling nation paused to hear the heartbreaking news of Crown Princess Masako's miscarriage, ending weeks of speculation about a future heir to the Chrysanthemum throne. On many levels, this was a momentous New Year's Eve for Japan.

I reach the apartment block, walk up the stairs and enter the small room. My friends have already gathered around the television and I hurriedly join them beneath the warm kotatsu (electric quilted table) in time for the programme's 7:30pm start. With a flash of colour, light and sound, the show that millions of people across Japan look forward to all year at last begins. It is the landmark 50th edition of the annual Kōhaku utagassen ('The Red and White Song Contest'), Japan's long-running song contest which is commonly, and affectionately, referred to as Kōhaku. The camera lingers on a large group of people standing onstage inside NHK Hōru (NHK Hall), a large, Western-style auditorium located in the grounds of the NHK Broadcast Centre in the Shibuya district in Tokyo.

These singers are the cream of Japan's mainstream popular music industry: a mix of young and old, soloists and bands, and newcomers and veterans. Their participation in Kōhaku marks a rite of passage and is a public acknowledgement of their success. These performers are the key players in the light-hearted, team-based 'battle of the sexes' contest. Over the course of the contest (which is divided into two discrete halves) women from the Red Team and men from the White Team will leave their separate 'team corners' located at either side of the stage to alternate song performances. At the end of the exciting evening, a panel of celebrity judges and the in-house audience of approximately 4000 people ultimately decide which team has won. Three compères ensure the live programme runs smoothly: the akagumi shikai (henceforth Red Team MC) and the shirogumi shikai (henceforth White Team MC) encourage team rivalry while the sōgō shikai (henceforth General Chairman) remains neutral and oversees the proceedings. To provide additional entertainment, supplementary segments featuring celebrities from Japan's geinōkai (entertainment world) are also presented, as are song performance preludes by way of introducing the singers and their songs.

Kōhaku can be considered a variety show but it is the spectacular song performances which are, undeniably, the focus of the programme. One by one, the hits of the year are performed alongside the classic songs of yesteryear, in accordance with a set programme theme. These song performances are, as always, complemented by custom-built stage designs, exquisite costumes, vivid light displays, billowing clouds of dry-ice and blizzards of paper snow. Although the sheer spectacle of Kōhaku is memorable in itself, the most captivating aspect each year is the air of congeniality and camaraderie that is conveyed through the song performances. A far cry from a ruthless contest between musical rivals, Kōhaku is instead presented as an intimate and social occasion for a close-knit group of friends: a community of song performers. This image of unity and togetherness, furthermore, seems to extend beyond the Hall and, via television, pervades the family home. Here, viewers are invited to sing along with their favourite performers and are guided by on-screen lyrics. At a time when Japan unites to celebrate the end of one year and the birth of another, Kōhaku captures and conveys a sentiment of community and national belonging.

Suddenly, the music begins, heralding the start of the first song performance and the commencement of the contest. This is what I have come to observe: the songs and performers of the 50th Kōhaku. I settle in for the evening.

{based on author's field notes, 31 December 1999}



In Japan, television programmes commonly portray celebrities as members of a “harmonious and interconnected community” (Painter 1996a:206). Commercials, game shows, daytime dramas and music programmes all feature stars interacting on a familiar level, devoid of the formal etiquette that is usually required by Japanese custom when strangers interact. Although celebrities may initiate this friendly behaviour, it is often the television producers who strategically construct the image of camaraderie and community in order to generate high ratings. Audiences like to see stars being “intimate, friendly and on the best of terms [because then they are] just like the millions of viewers at home” (Painter 1996a:199–200). A sense of community—

whether manufactured and false or spontaneous and genuine—is therefore “part of a larger effort to create intimacy between celebrities and their audiences” (Darling-Wolf 2004a:359). For celebrities in the Japanese popular music world, appearances on television are crucial to establishing and maintaining a public profile (Stevens and Hosokawa 2001:241). Music television shows, in particular, offer opportunities for music stars to be “spontaneous and casual” while emphasising their “human and fallible side” (Darling-Wolf 2004a:359). On-screen, they are depicted as friendly and approachable ‘everyday’ people who are “like everyone else and are idolised because they are not so different or outstanding” from each other or their audience (Herd 1984:94). In becoming “humanized”, they encourage audience identification (Stevens and Hosokawa 2001:241) and if there is little distinction between celebrities and their audience, then they can be considered to be “part of a larger circle and community known as Japanese society” (Painter 1996a:207). Ultimately, this strategy works under the assumption that everyone watches television and, by implication, a sense of national unity can be crafted via this medium.

Kōhaku is one music programme that portrays its song performers as members of a community (Darling-Wolf 2004a:359), but unlike other music shows which come and go each year, *Kōhaku* is a special programme. It is a significant New Year’s Eve event; a contemporary tradition which has been firmly integrated into the cultural rituals of the Japanese New Year. The annual *Kōhaku* is also steeped in its own history and traditions, with its first broadcasts taking place during the early post-war period. Furthermore, of all *Kōhaku* contests—both past and present—it is the milestone, ‘golden edition’ 50th *Kōhaku* which can be considered the most momentous and a testament to the programme’s resilience and longevity. The 50th *Kōhaku* is also meaningful within a broader context as the final *Kōhaku* of the century and, indeed, the millennium, due to its broadcast date of 31 December 1999. With these considerations in mind, it is important not to view the image of community that is projected in the 50th *Kōhaku* as simply a strategy to gain audience identification and generate ratings. Rather, it can be considered a key to understanding the contest, its participants and the viewing nation at an important time in Japan’s history.

This study adopts the premise that the song performers of the 50th *Kōbaku* are a community, labelled here as the 50th *Kōbaku* Community. Although the programme offers many opportunities to observe the members of the Community in action, it is the song performances—which lie at the heart of the contest—that offer the greatest potential to shed light on the Community. With this focus in mind, the following research question is posed: what do the song performances reveal about the 50th *Kōbaku* Community? In order to answer this, four key issues are explored: the first concerns the individual song performer within the Community; the second considers the Community as a collective; while the third and fourth issues situate the Community's performances within a broader context, reflecting on the 50th *Kōbaku* Community in relation to *Kōbaku* history and the Japanese nation.

Key Terms

The 50th *Kōbaku*

It is helpful to define four key terms here, beginning with the official title of the 50th *Kōbaku*, namely 'NHK *dai 50kai kōbaku utagassen*' ('NHK's 50th Red and White Song Contest'). 'NHK' refers to Japan's sole public broadcaster, Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai (Japan Broadcasting Corporation). As the creator of *Kōbaku*, NHK plays an important part in shaping the contest and, as such, a discussion of its historical development and public image in Japan is taken up later in the Introduction. '*Dai 50kai*' refers to the 50th edition of the contest while '*Kōbaku*' literally means 'crimson and white' (henceforth 'red and white'), signifying the colours of the battling teams. The final term, '*utagassen*', is translated here as 'song contest', whereby '*uta*' is 'song' and '*gassen*' is a 'battle', 'contest' or 'competition'.

The most significant part of the contest's title is the red and white colour combination. In Japan, colour and hue are often used to add additional dimensions of meaning and, in keeping with this concept, the colours of *Kōbaku* reflect established associations between sex and colour.¹ Red (the *kō* in *kōbaku*) is, for example, commonly associated with women—red is the colour of female beauty, of a *geisha*'s lips

¹ Dusenbury (1999), for example, notes that colour and hue were used in the Heian court to mark political and social status and were associated with philosophical beliefs.

and her *kimono* lining. In a similar manner, white (the *baku* in *kōbaku*) is associated with men—white is a marker of masculinity and virility. Consequently, the Red Team is considered to be ‘the women’s team’ and the White Team is ‘the men’s team’, thus these colours promote the idea of the ‘battling sexes’ and highlight the fundamental organisation of the contest. Red and white are also meaningful when viewed together, as paired colours. In Japan, red is considered to be the opposite of white in the same way as black is the opposite of white in the West. This is seen throughout Japan’s history, from the clan wars of 1180–85 where the Genji clan wore white and the Heike clan wore red, to the *jūdō* martial arts contests of modern times where teams are marked as either red or white. These colours are also regarded as interdependent forces, similar to the complementary pairing of yin and yang in Confucian metaphysical thought or the visual representation as the red disc and white border of Japan’s flag, the *hinomaru*. Indeed, these colours permeate all aspects of Japanese life from the celebratory dish of white rice and red beans served at weddings to the alternating stripes of colour on awnings at festivals (Gill 1998:51) and the red and white colours of prized carp. These are truly the ‘colours of Japan’. *Kōbaku* plays on all of these associations and demonstrates the two halves of the nation—red/women and white/men—which, together, make up the whole.

The 50th *Kōbaku* Community

The second key term, ‘the 50th *Kōbaku* Community of song performers’—or alternatively ‘the 50th *Kōbaku* Community’ as indicated above, or simply ‘the Community’—refers to the group of people who convey the musical and/or vocal information in *Kōbaku*. The Community comprises members of bands (ensembles whereby members play instruments and sing), groups (ensembles whereby members sing but do not play instruments) and also song performers who do not play instruments but are solo vocalists (or duos, trios etc). In this sense, a song performer is part of a musical ‘act’—a term used intermittently in this study to encompass the various combinations of musicians and vocalist outlined above. Overlapping categories of performer, audience and participant exist in all kinds music performance (Finnegan 1992:94–100) and these roles require varying degrees of interaction and participation within the production. *Kōbaku* song performers, nevertheless, are clearly identified by

NHK as the primary performers; they are publicly promoted as the drawcards for the contest prior to its broadcast. In the months preceding the contest, NHK staff invited selected acts to participate in the contest and once the list was finalised, the acts were revealed to the media. NHK identified 54 acts for the 50th *Kōhaku*, the names of which are presented for the first time in Chapter Two of this study. Even from this preliminary glimpse into the selection process (which is explained in detail in Chapter One), we see that the Community was not self-forming but was instead created by NHK. This does not, however, diminish its importance or render it disingenuous. Indeed, as Benedict Anderson has noted in relation to the imagined communities of nations, they “are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (1991 [1983]:6). We can therefore look to the style in which the 50th *Kōhaku* Community is imagined, by its members, by NHK and by the *Kōhaku* audience.

At this stage, it is useful to review select theory regarding community, a vital concept in this research. Mason has observed that “the notion of community is fundamentally ambiguous” (2000:4). Indeed, following on from the influential theories by scholars of community (for example Tönnies 1957 [1887] and Durkheim 1964 [1902]), community has been associated with value, thus implying alliance, unity and belonging (Mason 2000) as well as group solidarity as “a way of being interested in what is happening to one’s fellow group members, and from it springs the capacity to act as a group” (May 1987:40). Community has also been associated with a geographical place or locality or, in recent times, with the “more fluid and temporary forms of social relations” in virtual or cyber communities (Delanty 2003:168). Community can also be approached with regard to shared interests as opposed to locality (Hoggett 1997), as a means of identifying interests or characteristics which are common among individuals, and in this way can be considered as a social phenomenon (Liepins 2000). It can also, perhaps in its most intangible form, be considered in regard to attachment or communion, as in a ‘sense of community’ (Willmott 1989).

Music can play a central role in the construction of community. While community is an “inherent aspect of sociality which is readily evidenced in musical conduct” (Dasilva, Biasi and Dees 1984:5), it is important to note that “part of music’s

seductive ideological power lies in its distinctive acoustic capacity to surround people and create among them a sense of community” (Bowman 1998:324). Music, as such, has the means to unite people “by circling them, by enveloping...and turning them as listeners into participants” and it

creates an illusion of immediacy in a totally mediated world, of proximity between strangers, the warmth of those who come to feel a chill of unmitigated struggle of all against all. (Horkheimer and Adorno 1973:56)

In addition to bringing people together and creating a sense of closeness, it is also helps shape identity on many levels, for it is

precisely music’s extraordinary powers of imaginary evocation of identity and cross-cultural intersubjective empathy that render it a primary means of both marking and transforming individual and collective identity. (Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000:32)

This study considers these many nuances of community in relation to the 50th *Kōbaku* Community, but finds Cohen’s (1985) interpretive understanding of community to be especially useful. He sees community as a “boundary-expressing symbol” (Cohen 1985:15), that is, a relational idea of both similarity and difference delineated according to the symbolic boundaries perceived by the members of the community (1985:12–13). The song performers of the 50th *Kōbaku* fall within Cohen’s definition of community, as “members of a group of people” who “have something in common with each other, which...distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other putative groups” (Cohen 1985:12). Cohen’s concept of similarity and difference is closely related to Nakane’s (1973) theory of Japanese social groups. She notes that individuals are drawn into social groups on the basis of two contrasting yet overlapping criteria. The first is ‘attribute’, the mutual characteristics (for example, those acquired by achievement or bestowed at birth) which are shared by individuals; and the second is ‘frame’ (*ba*), “a locality, an institution or a specific relationship which binds a set of individuals into one group” (Nakane 1973:1).² The 50th *Kōbaku* Community meets Nakane’s criteria for a social group. It comprises people who share the same attributes (as invited song performers) and occupy the same frame (within the performance

² Many scholars have criticised Nakane’s theory of Japanese society, describing it as an extremely conservative and idealised model that suggests groups are always harmonious and free from conflict, and have been since the start of the Meiji era. See, for example, Jensen (1980), Mouer and Sugimoto (1980), and an excellent summary by Hata and Smith (1986). These criticisms are taken into account but they are not considered to be particularly applicable to this study of the *Kōbaku* Community.

locations of NHK Hall and the *Kōhaku* programme) within an institution (NHK) that binds them together. As will be seen, complex interpersonal relationships and hierarchies exist also and these serve to bind the set of individuals, bringing them together as a performing community.

It is important to consider the sense of exclusivity surrounding the 50th *Kōhaku* Community. Nakane observes that communities which are formed “on the basis of commonality of attribute can possess a strong sense of exclusiveness” (Nakane 1973:9) and often become a “closed world” (1973:24), an observation which is particularly true of this Community. Of the numerous musical acts in Japan, only a limited number are invited to the 50th *Kōhaku*. For this reason, among others, many song performers regard an invitation as a rare and great privilege. This idea is important with thinking about the 50th *Kōhaku* Community as an *uchi*: an ‘in-group’ which forms the centre of participatory belonging inside a private realm. *Uchi* “defines who you are through shaping language, the use of space and social interaction” (Kondo 1990:141). *Uchi* is in direct opposition to the symbolic term *soto*; those ‘outside of the group’, in the outside world or the public realm (Lebra 1976:112). In this sense, the *uchi* of the 50th *Kōhaku* Community can be contrasted with those outside, *soto*—those who are not song performers. However, as touched upon in the start of this Introduction, programmes which convey a sense of community encourage audience identification with those on-screen and this can be seen as an attempt to break down the symbolic barrier and exclusivity of the *uchi*. The 50th *Kōhaku* Community, like the cast members of other Japanese programmes, are “best viewed as electronically created *uchi*—all purpose ‘in-groups’ that anyone can join simply by tuning to the right channel” (Painter 1996a:198). In this way, the 50th *Kōhaku* Community can be seen as elite but still accessible via mediated form to the general public. We can also see concentric, overlapping spheres of *uchi*, ranging from the 50th *Kōhaku* Community-as-*uchi* to the all-encompassing Japanese nation-as-*uchi*. This study explores these ideas and looks at how *Kōhaku* depicts the nation as a united *uchi* through the Community’s song performances.

Song Performance

Now let us turn to the third key term, ‘song performance’, which is defined here as the audio/visual presentation of a billed song, delivered by members of the 50th *Kōhaku*

Community. At a basic level, song performance can be considered the re-interpretation of a pre-existing song which is executed in front of an audience (see Thom 1993). This study also considers song performance from an ethnomusicological perspective, that is, looking at the ways in which people “historically construct, socially maintain and individually create and experience music” (Rice 1987:473). Indeed, an ethnomusicological analysis of performance “involves much more than the structural analysis of music sound, for music is a human phenomenon produced by people for people and existing and functioning in a social situation” (Merriam 1964:187). In this respect, a song performance is not simply the aesthetic delivery of dramatic, theatrical and sonic events, but it also has inextricable connections to history, society and culture. It is a fundamental expression of human action (Turner 1982) and a mode of communication (Bauman 1984 [1977]) which takes on a “heightened and framed quality” (Finnegan 1992:91) when delivered on stage. It is also “a context in which other things happen” (Järviluoma 2000:103), it is a site for musicking (Small 1998), a situation where ritual behaviours unfold (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998) and where negotiations of space, place and identity (Stokes 1994) take place between performers and audience members. With this range of concepts in mind, an examination of song performance therefore holds great potential for understanding the 50th *Kōhaku* Community, its audience and Japan.

This research also considers song performance as a discrete occasion which takes place at a specific moment in time. As such, an investigation of the 50th *Kōhaku* Community as seen through its song performances can be considered an “atomized study” of “individuals and small groups of individuals linked for perhaps just a moment in time and place by shared beliefs, social status, behaviours, tastes, and experiences of the world” (Rice 2003:152). Performance, as some scholars (for example, Shield 1980, Phelan 1993) have observed, exists only in the present. The temporal nature of *Kōhaku* song performance, however, takes on a new meaning when considering the mediated form of the televised programme. The “moment in time” that Rice describes above can be captured via video-recording and each re-viewing/re-hearing within “the flux of time” (Rice 2003:163) can constitute “a new experience” for an audience member (Wachsmann 1982 in Rice 2003:163). For the moment, however, it is worth considering the purpose of mediated song performance, whether viewed

once or repeatedly. Mediated song performance is a form of ‘mediation’, namely “the art of channelling social knowledge and cultural values through an institutional agency to an audience” (Hartley 1994:176). Using this idea as a guide, we can envision televised song performance as an “agency” through which the Community channels knowledge, values and other information. Even though televised performance is a “pseudo-live” performance which “takes place at one remove, as it were, from the original or actual performance” and is different from a ‘live’ performance where “the audience is in close physical proximity to the performance, and the experience of the music is contiguous with its actual performance” (Shuker 1994:198), it can be a compelling vehicle for communications between performers and the broadcast audience. *Kōhaku*, as we shall see, is an excellent forum for this type of communication.

It is significant to note that the song performances identified by this study are also acknowledged as such by NHK. This is made clear by the programme’s long-established format. Prior to most song performances, for example, singers and their songs are introduced by way of a song performance prelude which, as noted at the start of this chapter, serves as a precursor to the main performance. During the song performance, moreover, the performer’s name and the song’s title are presented on-screen to clearly identify the segment. In this way, song performances are easily distinguished from supplementary segments, such as small-scale and/or impromptu performances involving music and/or song, which are unbilled in *Kōhaku*. Unlike most other segments, furthermore, song performances take place in the centre of the stage as opposed to the small, side areas of the stage known as team corners. They are positioned in the most prominent location inside the hall and hold claim to being the focus of the contest.

In order to examine song performance, it is necessary to identify the major elements of the form. Finnegan proposes four: firstly, acoustic elements (verbal, musical and other acoustic features); secondly, visual and material elements (including but not limited to colours, costume and local symbolisms relating to visual or material objects); thirdly, kinesic and proxemic elements (including but not limited to body language, specific movements); and fourthly, the senses (for example, auditory and visual) (1992:103–107). Taking into account Finnegan’s suggestions and using her

structure as a guide, this study identifies four elements of song performance applicable to the 50th *Kōbaku*: firstly, the performance of music and lyrics; secondly, the lyric themes; thirdly, the staging; and fourthly, the performing relationships. These elements are discussed in discrete chapters for the purpose of clarity but it is understood that they are interconnected and each greatly informs the other.

‘Performing Community’

Having examined the key terms, definitions and theoretical framework for this study, we now turn to the study’s title, namely ‘Performing Community’. This title can be understood in two ways, the first by considering ‘performing’ as an action (verb) which describes the enactment of community by members of this collective.³ In this sense, the performers project a sense of community through the very act of song performance. The second is to consider ‘performing’ as a descriptive attribute (adjective) and thus the 50th *Kōbaku* Community is a collective that performs, delivers and executes songs (in addition to other audio/visual information). With these two interpretations of this term in mind, we can see that “making music together is an enaction of human community, and the sound of music is the sound of community in action” (Cook 2003:Internet). The 50th *Kōbaku* song performers come together as a community, express this sense of community through music-making, with the resulting songs becoming the voice of the Community.

After defining the key terms, we can now begin to explore the four main issues arising in this research. These can be seen as different levels, beginning with a close view of the Community and moving outward to obtain a broader perspective.

Issues Arising

The Individual

Individual identity is often bound to that of the collective in that “the idea of community does have a part to play in the way people think about themselves, in the

³ In recent times, scholars have examined the performance of community in various contexts, from Bassar’s (1999) study of community and African American women’s writing to Waitt’s (2003) research into how community was performed at Sydney’s 2002 Gay Games. These examples demonstrate how groups of people can be considered as ‘performing communities’ and they show wider links between community building, cultural practice and collective identity.

construction of subjectivity, and in the production of personal identity” (Revill 1993:120). Japanese society, in particular, is regarded as a “collectivistic, as opposed to individualistic” society—a classification which, Hendry has cautioned, is considerably over-simplified (1992:55). With this in mind, the 50th *Kōbaku* Community can be seen not only as an example of Japan’s group-based society, but also as a complex and dynamic social organisation in which individual identity is valued for its distinctiveness. Performers are, after all, selected for *Kōbaku* based on their individual efforts in the popular music world. While this study does not intend to present a detailed discussion of Japanese group dynamics, it does address the issues surrounding the individual within the performance setting of *Kōbaku*.

Hendry’s discussion of the role of the individual within Japanese social groups is particularly salient. She observes a distinction between the terms ‘individualism’ and ‘individuality’. Individualism has “connotations of self-assertion and individual rights” and is similar to the Japanese concept of *kojinsbugi*, “a notion with negative connotations implying selfishness and immaturity” (Henry 1992:56). By comparison, individuality is “the opportunity for an individual to develop his or her own particular talents or character” and is similar to *kosei*, “an idealised notion which is much drawn on in advertising and modern literature” (Hendry 1992:56). This study primarily considers the second term, namely ‘individuality’, with regard to the 50th *Kōbaku* Community. Although each individual performs as a representative of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community, they are also presenting themselves onstage as distinct individuals. It is, of course, difficult to distinguish between an on-screen/onstage persona and what is ‘real’.⁴ The distinction between the projected public face (*tatemaie*) and the hidden private self (*honne*) is important in relation to Japanese behaviour. This study does not, however, seek to present a ‘behind the scenes’ investigation or to compare the public face with the private self. Nevertheless, the private lives of the *geinōkai* (entertainment world) are often made public through television programmes such as *Kōbaku* and “their lives, mediated and made widely available for (quasi)public scrutiny from even early in

⁴ Outside the Japanese context, scholars have noted that music stars regularly use ‘masks’ or star personae to present an image to fans and to conceal their true selves. Kaplan, for example, has observed that Madonna frequently changes her ‘star image’ in this manner in an attempt to keep private self out of the public eye, as supported by Madonna’s famous statement in an interview with *Vanity Fair* interview: “You will never know the real me. Ever.” (Madonna in Kaplan 1993:149).

childhood, become cultural icons” (Painter 1996a:214). In this sense, we can view *Kōhaku* performances as another forum for private lives to be publicly displayed.

Another significant aspect for the individual within the Community is the presentation of gender, especially within the context of the programme’s ‘battle of the sexes’ format. Gender is acknowledged (at least by Western scholars) as a cultural and sociological differentiation of male from female. Whereas sex is a biological demarcation based on human physiology, gender is a construct with meanings that vary not only according to the interpreter, but also on the context and situation (Senelick 1992, Moisala 2000). Most importantly, gender has been described as a performative act (Butler 1999 [1990] esp. 171ff) which is “continuously negotiated within a given cultural template or framework” (Koskoff 2002:191). Through performance, moreover, gender can be inscribed on both men and women. *Kōhaku* offers great potential for an analysis of gender and this research does address selected gender issues. It is not, however, the sole focus of this study. Discussions of gender are instead intended to highlight general trends in the late 1990s as well as pointing to future directions for further research in the context of *Kōhaku*.

The 50th *Kōhaku* Community: A Collective

The second issue arising is the depiction of the song performers as a collective. Small has observed that “those who are taking part in a musical performance are in effect saying—to themselves, to one another and to anyone else who may be watching or listening—*This is who we are*” (Small 1998:134; italics in original). The song performances of the 50th *Kōhaku* Community can be seen in this way, as vehicles to express the “we”, or rather ‘who the Community is’. They are also the means by which to project the collective’s image of unity, solidarity and alliance.

The contest setting of *Kōhaku* adds another dimension to this concept. *Kōhaku*’s battling teams immediately suggest a division within the 50th *Kōhaku* Community which, at first glance, contradicts an image of unity for the collective. However, as noted in relation to other song contests, competitive spheres are highly contentious social spaces where “identity can be performed and affectively experienced, heightening the participants’ sense of belonging” (Hosokawa 2000:96). This study

considers the Community's team divisions with these issues in mind and reflects on how this may impact upon the image of the song performers as a collective.⁵

Just as traditional forms of Japanese performing arts are based on performer hierarchies (see, for example, Leiter 1979 and Brandon 1997), so too is the 50th *Kōbaku* Community. A hierarchy consists of complex and dynamic relationships and, as Henshall has noted in relation to other kinds of group formations,

what appears outwardly to be balanced harmony and consensus is often a case of juniors deferring to seniors. In reality no group could survive for long unless it had some form of authoritative leadership and direction, and Japanese groups are no exception. (1999:149)

Hierarchic structure is typically based on senior/junior relationships within a social group. An individual's rank and length of service play an important part in establishing seniority, but it can also be determined by age, as seen in the traditional household system (*ie*) which is structured around parent/child relationships (*oya/kobun*) (Nakane 1973:44). To gain a well-rounded understanding of the Community, this study considers the kinds of relationships that exist within the Community, such as those between veteran *Kōbaku* performers (seniors/*senpai*), newcomers and those with little *Kōbaku* experience (juniors/*kōhai*) as well as those of equal rank (colleagues/*dōryō*).⁶

The Historical *Kōbaku* Community

The third issue arising in this research concerns the place of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community in relation to the contest's broader history. Each year, a new Community is created for *Kōbaku* and over time, an intricate and extensive network of past performers has emerged, thus forming a larger community of singers with shared experiences. This study calls this vast network 'the *Kōbaku* historical Community'. All *Kōbaku* song performers, past and present, are members of the *Kōbaku* historical Community. It is exclusive, consisting only of invited performers who have shared the *Kōbaku* stage, and can be considered an *uchi* that incorporates the 50th *Kōbaku* Community *uchi* (in-group) and yet also extends beyond it. The *Kōbaku* historical

⁵ It is acknowledged that *Kōbaku* song performers often demonstrate highly-competitive behaviour backstage, in spite of the public presentation of friendliness and cooperation (Aoyagi Hiroshi 2006:pers. com.). As stated, however, this study is chiefly concerned with the public presentation of the Community.

⁶ Theoretical concepts, such as these, which are pertinent to this study are presented in greater detail in Chapter Six.

Community is, furthermore, an imagined community. Due to the contest's long history these performers will, to borrow from Anderson, "never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear of them yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (1991 [1983]:6). This study looks at how the 50th *Kōbaku* Community is situated within this historical framework and considers the implications of belonging to this broader sphere of *uchi*.

The Nation

The fourth issue arising is how the song performances of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community shape a sense of nationhood for Japan at the end of the 20th century. The Japanese nation can be considered the widest sphere of *uchi*. It is an imagined community which is inherently limited "because of the boundaries between one nation and the next" and is sovereign "because its presumed autonomy is integral to its definition" (Anderson 1991 [1983]:6). A sense of nationhood is often constructed through evocations of the past, reflections on the nation's history and/or through cultural nationalism, whereby "the distinctiveness of the cultural community" can be seen as "the essence of a nation" and is used to "regenerate the national community by creating, preserving or strengthening a people's cultural identity" (Yoshino 1992:1).⁷ Japanese culture and traditions are often used "to legitimise...national existence" and this "belief in a common culture, rooted in tradition, serves to justify the nation" (Matthews 2000:30–31). Furthermore, as Hendry has noted,

Japan uses her arts and customary forms of entertainment to impress the outside world, but it is also in these same arts and entertainment forms that individual Japanese find satisfaction and spiritual strength. It is perhaps through them that they hope both to achieve a oneness with the environment and to confirm the validity of that environment as one's ultimate *uchi* group. (1987:167)

Although *Kōbaku* is televised internationally (as discussed later in this chapter), its target audience is Japanese viewers in Japan. The 50th *Kōbaku*, as such, can be viewed in the manner that Hendry describes, as contributing to both the construction of a national consciousness and an affirmation of the national *uchi*.

⁷ The extensive body of *nihonjinron* texts—which examine issues of Japanese culture, history and society, particularly in relation to the uniqueness of the Japanese—address many issues concerning nationhood and cultural nationalism. This study does not enter into this long-standing debate; instead see Fukutake (1981), Dale (1986), Mouer and Sugimoto (1986), Yoshino (1992), and Emmott (1989) for discussions and criticisms of *nihonjinron*.

This study explores the idea that through the medium of television, *Kōbaku* presents the nation to itself. Indeed, television has been described in other contexts as being “one of the prime sites upon which a given nation is constructed for its members” (Hartley 1992:104) such that it becomes “the private life of the nation state” (Ellis 1982:5). Like unisonance—the “experience of simultaneity” found in anonymous but coincident singing (Anderson 1991 [1983]:145)—the act of watching television, and in particular a live broadcast, creates a sensation of “being-together while being apart” for a nation of viewers (Ellis 2000:176). Painter observes that one technique is to “create a sort of quasi-intimate interaction between those on the screen and those who watch at home” (1996a:197). Moreover, he notes, the “inevitable break between those on TV and those who watch” provides “an important space for play” and thus “everyone can share in the close and informal relationships represented on Japanese TV precisely because those relationships are imaginary” (1996a:227). In keeping with this concept, the 50th *Kōbaku* Community can be viewed as a “televisual *uchi*” which is “real and tangible enough to facilitate empathy and identification among viewers” (Painter 1996a:227). In this way we can see the Community and their song performances as a vehicle for creating, shaping and conveying a sense of national belonging.

Having established the four issues arising in this research, it is useful to take a step back and identify the key genres performed in the 50th *Kōbaku*, and then important aspects of *Kōbaku*'s broadcaster, NHK. This will, in turn, provide grounding for later analysis and help situate *Kōbaku* within the world of broadcasting in Japan.

Genres

Like other industrialised nations, Japan boasts an eclectic variety of genres. The genres featured in the 50th *Kōbaku* are essentially classified under the umbrella term ‘Japanese popular music’.⁸ This music is ‘Japanese’ in that it domestically produced, is composed and/or performed by a person of Japanese origin and/or is widely regarded by the

⁸ Finding a Japanese-language equivalent for the term ‘Japanese popular music’ has proved problematic because of its multiple meanings that have shifted over time. Fujie (1989) and Kitagawa (1991), for example, have used the umbrella term ‘*kayōkyoku*’ to describe ‘Japanese popular music’ and de Ferranti (2002) has noted that other scholars interchange terms such as *taishū ongaku*, *poppyūra ongaku* or *poppyūra myūjīkku* (198). This study, however, does not intend to enter this debate and instead looks to the “specific genres of Japanese music that the Japanese themselves label ‘popular music’” (Fujie 1989:198) when discussing songs of the 50th *Kōbaku*.

Japanese public as being 'Japanese'. This music is 'popular' because it is commercially-orientated, and receives airplay and chart success at some level (Burnett 1996) and it is stored and transmitted via musical or musical-visual means such as CDs or music videos (Tagg 1982). On the whole, it is "liked or admired by people in general" (Blacking 1982:13) and is, at a most basic level, "popular with someone" (Middleton 1990:3).

Having clarified the term 'Japanese popular music', it is important to define the genres presented in the 50th *Kōbaku*. Overall, the genres are vocally-based and exhibit both foreign and indigenous attributes, a reflection of the cross-cultural borrowings taking place during and after Allied Occupation (1945–1952). It should be noted that the connection between genre and performer is strong in Japan, such that a song is classified as belonging to a particular genre because of who the song performer is rather than what the song sounds like (Fujie 1989:199). It is therefore necessary to look more closely at the types of singers in the 50th *Kōbaku* in order to classify the genres performed in this contest. This can be done by examining how the Japanese recording industry categorises singers, a system which is most evident when browsing through one of the largest stores in Japan, the multi-level Tower Records in Shibuya, Tokyo, located near to NHK Hall where *Kōbaku* is held. Inside this store, domestic CDs are divided into simplistic genres according to singer. The song performers of the 50th *Kōbaku* fall into six of these genres: J-pop, *enka*, *kayōkyoku*, *shōka*, *dōyō* and 'children's television songs'.⁹

The first genre, J-pop, is a contraction of 'Japanese pop', an umbrella term for a variety of styles including dance, rock, rap and lighter-style pop.¹⁰ J-pop songs generally incorporate both Japanese and English lyrics and use Western-influenced chord progressions and instruments such as electric guitars, drums and synthesisers. Performers of this genre include bands, groups and idol (*aidoru*) vocal soloists of any age, although most J-pop performers are young and are usually favoured by younger audiences. Unlike Western countries, where singers may have exceptional musical

⁹ The two most prevalent genres are J-pop and *enka*, discussion of which, below, will include a broad description as well as the kinds of star personae projected by performers from these genres.

¹⁰ Koizumi notes that J-pop is a relatively recent term than began to be used in 1994 to differentiate domestically-produced pop songs from those from Western Europe (2002:123). For further discussion of this genre, see Fujie (1996:197–220), Cahoon (1999), Kitagawa (1991) and Aoyagi (2000).

talent or physical characteristics, many J-pop stars do not necessarily rely on musical skill or dancing ability. Instead, they are popularised through their congenial, ‘boy/girl next door’ personae (*tonari no onna/otoko no ko*). This was epitomised by the ‘cute boy/girl’ persona (*kawaiiko-chan*) of sweet tempered, baby-faced idols in the 1980s—a persona that is still used by many *Kōbaku* stars in the late 1990s.

If the singer is above average in appearance, ability and charm—not too much to alienate or offend the audience, but just enough to give the illusion that “you can also be a star if you try hard enough”—he or she can have a secure career simply by being a cute, nice average teenager with no special talent. (Herd 1984:78)

Many J-pop singers continue to project this persona, regardless of their age, and in a sense they function as role models to and a representatives of their generation.¹¹

Enka, by contrast, is considered to be a traditional (although it is still classified as ‘popular’), indigenous genre which primarily appeals to older audiences.¹² Performers of this genre are usually vocal soloists (not bands or groups) and sometimes duos. Although *enka* songs feature Western instruments, the characteristic features are “Japanese scales, vocal techniques, and textual themes” (Yano 1995:37), particularly the slow vocal vibrato style known as *ko-busbi*. Often regarded as “the music of the Japanese nation” (Anderson 2002a:124) or “the soul of the Japanese” (*nihonjin no kokoro*) (Wilson 1993:238), *enka* is associated with melancholy, nostalgia, emotion and the nation and it often includes lyrics describing heartbreak and sorrow. *Enka* has several sub-categories, some of which are heavily influenced by upbeat rhythms such that they resemble J-pop, as seen in some *Kōbaku* songs.

An *enka* singer usually exhibits a more complex person than a J-pop star. This may be based on the representation of an ideal rather than an equal. Some male *enka* singers, for example, represent a fantasy image of idealised masculinity, complete with husky deep voice and rugged appearance. Others project the image of “the perfect Japanese son; handsome, well-groomed, serious rather than frivolous, and above all devoted to mother” (Yano 1995:171). Female stars also project highly-constructed

¹¹ Other singers, especially male stars, may project the image of a romantic heart-throb or a sexy toy boy (Darling-Wolf 2004a).

¹² As Yano (1995, 2002) has observed, *enka* is difficult to define and the term used to describe the genre has changed over time. In general, however, it is clear that *enka* in its earliest form is an abbreviation of ‘*enzetsu no uta*’ (‘oratorical songs’) from Meiji times (Yano 1995:40) and was later referred to as *ryūkōka* in early Shōwa, before the second world war (Anderson 2002a:123). See Yano (2002) for a comprehensive definition and history of *enka*.

personae, particularly those characterised by the ‘*enka* beauty’ (*enka bijin*) and ‘*kimono* beauty’ (*kimono bijin*) movement that emerged during the 1990s and adopt interesting twists such as gender crossing. In order to be seen as genuine and to achieve success in this genre, an *enka* star must project a sincere persona and embody the sentimental and melancholy tales of which they sing.

The third genre defined here is *kayōkyoku*. Over the years, scholars have used this term to describe various types of music. In the 1920s, it encompassed all domestic popular music and in the 1960s it described what we now call *enka* (Kitgawa 1991:306). In the late 1980s, moreover, it was a blanket term under which fell several genres including *enka* and J-pop (Fujie 1989:199). In the early 1990s, however, the term ‘*kayōkyoku*’ “connoted music of little substance” and referred to “a wide variety of trendy pop music” (Cahoon 1993:1286) which we would perhaps today classify as J-pop. During the late 1990s, however, the term ‘*kayōkyoku*’ seem to have fallen out of favour. When it is used, *kayōkyoku* describes an easy listening, generic pop style of music which is characterised by middle-of-the-road, Western-influenced songs and instrumentation. Songs of this style are usually performed by balladeers or ‘crooners’ from earlier decades, such as the 1960s, and are more often *natsu-mero* (nostalgic melodies) and past hits rather than new songs.

The three genres least represented in the 50th *Kōhaku* are *shōka*, *dōyō* and ‘children’s television songs’. At first glance *shōka* and *dōyō* may not appear to fall under the category of ‘popular music’. The songs selected for the 50th *Kōhaku* from these genres are, however, extremely well-known and are frequently performed and recorded, thus meeting the criteria for ‘popular music’ as previously defined. Indeed, they have become part of contemporary life such that it is likely many young Japanese do not realise they are shrouded in history. *Shōka* are educational songs originally composed in the Taishō era and feature lyrics by Japanese poets and literary scholars coupled with pre-existing Scottish, Irish, Spanish and German folk tunes (Uchida 1999:211). These songs were published in the ‘Primary School Songbook’ by the Japan’s Ministry of Education and were “taught in compulsory education courses” since 1881 (Nakano 1983:iii and 246). *Dōyō* songs were created soon after as a reaction to this genre—whereas *shōka* represented “the educational point of view”, *dōyō* had a colloquial and

“free-form” style (Nakano 1983:249). The meaning of the term ‘*dōyō*’ has changed throughout history but today it is generally used to describe “Western-style children’s songs composed in the twentieth century for the purpose of teaching children the principles of Western music” (Prescott 2005:33–34). These songs were also published by the Ministry and taught in schools but they featured Japanese lyricists and Japanese composers who wrote original, Western-styled melodies. From the mid-1980s, however, this genre has experienced a rise in popularity and many contemporary artists have come to specialise in *dōyō*. The final genre for children is classified ‘children’s television songs’ which describes J-pop-style songs which are featured in educational television programmes for children. These songs have also been recorded and released into the commercial marketplace and, in a way, can be seen as a contemporary form of *shōka* and *dōyō*.

NHK and Television Broadcasting in Japan

It is now timely to step back from the contest itself and take a broad view of the Japanese public broadcaster NHK because of its crucial role as creator, promoter, producer, broadcaster and distributor of the televised *Kōbaku*. NHK may be considered part of what Donald calls “the apparatus of discourses, technologies, and institutions...which *produces* what is generally recognised as ‘the national culture’” (Donald 1993 in Yano 1999:162; italics in original) which is projected to both a domestic and an international audience. In 1999, NHK’s broadcast reach extended to “almost every part of the world” via its radio and television digital satellite divisions collectively named ‘NHK World’ (NHK, NHK Wārudo TV Hōsō Eria 1999:1).¹³ At a domestic level, however, the public broadcaster’s diverse programming was distributed via three radio stations and four television channels, with a large broadcast reach that services even the most remote areas of Japan.¹⁴ The 50th *Kōbaku*, as such, was

¹³ The services supplied by NHK World include the two television stations NHK World TV and NHK World Premium and the short-wave radio station TV Japan.

¹⁴ The terrestrial television channels include NHK-G (NHK *sōgō* (general)) and NHK-E (NHK *kyōiku* (educational)), and the satellite television channels BS-1 (NHK *eisei* 1 (satellite 1)) and BS-2 (NHK *eisei* 2 (satellite 2)). NHK later introduced a new digital high-definition satellite television service named ‘NHK hi’ in January 2000. In 1999, there were 36,878,354 terrestrial contracts and 10,055,635 satellite contracts in Japan (NHK *Nenkan* [n.d.] cited in NHK 2002:343). While these figures give a general indication of the number of households which receive NHK channels, they are not entirely accurate. NHK cannot strictly monitor or enforce the fee system because “the inspectors, who make the nominal door-to-door checks for compliance, have no authority to enter the home without the householder’s permission” and, as such, many households evade the fee (Stronach 1989:130).

distributed internationally through NHK World and across Japan via the terrestrial channel NHK1 and the satellite channel BS2.

In 1999, and today, NHK co-exists with the ‘big five’ Tokyo-based commercial television broadcasters, namely NTV (Nippon Television Network Corporation), TBS (Tokyo Broadcasting System Inc.), Fuji TV (*Fuji Terebi*), TV Asahi (*Terebi Asahi*) and TV Tokyo Channel 12 (NHK 2002:16). Unlike these networks, however, NHK is independent from government and private organisations, a unique status held since its inception. The national broadcaster was formed in August 1926 after three localised, independent radio stations amalgamated.¹⁵ NHK’s role was clear even during these early years under state governance: it must “maximise the listener’s benefit and the public good” (Kasza 1988:81). This aim was expanded in 1950 when NHK was re-established as a public broadcaster by post-war occupying Allied forces. A significant ‘Broadcast Law’—still in effect in 2006—marked “a decisive break with the pre-war system of state-controlled broadcasting” and provided clear guidelines for the broadcaster’s structure, function and related activities (NHK 2002:6).¹⁶ NHK was required to fulfil a “mission”: it “must operate in a manner befitting its public role, must not pursue profit, and must remain independent of national institutions” (Ebisawa 2000:Internet).¹⁷ Financial independence was of primary importance and the ‘station for the people’ generated revenue from radio receiving-fees paid by audiences. This system was successful and by August 1952, in the face of competition from six new rival radio stations, the number of reception contracts exceeded 10 million (NHK 2002:16).

Japan was propelled into the television age in February 1953 when NHK launched the nation’s first black-and-white broadcast. Even so, post-war reconstruction and reform had left the broadcaster with “incomplete facilities, a shortage of hardware and software...[and] inadequate resources to produce programs”

¹⁵ The union of these stations (Tokyo Broadcasting Station, Osaka Broadcasting Station and the Nagoya Broadcasting Station) was fraught with opposition and disapproval by the independent stations. See Kasza (1988:83–88) for further discussion.

¹⁶ During this period, General MacArthur and the General Headquarters of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Forces deemed many Japanese institutions inadequate and, as such, instigated major reform.

¹⁷ The Broadcast law was one of the three ‘Radio Wave Laws’ decreed. Others include the ‘Radio Law’, which regulates use of radio airwaves and the ‘Law to Establish the Radio wave Supervision Commission’, which determines the administrative body to oversee radio use.

and relied on imported programmes and foreign films and thus NHK struggled to remain on air (Hirahara and Sata 1991:12). Although the newly-introduced television receiving-fees brought NHK income, few Japanese householders had signed contracts because exorbitant prices put television sets out-of-reach for most people.¹⁸ During the late 1950s, however, television sets were mass-produced and prices fell, thus creating a new television-watching culture. Television was so revered that

the mere thought of turning on the set was enough to set pulses racing. When a popular program came on, everyone in the family gathered round the television, which was often in the *tokonoma*, the alcove that was traditionally reserved for displaying the family's most prized possessions. Lights were dimmed and voices were lowered, so as not to miss a gesture of a syllable. (Schilling 1997:34–35)

While 'everyday' programmes were clearly cherished, it was Crown Prince Akihito's post-Royal-wedding public procession in April 1959 that gave Japan its first taste for extravagant, nationally-televised live events. In the week prior to the wedding, "the number of sets in Japanese households passed the two million mark, double the number of the year before" and NHK and the two commercial broadcasters covering the highly-anticipated occasion generated a combined audience of fifteen million viewers (Schilling 1997:212).¹⁹ This set a precedent for the viewing of major events, such as *Kōhaku*, in later years.

The regular transmission of colour programmes in September 1960 encouraged sales of colour sets but it was the broadcast of another spectacular live event—the October 1964 Tokyo Olympics—which prompted a 'colour television boom' (NHK 2002:203–204). The production of colour sets dramatically increased and the public demand prompted a new NHK colour-reception receiving fee in April 1968 (NHK 2002:204, 205). That year, NHK radio-receiving fees were abolished, making television fees the broadcaster's sole source of income (Hirahara and Sata 1991:5). It would be another seven years, however, until NHK transmitted all programmes in colour and with rival networks later following suit, colour became the norm in Japan (NHK 2002:205). In later years, NHK became a world-leader in broadcasting

¹⁸ Indeed, only 868 households were registered for the inaugural television broadcast (Hamota 2003:Internet) because of the exorbitant cost of television sets.

¹⁹ It is assumed that these ratings are based on the number of NHK's television-receiving contracts and other methods of ratings calculated by the commercial broadcasters. Independent television audience ratings were not, after all, introduced in Japan until 1962 (see Chapter One).

technology advancements, launching the first satellite broadcasting system in May 1984 and, in June 1989, regular transmissions of high-definition television programmes (NHK 2002:18).

Over the course of its history, NHK has developed the image of an honest, trustworthy and dependable broadcaster that will always serve the interests of the Japanese people. This image is duly supported by demonstrations of reliability where it has served as the key distributor of vital information in times of war, terrorism and natural disaster—from the 1959 Ise Bay Typhoon to the 1995 sarin gas poisoning in the Tokyo Subway by the Aum Shinrikyo religious cult. In short, the public trusts NHK.²⁰ In 1999, the year of the 50th *Kōbaku*, NHK's long-standing commitment to the public remained unyielding, as noted by the then NHK president, Ebisawa Katsuji, when he remarked that “NHK remains determined... to present programs that viewers and listeners really want to watch and listen to” (Ebisawa 1999:Internet). Certainly, NHK's varied educational, cultural and entertainment programmes aim to cater for the widest possible range of viewers and the broadcaster encourages feedback from viewers and alters its programming according to public opinion.²¹ It also operates two research organisations that conduct nationwide surveys, including those used to determine which singers the Japanese public would like to see in *Kōbaku*.²² Despite these efforts to remain closely connected to the people, the broadcaster's clean-cut image, morally upright stance, endorsement of family values and strong aversion to scandal often alienates younger viewers, who instead turn to the heady, fast-paced commercial networks for entertainment.

Furthermore, several of NHK's programmes—including *Kōbaku*—are considered by some to be tired, unfashionable and reminiscent of ‘old Japan’. We can see evidence of this in the changing face of *Kōbaku* throughout its history, as outlined in Chapter One.

²⁰ This idea is supported by a 1998 NHK survey, titled ‘Audiences and the Public Nature of Broadcasting: A Survey of ‘the Role of Broadcasting’’, where 79 percent of respondents deemed NHK more trustworthy than other information sources or non-media authoritarian organisations such as the legal courts (66 percent), the Diet (18 percent) and the government (16 percent) (Takahashi 1998:Internet).

²¹ A 1996 NHK document, for example, states that the broadcaster regularly receives correspondence (such as telephone calls and mail) from more than five million viewers each year and several Audience Advisory Councils evaluate NHK's programming and recommend improvements based on feedback from viewers (NHK 1996:3).

²² These organisations are the NHK Science and Technical Research Laboratories and the NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute.

Sources

This research presents an original contribution to the growing field of Japanese popular music studies. While most major investigations in this field are broad ethnographic studies of a single music genre (see for example Aoyagi (1999) on idol pop, Condry (1999) on rap, and Yano (2002) on *enka*) in various performance contexts, this study instead focuses on a single context, the 50th *Kōhaku*, where several genres are performed side-by-side. It also forms part of an increasing scholarly awareness of popular song contests held outside of Japan. Across the world, both amateur and professional song contests have been embraced as sources of entertainment by the general public and identified as fruitful areas of research by scholars. In particular, the televised amateur song contests such as British ‘Pop Idol’, ‘Canadian Idol’ and ‘Australian Idol’ have recently fascinated viewers in their respective countries.²³ While these are formulaic talent contests, there are other song contests that have long histories, established audiences and deep associations with the country in which they are held.²⁴ Although substantial scholarly writings about these contests are yet to be published, Björnberg has made an extensive investigation (1987, 1990) of another song contest, Sweden’s ‘Melody Festival’, which acts as a preliminary round for the widely-celebrated pan-Europe song contest ‘Eurovision’. His research, coupled with the hype of the 50th anniversary celebrations of ‘Eurovision’ in 2005, has stimulated a wealth of emerging research into this television programme.²⁵ A focus on the 50th *Kōhaku* is especially timely in the wake of scholarly writings on the 50th ‘Eurovision’, a contest which aroused comparable levels of expectancy and reflection in Europe as the 50th *Kōhaku* did in Japan. Moreover, this study arises at a time when other long-running contests are also being examined, such as Agostini’s (2005) work on Italy’s ‘Sanremo Festival’. This study of Japan’s *Kōhaku* also brings to light a Japanese contest within the context of studies of song contests around the world.

²³ In Australia, where televised song contests are uncommon, the locally-based ‘Australian Idol’ was a surprise hit with audiences, as was the internationally-syndicated ‘American Idol’ and the ‘grand final’ version of the program, ‘World Idol’.

²⁴ These include, for example, Poland’s ‘Sopot International Song Festival’ and its replacement, the ‘Intervision Song Contest’, Spain’s ‘Benidorm International Song Festival’ and Sweden’s ‘Baltic Song Contest’.

²⁵ Björnberg’s later (2005) research investigates the cultural significance of the musical and stylistic changes in Eurovision over time while others have examined other aspects of this contest. Solomon (2005), for example, has looked at song performers’ presentations of ethnicity, Pajala (2005) has considered musical sentimentality and melodrama, Raykoff (2005) has focused on camp/gay aesthetics and performativity and Tobin (2005) has examined nationality and sexuality in Eurovision.

Despite the sheer number and variety of song contests in Japan—from amateur to ‘talent-search’ to professional—scholarly investigations into these rich areas of research are scarce. This research into *Kōbaku* assists in redressing this imbalance. Of the few articles that have paved the way, Herd’s (1984) case study of the now defunct ‘Yamaha World Popular Music Festival’ still serves as the starting point.²⁶ Although her observations are now over 20 years old, they still shed light on the elements of popular song performance in Japan. Hosokawa’s recent (2000) work on the song contest ‘*Nodojiman*’ (‘Pride In My Voice’) is also significant and his observations are useful to this study of *Kōbaku* in that they raise pertinent issues concerning identity, community and belonging among participants.²⁷ All in all, his research prompts a different perspective on *Kōbaku*’s place within the sphere of Japan-related song contests.

Beyond these works, the sources consulted in this study fall within four categories: official documents, scholarly publications, information gleaned from *Kōbaku* viewers, and media sources. Official documents have proved vital to this study in that they provide accurate data, factual information and authoritative views of the contest. The most important source has been the televised concert which serves as the primary document for this research. Viewing the televised 50th *Kōbaku* has been enhanced by a valuable journal article authored by the production staff from the programme (published under Nippon Hōsō Gijutsu Kyoku Seisaku Gijutsu Sentā (2000)) which outlines the technical and procedural aspects, including lighting techniques and the types of camera equipment employed. Other ‘behind the scenes’ programmes broadcast on NHK the following year confirmed and enhanced observations, and allowed a perspective different from what might be had in simply viewing the televised concert.

²⁶ Although Herd does not refer to *Kōbaku* in this article, her discussion of the format and conventions of the 1982 ‘Yamaha’ festival enables pertinent comparisons with the 50th *Kōbaku* which would benefit future research on this topic. Both contests were, for example, staged in similarly large and prestigious venues in Japan and were also broadcast on television. The ‘Yamaha’ contest was, however, a three-day event which featured foreign songs performed by amateurs from Japan as well as other countries whereas the 50th *Kōbaku* was a one-night event featuring professional song performers, primarily from Japan.

²⁷ Hosokawa’s research includes an historical examination of the contest in Japan (2000a) as well as a study of local versions of the contest staged by the Japanese-Brazilian community in Brazil (2000b). Unlike *Kōbaku*, the Japanese ‘*Nodojiman*’ features amateurs performing covers of hit songs, *karaoke*-style, and has a more relaxed format. Nevertheless, the contests share many similar features in that they are both broadcast on television and chiefly present Japanese repertoires, they are grounded in history and are still produced today, and they are well-known to all generations of Japanese people.

Official publications greatly assisted this study's framing of the 50th contest within a historical context. The documentation of *Kōbaku* ratings by the independent organisation Video Research (2000a:1) have helped to trace *Kōbaku*'s popularity over time. Descriptive accounts of NHK's shifting visions for *Kōbaku* and the programme's role and reception are also documented in sections of *Broadcasting in Japan: The Twentieth Century Journey from Radio to Multimedia* (2002). To a lesser extent, the web-based article on *Kōbaku* by the 50 Years of NHK Television Publishing Committee (2003a) presents descriptive elements of the programme over time. The most valuable resource has been the meticulously-detailed archival book on *Kōbaku*, compiled by NHK staff-member Takahashi Koichi (2000). This source, published as the 1000th volume of a NHK periodical, has provided raw data and factual information, such as the names of performers and their songs, as well as descriptive accounts of events from the 1st *Kōbaku* (1951). In addition, the photographs included in this publication have enabled further interpretation of the song performances discussed in this study. These photographs complement *Kōbaku* videos dating from the early 1980s as well as excerpts from early rare editions of *Kōbaku* which have been reproduced in various NHK programmes during 1999. By evaluating all of these publications, videos and photographs, a balanced and impartial view of *Kōbaku*—free from the bias associated with NHK's published texts—has been acquired.

The second category is scholarly sources. There are only a small number of scholarly sources (in English or Japanese) which focus exclusively on *Kōbaku* and, as such, it is useful to review these here, beginning with the most substantial texts. One particularly noteworthy article is Hiroshi Ogawa's (1990) examination of the 40th *Kōbaku* (1989) which argues that *Kōbaku*'s declining popularity during the 1980s was due to changes in Japanese viewing habits. His insights have helped to shape an understanding of the programme's reception which could not have been gained by examining ratings data alone. Other articles on *Kōbaku* can be found in reference documents such as Kojima and Crane's *Japanese-English Dictionary of Japanese Culture* (1987). While these articles are often condensed, Schilling's entry on *Kōbaku* in his largely informal book *The Encyclopedia of Japanese Pop Culture* (1997) has provided insight on broader aspects of the programme, including the performer selection process. Even

though they pre-date the 50th *Kōbaku*, his observations can be equally applied to this contest and are beneficial to this study.

In recent years, scholars have made many passing references to *Kōbaku* in the context of other research on Japan. Mitsui (1997:165), for example, discusses the programme in relation to general broadcasting practices, Nakajima (1986 cited in Fukunishi Suzuki 1995:85) contemplates it in relation to images of women on television, and Chalmers (2000:75) considers it as an example of the media's depictions of a family. Markham (2000:209), furthermore, notes that watching *Kōbaku* has become part of the religious practices of New Year, while Bestor (1989:137) observes that this is a new-found ritual in the age of mass communication. Darling-Wolf (2000:147) acknowledges *Kōbaku* to be a major event on the Japanese musical calendar, and Yano (2004a:43, 2003:78, 1995:80 and 153–155) considers it an important vehicle for the popular genre *enka* and, as Anderson (2002:325) also observes, the individual stars of this genre.²⁸ Taking a different view, Olsen (2004:247–253) has looked at local variations of *Kōbaku* by the *nikkei* (people of Japanese heritage residing out side of Japan) in South American countries such as Peru and Brazil. The references to *Kōbaku* made by these scholars may be fleeting and rarely extend beyond a single sentence or paragraph, nevertheless, the fact that *Kōbaku* is used as an illustrative example highlights an emerging awareness of the contest's significance in a diverse range of scholarly contexts.

The third category is sources produced by *Kōbaku* fans. While a few information-rich books have been written by *Kōbaku* aficionados, such as Makiyama (1996) and Kaburagi (1995), in recent times fans have turned to more immediate and informal mediums, such as internet sites, web pages, chat rooms and blogs, to convey their views of the programme. Even a preliminary internet search will produce hundreds of thousands of website links, demonstrating the programme's status as a hot

²⁸ Broad examinations of Japanese popular genres and performers have helped to establish a deeper understanding of the Japanese music world and, consequently, *Kōbaku*'s place within it. For example, Mita's (1992 trans. Stephen Suloway; cited henceforth as Mita 1992) examination of the key words and motifs in Japanese popular song lyrics prior to 1963 proved beneficial when considering common themes in the songs of the 50th *Kōbaku*. Yano's excellent studies (1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2003, 2004a, 2004b and 2005) on the genre *enka* have, however, been of the highest value to this study. Most notably, her 1995 ethnographic dissertation and subsequent book in 2002 have elucidated the relationship between nationhood and song which not only shed light on *enka* songs and singers, but also provide insight into broader links between *Kōbaku* and the nation.

topic in cyberspace. It is acknowledged that internet-based sources such as these are ephemeral, unregulated and may not be authoritative or offer scholarly integrity. They are, nevertheless, important indicators of public attitudes—from scathing criticisms and glowing reviews—and are without fear or favour. Moreover, these sources describe the unofficial stories and personal experiences, the rumours and hearsay, and the expectations and anticipations surrounding the 50th *Kōhaku* in 1999. Overall, these sources help to inform the study by showing how *Kōhaku* deeply engages Japan at an individual level.

The final category of sources used in this study is Japanese media publications. In the months leading up to the concert, both print and online media sources, including television guides, entertainment magazines and newspapers, perpetuate the hype, relay the gossip and provide the ‘inside scoop’ on *Kōhaku* through independent interviews with performers, detailed editorials and glossy photographs.²⁹ Although at times highly speculative, these publications offer a broader point of view than official sources and have been consulted with due care. The media source most beneficial to this research is the special issue of *TV gaido zōkan: uta no hon besutu bitto '99* (1999), published in commemoration of the 50th edition of *Kōhaku*. This source offers a unique perspective that is distinct from NHK publications, and it also conveys a high level of detail about the performers and their songs. Overall, these sources show how the 50th *Kōhaku* is promoted to Japanese audiences and how the programme engages Japan at a national level.

To gain a more complete view of the contest, fieldwork was undertaken in Tokyo, Japan, during the northern winter of 1999–2000 when the 50th *Kōhaku* was held, and also the winter of 2000–2001.³⁰ One of my main objectives was to attend *Kōhaku* as an audience member but despite repeated conversations with NHK staff, I was politely declined.³¹ I was instead invited to take part in the annual *Kōhaku* ballot (a process

²⁹ Chapter Two outlines other media sources promoting the 50th *Kōhaku*.

³⁰ Before my initial time in the field, many months were spent establishing and maintaining crucial relationships with NHK staff. This proved to be challenging. As a *gaijin* (a person who is not Japanese), I was marked an outsider and my interest in *Kōhaku* was often met with surprise and disbelief. After extensive correspondence, however, NHK public relations staff came to see my English-based research as an opportunity for an aspect of Japanese popular culture to reach countries where *Kōhaku* is little known and were, therefore, supportive of the project.

³¹ This was due to various reasons, one of which was the great demand for audience tickets by the general public. NHK staff believed it would be unfair to grant me entry under these circumstances.

which is described in Chapter Two), whereby winning entrants receive *Kōbaku* audience tickets, but unfortunately my entries were unsuccessful. Nevertheless, in 1999 and 2000, I was granted admittance to the main rehearsals for *Kōbaku*—a rare privilege considering they are typically ‘off limits’ to the public. This not only enabled first-hand observations of the NHK Hall setting and the subtle, inner-workings of the contest, but also permitted glimpses into the closely-guarded world of the song performers. In 1999, I attended rehearsals under the guise of ‘researcher’ and due to restrictive security measures, was only authorised to view from a designated audience seat in the balcony and was advised not to use recording devices or photographic equipment. Viewing the rehearsals informed the ‘real’ song performances that were to later take place, and adopting the perspective of an in-house audience member proved beneficial in that it allowed points of comparison with the television presentation. The following year when my relationship with NHK had strengthened, I was granted the seemingly higher status of ‘member of the press’ for the 51st *Kōbaku* (2000) rehearsals. Armed with identification tags and cleared by NHK security, I moved freely inside NHK Hall and joined the press nearby the stage, near the song performers, where I was able to take photographs. Even though direct contact with the stars was strictly forbidden, it was enlightening to view them at close range.

As part of my fieldwork, I participated in several *Kōbaku*-related ‘occasions’ such as attending *Kōbaku*-related exhibitions (featuring photographs, signatures and messages of goodwill from stars) displayed in NHK Studio Park (NHK’s broadcasting theme-park), collecting specialist *Kōbaku* resources, watching television programmes about *Kōbaku* and observing *Kōbaku* song performers in other music programmes. This enabled insight into the kinds of activities which *Kōbaku* fans engage in as the contest approaches. Following *Kōbaku*’s broadcast, I compared audience ratings published in newspapers and reflected on the highlights of the show. Overall, I endeavoured to adopt the perspective of a typical fan by being ‘caught up’ in the *Kōbaku*-mania that sweeps the nation at year-end.³²

³² Other activities engaged in during this fieldwork have enabled valuable insights into traditional Japanese culture. In particular, participating in the activities of year-end, such as pounding *mochi* rice, and also the activities of the New Year period (*shōgatsu*) such as visiting temples in the early hours of New Year’s Day gave me first-hand experience of the time-honoured customs which frame *Kōbaku*.

Although this is not a study of audience reception, it has been beneficial to converse with a variety of people who are familiar with *Kōbaku*. Interviews with staff from the ratings organisation Video Research and conversations with journalists and photographers have provided insight into the Japanese media's perspective of the contest. Meanwhile, informal discussions with Japanese people, Australian expatriates, and Japanese-Australians of various ages have helped me to ascertain how *Kōbaku*, and the 50th edition in particular, is generally received in Japan. Casual exchanges with 50th *Kōbaku* ticket-holders and other fans outside of NHK Hall have also shed light on what *Kōbaku* means to avid fans, at a personal level. Overall, these conversations revealed mixed views. Some people enjoy *Kōbaku* but see it as out of step with modern times while others—especially those who have faithfully followed the programme over a long period of time—continue to regard it with genuine affection and delight. In any case, it is clear that *Kōbaku* provokes strong and varied responses, all of which have assisted in shaping my own perception of the programme.

One of the most important aspects of this fieldwork has been to view the televised 50th *Kōbaku* concert in real time and within a home setting. This enabled me to share the sense of immediacy and occasion experienced by viewers on New Year's Eve. It was the repeated viewings of the recorded programme, however, that lead to a greater understanding of the song performances and their intricacies. This method of watching the programme is in keeping with the way many Japanese experience *Kōbaku*. Some people record the programme and in subsequent weeks, months or years, re-watch the entire show or perhaps selected performances. Consequently, many people accumulate a large archive of *Kōbaku* programmes and become highly knowledgeable about *Kōbaku*'s singers and their performances. In order to develop a similar understanding, I have consulted my own archive of *Kōbaku* programmes, a collection of borrowed and dubbed tapes from the mid-1980s onward. In general, this footage shows the development of the contest over time and provides a historical context for the 50th *Kōbaku*.

This study takes a highly interpretive approach to analysing the song performances of the 50th *Kōbaku*. While the televised *Kōbaku* is the primary document, this study does not intend to present a frame-by-frame analysis of the programme.

Instead, it considers the televised *Kōbaku* in conjunction with observations made at the *Kōbaku* rehearsals. This facilitates a more inclusive analysis which embraces elements that are unique to the televised version, such as the song lyrics which are displayed on-screen. Those watching the televised *Kōbaku*, furthermore, have a different viewing experience to those attending the concert, as noted in the start of this Introduction. In recognition of this difference, two kinds of audiences are differentiated in this study, namely the ‘broadcast audience’ and the ‘in-house audience’ (also referred to as the NHK Hall audience). While discussion will include both kinds of audiences, the focus will be chiefly on the broadcast audience’s perspective.

The DVD accompanying this study enables readers to acquire a sense of the grand spectacle of *Kōbaku*. However, given the 50th *Kōbaku* runs for several hours, it is more useful to include only selected examples on this DVD to provide a snapshot of the programme. Seven key song performances have been selected from both halves of *Kōbaku*; examples 1–4 are taken from the first half of the programme and examples 5–7 are from the second half. Not only do these examples demonstrate the different styles of performance taking place over the course of the evening, but they also accurately represent the strong presence of *enka* and J-pop in the contest. Overall, the DVD brings to life observations from Part Two of this study, illustrating the simultaneous convergence of musical aspects, lyric themes, staging and the types of performing relationships.

Although *Kōbaku* is transmitted to many countries and territories around the world, this study principally focuses on the programme broadcast in Japan. In this sense, it examines a programme presented to its homeland (rather than to an external audience), showing what Japan expresses about its people, to its people. The televised *Kōbaku* examined here is the version broadcast on the terrestrial channel NHK *sōgō* (general), henceforth NHK-G. Although it is almost identical to the digital version of the programme presented on the satellite channel NHK BS-2, the NHK-G version is more widely watched in Japan because it is free-to-air.³³ This version is considered to

³³ The main difference between the NHK-G version and NHK BS-2 version is that the latter includes additional aspects associated with digital television, such as advanced menu options and picture control.

be the ‘real’ *Kōhaku*. Another benefit of this version is that ratings—an indicator of popularity—are available, whereas ratings for the NHK BS-2 are not.³⁴

At this point, it is helpful to summarise how *Kōhaku*’s ratings—which are cited throughout this study—are measured. Video Research uses the ‘people meter’ method whereby a television set-top box registers an individual’s programme selection and the entire household’s selection, measured in intervals of one minute.³⁵ These ratings are supplemented by the ‘diary method’ (similar to the ‘people meter’ method) which calculates data for each viewer according to intervals of five minutes. Although set-top boxes are placed in homes across Japan, this study is primarily concerned with ratings from the Kantō region, the geographical area that encompasses the seven prefectures of Honshū, the largest island in Japan, and it includes the nation’s capital, Tokyo.³⁶ The majority of Japan’s population resides in the Kantō region. It was the first region to have television ratings measured and it continues to be the primary ratings cited by the Japanese media and scholars as being indicative of the nation’s viewing habits.

This thesis is presented in two volumes. The first volume is divided into two parts. Part One takes a broad perspective and establishes the background and context necessary for understanding the 50th *Kōhaku* and its Community of song performers. Chapter One documents the historical development of *Kōhaku* from the programme’s inception until the 49th *Kōhaku* (1998), noting in particular the variations in song performers and genres presented, the other types of participants in the contest, the staging and technology employed, the judging and voting system and, lastly, the record of victories for the Red and White Teams. Chapter Two focuses on 1999’s ‘50th *Kōhaku* event’ which comprises a series of *Kōhaku*-related occasions—from preparations and publicity to the programme’s broadcast and its reception—that frame the 50th contest. Part Two presents an analysis of the 50th *Kōhaku* song performances to see what they reveal about the Community. Each chapter in this part looks at core elements of song performance and highlights issues surrounding the Community at an individual level, as a collective, with regard to the historical *Kōhaku* Community and the nation. Chapter

³⁴ According to a manager of the quality control department of Video Research, ratings data for the NHK BS-2 *Kōhaku* is not publicly released but is instead ‘sealed’ and sold to NHK (Ota Shizuka 2000:pers. com.).

³⁵ This method of calculating ratings was introduced in the Kantō area on 31 March 1997 and replaced an earlier system.

³⁶ Ratings for other regions in Japan are also presented in the appendices for comparative purposes.

Three considers musical and lyrical aspects of song performance, while Chapter Four examines recurring themes in the lyrics. Chapter Five observes the physical aspects of staging, and Chapter Six explores the various relationships displayed by the Community. The final chapter presents conclusions for the research.

The second volume begins with the appendices. Appendix A, as previously noted, lists the regional audience ratings for each *Kōbaku* preceding the 50th contest, while Appendix B presents profiles for each member of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community. Appendix C looks at the *Kōbaku* historical Community and shows the distribution of new performers and returning performers each year. Appendix D outlines the genres associated with each song performer in the 50th *Kōbaku* Community, and Appendix E offers a segment-by-segment overview of the televised 50th *Kōbaku*. Appendix F documents the regional ratings for the 50th *Kōbaku* and also shows the Kantō region ratings for each song performed. Appendix G presents translations of the 50th *Kōbaku* songs and acknowledges the lyricist and composer for each song. Appendix H comprises still images from the DVD that accompanies this thesis and is useful for readers unable to view the footage. Following the appendices is a selected glossary of key Japanese terms pertaining to the 50th *Kōbaku*. Inside the rear cover of Volume Two is the DVD and a user's guide to playback. The disc is classified as 'region free' and is suitable to be played in all territories and countries. In order to enable further accessibility for viewers, the footage has been converted from the Japanese NTSC format (in which *Kōbaku* is presented) into the PAL format (used in Australia, Western Europe etc.) and this process has resulted in some minor pixelation. Readers are advised to consult the 'Notes for DVD Playback' for further details and suggestions as to which playback devices support this format.

Before proceeding to Part One, a few editorial matters are relevant here. This study adopts the Hepburn style of romanisation of Japanese words and uses the macron system in accordance with *Kenkyusha's New Japanese-English Dictionary* (Masuda 1974), avoiding macrons for commonly-used words, such as 'Tokyo'. It also adheres to the Japanese convention of naming whereby family name precedes personal name. As previously indicated, this research is primarily intended for English language readers. As such, the Western calendrical system is predominantly used and all non-English

words are italicised with the exception of names, proper nouns and other words where duly noted. All translations are my own unless otherwise acknowledged. With an English language readership in mind, only English translations of lyrics are quoted in text but Japanese lyrics are also provided in Appendix G. Major Japanese historical periods referred to in this study are also presented on page xiii in conjunction with the corresponding Western dates. For ease of reading, *Kōbaku utagassen* is abbreviated to *Kōbaku* and is written without quotation marks, unlike the titles of other television programmes. When referring to different editions of *Kōbaku*, the year of performance is written in parentheses with the exception of the 50th *Kōbaku* which is commonly understood to have taken place in 1999. It is also acknowledged that it is grammatically incorrect for Japanese words to be written in the possessive form (i.e. *Kōbaku's*) and this is avoided as much as possible.

Now let us turn to Part One of this study which provides a background and context for the 50th *Kōbaku*.

part one

Framing the 50th *Kōhaku*:
Background and Context



1

The
Historical Development
of *Kōhaku*

Kōbaku has never stagnated. Since its early broadcasts—set against the backdrop of post-war Japan and amid fluctuating economic reforms and increasing Western cultural influence—*Kōbaku* has strived to reflect the music of the day and symbolise an evolving Japanese culture. This chapter traces the historical development of *Kōbaku*, from the contest's prototype in 1945 to the 49th *Kōbaku* (1998).¹ To compare each *Kōbaku* over time, data is summarised according to five-year periods and presented in a series of tables. Below each table are seven vast-ranging subsections which elaborate upon this data. Firstly, the 'Date, Time and Venue' subsection examines the programme's changing venues as well as various broadcasting details. Secondly, 'Ratings' traces the programme's popularity over time through its television ratings.² Thirdly, 'Song performers and Genres' looks at the types of song performers and music genres in *Kōbaku* and the varying numbers of acts per team over the years, broadly demonstrating the emergence of the *Kōbaku* historical Community.³ Fourthly, 'Other Participants' outlines the roles of *Kōbaku*'s Team MCs, General Chairmen and additional performers (such as dancers and instrumentalists) as well as its audience.⁴ Fifthly, 'Staging and Technology' describes the many innovations and developments in both the staging and broadcasting of the production. Sixthly, the contest's ever changing 'Judging and Voting System', which determines the winning team, is outlined for each contest.⁵ Lastly, 'The Historical Tally of Victories', follows the successes of the Red and White Teams throughout the contest's history.

In order to gain a thorough understanding of the progressive evolution of *Kōbaku* and its traditions, discussion is not restricted to issues of community as this is

¹ Selected data from NHK's official Japanese language book (Takahashi 2000) on *Kōbaku* is presented and interpreted here in English for the first time. To avoid bias and enable a well-rounded perspective, it is supplemented by close readings of photographs from this source and observations of video archives. These include the 38th to 41st *Kōbaku* (1987–1990), the 43rd to 45th *Kōbaku* (1992–1994) and the 47th to 49th *Kōbaku* (1996–1998).

² The 'Ratings' subsection in this chapter only appears in relation to *Kōbaku* broadcast from 1962 when ratings were first calculated. Unless stated otherwise, all television audience ratings cited in this chapter refer to the Kantō area and are cited from an unpublished document created by the media research, marketing and ratings organisation Video Research Limited (Video Research Limited 2000a:1). Consult Appendix A for ratings from other Japanese regions for the period 1962–1998.

³ It is beyond the scope of this study to list all performers throughout *Kōbaku* history. See Takahashi (2000) for data up to and including the 49th *Kōbaku* (1998).

⁴ See Takahashi (2000:173) for the names of Team MCs and General Chairmen up to and including the 49th *Kōbaku* (1998). Information about the additional musicians used in the contest is scarce and, as such, it is unknown if one or indeed many orchestras have been employed throughout *Kōbaku*'s history.

⁵ Refer to Takahashi (2000) for a complete listing of the names and occupations (where applicable) of each judge up to and including the 49th *Kōbaku* (1998).

taken up in detail in Part Two. This chapter instead illuminates core components of the song contest, namely the performers and participants, the staging and the songs, and the audiences, judges and their responses, and ultimately establishes a historical context for the 50th *Kōbaku* Community of song performers

The *Kōbaku* Prototype

In 1945 when Japan was under Allied Occupation (1945–1952), the NHK music producer Kondo Tsumoru created a lively radio programme to spiritually uplift the “defeated and poverty stricken nation” (Schilling 1997:94, Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:51).⁶ Originally titled ‘*Kōbaku ongaku gassen*’ (‘The Red and White Music Battle’), this live-to-air singing contest boasted a ‘battle of the sexes’ theme, used an in-house orchestra and was broadcast in a late night New Year’s Eve timeslot (NHK 2002:90).⁷ It was the blueprint for what was to be NHK’s flagship music programme, *Kōbaku utagassen*.

The concept of a ‘song battle’ was contentious in early post-war Japan, when the nation was still weary from its own battle. It is not known whether the programme was well received by the listening public but Occupation authorities were critical of the prohibited word *gassen* (battle) in the programme title because it was “reminiscent of war” (NHK 2002:90).⁸ Although the contest was dutifully renamed ‘*Kōbaku ongaku shiai*’ (‘The Red and White Music Competition’), it was later discontinued. Nevertheless, it heralded the start of NHK’s song contest tradition and less than a decade later, the real *Kōbaku* was born.

⁶ In a sense, this program was a product of cultural nationalism in that it aimed to “regenerate the national community by creating, preserving or strengthening a people’s cultural identity when it [was] felt to be lacking, inadequate or threatened” (Yoshino 1992:1).

⁷ This program aired from 10:20pm until midnight and featured 20 singers (NHK 2002:89–90). For a list of performers, see “1st *Kōbaku Utagassen*” (1999:Internet). Only a few weeks later on 19 January 1946, NHK launched ‘*Nodojiman*’ (‘Pride In My Voice’), the live, amateur song contest that would, like *Kōbaku*, become one of Japan’s most popular programs.

⁸ The Civil Censorship Detachment also heavily censored traditional Japanese performing arts. In particular, *rakugo* (comic monologue recitation), *kyōdan* (epic narration) and *nanjwa-bushi* (epic narration and singing accompanied by *shamisen* lute) stories about vengeance “were partially or completely banned because they were considered militaristic and might encourage the revival of nationalism” (NHK 2002:81).

The 1st–5th *Kōbaku* (1951–1954)

Kōbaku developed in tandem with NHK’s pioneering advancements in broadcasting technology and subsequently transformed from a small-scale radio show into one of the first black and white television programmes in Japan. Table 1.1 summarises data pertaining to each *Kōbaku* staged during this five-year period.

Table 1.1 Summary Data: the 1st–5th *Kōbaku* (1951–1954)

<i>Edition</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Timeslot</i> (<i>pm</i>)	<i>Duration</i> (<i>H:M</i>)	<i>Venue</i>	<i>SP^a per</i> <i>Team</i>	<i>Winning</i> <i>Team</i>
1 st	3 January 1951	8:00–9:00	1:00	NHK Radio Studio 1	7	White
2 nd	3 January 1952	7:30–9:00	1:30	NHK Radio Studio 1	12	White
3 rd	2 January 1953	7:30–9:00	1:30	NHK Radio Studio 1	12	White
4 th	31 December 1953	9:15–10:45	1:30	Japan Theatre	17	Red
5 th	31 December 1954	9:15–11:00	1:45	Hibiya Theatre	15	Red

Source: Adapted from Takahashi 2000:167–171.

^a Song performers.

Date, Time and Venue

The inaugural *Kōbaku* was broadcast on radio in an evening timeslot in early January 1951. Only a small studio audience was present and in order to receive additional feedback, producers encouraged listeners to contact NHK. The response was both positive and overwhelming, as this recollection of events indicates:

from the moment the first artist, Sugawara Tsuzuko, began to sing, the excitement in the studio spread to the whole country, and NHK’s phone lines were buzzing with comments and inquiries. (‘50 Years of NHK Television’ Publishing Committee 2003:Internet)

Some listeners wrote letters of encouragement to the *Kōbaku* performers and others travelled to the NHK studios to express their delight in person (Takahashi 2000:171). This unprecedented public reaction provided the impetus for *Kōbaku*’s growth. Indeed, by the 2nd *Kōbaku* (1952), the number of song performers nearly doubled and in order to accommodate the increase, the programme began earlier at 7:30pm.⁹

The New Year period was notoriously hectic for NHK. Studio One was in demand and securing time for the *Kōbaku* broadcast had proved difficult. Singers, moreover, were extremely busy with their own New Year concert schedules and tended to “give priority to stage performances” over radio programmes (Kobayashi

⁹ The increased number of song performers may also have been to celebrate Japan’s release from Occupation that year (Tokyo News *Tsūshinsha* 1999:41).

1999:3). A late-evening timeslot in December was, however, convenient for both NHK and the song performers and as such, two discrete programmes were broadcast in 1953: the 3rd *Kōbaku* on 2 January and the 4th *Kōbaku* on 31 December. Since the latter broadcast, *Kōbaku* has been staged on New Year's Eve each year.¹⁰

The shift in timeslot and broadcast day coincided with a move to the spacious Japan Theatre which accommodated a larger in-house audience than NHK's Studio One. The following year, however, *Kōbaku* moved again, this time to Hibiya Theatre to prepare for television test broadcasts.

Song Performers and Genres

There was a rising sense of anticipation and excitement surrounding the inaugural *Kōbaku*. In order to further arouse the public's curiosity and gain a following, NHK staff did not reveal the singers' names until the programme commenced (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:146). By the 2nd *Kōbaku* (1952), the show had gathered a strong audience and the names of singers were disclosed in advance, presumably due to public demand. Even so, NHK staff preserved *Kōbaku*'s mystery by withholding the song titles.

Despite its initial success, *Kōbaku* was still finding its feet. Indeed, problems arose at the 2nd *Kōbaku* (1952) when a car accident forced Red Team singer Matsushima Utako to suddenly withdraw from the contest. *Kōbaku* producers searched urgently for a substitute, eventually replacing her with an ex-Takarazuka performer.¹¹ The incident highlighted the delicate balance between the male and female teams: to ensure that future contests were fair, it was essential that each team had an equal number of performers.

The 1st and 2nd *Kōbaku* (1951 and 1952) had featured mostly Japanese ballad singers and the 3rd *Kōbaku* (Jan. 1953) focused on Takarazuka performers. By the 5th *Kōbaku* (1954), however, *Kōbaku* presented classical, folk, *chanson* and Latin singers. Most notably, Misora Hibari—who would later become the 'queen of *enka*' (that is, the

¹⁰ It is likely that *Kōbaku* producers had always considered 31 December for the broadcast day, because the *Kōbaku* prototype, '*Kōbaku ongaku shiai*' ('Red and White Music Contest') was also broadcast on New Year's Eve.

¹¹ Takarazuka is an all-female musical theatre company where women play men's roles and is famed for its spectacular staging and romantic stories. See Robertson (1998) for her groundbreaking analysis of Takarazuka and its sexual politics.

most important and representative performer) and would also be, in many ways the ‘queen of *Kōhaku*’—made her *Kōhaku* debut that year. *Kōhaku* was embracing all kinds of popular music genres and performers, but this policy would quickly change in later years.

Other Participants

The contest’s rapid fame attracted large in-house audiences, eagerly cheering for individual song performers.¹² A sense of rivalry between teams was, however, stimulated by Team MCs, expressly selected by NHK for this purpose.¹³ Only respectable, well-spoken male NHK announcers were considered for the White MC role. Red MCs, meanwhile, were chosen from a variety of professions. This meant that Team MCs often had clashing personalities which kept the contest lively, as did a new pairing of Team MCs each year. In December 1953, however, the White MC’s stiff and proper image was cast aside when likable and friendly Takahashi Keizo was selected for the 4th *Kōhaku*. This not only altered the dynamic between Team MCs, but also marked the start of his nine-year reign as White MC, setting a precedent for White MCs to retain the role for successive years.¹⁴

Staging and Technology

The cramped conditions of NHK Radio Studio One meant that the staging for the 1st and 2nd *Kōhaku* (1951 and 1952) was limited (see Plate 1). Contrary to current practice, the Red Team was grouped at stage left and the White Team at stage right.¹⁵ All participants, however, sat on metal folding chairs and the ‘stage’ was merely studio floor, level with the audience seating area (see photographs Takahashi 2000:170).¹⁶ Despite the simplistic layout, song performers were well dressed and wore decorative

¹² It is not known if audiences received tickets through the *Kōhaku* ballot system during these early years. See Chapter Three for a detailed examination of the *Kōhaku* audience ticket ballot process for 1999.

¹³ NHK also employed a male sports presenter for the 3rd *Kōhaku* (1953) to describe the expressions and movements of each song performer and convey the exciting atmosphere to the radio audience.

¹⁴ The role of Red MC was rarely held by the same person (with a few notable exceptions) for more than three consecutive years.

¹⁵ As of this writing, the Red Team is always located at stage right and the White Team at stage left.

¹⁶ The musicians were, however, elevated on a tier behind the singers, presumably for radio broadcast purposes.

red or white flower corsages.¹⁷ This established a trend for conveying team affiliation through colour which has continued throughout *Kōbaku* history.

The 4th *Kōbaku* (Dec. 1953), held in Japan Theatre, was the first to be televised.¹⁸ With the large audience and the television cameras in mind, singers performed on the elevated stage, accompanied by orchestral musicians who were seated on a steep four-tiered platform. Afterward, singers would join fellow team members to the side of the stage in the Red or White ‘team corner’ (*kōnā*)—the designated areas for each team—where they remained in full view of the audience. Colour was prominently used, in spite of the limitations of the black and white broadcast. A red or white coloured ribbon was, for example, tied around each team’s microphone. Song performers were dressed in considerably more colourful and ceremonial ball gowns and *kimono* than those worn in previous *Kōbaku*. Indeed, lavish and beautiful *Kōbaku* costumes quickly became a highlight of the programme.¹⁹

New rituals were introduced to make the 4th *Kōbaku* (Dec. 1953) especially entertaining for television viewers (Takahashi 2000:168). In a grand display of pageantry, for example, a nominated person (not named in sources) officially ‘opened’ the song contest.²⁰ Correspondingly, the contest ceremonially ‘closed’ when the MC of the winning team was awarded a large *Kōbaku* pendant, a gesture which became a continuing tradition.²¹

Kōbaku’s staging was modified when it relocated to Hibiya Theatre the following year. The orchestra moved to a lower, less imposing platform so as not to detract attention from the song performers (see photograph Takahashi 2000:168). Most significantly, Red and White Teams were positioned in opposite corners than in

¹⁷ Photographs of the 2nd and 3rd *Kōbaku* (1952 and 1953) indicate that White Team singers wore Western-styled neckties and double-breasted suits with a white rose corsage in the left lapel (Takahashi 2000:169–170). Women’s outfits ranged from simple dresses to *kimono*. Each woman wore a red rose corsage to signify their affiliation with the Red Team; some attached it above their left breast, others nestled it in their *obi* (a decorative waistband).

¹⁸ In all likelihood, only a small television audience witnessed the broadcast because few Japanese owned or had access to a television set at this time.

¹⁹ The term ‘costume’ is used in this thesis to encompass all aspects of outer-ware, including clothing garments, shoes, accessories, jewellery, makeup and hairstyles. See Chapter Five for further discussion of this term.

²⁰ Photographs from the 4th *Kōbaku* (1953) show a man running through the theatre audience aisle while carrying the pendant, presumably to present to the winning Team’s MC onstage (Tokyo News *Tsūshinsha* 1999:168).

²¹ A photograph indicates that three hanging material banners are suspended from the pendant’s peak (Takahashi 2000:168). The names of past winning teams are written on each banner as a visual record of the *Kōbaku* historical tally of victories.

previous *Kōbaku*. From the audience's perspective, the Red Team was now left of the stage and the White Team was positioned at the right. This was presumably to comply with a new horizontal banner along the rear stage wall that listed *kō* (red) part of '*Kōbaku*' to the left of *baku* (white). In any case, this layout became standard for future *Kōbaku*.

Judging and Voting System²²

Although the song contest was light-hearted, the judging process was relatively formal. The judges on the panel, nevertheless, hailed from all walks of life: some were employees of NHK, others were from the *geinōkai* (entertainment world) and many were members of the audience.²³ The judges' qualifications and credibility were, however, challenged at the 5th *Kōbaku* (1954) when a female singer threatened to withdraw from the contest, citing too many judges were from industries 'outside' the *geinōkai* (Takahashi 2000:167).²⁴ But NHK staff insisted that the role of a judge was not to evaluate a singer's vocal abilities but to compare each team's collective merits—a task that did not require musical training. *Kōbaku* was a song contest 'for the people', to be judged not by music professionals but by laypersons.

Historical Tally of Victories

Each year, *Kōbaku* became more competitive. The White Team was victorious at the first three *Kōbaku*, which placed pressure on the Red Team to make their mark. The

²² The criteria by which teams are judged are not known for this early period in the contest's history. Similarly, it is not known how votes were lodged. These processes are, however, clarified in later *Kōbaku* and are documented accordingly in this chapter.

²³ NHK selected six people for the judging panel at the 1st *Kōbaku* (1951), including one celebrity, one NHK employee and the remaining four (two men and women) from the studio audience (Takahashi 2000:171). The panel for the 2nd *Kōbaku* (1952), however, only had five judges: four audience members and one celebrity judge (Takahashi 2000:170). The 3rd *Kōbaku* (1953) employed six judges, only one of whom was selected from the audience. Two NHK employees (one each from radio and television) were included that year and the remaining three were record company employees. Many judges for the 4th *Kōbaku* (1953), however, were representatives of the press so to stimulate media interest for *Kōbaku*'s television debut (Takahashi 2000:168). Of the nine judges, three were NHK employees and the majority of the remaining six people worked for newspaper firms. That year, audience members did not participate in the adjudicating process, presumably to minimise unexpected problems associated with the live broadcast. The Japan Theatre audience was, for example, larger and more unpredictable than the smaller, contained NHK Radio Studio One audience.

²⁴ Of the eight judges, two were NHK employees and six came from highly diverse professions: one judge was, for example, a ballerina and another was a beautician. Audience judges were not included that year but one photograph of the contest shows the panel of judges seated among audience members (see photograph Takahashi 2000:167). In the photograph, the panel is clearly identified by a large sign which was used each year until the 17th *Kōbaku* (1966) after which it was seemingly abandoned (see photographs Takahashi 2000:131, 137, 140–142, 162–3, 165–6).

Red Team finally emerged triumphant at the televised *Kōbaku* in 1953. In jest, some members of the White Team declared it a hollow victory, claiming that judges were seduced by the women's elaborate clothing (Takahashi 2000:168). The Red Team, however, defended its credibility by winning the 5th *Kōbaku* (1954). The *Kōbaku* 'historical tally of victories' now stood at two wins for the Red Team and three for the White. Red needed to win the next *Kōbaku* and level the score.

The 6th–10th *Kōbaku* (1955–1959)

With its fascinating 'battle of the sexes' theme and exciting live format, *Kōbaku*'s future seemed secure. Its biggest threat came, however, when rival television broadcasters began creating 'copycat' song contests—*Kōbaku* would have to rise to the challenge in order to survive. See Table 1.2 for *Kōbaku* details pertaining to this five-year period.

Table 1.2 Summary Data: the 6th–10th *Kōbaku* (1955–1959)

<i>Edition</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Timeslot (pm)</i>	<i>Duration (H:M)</i>	<i>Venue</i>	<i>SP^a per Team</i>	<i>Winning Team</i>
6 th	1955	9:15–11:00	1:45	Sankei Hall	16	Red
7 th	1956	9:05–11:30	2:30	Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre	24R/25W ^b	White
8 th	1957	9:05–11:30	2:30	Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre	25	Red
9 th	1958	9:10–11:35	2:25	Shinjuku Koma Theatre	25	Red
10 th	1959	9:05–11:35	2:30	Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre	25	Red

Source: Adapted from Takahashi 2000:162–166.

^a Song performers.

^b That year, there was an unequal number of song performers per team, as discussed in following subsections.

Time and Venue

Kōbaku's timeslot fluctuated and it moved venue several times during this period. These changes were prompted in 1955 when a commercial television station's copycat programme titled '1955*nen ōrusta utagassen*' ('The 1955 All-star Song Contest') threatened to steal *Kōbaku*'s established audience (NHK 2002:163).²⁵ A variation of the programme screened the following year and *Kōbaku* met its competitor head-on by shifting to a near-identical timeslot and relocating to a similarly lavish venue.

²⁵ '1955*nen ōrusta utagassen*' ('1955 All-star Song Contest') was created by KRT (an acronym which is used to refer to *Rajio Tōkyō Terebi*) which eventually became TBS (Tokyo Broadcasting System). The program's format was extremely similar to *Kōbaku*'s: 28 popular singers were divided into Red and White teams and sang live in front of an audience at the Japan Theatre, *Kōbaku*'s old venue. It was broadcast on New Year's Eve from 8:50–11:15pm: a timeslot which commenced 25 minutes earlier than 6th *Kōbaku* (1955). From the mid-1950s, even more music programs vied for *Kōbaku*'s audience. *Kōbaku* has 'out-lived' all of these. Only the similarly prestigious '*Nibon rekōdo taishō*' (Japan Record Awards)—first broadcast in 1959—continues to air.

Song Performers and Genres

The 6th *Kōbaku* (1955) struggled to successfully entice Japan's most popular stars. The competing programme '1955nen ōrusta utagassen' had secured famous singers such as Misora Hibari, Fubuki Koshiji and Haida Katsuhiko, forcing them to sign exclusivity contracts that forbade them from appearing in *Kōbaku* (NHK 2002:163).²⁶ In response, NHK expanded *Kōbaku's* selection criteria to include opera singers and the following year, increased the numbers of acts. That year, the *Kōbaku* teams were intentionally imbalanced to stimulate the competition: the Red Team consisted of 24 acts and White Team of 25.²⁷ The following year, perhaps due to *Kōbaku's* success against its rival, the number stabilised to 25 acts per team and remained so for the 9th and 10th *Kōbaku* (1958 and 1959).

Kōbaku was developing a cast of singers who returned each year. After her exclusivity contract ended, Misora Hibari became *Kōbaku's* most prized 'regular' performer and sang in 16 consecutive programmes from 1957 to 1972.²⁸ Similarly, the soloist Minami Haruo appeared in 30 consecutive *Kōbaku* from 1958 to 1986.²⁹ Singers developed a sense of loyalty toward *Kōbaku* and NHK rewarded them by ensuring they performed near the contest's conclusion—the prestigious part of the programme—as an incentive for return appearances.³⁰

Other Participants

In 1955, NHK introduced several innovative strategies to preserve *Kōbaku's* audience such as assembling a special cheering squad of celebrities and actors to encourage both individual song performers and the Teams. Celebrities who were unable to attend sent

²⁶ During the mid-1950s, singers who were not bound by exclusivity contracts were dubbed 'kamikaze tarento' ('talent with a death wish') because of their frantic travels between studios in an effort to perform in as many of these programs as possible (Takahashi 2000:163). In 1958, for example, singer Frankie Sakai, in rapid transit, received a motorcycle escort to the 9th *Kōbaku* from two police officers.

²⁷ It is uncertain why this occurred but it is documented that Red team member Yukimura Izumi was ill and did not perform in this *Kōbaku*. Nevertheless, a replacement singer was supposedly found (Tokyo News *Tsūshinsha* 1999:165).

²⁸ Misora Hibari's run of consecutive *Kōbaku* performances drew to a close when she was shockingly omitted from the 24th *Kōbaku* (1973) as described in greater detail in later sections.

²⁹ Minami Haruo was later a member of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community.

³⁰ Misora Hibari, for example, was the last singer for the Red team in the 8th *Kōbaku* (1957) after only one previous appearance in *Kōbaku*. It is possible that this honour, bestowed on Misora so early in her 'Kōbaku career', was to lure her away from rival programs.

telegrams of support which were read onstage. Overall, celebrity involvement gave the programme variety, stimulated audience interest and connected *Kōhaku* with the wider Japanese *geinōkai* (entertainment world).

The most controversial strategy used to thwart *Kōhaku*'s rivals was to employ the popular NHK presenter Miyata Teru as Red MC for the 6th *Kōhaku* (1955) (Takahashi 2000:166). In past *Kōhaku*, only women had emceed for the Red Team, therefore Miyata—a man—was an extremely surprising selection and a clever twist on the 'men versus women' concept. The tactic worked. Miyata's appointment created such publicity and audience interest that he served as Red MC again the following year and *Kōhaku* "far outdistanced its rivals" (NHK 2002:162–163).³¹ No longer under threat, NHK returned to its original policy of employing a female Red Team MC for the 8th *Kōhaku* (1957) (Takahashi 2000:164). The celebrity cheer squad, however, proved so popular that it was permanently adopted and it adhered to *Kōhaku*'s same-sex conventions whereby, for example, only male celebrities were allowed to cheer for the White Team.³²

Staging and Technology

Simple yet effective stage designs were used throughout this period.³³ Each year, the focal point of the staging was a banner which hung along the rear stage wall and bore both the name '*Kōhaku utagassen*' and the programme 'edition' (see photographs Takahashi 2000:162–167). Such banners effectively set the scene for each contest and highlighted *Kōhaku*'s growing sense of history and tradition. The song performers' clothing also indicated that *Kōhaku* was becoming an increasingly formal occasion. Women wore elegant strapless dresses, patterned *kimono* or full-length ball gowns while

³¹ KRT moved its rival program to a new timeslot and abandoned its exclusivity contracts. It was a clear indication that *Kōhaku* had won the battle.

³² The same-sex conventions were meticulously upheld. In 1959, for example, a male singer who usually performed his song with a female backing choir instead appeared with an all-male choir for his performance in the 10th *Kōhaku* (Takahashi 2000:162).

³³ The 7th *Kōhaku* (1956), for example, featured a two-dimensional cardboard-like bird (presumably red in colour) which was positioned at stage left while a similar white bird was positioned at stage right so to identify each team's designated area (see black-and-white photograph Takahashi 2000:165). The 8th *Kōhaku* (1957), however, used a backdrop of a leafless tree and the 9th *Kōhaku* (1958) featured several musical notes hanging from above the stage (see photographs Takahashi 2000:164, 163).

men wore Western suits with a necktie in either a bow or a Windsor knot, or *kimono* (see photographs Takahashi 2000:162–166).³⁴

During this time, *Kōbaku* customs were developed. One photograph from the 9th *Kōbaku* (1958), for example, depicts members of both teams standing together at the end of the contest and singing what is presumed to be “*Hotaru no hikari*” (“The Light of the Fireflies”) (see photograph Takahashi 2000:163).³⁵ This song was also performed in the 50th *Kōbaku* and even today it is an integral part of *Kōbaku*’s closing ceremony to ‘sing out’ the old year and welcome in the new.

Judging and Voting System

In keeping with past practice, a variety of celebrities from non-musical professions were employed as judges as were members of the in-house audience.³⁶ Indeed, two in-house audience members were on the judging panel at both the 8th and 9th *Kōbaku* (1957 and 1958) and three were included at the 10th *Kōbaku* (1959) (Takahashi 2000:164–162). By contrast, from the 8th *Kōbaku* (1957) only one NHK employee appeared on the panel.³⁷ As such, the celebrity and audience voting power clearly outweighed NHK’s—it was the public, not the broadcaster that decided the contest’s outcome.

Historical Tally of Victories

The Red Team claimed its third consecutive victory at the 6th *Kōbaku* (1955), thus levelling the historical tally. The following year, the White Team was victorious but the Red Team surged ahead to win the 8th, 9th and 10th *Kōbaku* (1957, 1958 and 1959). The Red Team subsequently took the lead with six wins against the White Team’s four.

³⁴ Despite the overall consensus on formal attire, some outfits were conspicuously eccentric. Singer Frankie Sakai’s astronaut’s suit at the 9th *Kōbaku* (1958), for example, was both memorable and controversial. During his performance, moreover, he read aloud a letter (purportedly originating from outer space) that was written on toilet paper. Unfortunately, the paper came in contact with a hot stage light and unexpectedly caught fire, shocking the audience and causing great distress for *Kōbaku* staff (Takahashi 2000:163).

³⁵ “*Hotaru no hikari*” (“Light of the Fireflies”) is commonly sung on New Year’s Eve and well-known by all generations of Japanese people. It is unclear when it was first performed in *Kōbaku*, but this photograph indicates it may have been as early as 1958.

³⁶ One ‘non-musical’ judge at the 6th *Kōbaku* (1955) was, for example, a *sumō* wrestler (Takahashi 2000:166).

³⁷ In past *Kōbaku*, NHK employees from both the radio and television divisions were occasionally included in the panel, but from the 8th *Kōbaku* (1957), only one person was selected.

The 11th–15th *Kōbaku* (1960–1964)

After establishing itself as Japan's leading song contest, *Kōbaku* entered a new era of change in the 1960s, with colour television adding vibrancy and dimension and ultimately propelling *Kōbaku* to even greater heights of popularity. These were *Kōbaku*'s glory years. Table 1.3 presents key *Kōbaku* information from this period which is contextualised and discussed in following sections.

Table 1.3 Summary Data: the 11th–15th *Kōbaku* (1960–1964)

<i>Edition</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Timeslot</i> (<i>pm</i>)	<i>Duration</i> (<i>H:M</i>)	<i>Venue</i>	<i>Ratings</i> ^a (%)	<i>SP</i> ^b <i>per</i> <i>Team</i>	<i>Winning</i> <i>Team</i>
11 th	1960	9:00–11:40	2:40	Japan Theatre	—	27	White
12 th	1961	9:00–11:40	2:40	Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre	—	25	White
13 th	1962	9:05–11:45	2:40	Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre	80.4	25	White
14 th	1963	9:05–11:45	2:40	Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre	81.4	25	Red
15 th	1964	9:05–11:45	2:40	Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre	72.0	25	White

Source: Adapted from Takahashi 2000:134–143.

^a Maximum ratings achieved over the course of the programme from the Kantō region. See Appendix A for *Kōbaku* audience ratings for other regions.

^b Song performers.

Time and Venue

For the first time in the *Kōbaku*'s short history, the programme's duration and timeslot remained relatively stable.³⁸ Moreover, after changing venue several times, *Kōbaku* returned to the Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre in 1961 and remained there for 12 consecutive concerts. It appeared that *Kōbaku* had finally found a home.

Ratings

When the media organisation Video Research introduced methods for calculating television audience ratings in 1962, it became possible to confirm the extent of *Kōbaku*'s popularity by independent means. Indeed, an astonishing 80.4 percent of Kantō audiences watched the 13th *Kōbaku* (1962) and 81.4 percent the following year—*Kōbaku* had reached its zenith of popularity.³⁹ In 1964, however, ratings unexpectedly fell to 72 percent and remained in the 70 percent range for several years. Nevertheless, these were still extraordinary figures. *Kōbaku*'s high ratings proved that it “was not just

³⁸ In all likelihood, the 13th, 14th and 15th *Kōbaku* (1962, 1963 and 1964) started later (see again Table 1.3) so to accommodate a five-minute news bulletin at 9:00pm.

³⁹ The 14th *Kōbaku* (1963) was Japan's most watched program that year and also achieved the “highest ratings of all time” for any program in Japan in the forty years between 1962 (when television audience ratings were first measured in Japan) and 2001 (NHK *Broadcasting* 2002:162–163).

an annual NHK programme, but the biggest event in the entire music industry—and a national event” (50 Years of NHK Television’ Publishing Committee 2003:Internet).

Song Performers and Genres

Japan’s musical scene during the late 1950s and early 1960s was rapidly changing. After the rockabilly craze of the 1950s, Japanese-language cover songs of Western hits became extremely popular.⁴⁰ Japanese songwriters also began producing original songs influenced by Western pop. *Kōbaku*, known for bringing together the most popular singers and songs of the day, reflected these new musical trends. The 12th *Kōbaku* (1961), for example, featured “one of the year’s biggest hits” in Japan (Schilling 1997:216). The song, titled “*Ue o muite arukō*” (“I Look Up When I Walk”) and performed by Sakamoto Kyū, was released in December that year—the month of *Kōbaku*’s broadcast and as such, *Kōbaku* staff acted quickly to include Sakamoto and his song in the contest.⁴¹

During the early 1960s, many prominent pre-war stars had retired and the *Kōbaku* experienced a generational shift. Many new performers began to come on the show, including *enka* singer Kitajima Saburō who made his *Kōbaku* debut at the 14th *Kōbaku* (1963) and immediately became a firm fixture in the programme.⁴² An invitation to perform on *Kōbaku* was, nevertheless, difficult to acquire. *Kōbaku*’s prestige had risen

⁴⁰ Roy Shuker’s definition of cover versions (cover songs) is adopted in this study; they are “performances/recordings by musicians not responsible for the original recording” (1998:74–75). I also take into account the re-working and replacement of lyrics from the ‘original’ song into the new cover version. In the context of *Kōbaku*, therefore, cover versions are distinct from (nearly identical) tribute songs, as later discussed.

⁴¹ This was not Sakamoto’s first hit song. He came to prominence in the 1950s as a member of a country and Western band and was later known as a rockabilly performer. His first popular single in Japan was a Japanese-language cover song of Brian Hyland’s “Itsy Bitsy Teeny Weeny Yellow Polka Dot Bikini” in 1960 (Schilling 1997:216). During 1962, however, Sakamoto became the only Japanese singer to accomplish international commercial success when “*Ue o muite arukō*” was released in the U.S.A under the title “*Sukiyaki*”. The song was also released in Europe, this time translated into “local languages” for all countries except the Netherlands and England, where it was called “Unforgettable *geisha*” and “*Sukiyaki*”, respectively (Schilling 1997:215–216). Sakamoto Kyū, known affectionately in Japan as “*Kyū-chan*”, died tragically in an aeroplane crash in 1985 (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:146).

⁴² Kitajima Saburō was later member of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community. He appeared in *Kōbaku* for 23 consecutive years following his 1963 debut and, after a career hiatus in 1986, he continued to sing in the program each year from the 38th *Kōbaku* (1987).

such that singers of all ages desperately vied for a place in the contest.⁴³ In the past, it had seemed coincidental that the most accomplished singers performed later in the contest. By the 12th *Kōbaku* (1961), however, the song performer hierarchy was clearly defined: newcomers would perform at the start of the programme and the veterans would perform at the end. Each team's drawcard performer would perform last of all, to bring the evening to a climax. These 'final positions' became known as '*tori*' and from that year onward were highly coveted by *Kōbaku* singers (Takahashi 2000:12).⁴⁴ While singing *Kōbaku* was still a career-defining achievement, it was now also important where one was placed within the programme order.

Other Participants

The number of participants in *Kōbaku* gradually increased. Many dancers, for example, not only performed during song performances, but also in their own segments.⁴⁵ These segments interrupted the constant alternation of song performances, invigorated the programme and created a 'variety show' atmosphere. Other segments featured people who were in the public eye that year. At the 15th *Kōbaku* (1964), for example, Sakai Yoshinori, the final torchbearer for the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games, was included in *Kōbaku*'s ceremonial proceedings (Takahashi 2000:134).⁴⁶ *Kōbaku* was not simply a song contest but a cultural review of the nation's year.

⁴³ In order to regulate demand, NHK formed a *Kōbaku* selection committee which, in turn, shaped the program's musical direction. According to Kawaguchi Mikio, manager of the 1st–13th *Kōbaku* (1951–1962), "setting up the committee, which was originally formed to make the selection process fairer, eventually added to the program's prestige" (Suzuki 1999:3). Even one *Kōbaku* performance would greatly enhance a singer's career prospects. It "guaranteed that they would be paid more and sell more records" and, as such, "record companies competed to have their artists selected" (NHK 2002:163). Moreover, "appearing on the program would assure a performer a wide audience...[and] more appearance money for performing on other television shows" (Suzuki 1999:3).

⁴⁴ Misora Hibari had clearly established a reputation for successively holding the Red Team's *tori* position—except for her inaugural performance at the 5th *Kōbaku* (1954) where she appeared in the third-to-last place, Misora was the final singer for three consecutive years. This was not especially unusual; Fujiyama Ichirō was the White Team's *tori* singer from the 1st–3rd *Kōbaku* (1951–Jan. 1953). At the 14th *Kōbaku* (1963), however, Misora began a new record, consistently holding the *tori* position for the next 10 years.

⁴⁵ The 12th *Kōbaku* (1961), for example, included 27 female dancers wearing top hats who performed the 'can-can' across the *Kōbaku* stage in a segment unrelated to the song performances (see photograph Takahashi 2000:140). Other female dancers wearing modified tutus performed during a song performance (see photograph Takahashi 2000:140). This trend continued the following year when approximately 20 young men wearing striped T-shirts and black trousers danced 'the twist' during a song performance (see photograph Takahashi 2000:139).

⁴⁶ Yoshinori Sakai was selected as an Olympic torchbearer because he was a national symbol of hope and survival—he was born in Hiroshima on the day the city was destroyed by the atomic bomb.

Staging and Technology

To comply with the initial tests for colour television broadcasting, greater consideration was paid to *Kōhaku*'s stage design and costumes.⁴⁷ Instead of one general-purpose set for every performance, sets were now purpose-built for individuals.⁴⁸ By the 15th *Kōhaku* (1964)—the first to be broadcast in colour—the sets, staging and costumes were exceptionally colourful and dynamic (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:146). This landmark *Kōhaku* also featured several live crossovers to various parts of Japan and images of regional food and activities for the approaching New Year were displayed on a large projection screen inside the venue. *Kōhaku*'s technologically advanced staging brought the nation together to celebrate at year-end.

Judging and Voting System

The 11th–13th *Kōhaku* (1960–1962) used considerably less in-house audience judges.⁴⁹ Numbers increased at the 14th *Kōhaku* (1963), however, when 16 representatives from various Japanese regions were also included.⁵⁰ Although they were not officially part of the judging panel, these representatives provided a voice for regional Japanese people—not just Tokyoites—and symbolised the nation as a whole. *Kōhaku* was always a programme 'for the people' and now, more than ever before, the contest's outcome was decided by the people.

Historical Tally of Victories

White was the dominant team during the early 1960s, claiming three consecutive victories and dramatically shifting the balance in the historical tally of victories—it was

⁴⁷ At the 11th *Kōhaku* (1960) for example, the rear stage wall was ornately decorated with geometric shapes and a new staircase onstage clearly encouraged grand entrances from singers (see photographs Takahashi 2000:142, 143). Singers and musicians continued to occupy their usual positions: the orchestra remained in the pit, other musicians were divided into separate, tiered groups onstage and the song performers sang at the front of the stage into their team's designated microphone (see photographs Takahashi 2000:140, 141).

⁴⁸ At the 13th *Kōhaku* (1962), for example, a stylised replica of the Eiffel Tower and a city-skyline backdrop were used in individual song performances (see photographs Takahashi 2000:138,139).

⁴⁹ Of the 11 judges at the 11th *Kōhaku* (1960), seven were celebrities, three were audience members and one was an NHK representative. At the following *Kōhaku*, 11 judges were retained but audience judges were reduced to two and one celebrity was also included. This selection occurred again at the 13th *Kōhaku* (1962). Despite *Kōhaku*'s tremendous ratings that year, indicating it was deeply loved, the general public had little influence over the contest's outcome.

⁵⁰ In-house audience members did not take part in the adjudication. It is not known if the regional representatives were present at the *Kōhaku* venue or remained in their respective Japanese region, casting their votes via telephone.

now in the lead. The Red Team, however, triumphed at the 14th *Kōbaku* (1963) and the two teams were level with seven wins each. Nevertheless, the White Team regained the lead the following year. Although it was still a friendly song battle, *Kōbaku* was becoming increasingly competitive.

The 16th–20th *Kōbaku* (1965–1969)

Kōbaku struggled to represent all genres in Japan's ever-expanding popular music landscape, especially the controversial youth-orientated genres of the late 1960s. Would conservative NHK reevaluate its rigid policies to keep *Kōbaku* in touch with modern musical trends? *Kōbaku* data from this period is outlined in Table 1.4 and expanded upon in subsequent sections.

Table 1.4 Summary Data: the 16th–20th *Kōbaku* (1965–1969)

<i>Edition</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Timeslot</i> (<i>pm</i>)	<i>Duration</i> (<i>H:M</i>)	<i>Venue</i>	<i>Ratings</i> ^a (%)	<i>SP</i> ^b <i>per</i> <i>Team</i>	<i>Winning</i> <i>Team</i>
16 th	1965	9:05–11:45	2:40	Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre	78.1	25	White
17 th	1966	9:05–11:45	2:40	Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre	74.0	25	Red
18 th	1967	9:00–11:45	2:45	Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre	76.7	23	Red
19 th	1968	9:00–11:45	2:45	Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre	76.9	23	White
20 th	1969	9:00–11:45	2:45	Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre	69.7	23	Red

Source: Adapted from Takahashi 2000:124–133.

^a Maximum ratings achieved over the course of the programme from the Kantō region. See Appendix A for *Kōbaku* audience ratings for other regions.

^b Song performers.

Time and Venue

Kōbaku continued to be broadcast from the Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre in a timeslot that remained relatively constant throughout this period.

Ratings

In general, ratings were exceptional and fluctuated around the mid to high 70 percent range. The milestone 20th *Kōbaku* (1969), however, rated comparatively poorly, achieving the lowest number of viewers since the ratings system was introduced (for reasons discussed below).

Song Performers and Genres

The nation's "first homegrown commercial pop music directed at teenagers" emerged during the 1960s (Brasor and Tsubuku 1997:58).⁵¹ One musical style was *ereki* (electric guitar music) which was inspired by the instrumental sounds of American bands such as The Ventures and The Astronauts and emerged soon after these acts toured Japan in 1965. Another style was named 'Group Sounds' after the U.K. groups that created the 'Liverpool sound'. The Beatles were particularly influential and the band's tour of Japan in 1966 thrust the nation into Beatlemania, with teenagers replicating the music, fashion and style of the group.

NHK staff were wary of the new teenage-oriented genres: only one Group Sounds band—Jakkī to Burū Komettsu (Jackey Yoshikawa and his Blue Comets)—was selected to perform in the 17th *Kōbaku* (1966) while other Group Sounds bands merely appeared as 'celebrity guests' (Takahashi 2000:130).⁵² The following year, the most prominent of all Group Sounds bands—the Tigers—was excluded on the basis that "the band members' long hair was not favourable" with the broadcaster (Suzuki 1999:3).⁵³ *Ereki* stars, on the other hand, were included that year but were monitored closely. Kayama Yūzō, for example, was invited on the condition he perform a sentimental love ballad which bore little resemblance to the vibrant ferocity of his electric guitar songs.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Prior to the 1960s, Japanese popular music had been targeted solely toward adults. Many songs had themes "about love and [were], therefore, considered inappropriate for children" (Brasor and Tsubuku 1997:58).

⁵² In all likelihood, Jacky Yoshikawa and his Blue Comets was invited because its hit song "wasn't much different stylistically from most *kayōkyōku* at the time" (Brasor and Tsubuku 1997:58). Moreover, the band members had short hair and a clean-cut image which would have pleased conservative NHK (Schilling 1997:204). Following this performance, the song's popularity and status rose such that

every record company demanded that their Group Sounds artists come up with something similar, since the *Kōbaku* imprimatur seemed to indicate that that was the kind of song the Japanese public liked. (Brasor and Tsubuku 1997:58)

⁵³ Presumably, NHK's refusal to allow the Tigers to perform at the 18th *Kōbaku* (1967) was also influenced by the authorities' growing concerns over the social effects of the Group Sounds movement, prompted by "reports of injuries at a November 1967 Tigers concert, as well as news stories of kids running away from home and counterfeiting concert tickets to be near their favourite bands" (Schilling 1997:204).

⁵⁴ Kayama Yūzō was later a member of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community and he also performed this song, titled "*Kimi to itsumademo*" ("You, Forevermore"), in the 1999 contest.

By 1968, Group Sounds had reached new heights of popularity and was considered by the government to be a ‘dangerous’ movement.⁵⁵ As such, NHK continued to limit the kinds of Group Sounds bands in *Kōbaku*. *Enka* singers, by contrast, were considered ‘safe’ and NHK invited several newcomers to the 19th *Kōbaku* (1968) including Mikawa Ken’ichi and Mori Shin’ichi.⁵⁶ Overall, however, the tone of the programme had changed and *Kōbaku* no longer accurately reflected current musical trends (Takahashi 2000:126).

The landmark 20th *Kōbaku* (1969) was an opportunity to contemplate the contest’s history and celebrate new musical talent. Veteran singers from past *Kōbaku* performed their hit songs and new acts such as Uchiyamada Hiroshi *to kūru faibu* (Uchiyamada Hiroshi and Cool Five) debuted.⁵⁷ To conclude the programme, Misora Hibari once again occupied the *tori* position, as she had done each year since 1965 (Takahashi 2000:124).

Other Participants

A new position titled General Chairman (*sōgō shikai*) was created for the 19th *Kōbaku* (1968), perhaps to revitalise the *Kōbaku* format. The General Chairman was male and served as an impartial anchor, overseeing the contest proceedings and relieving the Team MC from various duties. The role was reprised at the 20th *Kōbaku* (1969) but unexpectedly abandoned the following year. Nevertheless, the General Chairman position was revived several years later (as discussed in this chapter).

⁵⁵ The government made several attempts to curb the movement. Bands were not permitted to perform at public auditoriums (Brasor and Tsubuku 1997:58). Moreover, students caught attending Group Sounds concerts were suspended or expelled from school and authorities created a list of “forbidden” and/or “dangerous” Group Sounds bands which was published in school handbooks to warn students (Schilling 1997:204).

⁵⁶ Mori Shin’ichi became an established member of the White Team, continuing to sing in every *Kōbaku* following his debut. Mori, like Mikawa Ken’ichi, was later a member of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community. Mikawa became a *Kōbaku* regular from his 1968 debut and performed in six consecutive *Kōbaku* thereafter. He wore a simple tuxedo for his *Kōbaku* debut but in later performances he wore spectacular costumes that became a highlight of the contest.

⁵⁷ Following this debut, Uchiyamada Hiroshi *to kūru faibu* (Uchiyamada Hiroshi and Cool Five) performed intermittently in *Kōbaku* until 1982. One of its singers, Maekawa Kiyoshi, embarked on a solo career in 1987 and was later a member of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community.

Staging and Technology

Compared with other venues, the Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre stage was spacious and gave *Kōbaku* acts more room to dance and move while performing.⁵⁸ Decorations were minimal but stage props enlivened the stage area.⁵⁹ In addition to the orchestra (seated in the pit), each team had its own band onstage. This intensified the team rivalry: the stage right band only accompanied the Red Team and the stage left band only accompanied the White Team (see photograph Takahashi 2000:129).

The equal rights and feminist movements gained momentum in Japan during the 1960s and *Kōbaku* reflected these social changes in its staging.⁶⁰ Most significantly, from the 19th *Kōbaku* (1968), NHK permitted male performers entry into the previously ‘women only’ Red Team and female performers in the ‘male only’ White Team (Takahashi 2000:126). This allowed mixed-sex groups and bands such as Pinkī to kirāzu (Pinky and the Killers), entry into *Kōbaku*.⁶¹ However, in order to retain the general ‘battle of the sexes’ principle, male soloists were still prohibited from the Red Team and female soloists were prohibited from the White Team.

Judging and Voting System

Each year during this period, eight celebrities and one NHK representative were present on the *Kōbaku* judging panel. Regional representatives also participated, demonstrating NHK’s desire for input from the greater Japanese public.⁶²

A new ritual was established at the 16th *Kōbaku* (1965) which invigorated the Judging and Voting System and made the announcement of the winning team especially suspenseful. After votes were tallied, they were converted into balls and

⁵⁸ Indeed, the middle section of the stage extended over the orchestra pit and joined an additional walkway that spanned the width of the stage, thus bringing performers closer to the audience (see photographs Takahashi 2000:126, 127, 129 and 131).

⁵⁹ For example, various lights were used to form the program name ‘*Kōbaku*’ at the 17th *Kōbaku* (1966) and two large pinwheel signs identified team areas on stage at the 19th *Kōbaku* (1968) (see photographs Takahashi 2000:130 and 127).

⁶⁰ 1968, in particular, was the year of the *pantaron kakumei* (lit. ‘pantaloon revolution’) and women expressed their independence by wearing bell-bottom trousers or pants, rather than dresses or skirts (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:41). The trend was also reflected in that that year’s *Kōbaku* where, for the first time, half of the Red Team wore pants (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:41).

⁶¹ A mixed-sex ensemble could feasibly join either team. Generally, however, the sex of the lead singer would be the deciding factor.

⁶² There were 16 representatives for both the 16th, 17th and 18th *Kōbaku* (1965, 1966 and 1967), 10 for the 19th *Kōbaku* (1968) and eight for the 20th *Kōbaku* (1969).

placed in one of two ‘team compartments’ inside a metal chest. To ensure the process was fair and regulated, the chest was held by a uniformed security guard (see photograph Takahashi 2000:132 and Plate 2). The Red and White MCs each took one ball from their team’s compartment (without observing the total number) and threw them toward the theatre audience. Eventually, the Red Team was exposed as having the least balls and the White Team was subsequently declared the winner (Takahashi 2000:132). Variations of this exciting method continued to be used each year, as described in later subsections.

Historical Tally of Victories

The White Team’s success at the 16th *Kōhaku* (1965) brought its accumulated victories to nine. Nevertheless, the Red Team prevailed at the 17th and 18th *Kōhaku* (1966 and 1967) and ultimately levelled the scores on the historical tally but the following year, the White Team took the lead.⁶³ The stakes rose in 1969: which team would be victorious at the milestone 20th *Kōhaku*? That year, the Red Team triumphed over White and the scores were subsequently tied as *Kōhaku* entered the new decade.

The 21st–25th *Kōhaku* (1970–1974)

During this period, the ever-popular *Kōhaku* reflected many of Japan’s musical trends but was marred by scandal. Most significantly, the broadcast audience began to participate in the voting. Indeed, if *Kōhaku* was truly a programme for the nation it should be judged by the nation. Table 1.5 presents a summary of data pertaining to this five-year period.

Table 1.5 Summary Data: the 21st–25th *Kōhaku* (1970–1974)

<i>Edition</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Timeslot</i> (<i>pm</i>)	<i>Duration</i> (<i>H:M</i>)	<i>Venue</i>	<i>Ratings</i> ^a (%)	<i>SP</i> ^b <i>per</i> <i>Team</i>	<i>Winning</i> <i>Team</i>
21 st	1970	9:00–11:45	2:45	Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre	77.0	24	Red
22 nd	1971	9:00–11:45	2:45	Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre	78.1	25	White
23 rd	1972	9:00–11:45	2:45	Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre	80.6	23	Red
24 th	1973	9:00–11:45	2:45	NHK Hall	75.8	23	Red
25 th	1974	9:00–11:45	2:45	NHK Hall	74.8	25	Red

Source: Adapted from Takahashi 2000:104–113.

^a Maximum ratings achieved over the course of the programme from the Kantō region. See Appendix A for *Kōhaku* audience ratings for other regions.

^b Song performers.

⁶³ This was to be the last time the White Team would be ahead of the Red Team in the historical tally of victories for more than three decades.

Time and Venue

Following 12 years at the Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre, *Kōbaku* relocated to the newly built NHK Hall in 1973.⁶⁴ The Hall was modern, technologically advanced and due to its seating capacity of 3500 audience members, it was especially spacious. Most importantly, it was conveniently located within the grounds of the NHK Broadcasting Centre in Shibuya, Tokyo (NHK 2002:163). After decades of venue changes—both temporary and long-term—*Kōbaku* had found a new, permanent home that would take it into the 21st century.

Ratings

Kōbaku achieved some of its highest consecutive ratings during this period, climaxing at an outstanding 80.6 percent for the 23rd *Kōbaku* (1972). This was the first time since 1963 that *Kōbaku* had entered the 80 percent range (for Kantō audiences) and it reaffirmed the contest's popularity.⁶⁵ In 1973, however, *Kōbaku*'s ratings dropped nearly 5 percent and even fewer viewers tuned in the following year.⁶⁶ These were still exceptional ratings but it was clear that *Kōbaku* needed to make some modifications or NHK would not be fulfilling its duty as public broadcaster.

Song Performers and Genres

Japan's musical scene was once again evolving.⁶⁷ Many prominent Group Sounds acts disbanded in the early 1970s causing the Group Sounds movement to come to an end. In the meantime, underground and college folk singers had shifted into the music mainstream, inciting a national *fōku būmu* (folk music boom) of intensely heartfelt and

⁶⁴ NHK built the new NHK Hall to replace a smaller, older venue (also named NHK Hall) which was located in the Shinbashi-Uchisaiwai-chō district of Tokyo. Built in 1955 and with a seating capacity of 630 people, the old NHK Hall was one of the first post-war venues for classical music recitals and NHK radio concert recordings (NHK and Hōsō Gijutsu Kenkyūjo n.d.:Internet).

⁶⁵ The 23rd *Kōbaku* (1972) also achieved extremely high ratings in other regions. See Appendix A.

⁶⁶ It is likely that the sudden drop in ratings was in response to Misora Hibari's surprise exclusion that year, as described in later subsections.

⁶⁷ This was prompted by unprecedented cultural and social change in Japan. The strong national trend towards urbanisation continued and the majority of Japanese people relocated to cities in search of better-paying jobs. The family unit was deeply affected: suddenly, two or three generational families living together in the country became singular, nuclear households. Television and music became key sources of entertainment for city residents and, as such, the recording industry began to thrive, generating an influx of new musical artists, many of whom appeared in *Kōbaku*.

thought-provoking songs.⁶⁸ Simultaneously, innocent-looking teenage idols such as Yamaguchi Momoe, Mori Masako, and Sakurada Junko also rose to enormous heights of popularity with their clean-cut image and upbeat pop ('50 Years of NHK Television' Publishing Committee 2003:Internet).⁶⁹

Kōbaku's format was also undergoing change during this period. For the first time since the 1950s, the number of song performers varied slightly with each year. Most significantly, *Kōbaku* took its first steps toward internationalisation in 1970 by including its first *gaijin* (a person who is not Japanese) song performer.⁷⁰ *Kōbaku* also featured more pop artists than before and fewer folk acts, despite the *fōku būmu*.⁷¹ The contest also included performers than spanned several musical genres, such as jazz/blues/soul singer Wada Akiko who debuted at the 21st *Kōbaku* (1970).⁷²

Several long-serving performers were 'dropped' from *Kōbaku's* invitee list to make way for a new generation of singers. Most surprisingly, Misora Hibari was excluded from the 24th *Kōbaku* (1973), despite 16 years of consecutive *Kōbaku* performances. Misora's omission was, however, rumoured to be due to her brother's association with *yakuza* (gangsters) which reflected badly upon the 'queen of *enka*' and rendered her 'unsuitable' for *Kōbaku*.⁷³ Even during the 1970s—an era of change—NHK was vehemently upholding *Kōbaku's* image of respectability. In any case, Misora did not forgive NHK and shunned the broadcaster for years after the "public slap in the face" (Schilling 1997:133).

⁶⁸ The folk music fad was instigated by the unlikely success of Inoue Yosui's 1972 song "*Kasa ga nai*" ("I Don't Have an Umbrella") (Schilling 1997:310).

⁶⁹ Many of *Kōbaku's* youngest singers performed during the 1970s. Mori Masako was aged only 15 at the time of her performance in 24th *Kōbaku* (1973) and had to perform early in the contest so to comply with Japanese law that restricted children aged 15 and younger from working after 10:00pm (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:146).

⁷⁰ Previously, *Kōbaku* only included Japanese acts but the 21st *Kōbaku* (1970) opened the door for the influx of foreign singers in *Kōbaku* in later decades (Takahashi 2000:112). The foreigner was Italian-born singer Rosanna who performed as a duo with Japanese singer Hide for the White Team.

⁷¹ It is likely that folk singers rejected NHK's invitations in accordance with their general anti-television stance (Schilling 2000:310). An appearance in *Kōbaku* alongside 'frivolous' pop idols lay would conflict with their image as 'serious' musicians. It is also likely that folk singers were unwilling to shorten their songs to a length acceptable for television.

⁷² Wada Akiko's unique deep voice, solid physique and unusually tall stature set her apart from other singers. Following her debut *Kōbaku* performance, Wada appeared in nine consecutive *Kōbaku* from 1970–1978. After a five-year hiatus, she re-appeared in 37th *Kōbaku* (1986) and has sung every subsequent year. Around the same time as her *Kōbaku* comeback, she began occupying the role of Red MC for the 38th, 39th and 48th *Kōbaku* (1987, 1988 and 1997). She was later a member of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community.

⁷³ In 2002, however, NHK authors admitted that this was indeed the reason, noting that "public facilities declined to ask her to perform" (NHK 2002:164) because of her brother's arrest.

In acknowledgment of *Kōbaku*'s history amid changing times, the 24th *Kōbaku* (1973) looked back on 'the early years'. Watanabe Hamako and Fujiyama Ichirō appeared as representatives of the 'first generation' *Kōbaku* artists and commented on how far *Kōbaku* had progressed (Takahashi 2000:106).⁷⁴ Indeed, the presence of several newcomers that year such as *enka* soloist Yashiro Aki and pop singer Gō Hiromi, demonstrated *Kōbaku*'s new musical direction (Takahashi 2000:106).⁷⁵ *Kōbaku* maintained its prestigious reputation as Japan's best music live programme, attracting most of Japan's stars.⁷⁶

Other Participants

Kōbaku was depicted as a friendly song contest with good-natured rivalry between the teams. To encourage light-hearted competition, new leaders were appointed to guide celebrity guests and formalise the haphazard cheering at the 23rd *Kōbaku* (1972) (Takahashi 2000:108). There were also changes made to the selection process for determining the Team MCs. In past *Kōbaku*, the role of MC had been distinct from that of 'song performer' yet at the 21st *Kōbaku* (1970) these boundaries were blurred when Misora Hibari was both Red MC and the Red Team's *tori* singer (Takahashi 2000:112). As both song performer, multiple *tori* singer and Team MC, Misora was undeniably an integral part of *Kōbaku* and her omission from the 24th *Kōbaku* (1973) was therefore shocking.

⁷⁴ These guests were in addition to the official number of song performers that year. Watanabe had performed in the majority of the *Kōbaku* during the 1950s and also at the 15th *Kōbaku* (1964). During the 1950s, she performed at the 1st, 2nd, 4th and 5th (1951, 1952, 1953 and 1954) and consecutively from the 7th–9th *Kōbaku* (1956–1958). She also held the prized Red Team *tori* (last place) position at the 5th *Kōbaku* (1954). Fujiyama, similarly, was a respected *Kōbaku* song performer. He performed consecutively from the 1st–8th *Kōbaku* (1951–1957). In addition, he had held the White Team *tori* position at the 6th *Kōbaku* (1955).

⁷⁵ Yashiro Aki and Gō Hiromi continued to perform year after year in the song contest. Yashiro, for example, sang in 15 consecutive *Kōbaku* and Gō performed in 13 programs. Both singers were later members of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community.

⁷⁶ Singers still balanced their New Year's Eve commitments with other television networks and hurried to *Kōbaku* to perform. As always, there were problems resulting from such hectic schedules. At the 25th *Kōbaku* (1974), for example, the White Team's *tori* singer Mori Shin'ichi was delayed by the 'Nihon rekōdo taishō' ('Japan Record Awards') and in his rush to NHK Hall he had left his trouser fly unzipped (presumably after a costume change). Between stanzas of his song performance, however, fellow White Team song performers gathered onstage, called attention to his fly and encircled him so that he could fix the embarrassing problem.

Staging and Technology

Technological advancements in broadcasting greatly impacted *Kōbaku* and new camera techniques provided *Kōbaku* with a fresh and modern ‘look’.⁷⁷ Moreover, wireless microphones were introduced at the 22nd *Kōbaku* (1971) and gave song performers freedom of movement on stage (see photographs Takahashi 2000:111).⁷⁸ The move to NHK Hall the following year, however, enabled even greater opportunities for staging (see Plate 3). Here, the computer-operated set system allowed multiple changes of backdrops within the programme, thus producing highly individualised song performances. Furthermore, Red Team singers “vied with each other to wear the most eye-catching costumes, making [*Kōbaku*] a fancier and more costly undertaking than ever” (NHK [*Broadcasting*]:163).⁷⁹

Judging and Voting System

A landmark change to the judging and voting system during the early 1970s allowed selected in-house audience members to vote in addition to the judging panel and regional voters.⁸⁰ The general public also played a greater role in determining the contest’s outcome. This decidedly complex voting system was simplified when *Kōbaku* moved to NHK Hall in 1973. Most notably, the regional voting scheme was abandoned and 40 in-house audience members were instead selected to vote.

Historical Tally of Victories

The Red Team won the first *Kōbaku* of the 1970s and reclaimed the lead in the historical tally. However, the White Team’s success at the 22nd *Kōbaku* (1971) caused the scores to tie. Nevertheless, Red’s three consecutive victories—its first since the late

⁷⁷ One ‘still’ from the television broadcast of the 23rd *Kōbaku* (1972), for example, is a split-screen image whereby a ‘close up’ of a female singer’s face stands alongside a ‘full-body’ shot (Takahashi 2000:108).

⁷⁸ The microphones also eliminated the need for stands, thus ending the *Kōbaku* tradition of tying a coloured ribbon (red for the Red Team, white for the White Team) around a microphone stand. A new tradition was initiated in its place: wireless microphones would now have red or white coloured foam wind-covers.

⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the image presented onstage was of team unity. One photograph from the 25th *Kōbaku* (1974), for example, shows members of the Red Team smiling and joyfully clapping as they gather around a fellow team member during her song performance (see photograph Takahashi 2000:104).

⁸⁰ While 41 regional spokespersons (one from each Japanese prefecture) voted at the 21st *Kōbaku* (1970), the following year, 31 representatives and 40 members of the in-house audience voted (Takahashi 2000:110,112). That year, audience voters were selected (seemingly at random) from the eight main areas of the Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre and were individually introduced to camera. For reasons unknown—and in the face of decades of tradition—an NHK judge was not present at this *Kōbaku*.

1950s—brought the score to 14 for Red while White still remained at 11.⁸¹ The Red Team's winning streak was not short-lived. Now that the Red held the lead in the historical tally, it would remain in front for nearly three decades.

The 26th–30th *Kōbaku* (1975–1979)

This period was characterised by the rise of pop idols, glamorous costumes and increased team camaraderie. As *Kōbaku* approached its 30th anniversary, it was also a time to reflect on its historical development and forge a new path for the future. *Kōbaku* data for this period is presented in Table 1.6 and discussed in detail below.

Table 1.6 Summary Data: the 26th–30th *Kōbaku* (1975–1979)

<i>Edition</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Timeslot</i> (<i>pm</i>)	<i>Duration</i> (<i>H:M</i>)	<i>Venue</i>	<i>Ratings</i> ^a (%)	<i>SP</i> ^b <i>per</i> <i>Team</i>	<i>Winning</i> <i>Team</i>
26 th	1975	9:00–11:45	2:45	NHK Hall	72.0	24	White
27 th	1976	9:00–11:45	2:45	NHK Hall	74.6	24	Red
28 th	1977	9:00–11:45	2:45	NHK Hall	77.0	24	White
29 th	1978	9:00–11:45	2:45	NHK Hall	72.2	24	White
30 th	1979	9:00–11:45	2:45	NHK Hall	77.0	23	Red

Source: Adapted from Takahashi 2000:94–103.

^a Maximum ratings achieved over the course of the programme from the Kantō region. See Appendix A for *Kōbaku* audience ratings for other regions.

^b Song performers.

Time and Venue

Kōbaku's timeslot, duration and venue remained unchanged throughout this period.

Ratings

The programme's ratings remained in the 70 percent range but fluctuated from year to year.

Song Performers and Genres

In the mid 1970s, NHK began hosting a press conference prior to *Kōbaku*'s broadcast where staff revealed the coveted list of song performers and Team MCs to the public—a tradition which continues today. Regular *Kōbaku* singers would often be present at

⁸¹ The Red Team's three consecutive victories indicated a sustained interest in women's music throughout Japan at a time of women's liberation.

the conferences but newcomers were the focus.⁸² New singers were not only integral to *Kōbaku*'s survival, but also shaped the direction of the programme. For example, the *enka* singer Hosokawa Takashi became a permanent fixture on the programme and sang every year following his *Kōbaku* debut at the 26th *Kōbaku* (1975).⁸³ To make way for newcomers, long-term *Kōbaku* singers were sometimes replaced. Mikawa Ken'ichi who had performed successively from the 19th *Kōbaku* (1968) to the 25th *Kōbaku* (1974) was, for example, dropped from the invitee list in 1975 but later returned in a spectacular comeback and eventually became one of *Kōbaku*'s most popular performers (see later sections).

In order to appeal to a wide audience demographic, the 27th *Kōbaku* (1976) featured 'older generation' *Kōbaku* performers in addition to young singers.⁸⁴ Several young acts debuted the following year, including the teenage *enka* singer Ishikawa Sayuri and, most memorably, the disco-dancing duo Pink Lady.⁸⁵ By the 29th *Kōbaku* (1978), however, New Music and pop was clearly favoured 'over fashioned' *enka* ballads. This shift was fully realised when young pop idols Yamaguchi Momoe and Sawada Kenji occupied the coveted *tori* (final) positions for their respective teams that year ('50 Years of NHK Television' Publishing Committee 2003:Internet).⁸⁶

The 30th anniversary *Kōbaku* (1979) featured songs representative of that year and past *Kōbaku* hits. Newcomers such as the pop band Godaigo and folk singer Sada Masashi gave the programme musical variety and pop/disco favourite Saijō Hideki

⁸² The first documentation of a press conference is a 1976 photograph depicting several of the newcomers and the MCs together under a makeshift banner for the 27th *Kōbaku* (1976) (see photograph Takahashi 2000:100). Other photographs from 1978 and 1979 show the newcomers with the Team MCs (see photographs Takahashi 2000:99, 94).

⁸³ Hosokawa Takashi was later a member of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community.

⁸⁴ 'Older generation' *Kōbaku* singers at the 27th *Kōbaku* (1976) included Shimakura Chiyoko and Frank Nagai, both of whom commemorated 20th consecutive *Kōbaku* appearances over the years. Remarkably, the average age of White Team singers that year was 33, while the Red Team's average age was 25.

⁸⁵ Ishikawa Sayuri became a regular *Kōbaku* performer in the 1980s and was later a member of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community. Pink Lady, however, declined NHK's invitation to perform the year after their *Kōbaku* debut. As part of a controversial publicity stunt to improve record sales, the duo instead held a charity concert which was broadcast throughout Japan via a different network in the same timeslot as *Kōbaku*. Pink Lady's ratings were, however, very poor and the duo's popularity declined. For further details, see Sharnoff (1979). Pink Lady did, nevertheless, return to *Kōbaku* in the late 1980s for a reunion performance, as discussed later in this chapter.

⁸⁶ At merely 19 years of age, Yamaguchi Momoe became the youngest ever singer to perform in the *tori* position for the Red Team (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:146). Moreover, her *tori* song "Playback Part 2" was allegedly 'punk' (*tsuppari*) sounding and, thus, far removed from the *enka* ballads which were usually performed at the end of *Kōbaku* which made the occasion all the more momentous (Schilling 1997:297).

enthused audiences with his energetic dancing.⁸⁷ *Enka* returned to the fore with Kobayashi Sachiko making her *Kōbaku* debut and established *enka* stars Yashiro Aki and Itsuki Hiroshi occupying the *tori* positions for their respective teams.⁸⁸ In addition, two distinguished *enka* singers from *Kōbaku*'s 'first generation', namely Misora Hibari and Fujiyama Ichirō, performed a medley of their signature songs (Takahashi 2000:94).⁸⁹ Misora Hibari's inclusion was surprising in view of her aversion to NHK, but she readily accepted her invitation and was supported by fellow Red Team members during her song performance (see photograph Takahashi 2000:95).⁹⁰

Other Participants

The Team MC roles unexpectedly changed during this period. Previously, Team MCs had formally 'opened' the contest but at the 27th *Kōbaku* (1976), for reasons unknown, Red and White Team members performed this duty. Additionally, Team MCs were unexpectedly referred to as '*kyaputen*' (captains) that year (Takahashi 2000:100). These changes were, however, short-lived and *Kōbaku* soon returned to its usual format.

The eclectic assortment of additional performers enhanced *Kōbaku*'s gala atmosphere. Some brought traditional Japanese elements to the programme, such as folk instruments and martial arts, while others promoted modern dance and cheerleading.⁹¹ As such, *Kōbaku* audiences not only looked forward to the songs, but also the interesting additional segments which gave *Kōbaku* great variety and appealed

⁸⁷ Sada Masashi and Godaigo were both members of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community. Saijō Hideki's now infamous interactive performance of "Young Man (Y.M.C.A.)" included sports cheerleaders, members of the White Team and the NHK Hall audience simultaneously forming the letters 'Y', 'M', 'C' and 'A' with their arms. "Young Man (Y.M.C.A.)" is a Japanese-language version of the song "Y.M.C.A." which was performed by the all-male American group The Village People. At the time, Japanese audiences were only familiar with Saijō Hideki's version, the lyrics of which had little similarity to those of the English-language version.

⁸⁸ Kobayashi Sachiko was later a member of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community.

⁸⁹ Fujiyama Ichirō had previously appeared as a special guest at the 24th *Kōbaku* (1973).

⁹⁰ Misora's dislike of NHK was prompted by her omission from the invitee list for the 24th *Kōbaku* (1973), as previously discussed.

⁹¹ Indeed, at the 26th *Kōbaku* (1975) 10 *shamisen* players accompanied a White Team singer and the following year, five *ninja* swordsmen and a White Team soloist battled during his song performance (see photographs Takahashi 2000:103, 101). At the 29th *Kōbaku* (1978), however, cheerleaders from the University of South California performed in their own segment, while various gymnasts, Japanese cheerleaders with pom-poms and formally dressed ballroom dancers accompanied song performances (see photographs Takahashi 2000:96, 97).

to the broadcast audience.⁹²

Staging and Technology

New staging techniques were introduced to highlight a performer's team affiliation.⁹³ Singers also expressed team camaraderie during song performances by promoting team colours.⁹⁴ Furthermore, singers participated in special, team-only segments (separate from song performances) to exhibit their other talents and demonstrate their ability to work as a collective.⁹⁵ Although clearly rehearsed and choreographed, these segments depicted solidarity and alliance within a team: sentiments that are fundamental to *Kōbaku*. A singer's individuality was also articulated, most often through adventurous and experimental stage designs.⁹⁶ Some general staging props even promoted the 'singer-against-singer' aspect of the song contest rather than 'team-against-team'.⁹⁷ Unique and ornate costumes also highlighted a singer's individuality. At the 30th *Kōbaku* (1979), for example, Misora Hibari wore the most expensive *kimono* in *Kōbaku* history.⁹⁸

⁹² Not everyone was, however, pleased with the program. In 1975, a women's protest group demanded that NHK depict men and women equally in all of its programs and, in particular, protested against the 26th *Kōbaku* (1975) by "posting leaflets and handing them out to members of the audience entering NHK Hall. The leaflets stated "Stop singing contests that depict women as possessions!" (Nakajima 1986 cited by Fukunishi Suzuki 1995).

⁹³ Sections of stage floor at the 27th *Kōbaku* (1976) were coloured red or white to indicate team space on stage. This design was adopted and modified for each *Kōbaku* during this period (see photographs Takahashi 2000:94–103). The 1976 original design featured two large and slightly elevated circles on the stage floor, one coloured red and the other white and both framed by rows of light bulbs (Takahashi 2000:100, 101). In general, singers did not stand inside these circles during their song performance but instead were positioned inside a smaller, 'neutral' circle located between each team's circle (see photographs Takahashi 2000:100,101).

⁹⁴ At the 26th *Kōbaku* (1975), members of the Red Team stood in a line behind a fellow song performer, waving large red banners with messages of support for the Red Team (see photograph Takahashi 2000:102). During another song performance that year, several members of the White Team gathered behind a White singer Minami Haruo, waving white pom-poms and holding signs displaying the ideograph for 'white' (see Plate 4). At the 29th *Kōbaku* (1978), Red Team members wore red robes and held red stars and streamers to cheer on a fellow team member during their song performance (see photograph Takahashi 2000:97). Video footage of the 30th *Kōbaku* (1979) also shows the Red Team members holding separate red blocks which together form the ideograph 'Red' (*Omoide no Kōbaku utagassen* 2000:Television Program).

⁹⁵ For the Red Team segment at the 28th *Kōbaku* (1977), members wore identical red leotards and black stockings and danced in a can-can line (see photograph Takahashi 2003:98). Red Team members again performed the can-can at the 30th *Kōbaku* (1979) and, in a different segment, dressed in red aprons and dancing together (see photographs Takahashi 2000:94).

⁹⁶ One White Team singer at the 29th *Kōbaku* (1978), for example, was engulfed in billowing dry-ice clouds during his song performance (see photograph Takahashi 2000:96).

⁹⁷ Indeed, an electronic billboard at the 28th *Kōbaku* (1977) displayed a singer's name followed by the 'VS' symbol and the name of the rival singer from the opposing team (see photograph Takahashi 2000:99).

⁹⁸ Misora's mother had designed the magnificent *kimono* which was valued at ¥60 million and "made only for that occasion, to wear once" (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:16). It featured eagles with real diamond eyes and pine trees set against a background of blue material. Misora also wore a white *obi* with inlaid diamond and jade jewels, and an emerald ring on her finger which was separately valued at ¥80 million. The total value of her outfit was estimated at ¥140 million (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:16).

The intricate detail, beauty and cost of such outfits was indicative of the new level of prestige associated with the milestone 30th anniversary *Kōbaku* contest.⁹⁹

New broadcasting technologies enabled the 26th *Kōbaku* (1975) to present live images from all over the world, thus linking Japan with other nations at a pivotal time of year: New Year's Eve. That year, *Kōbaku* was also broadcast (via satellite) to Brazil for the first time ('50 Years of NHK Television' Publishing Committee 2003:Internet). By expanding *Kōbaku*'s broadcast reach, NHK was reuniting communities of expatriates across the globe with their homeland via a beloved national institution.

Judging and Voting System

A revolutionary system introduced for the 26th *Kōbaku* (1975) allowed greater voting input from Japanese audiences. In addition to the usual panel of eight celebrities and one representative from NHK that year, 400 television audience members from various regions of Japan also voted (via telephone) (Takahashi 2000:102).¹⁰⁰ The programme was also informally divided into three parts and at the end of each part, voters called in and the MCs gave a running total of votes (Takahashi 2000:102). *Kōbaku* was not only a programme to watch, but also an event in which many could participate. Furthermore, the contest's results reflected the views of the average Japanese person rather than public figures or regional representatives.

Historical Tally of Victories

The White Team's victory at the 26th *Kōbaku* (1975) was its first in three years. The following year, the Red Team fought back and won but the White Team prevailed at the 28th and 29th *Kōbaku* (1977 and 1978), bringing the *Kōbaku* historical tally to 14 wins for the White Team and 15 for the Red Team. A victory for the White Team at the 30th anniversary *Kōbaku* (1979) meant the teams would begin the 1980s afresh on level scores. Nevertheless, the White Team was defeated and the historical tally stood at 16 wins for the Red Team and 14 for the White.

⁹⁹ Many song performers wore expensive jewellery at the 30th *Kōbaku* (1979). Judy Ong, for example, reportedly wore over ¥3 million worth of jewels (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:16).

¹⁰⁰ In keeping with past practice, however, audience votes were given less weight than those from the in-house judging panel.

The 31st–35th *Kōbaku* (1980–1984)

As *Kōbaku* entered the 1980s, it shed its conservative image and was reenergized by effervescent Team MCs and light-hearted pop music. This was a period of renewal. See Table 1.7 for *Kōbaku* data relating to this period which is discussed in subsequent sections.

Table 1.7 Summary Data: the 31st–35th *Kōbaku* (1980–1984)

<i>Edition</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Timeslot</i> (<i>pm</i>)	<i>Duration</i> (<i>H:M</i>)	<i>Venue</i>	<i>Ratings</i> ^a (%)	<i>SP</i> ^b <i>per Team</i>	<i>Winning Team</i>
31 st	1980	9:00–11:45	2:45	NHK Hall	71.1	23	Red
32 nd	1981	9:00–11:45	2:45	NHK Hall	74.9	22	White
33 rd	1982	9:00–11:45	2:45	NHK Hall	74.9	22	Red
34 th	1983	9:00–11:45	2:45	NHK Hall	74.2	21	White
35 th	1984	9:00–11:45	2:45	NHK Hall	78.1	20	Red

Source: Adapted from Takahashi 2000:74–83

^a Maximum ratings achieved over the course of the programme from the Kantō region. See Appendix A for *Kōbaku* audience ratings for other regions.

^b Song performers.

Time and Venue

Kōbaku's timeslot, duration and venue remained unchanged during this period.

Ratings

The programme's ratings remained in the 70 percent range and climaxed with an outstanding 78.1 percent for the 35th *Kōbaku* (1984)—a level last achieved in the early 1970s. Clearly, *Kōbaku*'s popularity was rising.

Song Performers and Genres

The number of *Kōbaku* acts slowly decreased during this period.¹⁰¹ To compensate, song performances were lengthened, more supplementary segments were included and repartee between songs was encouraged, resulting in a more conversational and spirited contest—a trend that continued for years to come. These were carefree times. Japan was experiencing the height of its 'bubble' economy and a pop idol craze swept the nation. In line with its desire to keep in step with its viewer's changing tastes, NHK staff included more light-hearted pop acts than other genres. Japan's leading idol Matsuda Seiko, for example, debuted at the 31st *Kōbaku* (1980) and performed again for

¹⁰¹ Indeed, by the 35th *Kōbaku* (1984), there were only 20 song performers per team—the lowest since the 6th *Kōbaku* (1955).

the following eight *Kōbaku*.¹⁰² Matsuda's turbulent romances were highly publicised and when she was placed in direct competition with her then boyfriend, fellow idol Gō Hiromi, for the 35th *Kōbaku* (1984) it caused a nation-wide stir (Takahashi 2000:74).¹⁰³ Clearly, *Kōbaku* staff used their keen knowledge of the *geinōkai* (entertainment world) to create provocative situations and stimulate excitement.

In 1982, *Kōbaku*'s image was marred when Kuwata Keisuke (the lead singer of the young, liberal rock group Southern All Stars) impersonated the elderly and highly respected *enka* singer Minami Haruo as a joke. This controversial incident generated excitement among younger audiences and outraged NHK staff (Takahashi 2000:78). Nevertheless, a symbolic barrier had been broken—*Kōbaku*, an institution fiercely defended by conservative NHK, was no longer 'safe' or predictable. Now, anything was possible.

Kōbaku also cultivated new *enka* talent including newcomer Kawanaka Miyuki who debuted at the 32nd *Kōbaku* (1981).¹⁰⁴ *Kōbaku*'s prestige was unrivalled such that established *enka* stars often made their farewell performance in *Kōbaku* before retiring from the industry. Miyako Harumi, for example, ended her career on a high note at the 35th *Kōbaku* (1984) where she appeared in the final place (*tori*) for the Red Team (Takahashi 2000:74).¹⁰⁵ Although focus was often centred on individuals, as in this instance, the *Kōbaku* song performers were regarded as a collective. Indeed, at the 33rd *Kōbaku* (1982), both teams gathered together to sing a medley of songs (Takahashi

¹⁰² Matsuda Seiko was later a member of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community. See Schilling (1997:113–123) for details regarding Matsuda's erratic musical career.

¹⁰³ A photograph from the 35th *Kōbaku* (1984) also depicts Matsuda and Gō together onstage alongside fellow idols Kondō Masahiko and Nakamori Akina who were rumoured to be a couple (Takahashi 2000:74). Like Matsuda Seiko, Gō Hiromi was also a member of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community.

¹⁰⁴ Kawanaka Miyuki was later a member of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community.

¹⁰⁵ The occasion was especially momentous because it was Miyako Harumi's 20th consecutive performance in *Kōbaku*. Before the performance, a presenter mistakenly (yet complimentarily) called her "Misora-san", a reference to the *enka* paragon Misora Hibari (Takahashi 2000:74). Harumi's song performance was highly emotional and afterward, the White MC unexpectedly requested an encore. Although she was sobbing and clearly distressed, Miyako obligingly sang and fellow Red Team members gathered around her in concern (see Plate 5). Television audiences were captivated and the program's ratings leapt to 78.1 percent during her performance (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:41). Afterward, NHK received approximately 1300 telephone calls from viewer, with some expressing their delight in the moving performance and others protesting over the encore, saying Miyako shouldn't have been asked to sing when she was clearly distraught (Takahashi 2000:74; Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:41). In spite of the commotion over this 'final' performance, Miyako later came out of retirement and once again appeared in *Kōbaku*.

2000:80).¹⁰⁶ This was, presumably, the first of such performances and it quickly became a *Kōhaku* tradition.

Other Participants

In order to invigorate the traditional format, NHK staff searched for a television personality or a famous ‘career-minded’ woman to act as Red Team MC (Takahashi 2000:82). They selected Kuroyanagi Tetsuko—an NHK actress, co-host of the TBS live pop-music programme ‘*Za besuto ten*’ (“The Best Ten”) and interviewer on her TV Asahi show ‘*Tetsuko no heya*’ (“Tetsuko’s Room”)—for the 31st *Kōhaku* (1980).¹⁰⁷ Her conversational style proved ideal and she assumed the role for the next four years.¹⁰⁸ At the 34th *Kōhaku* (1983), she was paired with the vibrant and witty White MC Suzuki Kenji.¹⁰⁹ Unlike the sombre, conventional NHK announcer from past years, Suzuki’s humorous commentary between song performances was a breath of fresh air for *Kōhaku*. Furthermore, his visually engaging outfits drew plenty of interest and defied the usual White MC conservatism.¹¹⁰ That year, the role of General Chairman was permanently reinstated after a nearly 15-year absence and was occupied by the comedian Tamori (Morita Kazuyoshi), known for his dark glasses, surly expression and merciless celebrity imitations.¹¹¹ Together, Tamori, Suzuki Kenji and Kuroyanagi Tetsuko made *Kōhaku* especially jovial and exciting.

Staging and Technology

By this time, staging had become especially important. The 31st *Kōhaku* (1980) featured a new electronic device—an archway with red lights on the left and white on the right, indicative of each team—to visually-represent the final tally of votes, thus heightening

¹⁰⁶ This medley was comprised of songs by The Beatles, thus demonstrating the long-standing popularity of the band, decades after the Group Sounds boom had come and gone.

¹⁰⁷ Kuroyanagi also found prominence as an author when her childhood memoir ‘*Madogawa no Totto-chan*’ (English title ‘*Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window*’) was published in 1981 and later became an international best-selling book. She used the royalties to create aid organizations for children.

¹⁰⁸ In 1984, she was bestowed the role of the first Asian Goodwill Ambassador for UNICEF in recognition of her charitable work. This role required her to undertake several field missions abroad, which perhaps affected her availability to participate in *Kōhaku*, hence her departure from the role of Red MC.

¹⁰⁹ Suzuki Kenji had been in public eye throughout the year as host of the stimulating and popular NHK television quiz program “*Omoshiro zemināru*” (“Interesting Seminar”).

¹¹⁰ Suzuki Kenji wore a variety of interesting suits throughout the program as well as his trademark white-rimmed glasses (see photographs Takahashi 2000:76).

¹¹¹ Tamori was host of the popular Fuji TV program “*Waratte itomo*” (“It’s Ok to Laugh”).

the overall sense of excitement and tension for song performers and audiences alike (Takahashi 2000:83). At the 34th *Kōbaku* (1983), however, space was reclaimed when team bands were relocated from the stage to the orchestra pit. The additional space allowed singers to actively participate in their teammate's performances.¹¹² Sets were also used to decorate the 'empty' areas and an impressive 32 set changes were made that year (Takahashi 2000:76). *Kōbaku's* newfound focus on staging was formally acknowledged that year when gold and silver goblets were awarded to outstanding individual performances (Takahashi 2000:177).

The most important technological development during this period was the introduction of on-screen lyrics for the television broadcast of the 33rd *Kōbaku* (1982). This novel addition proved popular and, as of this writing, is still used.

Judging and Voting System

The voting system for the 31st *Kōbaku* (1980) remained consistent with previous years where an in-house panel of eight celebrities and one NHK employee voted in addition to 400 people across Japan who voted via telephone (Takahashi 2000:82). The following year, the telephone voting system was abolished and 16 representatives from various Japanese regions were instead invited to join the judges inside the venue.¹¹³ Most surprisingly—and for the first time in *Kōbaku* history—the entire NHK Hall audience voted that year. To ensure accuracy, birdwatchers from *Nihon yachō no kai* (Wild Bird Society of Japan) and the abacus champion of Japan were employed to count and tally more than 3500 votes (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:146).¹¹⁴ Overall, the new voting system increased the Hall audience's participation and placed a greater value on the votes of those inside the Tokyo-based NHK Hall.

Alterations to the voting system continued with each year. Regional representatives were excluded from the 33rd *Kōbaku* (1982) and instead, the entire Hall

¹¹² That year, for example, the *enka* singer and female impersonator Umezawa Tomio appeared both as a song performer for the White Team and as an *onnagata* (female impersonator) (Takahashi 2000:76). For Umezawa's latter role, he performed an elegant *geisha* dance during White teammate Hosokawa Takashi's song performance. Umezawa also appeared as an additional performer in 50th *Kōbaku*.

¹¹³ This system had been in place since the 24th *Kōbaku* (1973).

¹¹⁴ It is presumed that audience members voted by holding a coloured fan to indicate their team preference, a process which is described later in this chapter.

audience were permitted to vote.¹¹⁵ By the 34th *Kōbaku* (1983), however, merely 88 audience members were invited to vote and the following year only 16 people voted, significantly reducing the general public's effect on the contest's outcome.¹¹⁶

Historical Tally of Victories

The Red Team's success at the 31st *Kōbaku* (1980) brought its cumulative victories to 17 compared with White's 14. Over the following four years, the teams alternated victories, culminating in Red's win at the 35th *Kōbaku* (1984) and the women's team retained the lead.

The 36th–40th *Kōbaku* (1985–1989)

By this stage in *Kōbaku*'s history, a key question was emerging: was *Kōbaku* destined to be an international song contest? Despite the programme recording its lowest ratings, NHK staff continued to invite foreign song performers and, in turn, alienate Japanese viewers. Indeed, *Kōbaku*'s future hung in the balance. Data pertaining to this period is presented in Table 1.8 and discussed in subsequent sections.

Table 1.8 Summary Data: the 36th–40th *Kōbaku* (1985–1989)

<i>Edition</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Timeslot</i> (<i>pm</i>)	<i>Duration</i> (<i>H:M</i>)	<i>Venue</i>	<i>Ratings</i> ^a (%)	<i>SP</i> ^b per Team	<i>Winning Team</i>
36 th	1985	9:00–11:45	2:45	NHK Hall	66.0	20	Red
37 th	1986	9:00–11:45	2:45	NHK Hall	59.4	20	White
38 th	1987	9:00–11:45	2:45	NHK Hall	55.2	20	Red
39 th	1988	9:00–11:45	2:45	NHK Hall	53.9	21	White
40 th	1989	7:20–11:45	4:25 ^c	NHK Hall	38.5 ^d 47.0 ^e	27	Red

Source: Adapted from Takahashi 2000:64–73

^a Maximum ratings achieved over the course of the programme from the Kantō region. See Appendix A for *Kōbaku* audience ratings for other regions.

^b Song performers.

^c The 40th *Kōbaku* (1989) was the first to be divided into programme halves. A ten-minute news bulletin separated the halves and this was, despite its differing content, classified as part of the *Kōbaku* programme. The duration presented here is therefore inclusive of this ten-minute bulletin.

^d First half of programme.

^e Second half of programme.

¹¹⁵ The regional representatives were, for example, discarded for the 33rd *Kōbaku* (1982) presumably because the NHK Hall audience's and the celebrity judge's votes were sufficient. The number of celebrity judges that year increased from 10 to 12 and by the 34th *Kōbaku* (1983) it had risen to 14, the largest number of judges for *Kōbaku* to date. The following year, however, the number of celebrity judges decreased to nine. The standard practice to include one NHK staff member as a judge nevertheless remained throughout these changes.

¹¹⁶ It is possible that these audience members represent various sections of NHK Hall. Indeed, in future *Kōbaku* programs, votes are tallied according to sections from the two balconies and the ground floor. It is, however, unclear if this system is adopted for the 31st–35th *Kōbaku* (1980–1984).

Time and Venue

Following 22 years in the same timeslot, *Kōbaku* moved to an earlier starting time to accommodate the lengthy 40th *Kōbaku* (1989) and, most unusually, the programme was divided into halves (as discussed in later sections).

Ratings

After decades rating in the 70 percent range, *Kōbaku*'s popularity suddenly waned and “showed no signs of picking up again” (NHK 2002:164).¹¹⁷ The 40th *Kōbaku* (1989) was, however, an ideal opportunity for the programme to recover its audience. Indeed, a new ratings system was adopted which calculated separate ratings for each half programme, thus determining which was more appealing to viewers.¹¹⁸ But despite the musical variety and the “nostalgia of a 40th anniversary”, neither half reached the 50 percent range (Ogawa 1990:33). *Kōbaku* was facing a crisis.

Song Performers and Genres

The number of *Kōbaku* newcomers fluctuated throughout this period (see Appendix C). Many of these, however, became programme favourites and later performed in the 50th *Kōbaku*.¹¹⁹ *Kōbaku* still attracted a stable of established singers some of whom gave

¹¹⁷ Across the nation, ratings for the 36th *Kōbaku* (1985) were falling (see Appendix A). NHK offered several reasons for the program's sudden decline,

one was that individual households now owned several TV sets and members of the family were in the habit of watching television individually rather than as a family. Another was the kinds of music that were popular had diversified, and people's tastes had changed. On the one hand, young people found the kind of songs performed on [*Kōbaku*] old-fashioned and boring, while their elders, on the other, found the music favored by younger people unfamiliar and hard to appreciate. There was also a dearth of major hit songs. (NHK 2002:164)

In addition, *Kōbaku* viewers were lured away by other exciting television programs broadcast at the time such as “lengthy *samurai* period dramas” offered by rival networks (Ogawa 1990:33). Some people even abstained from watching television on New Year's Eve, instead choosing to attend a concert, participate in another year-end celebration, go on a skiing holiday, or even travel overseas (Ogawa 1990:33). By the 1980s, there were more leisure activities accessible to Japanese families than before and, as such, these distractions greatly affected the size of the *Kōbaku* audience. *Kōbaku*'s apparent demise provoked rumours that NHK would terminate the program (Schilling 1997:97). These were, however, rapidly dispelled for “even though the ratings for [*Kōbaku*] were low by comparison to previous years, they were still the highest for any program shown that year” (NHK 2002:164).

¹¹⁸ This new ratings method was adopted permanently and, as of this writing, continues to be used.

¹¹⁹ Toba Ichirō, for example, made his program debut at the 36th *Kōbaku* (1985), Yoshi Ikuzō and Yamakawa Yutaka performed for the first time at the 37th *Kōbaku* (1986), Tanimura Shinji sang at the 38th *Kōbaku* (1987) and Horiuchi Takako debuted at the 39th *Kōbaku* (1988). Sakamoto Fuyumi debuted at the 39th *Kōbaku* (1988) and *dōyō* singers Yuki Saori and Yasuda Sachiko first performed in *Kōbaku* as a duo for the 40th *Kōbaku* (1989).

farewell performances on the programme before entering retirement.¹²⁰ Others such as *enka* singer Shimakura Chiyoko, however, continued to return year after year. Indeed, at the 37th *Kōbaku* (1986) she was proclaimed the ‘longest-running’ performer and sang for the thirtieth consecutive year (Takahashi 2000:70). This milestone highlighted the programme’s enduring prestige and allure for song performers, in spite of *Kōbaku*’s declining audience ratings.¹²¹

NHK upheld its unwritten policy of only inviting respectable singers. This was taken to extreme lengths when young singer Watanabe Misato, who had a hit song that year, was noticeably omitted from the 37th *Kōbaku* (1986) performer list.¹²² Evidently, NHK deemed Watanabe a performer of ill repute because she had, earlier that year, “sung at a *yakuza* gang’s New Year’s Eve party” (Schilling 1997:96). In addition, idol singer Nakamori Akina, who had sung at six previous *Kōbaku* and was publicly expected to perform in the 40th *Kōbaku* (1989), was omitted following an “attempted suicide” (Schilling 1997:98). Furthermore, equally popular idol Matsuda Seiko was dropped from the line-up because of her vague association to Nakamori’s suicide scandal.¹²³

¹²⁰ Mori Masako, for example, staged the dramatic, final performance of her career at 36th *Kōbaku* (1985) (Takahashi 2000:72). Her decision to withdraw from the *geinōkai* (entertainment world) was prompted by her engagement to fellow *Kōbaku* singer and renowned *enka* star Mori Shin’ichi (female singers often retired in order to become full-time housewives). To maximise the impact of her final performance, both she and her fiancé occupied the highly prized *tori* positions for their respective teams and in a sense, competed against each other. All eyes were on Mori Masako as she tearfully sang. Indeed, one photograph from the end of the program shows an emotional Mori Masako in her fiancé’s embrace when the Red Team is proclaimed the winner (see photograph Takahashi 2000:72).

¹²¹ That year, Matsuda Seiko performed at the 37th *Kōbaku* only months after giving birth to her daughter, contrary to a public announcement that she would put her career on hold that year (Takahashi 2000:70). Although this is an important indication of the importance of *Kōbaku* to performers, this perhaps says more about Matsuda’s character. Unlike many other female stars who dutifully abandon their professional career after marriage and/or motherhood, such as the case of Mori Masako as mentioned above, Matsuda was fiercely independent and career-minded and soon returned to regular performing. Another milestone *Kōbaku* event was when *enka* singer Segawa Eiko performed in the 38th *Kōbaku* (1987), her first *Kōbaku* performance after 20 years in the industry and a confirmation that after all this time, she had at last ‘made it’. Her father, post-war singer Segawa Shin, had previously sung in the 2nd and 7th *Kōbaku* (1952 and 1956) and, in the long history of the song contest, this was the only instance where both parent and ‘child’ had been *Kōbaku* song performers (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:41).

¹²² Watanabe’s song “My Revolution” was especially popular and the single sold 700,000 copies in Japan (Schilling 1997:101). This song was written and produced by Komuro Tetsuya, who would later be associated with many *Kōbaku* song performers in various capacities.

¹²³ Matsuda Seiko was an established *Kōbaku* performer and had appeared in the previous nine programs. Nakamori was reportedly overwhelmed with jealousy when photographs revealed that her boyfriend, Kondō Masahiko, was secretly dating Matsuda Seiko. At the time, Kondō and Matsuda were both in New York and prying photographers captured the incriminating scenes and sold the photographs to a Japanese magazine (Schilling 1997:120).

Kōbaku began to include a wider variety of musical genres. The 38th *Kōbaku* (1987), for example, featured stage musical songs, classical opera, French *chanson*, *min'yō* folk tunes and a heavier style of rock music (Takahashi 2000:68). Moreover, several foreign singers appeared, including Korean singer Cho Yon-pil. *Kōbaku* was shifting away from its domestic focus. Indeed, the following year at the 39th *Kōbaku* (1988), many Japanese performers who usually only sang Japanese lyrics instead sang other languages.¹²⁴ *Kōbaku* was becoming ‘internationalised’.¹²⁵

The 40th *Kōbaku* (1989) was divided into two very different programme halves. A *Kōbaku* retrospective was presented in the first half, recognition of the end of the Showa era (prompted by the then Emperor’s death that year).¹²⁶ A significant portion was also dedicated to Japan’s post-war icon and *enka* star, Misora Hibari who had also died. Footage of her past *Kōbaku* performances was projected onto a large screen onstage, allowing audiences to reflect and honour an icon who had significantly shaped *Kōbaku* history.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ It must be noted that Japanese singers commonly performed Western songs with Japanese lyrics and, on occasion, performed a song in a foreign language in *Kōbaku*. The sheer variety and quantity of foreign languages used in songs at the 39th *Kōbaku* (1988) was, however, extraordinary. Video footage, for example, shows Sugawara Yōichi singing entirely in Spanish, Kayama Yūzō singing in English and Satō Shinobu beginning in German and later singing in Japanese (39th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1988:Television Program). Sugawara had, however, established a reputation for singing non-Japanese songs throughout her 22 years of performing in *Kōbaku*. The operatic performer Satō Shinobu, too, had frequently sung Western songs, such as Schubert’s “*Ave Maria*”. In addition that year, many *Kōbaku* performers substituted Japanese lyrics in place of the English lyrics for Western songs, for example, “*Hoshi ni negai o*”: a Japanese-language version of the Walt Disney-associated song “When You Wish Upon a Star” performed by the jazz vocal group Taimu fuaibu (“Time Five”). Other examples included Shimada Kaho’s “On My Own” from Andrew Lloyd Webber’s stage musical ‘*Les Misérables*’ and Koyanagi Rumiko’s “*Ai no serebureishiyon*” which was predominantly sung in Japanese but ended with an English stanza. This song was a version of “Tonight, I Celebrate My Love”, a duet popularised in the West by American singers Peabo Bryson and Roberta Flack. Video footage of this *Kōbaku* performance shows that unlike other singers, Koyanagi Rumiko is miming her song, a practice which is extremely rare in *Kōbaku* (39th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1988:Television Program). Despite the presence of a lapel microphone—clearly to make it seem to audiences that she was vocally participating—she did not sing or speak throughout the contest.

¹²⁵ While the change in programming may have offended conservative audiences, many acts that had dismissed the *Kōbaku* in the past as ‘old-fashioned’ suddenly regarded *Kōbaku* in a new light. The youth-oriented group TM Network, for example, unexpectedly performed in the 39th *Kōbaku* (1988) following several years of refusing NHK’s invitations, now believing that it was in step with modern trends.

¹²⁶ The first half featured singers from the 1st *Kōbaku* (1951) as well as acts that reformed or came out of retirement for the occasion. For example, *enka* star Miyako Harumi—who had previously farewelled the music industry in a lavish and memorable *Kōbaku* ‘goodbye’ performance only a few years earlier—appeared in this historically significant *Kōbaku*. The Group Sounds band The Tigers and the disco duo Pink Lady also re-formed especially for this *Kōbaku* and performed a medley of songs. Although Pink Lady had previously appeared in the contest, this was The Tigers first time performing in *Kōbaku*. When the band rose to fame during the 1960s, its music, image and association with the Group Sounds movement was considered too rebellious for *Kōbaku* (see previous sections of this chapter).

¹²⁷ Footage of singers from *Kōbaku*’s past, such as Miyako Harumi, Mori Masako, Yamaguchi Momoe, Sakamoto Kyū, Mizuhara Hiroshi and others who had retired or died were also displayed on the screen.

The second half commemorated the dawn of the new Heisei era and the accession of Emperor Akihito. The programme featured standard *enka* singers, a new generation of song performers and foreign artists such as Korean singers Patty Kim and Kim Yonja and the Hong Kong performer Alan Tam.¹²⁸ Despite its diversity, the 40th *Kōbaku* (1989) failed to resonate with its audience. Sadly, “viewers, whatever their age, probably knew only half of the performers and just a few of the tunes” (Ogawa 1990:33). *Kōbaku*’s lack of success also put into question the programme’s validity in the lives of the Japanese people. Moreover, as Ogawa notes, “some critics” labelled the ‘battle of the sexes’ premise “anachronistic” (1990:33). Instead of a fresh start in promising new era, *Kōbaku*’s faced an uncertain future.

Other Participants

Throughout *Kōbaku* history, there had only been one MC per team for each contest, yet at the 37th *Kōbaku* (1986) each team had two MCs.¹²⁹ Falling ratings indicated that the additional MCs were poorly received and, as such, only one MC was selected per team for the 38th *Kōbaku* (1987). Nevertheless, experimentation continued the following year where a woman was selected as General Chairman—a novel twist to the programme’s standard practice.

During this period, the between-song variety segments were frequently used to cross-promote other NHK television programmes. Actors or singers from such shows would often be guests on *Kōbaku* and would occasionally perform theme songs from

¹²⁸ In a brief critique of the 40th *Kōbaku* (1989), Hiroshi Ogawa likens the performer selection process to “a proportional representation election” and identifies the number of acts for each music genre (1990:33). In this *Kōbaku*, 11 singers performed *enka*, eight sang “idols and pops”, five (from “places like South Korea and Hong Kong”) performed “Asian pops”, two performed musical theatre songs and the genres “*min’yo*” (traditional folk music), “children’s songs” and “Western classics” had one performer each (Ogawa 1990:33). It must be clarified that the tallied number of Ogawa’s ‘genre representatives’ (29) is not equivalent to the total number of song performers that year (54 or 27 per team) in the contest. Ogawa, moreover, notes the number of song performers was 40 which is inconsistent with NHK’s official figures (see Takahashi 2000:64).

¹²⁹ This was possibly to provoke spontaneity, increase ratings and to enliven the somewhat predictable format. Indeed, the White Team co-MC Kayama Yūzō at the 37th *Kōbaku* (1986) mispronounced a song title. Instead of “*Kamen butokai*” (“Masquerade Ball”), the song by the male idol trio Shōnen tai, he said “*Kaimen raidā*” (“Masked Rider”) which referred to ‘fighter characters’ from a popular children’s television show. The mistake was understandable: the group had earlier worn costumes so to dress up as these characters. Nevertheless, as a MC, this error caused great embarrassment for Kayama. Despite his publicly apology, the incident gained notoriety, so much so that Shōnen tai later appeared on a New Year program wearing *Kaimen raidā* masks, to jokingly acknowledge Kayama’s mistake (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:41).

television programmes.¹³⁰ These served to remind viewers of NHK shows broadcast that year and, moreover, reinforced *Kōbaku*'s Japanese connections in spite of its increasingly foreign song content.

The experimental form of the 40th *Kōbaku* (1989) meant that celebrity cheer squads were replaced by past song performers and MCs who spoke about their earlier experiences in *Kōbaku* (Takahashi 2000:64). There were, nevertheless, a few foreign celebrity guests, in keeping with the programme's new 'international' focus. A most interesting inclusion was the allegedly 'live' interview with Olivia Newton-John from Australia, which beamed via satellite onto a screen on the *Kōbaku* stage.¹³¹ After stating (in English) that she was looking forward to visiting Japan in the forthcoming year, she cheered "Girls! *Akagumi ganbatte!*" ("Girls! Keep at it/good luck, Red Team!") (40th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1989:Television Programme). Although clearly scripted, this statement suggested that internationally-renowned Western foreigners, like Newton-John, were familiar with *Kōbaku* conventions and, thus, the contest was meaningful outside of Japan. In reality, however, *Kōbaku* was unknown in many countries, including Australia (but excluding the Japanese diaspora). Newton-John's appearance in *Kōbaku* was not, therefore, designed to create a sense of national unity in Japan by focusing on "the alien nature of other ways of life" (Painter 1996a:203). Instead, it demonstrated that *Kōbaku* and, by corollary, Japan was significant in an international context.

Staging and Technology

During this period, *Kōbaku*'s opening ceremony developed into an especially grand

¹³⁰ At the 36th *Kōbaku* (1985), for example, the White Team singer Shibugakitai performed a little-known song from the NHK children's program *Minna no uta* but after its exposure in *Kōbaku*, it became widely popular across Japan (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:41).

Despite the program's waning ratings, *Kōbaku*'s status as a powerful site for promotion and dissemination to the Japanese public was unequalled—this song became in such high demand that it was released as a single the following year. Another type of cross-promotion was seen in the 36th *Kōbaku* (1985) when a storyline from a popular NHK morning serial drama crossed-over into a *Kōbaku* variety segment. The drama's storyline had involved an unmarried couple but in this segment, the couple were dressed in formal Japanese wedding attire and a marital ceremony was conducted to bring the storyline to a close (Takahashi 2000:72).

¹³¹ Olivia Newton-John is a famous (British-born) Australian singer and occasional actor, more recently known for her breast-cancer and environmental campaigning. In 1990, she was a Goodwill Ambassador to the United Nations Environment Program and was to visit Japan in this capacity.

occasion.¹³² *Kōbaku* also looked outside its own traditions and regularly included live outside-broadcasts of Japan's distinctive *ōmisoka* (New Year's Eve) customs. The 37th *Kōbaku* (1986), for example, featured families preparing the rice-cake *mochi* and eating the special year-end buckwheat noodles *toshikoshi-soba* (Takahashi 2000:70).¹³³ Indeed, just like the traditional activities associated with New Year, watching *Kōbaku* was integral part of 'ringing out' the old year and welcoming in the new.

In general, performers from the same music genre often shared similar staging characteristics.¹³⁴ Nevertheless, increasingly complex and visually interesting stage designs produced many highlights over the course of a programme.¹³⁵ The 40th *Kōbaku* (1989), however, set a precedent—not only did several song performers wear impressive, technologically enhanced costumes that year but the stage was also extended to allow a greater number of set changes (40th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1989:Television Programme).¹³⁶

¹³² Footage from the start of 38th and 39th *Kōbaku* (1987 and 1988), for example, shows the MCs shaking hands in preparation for the 'battle' (38th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1987:Television Program; 39th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1988:Television Program). The song performers, grouped together in their respective teams, walk on stage when their name is called, bow and/or shake hands with their MC. Unlike the song performers in the 38th *Kōbaku* (1987), those in the 39th *Kōbaku* (1988) play small, portable rhythm instruments such as tambourines and drums as they walk. Furthermore, Nakayama Miho and Hikaru GENJI—the first two acts from each team—declare the contest 'open'. The comprehensive opening ceremony continues as the members of the judging panel walk onstage, are individually introduced and later retire to their seats in the NHK audience area. Footage from the 38th *Kōbaku* (1987) also shows the White MC (as representative of last year's winning team) passing the *Kōbaku* pendant to the NHK President before the contest itself begins.

¹³³ The 40th *Kōbaku* (1989) also displayed images of people walking through Shibuya streets near to NHK Hall. The 15th *Kōbaku* (1964) had featured similar scenes, but from the 37th *Kōbaku* (1986) it became common for *Kōbaku*'s outside-broadcasts to relate to New Year's Eve activities.

¹³⁴ *Enka* or *kayōkyoku* performances used elegant or minimal stage designs; the performer stood alone onstage, illuminated by a single white spotlight and a patterned curtain backdrop. The camera alternated between a close-up of the performer's face and a wide shot of the stage. On the other hand, J-pop acts (most often bands, vocal groups and solo performers) had exciting and surprising staging, whereby dry ice, flashing lights, large props and elaborate backdrops were often into song performances. The roaming hand-held camera shots and tilted angles equally contributed to the vibrant, upbeat atmosphere.

¹³⁵ Video footage from the 39th *Kōbaku* (1988), for example, shows White Team singer Kondō Masahiko demonstrating a magic trick mid-performance: he dramatically disappears from the stage and re-appears amid the ground floor NHK Hall audience (39th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1988:Television Program). The pop group Hikaru GENJI, however, set a new precedent for attention-grabbing staging with their inaugural *Kōbaku* performance that year. Video footage shows the group's members wearing a variety of costumes during the song performance and executing complex roller-skating dance routines onstage (39th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1988:Television Program). To further enliven the performance, there were several additional dancers who performed skateboard tricks and enacted swordfights.

¹³⁶ Video footage shows the women from the duo Wink wearing matching extravagant ball gowns with dazzling blinking lights woven into the skirts. Similarly, the two women from Pink Lady wear a variety of illuminated and glittering costumes during their song medley (40th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1989:Television Program).

The highlight of this period was the start of Kobayashi Sachiko's famous 'costume marathon', a long-running tradition of wearing dazzling costumes each *Kōbaku* (see photographs Takahashi 2000:16–17). At the 36th *Kōbaku* (1985), she wore a stunning *jūnihitoe*, a ceremonial *kimono*-style garment and the following year Kobayashi "appeared as the Egyptian queen Cleopatra, dressed in a clingy gown and cloak of gold with a huge circle of peacock feathers spread out behind her" (Wilson 2003:Internet).¹³⁷ By contrast, Kobayashi's *kimono* for at the 38th *Kōbaku* (1987) was simple and elegant.¹³⁸ The following year, however, Kobayashi wore a vibrantly coloured costume reminiscent of *nō* theatre (39th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1988:Television Programme, Wilson 2003:Internet). Moreover, she wore a multi-layered puffy stylised *kimono* and an ornate gold headpiece at the 40th *Kōbaku* (1989).¹³⁹ From this performance onward, her costumes were clearly influenced by the dramatic costume designs from Broadway, Takarazuka and, most notably, the contemporary theatre genre *sūpā kabuki* (super *kabuki*) which heightened interest and engaged a broader audience.¹⁴⁰

Judging and Voting System

NHK experimented with the number of *Kōbaku* voters during this period, leaving viewers uncertain of the value of their input. At the 37th *Kōbaku* (1986), for example, 500 family households (randomly selected by NHK via a lottery-card system) and a further 800 people, 100 from each of the eight regions of Japan, voted in the contest.¹⁴¹ Yet the following year, only the panel of judges (consisting of 10 celebrities and one

¹³⁷ A *jūnihitoe* consists of 12 unlined and layered robes and was commonly worn by court ladies during the Heian period (794–1185) and, later, by imperial princesses as a wedding dress (Kojima and Crane 1987:134). At that time, Kobayashi's costumes drew attention because of their unique design, ornate detailing and use of beautiful and undoubtedly expensive fabrics. Only later in her 'costume marathon' did Kobayashi incorporate mechanical staging and special effects into her song performances.

¹³⁸ Video footage from the 38th *Kōbaku* (1987) shows Kobayashi wearing a simple and elegant white *kimono* with *furisode* (very long hanging sleeves) and a decorative gold and purple *obi* sash (8th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1987:Television Program).

¹³⁹ Video footage from this performance shows her removing a covering shawl and in a grand and sweeping motion, she extends her arms perpendicular to her body to fully display the dress (40th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1989:Television Program).

¹⁴⁰ *Sūpā kabuki* was founded by the *kabuki* actor Ennosuke Ichikawa III, and is described as "an exciting new form of drama, a wildly colorful and fast-paced theatrical experience" ("Ichikawa Ennosuke no shigoto" 1995:56). Moreover, it rebels against the conservatism of traditional *kabuki* by using vibrant special effects, visual stunts, aerial sequences and rapid costume changes.

¹⁴¹ These voters were in addition to the 10 celebrity judges and one NHK judge that year. The NHK Hall audience did not vote and, consequently, the birdwatchers were not present.

NHK representative) voted. This greatly simplified system was again adopted for the 39th *Kōbaku* (1988) and the 40th *Kōbaku* (1989).¹⁴²

Several rituals pertaining to the judging and voting system were strictly enforced during this period. Footage from the 38th *Kōbaku* (1987), for example, shows judges registering their vote by depositing a red or white coloured ball into a container (38th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1987:Television Programme). The balls are then secretly divided according to team and presented to the respective Team MC in a new container. While standing in front of the song performers onstage, the MCs simultaneously throw their respective team's balls into the NHK Hall audience while chanting “*hitotsu! futatsu! mitsu!*” (“One! Two! Three!”) until it is evident the Red Team possesses more balls (and therefore, more votes) and is consequently the victor. Clearly overwhelmed with the honour, Wada Akiko (the winning team's MC) is presented with the *Kōbaku* pendant by the NHK President amid celebratory cheers and tears of joy. Meanwhile, the orchestra plays the instrumental opening to “*Hotaru no hikari*” (“Light of the Fireflies”) while the song performers and members of the NHK Hall audience join in singing until the programme's conclusion.

Historical Tally of Victories

During this period, both teams claimed victories but neither won consecutive contests.¹⁴³ The Red Team's success at the 36th *Kōbaku* (1985) increased its lead in the historical tally to 20 wins compared with White's 16. The teams alternated victories for the following four *Kōbaku* and following the Red Team's triumph at the 40th *Kōbaku*, subsequently increased its lead to 22 wins while the White Team trailed with 18.

¹⁴² Upon viewing footage from the 39th *Kōbaku* (1988), it appears that the NHK Hall audience does play a part, albeit unofficial, in the voting process (39th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1988:Television Program). Approximately halfway through the program, each audience member waves a red or white handkerchief to indicate his or her preferred team. The ratio of red to white colours displayed by the audience serves as an immediate, visual indicator of how the teams are faring midway through the contest.

¹⁴³ This trend was perhaps indicative of the fluctuating program themes, music genres, and types of performers from year to year—the program's lack of continuity did not allow one particular team to stand out over the other.

The 41st–45th *Kōbaku* (1990–1994)

This period was characterised by dramatic change. No longer a simple song contest about Japanese popular music, the ever-expanding *Kōbaku* welcomed a multitude of foreign performers. Was *Kōbaku* losing direction and, most importantly, its devoted Japanese audience? Table 1.9 presents a summary of data pertaining to this five-year period.

Table 1.9 Summary Data: the 41st–45th *Kōbaku* (1990–1994)

Edition	Year	Timeslot (pm)	Duration ^a (H:M)	Venue	Ratings ^b (%) per half		SP ^c per Team	Winning Team
					First	Second		
41 st	1990	7:20–11:45	4:25	NHK Hall	30.6	51.5	29	White
42 nd	1991	7:20–11:45	4:25	NHK Hall	34.9	51.5	28	Red
43 rd	1992	7:20–11:45	4:25	NHK Hall	40.2	55.2	28	White
44 th	1993	7:30–11:45	4:15	NHK Hall	42.4	50.1	26	White
45 th	1994	8:00–11:45	3:45	NHK Hall	40.1	51.5	25	Red

Source: Adapted from Takahashi 2000:36–55.

^a Inclusive of the 10 minute news bulletin.

^b Maximum ratings achieved over the course of the programme from the Kantō region. See Appendix A for *Kōbaku* audience ratings for other regions.

^c Song performers.

Time and Venue

The 44th and 45th *Kōbaku* (1993 and 1994) were shorter in duration so to accommodate the steadily decreasing number of song performers and the 45th *Kōbaku* (1994) shifted to a later starting time as numbers fell even further.

Ratings

Ratings for the 41st *Kōbaku* (1990) slightly improved but the first half rating of 30.6 percent was embarrassingly low. Clearly, viewers were unresponsive to the influx of foreign artists, most of whom had appeared during this part of the contest. Indeed, when foreign artists were omitted from the programme in 1992, the first half ratings increased to 40.2 percent and *Kōbaku* achieved its highest overall rating in five years. In later years, the first half rating remained steady but *Kōbaku*'s overall ratings continued to peak around 50 percent, suggesting more improvements were needed.

Song Performers and Genres

Throughout this period, *Kōbaku* introduced several newcomers who would come to regularly participate in the programme and later perform in the 50th *Kōbaku*. The 41st

Kōbaku (1990), for example, featured *enka* singer Godai Natsuko while the 42nd *Kōbaku* (1991) included *enka* singers Kōzai Kaori and Maekawa Kiyoshi, as well as the male idol group SMAP (an anagram of ‘Sports Music Assemble People’) which was created by the prominent pop idol talent agency Johnny’s (*Janīzu jimusho*) (Takahashi 2000:48).¹⁴⁴ The 43rd *Kōbaku* (1992) featured fresh talent, with *enka* singers Fuji Ayako and Nakamura Mitsuko both making their debut, while the 44th *Kōbaku* (1993) included debut performances by *enka* singers Nagayama Yōko and Tendō Yoshimi. Overall, these acts formed a new generation of *Kōbaku* performers who would continue to participate in the contest for years to come.

Kōbaku was expanding. The 41st *Kōbaku* (1990) most notably included 58 acts—the largest number in the contest’s history.¹⁴⁵ This contest focused on songs from Japan’s musical past and, as such, *Kōbaku* artists from the 1970s and earlier (including Pink Lady, Ozaki Kiyohiko, Fuse Akira and Hashi Yukio) performed *natsu-mero* (nostalgic melodies) while others sang Japanese cover songs (songs originally popularised by other performers).¹⁴⁶ In addition to local music, this *Kōbaku* clearly embraced non-Japanese songs, as stated in *Kōbaku*’s first official theme: ‘*Nijūisseiki ni tsutaeru nihon no uta • sekai no uta*’ (‘Passing on Japan’s Songs to the 21st Century: World Songs’) (Takahashi 2000:52). Consequently, a large proportion of song performers were foreigners.¹⁴⁷ The flamboyant American star Cyndi Lauper, for example, sang the

¹⁴⁴ Although this was SMAP’s first song performance in *Kōbaku*, the group’s members had previously appeared as dancers for many song performances by fellow Johnny’s (*Janīzu jimusho*) group, Hikaru GENJI. Similarly, soloist Maekawa Kiyoshi had sung in previous *Kōbaku* as a member of the band Uchiyamada Hiroshi to kuru fuaibu (Uchiyamada Hiroshi and Cool Five).

¹⁴⁵ That year, an interesting string group named G-kurefu (G-clef) appeared—possibly the only instrumental act (billed as song performers) in *Kōbaku*’s history appeared.

¹⁴⁶ Tanimura Shinji, for example, sang the Momoe Yamaguchi song “*It hi tabidachi?*” (“Departure on a Fine Day”) which he had composed, while *Kōbaku* newcomer Yoshida Eisaku sang “*Kokoro no tabi?*” (“Heart’s Journey”) originally popularised by the group Tulip. Ninja, the male idol group from the talent agency Johnny’s (*Janīzu jimusho*) performed “*Omatsuri ninja*” (“Festival Ninja”), a version of Misora Hibari’s classic 1950s song “*Omatsuri manbo*” (“Festival Mambo”).

¹⁴⁷ Foreign acts included the Mongolian singer Oyunna and the Soviet singer/guitarist Alexander Gradsky. Most were unknown to the wider Japanese public and only sang in English. To aid viewers, NHK included the act’s country of origin and occasionally, as with Filipino performer Gary Valenciano, a Japanese translation of the English lyrics was also provided on-screen (41st *Kōbaku utagassen* 1990:Television Program).

English-language song “I Drove All Night”.¹⁴⁸ Two Japanese acts also performed English-language songs.¹⁴⁹ The teenage idol Miyazawa Rie, however, sang a Japanese-language version of an English song in what was arguably the most provocative song performance in *Kōbaku* history.¹⁵⁰

Unlike the 41st *Kōbaku* (1990), the 42nd *Kōbaku* (1991) did not have an official theme. Nevertheless, the programme presented a similar variety of foreign artists as well as several Japanese ‘dance music’ acts that were representative of the dance music fad from that year.¹⁵¹ Most notably, the glam-styled Japanese rock band X (pronounced ‘*ekkusū*’) appeared—the first *bijuaru-kei* (visual-style) band to perform on *Kōbaku*.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Video footage from the start of Cyndi Lauper’s performance shows three men rising from underneath the stage, carrying a palanquin-style box from which Lauper, wearing a *kimono* and a long red wig, emerges (41st *Kōbaku utagassen* 1990:Television Program). Reminiscent of a *kabuki hayagawari* (“rapid change”) transformation, Lauper flings away her formal kimono to reveal her new outfit: a risqué red halter-top, hotpants with hanging tassels, red stockings and heeled ankle-boots. Meanwhile, Lauper dances wildly with one arm flailing then falls to the floor and continues to sing while on her knees. She then proceeds to ‘head bang’. These extremely chaotic bodily gestures are clearly out-of-place on the *Kōbaku* stage and the song concludes unceremoniously when the accompanying rock band (positioned onstage behind her) creates a cacophony of feedback noise. From this performance we can deduce that Lauper’s red-themed outfit demonstrates an awareness of, and an association with, the Red Team. Her carefree dancing and music may also be interpreted as a revolt against *Kōbaku* performance etiquette. By the end of the song performance, however, it is clear that Lauper does not fully understand *Kōbaku* customs. In a post-performance interview on stage, Lauper naïvely asks her translator “did we win?” even though the program is yet to reach the halfway point (41st *Kōbaku utagassen* 1990:Television Program). Lauper then haphazardly exits the stage toward the opposing team’s corner, oblivious to protocol requiring a performer to return to his/her respective team area. It is likely that her inclusion in the program was intended to reinforce a sense of *uchi* (in-group) for both the *Kōbaku* Community and the Japanese nation by contrasting it with *soto* (‘outside the group’) and what is ‘not-Japanese’.

¹⁴⁹ Satō Shinobu performed “Tonight” from the Sondheim and Bernstein musical ‘West Side Story’, while the vocal trio Eve sang “*Imajin*” (John Lennon’s “Imagine”). Japanese translations were also presented on-screen, so to aid audiences.

¹⁵⁰ This song was popularised by David Bowie in 1975 and later re-mixed in 1990 under the new title “Fame 90”. Video footage shows Miyazawa Rie’s performance of “Game” taking place not on the *Kōbaku* stage but the NHK Hall roof (41st *Kōbaku utagassen* 1990:Television Program). During this pre-recorded performance, she lies in a frothy bubble bath with her bare arms, shoulders and décolletage on display. Indeed, upon first glance she seems to be naked. These early shots are deliberately deceptive—she later emerges from the bubbles wearing a strapless silver-sequinned mini-dress. Miyazawa Rie has been described as “one of the first *bishojo*” (pretty girl) stars of the 1980s who was originally presented as “a well-dressed, well-mannered, well-educated young lady” (Schilling 1997:147). Her *Kōbaku* performance with its titillating allusion to nudity is, however, incongruous with the *bishojo* image. Around this time, Miyazawa also posed nude for a calendar, thus moving her career and public image in a new direction, one that did not please NHK. Considering the broadcaster’s aversion to scandal and indecent behaviour, it is surprising that she was included in the 41st *Kōbaku* (1990), let alone stage a suggestive song performance. Miyazawa showed no sign of reverting to her previous image of respectability and, the following year she was omitted from the invitee list for the 42nd *Kōbaku* (1991).

¹⁵¹ Foreign artists included American singer Andy Williams performing “Moon River”, and British singer Sarah Brightman performing “*Opera za no kaijin*” (“The Phantom of the Opera”) from Andrew Lloyd Webber’s stage musical of the same name. Lesser-known acts included a female singer from Latvia who was most likely selected in recognition of the country’s independence that year, and a young Filipino vocal quartet. It is presumed that all foreign performers sang in their native languages.

¹⁵² The band later changed its name to X-Japan to avoid confusion with a similarly titled USA punk band. The Japanese band is remembered for the shocking suicide of guitarist Hideto “Hide” Matsumoto during the late 1990s.

This not only demonstrated that a somewhat ‘underground’ music genre had entered the music mainstream, but also paved the way for other *bijuaru-kei* bands to perform in later years. Memorably, the soloist Mikawa Ken’ichi returned to *Kōbaku* that year after a sixteen-year absence from the programme.¹⁵³ The most exciting performance was, however, by the newcomer comedy duo Tonneruzu (Tunnels) who revealed a controversial message painted on their backs, asking viewers to pay the NHK television license fee.¹⁵⁴ *Kōbaku* also paid heed to events that greatly affected Japan that year and in one unbilled performance, members of both Red and White Teams together performed “Smile Again”, a song composed by White Team member Sada Masashi to honour the survivors of the horrific Unzen–Fugendake volcano that had recently erupted.¹⁵⁵

The number of foreign artists was significantly reduced for the 43rd *Kōbaku* (1992) and the official *Kōbaku* theme ‘*Terebi 40nen • nihon soshite kazoku*’ (‘40 Years of Television: Japan and Family’) (Takahashi 2000:44) signalled a welcome return to the programme’s long established, but recently overlooked, domestic focus.¹⁵⁶ The

¹⁵³ His career revival owed much to the *monomane* impersonator Korokke (Croquette) whose imitations of Mikawa, complete with his signature makeup, embellished clothing, and unmistakable voice, became popular throughout the 1980s. In a comic segment that acknowledged their relationship (1991), Korokke sang alongside Mikawa at the 42nd *Kōbaku* and both wore near-identical outfits and makeup (see photograph Takahashi 2000:49).

¹⁵⁴ After facing the audience, the men yelled “I love you, I love you NHK!” which pleased the then NHK President (Takahashi 2000:48). He “praised them highly” and reportedly said “I’m very thankful. With their charm, they uplifted the stage and I was hugely impressed” (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:16). Tonneruzu members Kinashi Noritake and Ishibashi Takaaki hosted the music program ‘*Tonneruzu no minasan no okagedesu*’ (‘Tunnels: Thanks to Everyone’) on Fuji TV and later formed the singing group Yaen which later performed in the 50th *Kōbaku*.

¹⁵⁵ One photograph from this performance shows that the singers mingled together and stood in random groups, thus suggesting that the team segregation rule was temporarily relaxed for this song (see photograph Takahashi 2000:120).

¹⁵⁶ The ‘*Terebi yonjūnen*’ (‘40 Years of Television’) component of the theme was in recognition of the 40-year anniversary of television in Japan, to be celebrated the following year (1993). Meanwhile, the ‘*kazoku*’ (‘family’) component referred to a nuclear, heterosexual idea of ‘family’ and did not leave room for the variety of families in Japan that existed outside of this mould (for example, single parent families, parents with disabled children, etc.). One lesbian mother who watched this edition of *Kōbaku* noted that NHK was equating a ‘normal family’ with happiness, so everyone in Japan would accept their normative positions in society and the status quo would be maintained. This made her angry:

I hate it! It makes me see red... Everyone on the show [that year] was saying that there was nothing they like more than going home an relaxing with their families, that their families were their top priority, that kind of thing. It made me absolutely furious. I hate that programme and didn’t want to watch it, but my mother, who was sick, was staying with me...and to her New Year’s Eve wouldn’t be New Year’s Eve without seeing it, so I suffered in silence. (cited in Chalmers 2002:75)

This statement reveals the woman’s feelings of duty and obligation toward her own mother, but more pointedly, it highlights how NHK’s failure to represent minority groups in the program can isolate and offend certain viewers when in fact it is the broadcaster’s intention to bring the nation together.

programme presented a variety of Japanese popular music genres from the past 40 years, such as J-pop, rock, folk and *enka*. Young male idol groups from the talent organisation Johnny's (*Janīzu jimusho*) were especially prominent and gave dynamic performances.¹⁵⁷ Arguably the most exciting singer that year was, however, the Red Team's new soloist Gao and her unique, androgynous image (Takahashi 2000:44).¹⁵⁸ An element of nostalgia was also brought to the programme through the appearance of established singers Funaki Kazuo and Azusa Michiyo who performed their signature songs from the 1960s (Takahashi 2000:44). In addition, singer/songwriter Minami Kōsetsu performed "*Kanda-gawa*" ("Kanda River"), the 1973 popular song that was representative of the *fōku būmu* (folk music boom) of that decade (Takahashi 2000:44).¹⁵⁹ *Kōhaku* was paying homage to Japan's musical history and its 'family' of song performers, as indicated by the contest's theme.

The 44th *Kōhaku* (1993) continued the contest's focus on Japan, evident in the programme theme '*Kawaru nippon, kawaranu nippon*' ('Changing Japan, Unchanging Japan') (Takahashi 2000:40). Although Latin salsa music was included, other genres were primarily Japanese *enka* and J-pop. Most interestingly, traditional scales from Okinawa were incorporated into a rock song, thus demonstrating how 'unchanging' musical elements could combine with 'changing' modern genres (Takahashi 2000:40).¹⁶⁰

The 45th *Kōhaku* (1994) honoured 50 years of post-war Japanese music through the theme '*Sengo 50nen • meikyoku wa sedai o koete*' ('50 Years Post-War: Famous Musical Works Spanning Generations') (Takahashi 2000:36). In recognition of the

¹⁵⁷ Hikaru GENJI's performance, for example, was lively and featured the fellow Johnny's (*Janīzu jimusho*) group TOKIO as dancers. Most notably, the six young men from SMAP gave an extremely energetic opening performance for the White Team and engaged in sporting activities (such as shooting basketball hoops) while singing (43rd *Kōhaku utagassen* 1992:Television Program).

¹⁵⁸ Robertson notes that Gao was "invented" in 1993 (1998:205) yet Gao's performance in the 43rd *Kōhaku* (1992) pre-dates this. Gao is described as "a Japanese version of the gender-bending Canadian popular singer k.d.lang" and her image was manufactured by a music corporation and plays on Japan's long history with cross-gendered music and theatre performance, which includes *onnagata* and the Takarazuka revue (Robertson 1998:205). Although she is a member of the Red Team which immediately identifies her as woman, video footage of her performance indicates that she has a somewhat masculine image (43rd *Kōhaku utagassen* 1992:Television Program). Her hair is styled short and she wears black pants, a chunky belt and a billowing white shirt which reveals her flat chest. Moreover, her voice is deceptively husky and resonant, much like a man's, and she does not appear to wear makeup. These performance attributes paint a calculatedly ambiguous picture and, as posed in Gao's publicity campaign, beg the questions: "A man? Or is that a woman?" (Gao 1993:32 in Robertson 1998:205).

¹⁵⁹ This song was originally popularised by Minami Kōsetsu's folk band Kaguya Hime (lit. 'Moon Princess') which disbanded in 1975. The group re-formed in 1999 and was a member of the 50th *Kōhaku* Community.

¹⁶⁰ That year, music from Okinawa was extremely popular in Japan.

occasion, artists performed well-known post-war songs and the famous folk singer Yoshida Takuro appeared after rejecting NHK's invitations for years (Takahashi 2000:36). In addition, several new pop and rock acts such as TOKIO debuted.¹⁶¹

Other Participants

Two successful pairings of Team MCs clearly impacted upon *Kōbaku* during this period. The first pairing was between Sakai Masa'aki (White MC), a multi-talented comic actor, television host, entertainer and musician, and a youthful NHK morning drama actor (Red MC) at both the 43rd and 44th *Kōbaku* (1992 and 1993).¹⁶² They interacted with team members and circulated among audience members, bringing a casual familiarity and friendliness to the programme (44th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1993:Television Programme). The second successful pairing occurred at the 45th *Kōbaku* (1994). Here, a fast-talking sports commentator White MC was suitably coupled with a comedian Red MC and together their lively banter and enthusiasm greatly uplifted the mood of the contest and spurred on the friendly team rivalry.

In addition to the many dancers, musicians and singers, several celebrity guests also participated in ceremonial segments during this period. The famous *sumo* wrestlers 'the Hanada Brothers' were, for example, declared the 42nd *Kōbaku* (1991) contest 'open' (Takahashi 2000:48).¹⁶³ Video footage of the 44th *Kōbaku* (1993), moreover, shows the contest being 'opened' by two elderly women—reputedly the oldest twins in Japan at the time—and a popular child actress (44th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1993:Television Programme). Onstage, the threesome huddled beneath a quilted *kotasu* table that was decorated with a bowl of *mikan* mandarins, a scene repeated in homes across Japan; old and young generations were united on New Year's Eve by sharing the experience of watching *Kōbaku*.

Celebrities were often involved in comic skits in *Kōbaku*. The American magician Rudy Colby, for example, performed sleight-of-hand tricks with White Team members at the 44th *Kōbaku* (1993) (44th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1993:Television Programme).

¹⁶¹ TOKIO later became a member of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community.

¹⁶² Sakai Masaaki had risen to fame during the 1960s with his Group Sounds band, the Spiders. He had previously emceed for the White Team at the 42nd *Kōbaku* (1991) alongside the Red MC, actress Asano Yūko. Sakai later became a member of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community with his band Sans Filter (lit. 'Without Filter').

¹⁶³ The wrestlers were also celebrity judges that year.

Other jokes involved the NHK Hall audience.¹⁶⁴ Indeed, during this period, the in-house audience became increasingly integrated into *Kōbaku* and often encouraged to support a particular team.¹⁶⁵

Staging and Technology

Kōbaku continued to use live and pre-recorded footage from all over the world. At the 41st *Kōbaku* (1990), for example, song performances from artists unable to attend *Kōbaku* were projected onto a giant video screen onstage (Takahashi 2000:52).¹⁶⁶ *Kōbaku* also embraced the latest broadcasting technology of the early 1990s. From the 43rd *Kōbaku* (1992), for example, the programme was filmed in high-resolution ‘Hi-Vision’ and the following year began screening in digital high-definition via NHK’s satellite station BS-2 (Nihon Hōsō Gijutsu Kyoku Seisaku Gijutsu Centā 2000:466). *Kōbaku* presented clearer and more detailed images, and as such, special computer generated graphics and special effects were featured more prominently, especially in *Kōbaku*’s opening sequences.¹⁶⁷

Despite *Kōbaku*’s hi-tech image, many song performers had simplistic stage designs and wore basic costumes. At the 42nd *Kōbaku* (1991), for example, the White Team duo Tonneruzu (Tunnels) wore the “cheapest costume” in *Kōbaku* history,

¹⁶⁴ At the 44th *Kōbaku* (1993), for example, the NHK Hall audience was ‘let in’ on a prearranged joke involving the celebrity comedian Tani Kei (44th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1993:Television Program). Instead of performing his signature hand gesture, much to his genuine surprise the house lights were turned on and the audience and onstage song performers performed the gesture toward him. By contrast, a celebrity at the 45th *Kōbaku* (1994) played a joke on *Kōbaku* staff: One of the hosts from the NTV’s popular ‘absurd-challenge’ television program ‘*Susume! denpa shōnen*’ (‘Go forth! Radiowave Boy’) posed as a chorister during *Kōbaku*’s closing ceremony (45th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1994:Television Program).

¹⁶⁵ Most notably, female audience members at the 44th *Kōbaku* (1993) demonstrated their alliance with the Red Team by wearing red gloves (44th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1993:Television Program).

¹⁶⁶ One such performer was New York singer/songwriter Paul Simon who sang the Simon and Garfunkel English-language song “Bridge Over Troubled Water” which was billed in Japanese as “*Asu ni kakeru hashī*” (“Bridge Over Troubled Water”) and contained Japanese-language subtitles on-screen. Video footage shows Simon saying “*Kōbaku utagassen*, hello Japan. New Year’s Greetings”, thus indicating the song performance is exclusively for *Kōbaku* (41st *Kōbaku utagassen* 1990:Television Program). Other outside broadcasts that year included an interview and live performance from the Japanese folk singer Nagabuchi Tsuyoshi in Berlin. In addition, the Japanese vocalist Kubota Toshinobu and New York singer Alyson Williams performed a soul/rhythm and blues duet titled “Forever Yours” which took place in an empty New York restaurant. Video footage of this performance indicates that it was pre-recorded and heavily edited in the manner of a music video (41st *Kōbaku utagassen* 1990:Television Program). The singers, moreover, were miming.

¹⁶⁷ Footage from the 44th *Kōbaku* (1993), for example, shows a crane-like bird flying over the NHK Hall audience while the opening for the 45th *Kōbaku* (1994) shows giant colour photographs of song performers, projected onto the side of a building (44th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1993:Television Program; 45th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1994:Television Program).

costing only ¥400 (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:16).¹⁶⁸ Other song performers used their costumes to draw attention to social issues. The following year, for example, singer Motoki Masahiro hung six white condoms that were filled with air and white paint around his neck to raise awareness of AIDS and safe sex practices (see photograph Takahashi 2000:46). The most dazzling outfits, however, were still those worn by *enka* singer Kobayashi Sachiko. Her costumes and staging became increasingly theatrical, outlandish and technically complex.¹⁶⁹ By this stage in Kobayashi's *Kōbaku* career, each costume was a work of art and, as such, received a descriptive title.¹⁷⁰ She wore '*Fuyu no tori*' ('Winter Bird') at the 42nd *Kōbaku* (1991) and, for the first time, incorporated *keren* (stage tricks) into her performance (Wilson 2003:Internet).¹⁷¹ The following year, a light instillation was woven into her costume's fabric. This glowing outfit, titled '*Hikari no fantaji*' ('Fantasy of Light'), caused the NHK Hall audience to audibly gasp when it illuminated the darkened stage (Atelier Hinode 2004:Internet).¹⁷² That year, the White Team's Mikawa Ken'ichi wore a considerably glamorous outfit during his song performance.¹⁷³ Although Kobayashi's costume and stage design was considerable superior, this demonstrated Mikawa's potential as her rival.

¹⁶⁸ Tonneruzu had created an uproar when they displayed a painted message on their backs (see discussion earlier in this chapter). One photograph of this performance shows the men covered in body paint (one was red, the other was white), wearing bushy wigs and loincloths (see photograph Takahashi 2000:49). These costumes were not only for 'shock value', they also made resembled (and made reference to) the traditional Japanese mythological character *oni* (ogre/demon/wicked spirit) and in particular the *aka-oni* (red ogre), which is usually depicted as wearing a loincloth, having unkempt hair and being red in colour.

¹⁶⁹ For example, footage from the 41st *Kōbaku* (1990) shows Kobayashi rising from underneath the stage (as in past *Kōbaku*) and slowly stretching her arms out to her side to reveal her startling costume (41st *Kōbaku utagassen* 1990:Television Program). She wears a black ball gown, partially obscured by long, silver grey and gold patterned sashes. Upon her head is a very tall, conical-shaped gold headdress with hanging jewels. The most striking part of Kobayashi's costume is, however, two black draping 'wings' that are decorated by small clusters of red flames.

¹⁷⁰ See Atelier Hinode for the names of Kobayashi Sachiko's *Kōbaku* creations (2004:Internet).

¹⁷¹ Her feathered bird-like outfit was reminiscent of a phoenix costume worn by *Sūpā kabuki* ('Super *kabuki*') creator Ichikawa Ennosuke III in the play '*Yamato Takeru*' (Wilson 2003:Internet). Like Ichikawa, Kobayashi was also suspended by wires and 'flew' "above and over" the stage in the style of a *kabuki chūnori* (mid-air suspension 'flying') aerialist (Wilson 2003:Internet). One photograph shows Kobayashi in a silver white dress, holding out long *furisode* sleeves (typical of *kimono*) to emulate outstretched wings (see photograph Takahashi 2000:17).

¹⁷² Video footage of this performance shows her standing on a highly elevated podium, softly lit by two blue spotlights (43rd *Kōbaku utagassen* 1992:Television Program). She is wearing a futuristic bodice attached to suspenders, a large headdress shaped like a bouffant wig and, most notably, has two sets of extremely large geometric-shaped wings that skim the stage floor.

¹⁷³ Video footage shows Mikawa Ken'ichi wearing thick red lipstick and dark eye make-up that year as well as feminine-styled clothing such as an enormous, floor-length white-feathered coat (which completely obscures his body) and a sparkling gold skullcap (43rd *Kōbaku utagassen* 1992:Television Program). Near the end of his performance, he partially removes the coat to reveal a pale silk pantsuit.

Kobayashi's 30th anniversary in the Japanese *geinōkai* (entertainment world) was celebrated with an especially striking costume for the 44th *Kōhaku* (1993) titled 'Pegasasu' ('Pegasus'), the winged steed from Greek mythology (Atelier Hinode 2004:Internet).¹⁷⁴ Her song performance staging for the 45th *Kōhaku* (1994) was, however, considerably more complex.¹⁷⁵ Titled 'Ningen naiagura' ('Human Niagara')—a reference to the famous Canadian waterfall Niagara Falls—this set placed Kobayashi on an elevated podium while beneath her, “descending layers of revolving blue balls” emitted dry-ice like a waterfall (Wilson 2003:Internet, Atelier Hinode 2004:Internet).¹⁷⁶ Mikawa Ken'ichi was paired against Kobayashi that year, thus enabling a clear comparison between their staging. Surprisingly, his dazzling costume and breathtaking stage design was comparable to Kobayashi's own. This, in turn, signalled the start of a long-running 'stage design and costume battle' between the singers.¹⁷⁷

Judging and Voting System

From the 41st *Kōhaku* (1990), *Kōhaku* once again incorporated votes from 'outside' sources. Indeed, 200 families throughout Japan voted and increased to 600 the following year—the largest number of voting families to date.¹⁷⁸ Inevitably, however, it

¹⁷⁴ Video excerpts show the NHK Hall audience cheering, applauding and whistling when the stage lights reveal Kobayashi, dwarfed behind two enormous blue-feathered wings spanning the entire width of the stage (44th *Kōhaku utagassen* 1993:Television Program). The scene is so spectacular that audience members continue to murmur in awe, long after the instrumental opening of the song. At one point, the blue-feathered material falls away, exposing dazzling gold wings underneath. Later in the performance, another set of wings unfurl behind her “to produce a halo effect” and ripple in a gentle breeze (Wilson 2003:Internet).

¹⁷⁵ The dramatic outfits worn by Kobayashi in the latter part of this five-year period were visually appealing to *Kōhaku* audiences, but some were

so restrictive they inhibited her singing. Moreover, people were focused so much on what she was wearing that they were not even really listening to her voice or aware of what song she was singing. To rectify this, a conscious attempt was made to create stage illusions, rather than costumes, effects that would be visually interesting, but at the same time give [Kobayashi] more freedom of voice and movement, and which allowed the attention to be on her as much as on the outfit...The outfits were revealed in stages, at the ends of the song verses, so [Kobayashi] herself was kept more in the spotlight. (Wilson 2003:Internet)

The mechanically-operated stage illusions, such as those used in her 'Pegasus' and 'Human Niagara' creations, clearly achieved this aim and Kobayashi continued to make dazzling costumes part of her *Kōhaku* song performances.

¹⁷⁶ Video footage shows her in costume inspired by the Victorian period (45th *Kōhaku utagassen* 1994:Television Program). She wears an enormous glittering blue ball gown with puffed sleeves and a large curled wig and has a small black star as a beauty spot on her cheek and waves a feather fan.

¹⁷⁷ Mikawa wore a blue, red and gold bejewelled costume with hanging sleeves. Video footage of the start of this performance shows him floating from above the *Kōhaku* stage like a butterfly (45th *Kōhaku utagassen* 1994:Television Program).

¹⁷⁸ This was in addition to the 10 celebrity judges and one NHK judge that year.

proved too difficult to coordinate voting of this magnitude and family votes were discontinued from the 43rd *Kōbaku* (1992).

During early 1990s, NHK tested new various methods of tallying the Hall audience's votes. At the 41st *Kōbaku* (1990), for example, representatives from six sections of the Hall voted on behalf of the audience by raising either a Red or White paddle (41st *Kōbaku utagassen* 1990:Television Programme).¹⁷⁹ At the 43rd *Kōbaku* (1992), however, the Hall was divided into three regions, namely the ground floor, the first balcony and the second balcony, and audience members raised individual fans (43rd *Kōbaku utagassen* 1992:Television Programme).¹⁸⁰ After years of alterations, it seemed that an appropriate voting method was at last decided.

Historical Tally of Victories

After the White Team triumphed at the 41st *Kōbaku* (1990), the teams alternated between winning and losing for most of this period. The Red Team's victory the 45th *Kōbaku* (1994), however, brought its score on the historical tally to 24 compared with White's 21. Red was once again the reigning champion but it was only a matter of time until the White Team levelled the score.

The 46th–49th *Kōbaku* (1995–1998)

By the latter half of the 1990s, *Kōbaku* had a stable group of singers whose music reflected the sounds of the late 20th century. Moreover, the contest was firmly focused on Japanese popular music and local trends.

¹⁷⁹ That year, audience votes were converted into six balls and these were added to the judges' voting balls.

¹⁸⁰ The birdwatchers that year were from Azabu University, a specialist Veterinarian and Environmental Science institution. Video footage from the 43rd *Kōbaku* (1992) reveals the intricacies of the voting, judging and tallying methods (43rd *Kōbaku utagassen* 1992:Television Program). The total votes for each team is documented on the back of three separate signs and dramatically revealed. The first sign (presumably representing the votes from the floor level of the NHK Hall audience) indicates the White Team is narrowly preferred: it achieves 342 votes compared with the Red Team's 348. The second sign (presumably for the first balcony) reveals 597 votes for White and for 474 Red. The third and final sign shows the greatest difference with 600 votes for the White Team and 216 for the Red. Clearly, the majority of the NHK Hall audience preferred the White Team that year.

Table 1.10 Summary Data: the 46th–49th *Kōbaku* (1995–1998)

Edition	Year	Timeslot (pm)	Duration ^a (H:M)	Venue	Ratings ^b (%) per half		SP ^c per Team	Winning Team
					First	Second		
46 th	1995	8:00–11:45	3:45	NHK Hall	44.9	50.4	25	White
47 th	1996	8:00–11:45	3:45	NHK Hall	41.6	53.9	25	White
48 th	1997	8:00–11:45	3:45	NHK Hall	40.2	50.7	25	White
49 th	1998	8:00–11:45	3:45	NHK Hall	45.4	57.2	25	Red

Source: Adapted from Takahashi 2000:20–35.

^a Inclusive of the ten-minute news bulletin.

^b Maximum ratings achieved over the course of the programme from the Kantō region. See Appendix A for *Kōbaku* audience ratings for other regions.

^c Song performers.

Time and Venue

Kōbaku's timeslot, duration and venue remained unchanged throughout this period.

Ratings

Compared with earlier contests, *Kōbaku*'s ratings were less favourable but, nevertheless, slowly improving. The first half of the 46th *Kōbaku* (1995) in particular, achieved the highest 'first half rating' since the new ratings monitoring began in 1989.¹⁸¹ However, the 47th *Kōbaku* (1996) captured far more viewers during the second half, presumably to see which singers would be the final performers, and fewer watched the first half. Finally, after years of fluctuating ratings, *Kōbaku* rose to new heights of popularity in 1998 when the 49th *Kōbaku* achieved the highest maximum rating in twelve years.¹⁸² Would as many viewers tune in for the milestone 50th *Kōbaku* the following year?

Song Performers and Genres

Throughout 1995, a number of devastating and demoralising events occurred in Japan and in order to uplift the nation's spirits, the 46th *Kōbaku* (1995) adopted the theme '*Nippon arata naru tabidachi*' ('Japan: A New Start') (Takahashi 2000:32).¹⁸³ It was an especially upbeat, exciting and well-received *Kōbaku* and set a precedent for *Kōbaku* in

¹⁸¹ Indeed, the ratings for the 46th *Kōbaku* (1995) far surpassed other New Year's Eve television programs that year, including TV Asahi's program "The Beatles Anthology" which captured only 3.3 percent of Kantō viewers (Schilling 1997:98).

¹⁸² The 49th *Kōbaku* (1998) surpassed the record set at the 46th *Kōbaku* (1995) and achieved the highest rating ever documented for the first half of the program.

¹⁸³ In January that year, the Great Hanshin–Awaji earthquake struck Kobe, leaving more than 300,000 people homeless and a death count of over 6000 people (McCormack 1998:9–10). Only months later, the religious cult Aum Shinrikyō conducted a series of deadly sarin gas attacks in downtown Tokyo, killing and injuring more than 5000 people (Iida 2002:238). The nation's anguish was further compounded by the failing economy which reached a new low that year when several prominent financial organisations declared bankruptcy.

the 1990s. Several *Kōbaku* favourites appeared, as did many newcomers.¹⁸⁴ However, it was the ‘Komuro Family’ performers—singers and musicians who have worked with the dance-style J-pop talent scout, producer, songwriter and performer Komuro Tetsuya—that dominated the *Kōbaku* line-up.¹⁸⁵ In particular, the ‘Komuro Family’ singer Amuro Namie¹⁸⁶ made an impressive *Kōbaku* debut and Komuro Tetsuya’s performance with his own band (named ‘H Jungle With t’) was also memorable.¹⁸⁷

The 47th *Kōbaku* (1996) projected a sense of pride in Japan’s song heritage, as articulated in the programme theme ‘*Uta no aru kuni ■ nippon*’ (‘The Country with Songs: Japan’) (Takahashi 2000:28). Once again, the ‘Komuro Family’s acts were prominent in the song performer line-up. Komuro’s new band globe debuted as did the ‘Komuro Family’ soloist Kahala Tomomi (who was accompanied by Komuro on piano) and Amuro Namie performed a song composed by Komuro. There were also unusual collaborations between *Kōbaku* song performers—the versatile *enka* singer Mori Shin’ichi, for example, was joined onstage by guitarist Hatake from the pop/rock band Sharan Q. Such associations were not only staged to celebrate Japanese artists and their music, but also to express comradeship between team members.

¹⁸⁴ One newcomer was the singer/actor Sakai Noriko who had played a hearing-impaired person in a television drama that year. Intriguingly, she appeared ‘in character’ for her *Kōbaku* song performance and also used sign language to communicate with *Kōbaku* viewers (Takahashi 2000:32).

¹⁸⁵ Komuro himself is also a performer in acts such as TM Network and globe, both of which have performed in *Kōbaku*.

¹⁸⁶ Amuro Namie was later a member of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community. For Amuro’s debut *Kōbaku* performance, however, five female dancers collectively named MAX performed alongside her; soon after, MAX became a vocal group and it was also a member of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community. All of these women (including Amuro) had trained at the famous talent and grooming institution, the Okinawa Actor’s School. In his research on pop idols from this school (1999:esp 122–134), Aoyagi notes that the school first gained national recognition through Amuro’s success and subsequently became “the powerhouse of the new and emergent pop-idol category, “idol dancers” (*dansu-kei aidoru*) (122).

¹⁸⁷ At the 46th *Kōbaku* (1995), guest singer Hamada Masatoshi—a member of the *manzai* (comedy dialogue with musical accompaniment) duo named Downtown—joined Komuro’s band (which was called ‘H Jungle With t’). The performance descended into chaos when Masatoshi’s comedic partner Matsumoto Hitoshi also appeared on stage. Bizarrely, he was dressed as a geisha on the upper half of his body yet wore very brief underpants on the lower half (see photograph Takahashi 2000:32). Matsumoto Hitoshi appearance, as one magazine notes below, caused a surge in ratings.

The *Kōbaku* song performers and MCs were surprised and pleased by his appearance and the [NHK Hall] audience cheered loudly. After the performance, the two men made jokes about each other and the [television] audience ratings rose. The audience rating at the beginning of their song was 49.5% at 9:30pm...but six and a half minutes later, during Matsumoto’s appearance, it raised to 56.6%. This rise of 7.1% within a single song was the highest [in *Kōbaku* history]. (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha. 1999:17)

The 48th *Kōbaku* (1997) had the theme ‘*Yūki, genki, charenji?*’ (‘Courage, Vitality, Challenge’) which was less specific than themes from previous years but still captured the energy of the programme (Takahashi 2000:24). The number of new *Kōbaku* acts increased that year, many of which went on to perform in the 50th *Kōbaku*, including the ‘Komuro Family’ vocal groups MAX and SPEED, the band Every Little Thing, singer Matsu Takako and the rock band GLAY.¹⁸⁸ J-pop acts were especially prevalent and J-pop star Amuro Namie gave a memorable performance as the Red Team’s *tori* singer—reputedly her last performance before taking maternity leave and retiring indefinitely.

The 49th *Kōbaku* (1998) focused on local music and the imminent new millennium, as described by the programme theme ‘*Nippon niwa uta ga aru ~ yume, kibō, soshite mirai e?*’ (‘There are Songs in Japan: Dreams, Hopes and Looking to the Future’) (Takahashi 2000:20).¹⁸⁹ In addition, there were several new J-pop acts such as the all-female vocal octet Mōningu Musume., piano/vocal duo Kiroro, the vocal group DA PUMP and the rock band L’arc~en~Ciel (lit. ‘Rainbow’).¹⁹⁰ In a variety of supplementary segments and team talent segments, fellow teammates welcomed these song performers into *Kōbaku*.¹⁹¹ In a highly anticipated career comeback following the birth of her child, Amuro Namie performed second to last for the Red Team.¹⁹² The highlight that year was, however, song performance by the Red Team’s *tori* singer

¹⁸⁸ At age 13, SPEED singer Shimabukuro Hiroko became the youngest *Kōbaku* song performer in the contest’s history (Takahashi 2000:32). All of the members of SPEED (and also MAX and the singer Amuro Namie) had trained at the Okinawa Actor’s School.

¹⁸⁹ The first part of this theme was reminiscent of the 47th *Kōbaku* (1995) theme, namely ‘*Uta no aru kuni: nippon?*’ (‘The Country with Songs: Japan’).

¹⁹⁰ Mōningu Musume., Kiroro, DA PUMP and L’arc~en~Ciel were all later members of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community. Like several other *Kōbaku* acts, the members of DA PUMP had also trained at the Okinawa Actor’s School.

¹⁹¹ In a comedy segment between songs, for example, *enka* singers Maekawa Kiyoshi, Yoshi Ikuzō and Hosokawa Takashi playfully adorn coloured wigs and glam makeup to look like the *bijuaru-kei* (visual-style) White Team act Luna Sea (49th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1998:Television Program). Similarly, Red Team *enka* singers including Nakamura Mitsuko, Fuji Ayako and Tendō Yoshimi, attempt to sing a song by the youthful J-pop group Max that year. In the White Team Talent segment, several *enka* and J-pop song performers fought like *samurai* against a man wearing a red jacket, while the Red Team members wore ruffled Spanish dresses and tap-danced in time with castanets

¹⁹² Amuro gave an emotional performance that ended in tears (49th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1998:Television Program). Afterward, her fellow Team members, MAX, embraced her and she was quoted by one magazine as saying “I could sing well because of the warm support I received from everyone. I am now relieved” (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:147), thus demonstrating team unity. See Chapter Three for further details about this song performance.

Wada Akiko—in a dramatic gesture, she lowered her microphone mid-song and her powerful voice filled NHK Hall without the assistance of standard amplification.

Other Participants

The ‘New Start for Japan’, as stated in the 46th *Kōbaku* (1995) theme, was also a fresh beginning for *Kōbaku*. That year, two General Chairmen—one male and female—were adopted to heighten the ‘battle of the sexes’ atmosphere. Although both were retained the following year, only the male NHK announcer Miyamoto Ryūji, known for his clear speaking voice and image of respectability, returned for subsequent programmes including the 50th *Kōbaku* (Takahashi 2000:24).

At the 47th *Kōbaku* (1996), 19-year-old Matsu Takako was the youngest Team MC in *Kōbaku* history and her polite demeanour brought a wholesome quality to the Red MC role (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:147).¹⁹³ The following year, the youthful, cheeky and charismatic SMAP member Nakai Masahiro was the White MC. By contrast, the Red MC was the strong-willed, forthright and mature soloist Wada Akiko, both of whom were also song performers that year. Their competitive banter and distinctive, lively personalities made the programme especially entertaining. Nakai was retained for the 49th *Kōbaku* (1998) but was placed opposite a similarly aged Red MC: NHK announcer Kubo Junko.¹⁹⁴ That year, for unknown reasons, Kitajima Saburo and Wada Akiko—two of the longest-serving *Kōbaku* song performers—assisted with MC duties and were informally called *tīmu rīdā* (Team Leaders).

Many types of additional participants appeared on *Kōbaku*. Celebrity guests, for example, provided words of encouragement for song performers and their associated team.¹⁹⁵ Singers and dancers, meanwhile, augmented the individual song

¹⁹³ That year, Matsu and the White MC were formally introduced as ‘*kyaputen*’ (‘captains’) rather than ‘*shikā*’ (lit. ‘chairmen’) even though their duties remained unchanged (47th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1996:Television Program). Interestingly, Team MCs at the 27th *Kōbaku* (1976) were also called ‘*kyaputen*’ (‘captains’). NHK’s definitive publication on *Kōbaku*, however, uses the label ‘*shikā*’ (see Takahashi 2000:28).

¹⁹⁴ See Chapter Three for further details about these MCs at the 49th *Kōbaku* (1998).

¹⁹⁵ For example, the male J-pop duo Kinki Kids (who were not song performers that year) cheered for the White Team during ‘Song Performance Prelude’ segments in the 47th *Kōbaku* (1996) (Takahashi 2000:28).

performances.¹⁹⁶ Children's television characters also appeared so to cater for young audience members, in keeping with *Kōbaku*'s status as a family programme.¹⁹⁷

Staging and Technology

Kōbaku's opening ceremonies were staged in order to maximise the audience's excitement for the segments that followed.¹⁹⁸ Song performances, meanwhile, were styled to suit specific music genres. Female *enka* singers, for example, wore beautiful *kimono* and had minimal props while J-pop bands often used dramatic lighting, clouds of dry ice and aerial stunts.¹⁹⁹ Technically advanced staging was, nevertheless, the realm of Kobayashi Sachiko and Mikawa Ken'ichi. Their friendly rivalry had become highly competitive and the singers performed in succession at both the 46th and the 47th *Kōbaku* (1995 and 1996) so that audiences and judges could compare their respective costumes and stage designs.

Kobayashi's costume for the 46th *Kōbaku* (1995) was named 'Nijūisseiki no kannonsama' ('21st Century Kannon')—a futuristic interpretation of Kannon, the Buddhist goddess of mercy (Atelier Hinode 2004:Internet).²⁰⁰ Mikawa's performance was, however, more impressive because of his mid-performance costume change from a sparkling blue ball gown to a Las Vegas-styled white feather and sequin outfit (see photographs Takahashi 2000:33). The following year, Kobayashi used dramatic staging devices to technologically enhance her costume. Her design, titled 'Nijūisseiki no yuki onna' ('21st Century Snow Woman') used mechanical movements that 'came alive' and

¹⁹⁶ Indeed, one photograph from the 46th *Kōbaku* (1995) shows a troupe from the all-female Takarazuka revue—wearing distinctive makeup, ornate pink dresses and classic tuxedos—gathered around Tanimura Shinji during his song performance (see photograph Takahashi 2000:35).

¹⁹⁷ At the 46th *Kōbaku* (1995), for example, several life-sized animal characters from NHK children's show 'Okāsan to issho' ('With Mother') danced during a variety segment (see photograph Takahashi 2000:34). Furthermore, Disney characters such as Mickey Mouse and Snow White performed a medley of songs at the 49th *Kōbaku* (1998) (49th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1998:Television Program).

¹⁹⁸ Footage from the 47th *Kōbaku* (1996), for example, shows a giant sphere on stage that suddenly breaks open to reveal the *Kōbaku* song performers standing inside (47th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1996:Television Program). Other footage shows a mysterious egg-like balloon appearing onstage during the opening ceremony for the 49th *Kōbaku* (1998) (49th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1998:Television Program). To the surprise of the in-house audience, it rapidly deflated to reveal the *Kōbaku* song performers standing on a tiered pyramid.

¹⁹⁹ Video footage from this period documents this general trend (47th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1996:Television Program; 48th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1997:Television Program; 49th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1998:Television Program).

²⁰⁰ A photograph from this performance shows her wearing a long-sleeved black dress with hanging silver threads and a tall crown-like silver headdress (see photograph Takahashi 2000:17).

subsequently delighted audiences (Atelier Hinode 2004:Internet).²⁰¹ Mikawa's staging was, by comparison, less dramatic but his outfit was similarly lavish—he wore an ornate purple feather headdress and a large multi-coloured robe with long silver horns arising from around and behind his shoulders (see photograph Takahashi 2000:28).

The Kobayashi/Mikawa 'stage design and costume battle' progressed such that both singers regularly used large-scale stage illusions and wore extravagant outfits. Consequently, *Kōbaku* production staff required additional time to coordinate each performer's elaborate staging. To ease the strain, from the 48th *Kōbaku* (1997) the singers no longer performed consecutively and were instead distanced in the programme order. Kobayashi, in particular, used wide variety of technical effects. Her design that year was titled '*Seimei tanjō*' ('Creation') and combined a rapid costume change, moving parts and imbedded electric lights so to capture "the beauty and chaos of the galaxies at the moment of creation" (Wilson 2003:Internet, Atelier Hinode 2004:Internet).²⁰² Mikawa's costume and staging was similarly dramatic and complex. Wearing a silver and white gown and outstretched angle wings, Mikawa was suspended by wires used aerial tricks to fly above the *Kōbaku* stage (see photograph Takahashi 2000:26).

Kobayashi's unusual design for the 49th *Kōbaku* (1998) was titled '*Hyuman fantaji*' ('Human Fantasy') (Atelier Hinode 2004:Internet). During her performance, she slowly removed several bulky layers of material and eventually exposed a skin-tight flesh-coloured dress. This motion symbolised the 'stripping back' of her extravagant

²⁰¹ Video footage shows Kobayashi standing amid swirling dry ice and wearing a black and white long coat decorated with snow-covered trees on each hanging sleeve (47th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1996:Television Program). She also wears a very large silver crown with snowflake-shaped peaks and hanging silver threads. Throughout the first stanza, Kobayashi is stationary and the anticipation for one of her trademark special effects escalates. Later, she is rapidly elevated several meters in the air via a podium. Meanwhile, her coat falls away to reveal a glittering gold dress which falls to the floor. When she outstretches her arms to exhibit the dress, an enormous multi-layered silver snowflake unfurls behind her and the NHK Hall audience gasps, screams and applauds (see Plate 6).

²⁰² Unlike the previous year, the progressive unfolding of special effects occurred mid-song, therefore diverting attention away from Kobayashi's vocal performance. Video footage from the start of the song performance shows a glowing egg-shaped cocoon elevated onstage (48th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1997:Television Program). It slowly splits in half and Kobayashi emerges like a butterfly. As the song progresses, two giant wings with tiny, multi-coloured electric lights appear behind her. At one point, Kobayashi's entire outfit including her headdress, skirt, bodice and wings, is aglow thus creating a spectacular light show.

performances in order to shift attention toward her singing (Wilson 2003:Internet).²⁰³ By contrast, Mikawa wore a majestic costume and used grandiose designs and stage tricks that year.²⁰⁴ The stark contrast between performances prompted speculation about the future of the Kobayashi/Mikawa ‘stage design and costume battle’—would it continue for the 50th *Kōbaku*?

Judging and Voting System

In past *Kōbaku*, each step of the judging process was displayed for all to see. This was a complex and time-consuming activity involving outsider voters, the judging panel and the in-house audience. Votes for each team were counted, tallied, revealed and then combined into a grand total score. During the late 1990s, however, this process was greatly simplified. In addition to the judging panel (which consisted of 10 celebrities and one NHK representative), individual members of the NHK Hall audience voted via red or white fans which were counted by birdwatchers.²⁰⁵ At the end of the contest, the grand-total audience vote for each team was revealed and then converted into voting balls along with the judges’ votes which the Team MCs threw toward the NHK hall audience.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Kobayashi’s ‘costume marathon’ predated her battle with Mikawa and required a tremendous amount of money, effort and time produce a new design for a few fleeting moments of visual pleasure. Indeed, Kobayashi acknowledges that it “takes a year’s salary to make, six months to plan for and three minutes to watch” (Kobayashi cited in Wilson n.d:Internet).

²⁰⁴ Footage from that year’s performance shows Mikawa wearing an ornate crown and regal robes (49th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1988:Television Program). As he slowly rises into the air, a long skirt unfurls and reveals a cherubic painting reminiscent of a Michelangelo ceiling fresco (see Plate 7). Later, Mikawa ‘grows’ butterfly wings and begins to ‘fly’ across the *Kōbaku* stage.

²⁰⁵ Footage from the 47th *Kōbaku* (1996) shows that each team had its own group of birdwatchers who would only count audience votes associated with that team (47th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1996:Television Program). In a reversal of loyalty, several female birdwatchers counted White Team votes and male birdwatchers counted Red Team votes. This was remedied at the 48th and 49th *Kōbaku* (1997 and 1998) when instead of mixed-sex groups, the birdwatchers (like the song performers) were segregated according to sex: only female birdwatchers were allowed to count Red Team votes and only male birdwatchers were allowed to count White votes (48th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1997:Television Program; 49th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1998:Television Program).

²⁰⁶ A comparison of video footage reveals how many votes were tallied from the NHK Hall audience during this period (47th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1996:Television Program; 48th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1997:Television Program; 49th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1998:Television Program). The 47th *Kōbaku* (1996), for example, received 2096 NHK Hall audience votes compared with 2678 for the 48th *Kōbaku* (1997) and 2558 for the 49th *Kōbaku* (1998). This suggests that not all votes were counted and/or some audience members did not vote. Video footage also sheds light on the audience’s team preferences each year. In the case of the 47th *Kōbaku* (1996), 801 audience votes were recorded for the Red Team while an overwhelming 1295 votes were registered for the White Team. The difference was even greater the following year and the majority of audience voters once again preferred the White Team, which accrued 1610 votes compared with the Red Team’s 1068 votes. At the 49th *Kōbaku* (1998), however, the Red Team received the larger amount, tallying 1428 votes against the White Team’s 1130. Remarkably, at each of the 47th, 48th and 49th *Kōbaku* (1996, 1997 and 1998), the audience’s preferred team was also the overall winner.

Historical Tally of Victories

For decades, the White Team trailed in the historical tally of victories. During the late 1990s, however, it triumphed at both the 46th and 47th *Kōbaku* (1995 and 1996) and after winning the 48th *Kōbaku* (1997) the scores were finally equal at 24 victories each. The 49th *Kōbaku* (1998), as such, was a tightly fought contest. The outcome could greatly shift the historical Tally of Victories—could the White Team finally take the lead? Even though the Red Team emerged victorious, the upcoming 50th *Kōbaku* was an opportunity for the White Team to again level the scores and create an even level for the first *Kōbaku* of the new millennium.

Having gained a broad understanding of the contest and its development over time, we can now look to 1999 and the series of *Kōbaku*-related occasions which frame the 50th *Kōbaku* television programme and the song performances of the Community.

2

The 50th *Kōhaku* Event

The 50th *Kōbaku* programme is not an isolated television show. It lies at the heart of a series of *Kōbaku*-related occasions, from the opening of the audience ticket ballot, to the first whisperings of who the MCs might be, to the critical dissection of the post-broadcast audience ratings. These occasions—collectively labelled ‘the 50th *Kōbaku* event’ in this study—are documented here in a timeline spanning October 1999 to the first few days of 2000. An examination of the 50th *Kōbaku* event not only reveals details about the many aspects of the programme and accounts for the amassing expectancy from fans and media. It also presents a perspective of *Kōbaku* that shows it is more than merely a television programme and traces how the 50th *Kōbaku* Community of song performers is formed. Ultimately, this chapter documents the sense of occasion surrounding a national tradition in its milestone year.

The NHK Hall Audience Ballot

In October, well before official details about the concert were released, NHK announced the opening of the annual *Kōbaku* audience ticket ballot. For most members of the Japanese public, the only way to witness the 50th *Kōbaku* in person was to be a member of the NHK Hall audience.¹ As such, fans were keen to lodge the reply-paid ‘double-postcard’ with NHK in the hope of success—there was only a window of one month to submit.² After the closing date of 20 November, officials drew postcards randomly and single tickets were awarded to lucky applicants.

Fans often go to great lengths to maximise their chances of obtaining a ticket to *Kōbaku*. One long-time fan, a winner of multiple *Kōbaku* tickets each year, notes that the first step is to send an authorised, valid postcard (Makiyama 1996:12).³ As with any ballot, the chance of winning greatly increases if an applicant submits several entries.⁴

¹ Indeed, an NHK staff member stated that visitors are usually not allowed into NHK Hall for *Kōbaku*. (Koike Fumina 2000:pers. com.) Moreover, it was noted that if one’s postcard was not selected from the ballot there was no other way to see *Kōbaku* ‘in the flesh’.

² A ‘double-postcard’ is a standard-sized card divided in halves and available from post offices.

³ It is essential that entrants correctly write NHK’s postal address on one part of the postcard and their own on the other.

⁴ It is unknown if, or how many, entries are received from outside of Japan. At the time of submission I was in Australia but this did not cause a problem. Intriguingly, a sympathetic NHK staff member submitted an entry on my behalf using her Japanese sibling’s name and contact details so to avoid the postcard becoming lost or encountering “any other trouble for the reason that it comes from abroad” (Koike Fumina 1999:pers. com.).

NHK does not limit the number of entries made per person and, as such, it receives in excess of 500,000 postcards each year (NHK 1998a:Internet). Sadly, supply cannot meet the demand and only 3500 *Kōbaku* tickets are distributed each year by NHK.⁵ Tickets are highly prized because of their scarcity; fans outlay a considerable amount of money on postage stamps and dedicate considerable time to writing multiple postcards in the hope that (at least) one will be drawn. Fans also share information with each other as to how to maximise their outcomes. One successful *Kōbaku* entrant (mentioned previously), for example, studiously examined the ratio between the number of postcards submitted during an eight-year period and the resulting successful entries, noting in his book that

In Showa era 63 [1988], I won two tickets after sending 40 postcards...in Heisei era 2 [1990], I posted 100 cards and won two seats [and]...in Heisei era 4 [1992], I posted 200 cards and received two seats... In Heisei era 5 [1993], I only got one ticket after sending 200 cards...in Heisei era 6 [1994], I got two after sending 200 cards...[and] in Heisei era 7 [1995], I received one out of 200 postcards. (Makiyama 1996:11, 13)

Fans can also be superstitious about their entries, believing that the location where an entry is lodged will affect the outcome of the draw. This fan's success began with a particularly 'lucky' post-box in Tokyo:

The first time I applied for the postcard was in Showa era 62 [1987]...sending 12 postcards from the Shibuya station South exit post-box, which stands in front of Tokyo Plaza. One was accepted. (Makiyama 1996:11)

Throughout *Kōbaku*'s history, NHK staff has encouraged audience feedback but it is a little known fact that that the likelihood of obtaining *Kōbaku* tickets greatly improves when viewers correspond regularly with the broadcaster. Persistence is often rewarded, as this fan observes:

In Heisei era 3 [1991], I was very lucky. I won four seats and because I have been writing my ideas and contribution letters to NHK, I was given two [additional] guest tickets. I was awarded six tickets in total! (Makiyama 1996:13)

It is likely that additional tickets were also awarded to fans who actively engaged in communication with NHK during 1999. Regardless of the method of acquisition, however, all of the successful entrants in the 50th *Kōbaku* audience ballot received

⁵ This is an approximated number, based on the maximum capacity for NHK Hall which has seating for 3600 people. It should be noted, however, that not all seats are available for the ballot since NHK management retains seats for its own use and for use by *Kōbaku* officials, such as the judges.

confirmation letters and accompanying ticket(s) from early to mid-December that year. By this stage, information about the *Kōbaku* Community had already been announced and, as such, successful ballot entrants now knew who they soon would see performing in the flesh.

Press Releases

The Team MCs and General Chairman

The first official press release relating to the 50th *Kōbaku* came on 4 November when NHK announced the names of the programme hosts. For the fifth consecutive year, NHK's Miyamoto Ryūji was appointed General Chairman and 27-year-old NHK announcer Kubo Junko was named MC for the Red Team for the second consecutive year.⁶ Junko—known for her beauty, respectful manner and clear speaking voice in other NHK programmes—had wide appeal with the Japanese public. It was evident that she valued her role in *Kōbaku* and held the programme in high regard; she had even shed tears of happiness when her team won the pennant at the 49th *Kōbaku* (1988). Her repeated nomination as Red MC suggested that her stirring, emotional reaction had not gone unnoticed by NHK officials and fans alike. She would be the ideal Red MC for the momentous 50th *Kōbaku*.

The Team MCs play a pivotal role in *Kōbaku* and the combination of personalities is essential for a lively and entertaining contest. In 1998, the pairing of Team MCs for the 49th *Kōbaku* had been especially successful. The then White MC was Nakai Masahiro, a vivacious and comical member of pop group SMAP. Like his fellow MC, Kubo Junko, Nakai was aged in his 20s. These MCs brought a youthful, fresh element to the programme and ratings were favourable. It therefore came as a surprise that 44-year-old *kabuki* actor Nakamura Kankurō, and not Nakai, was named as White MC for the 50th *Kōbaku*.

This was Nakamura's first appearance in *Kōbaku* and the reasons for his selection as a *Kōbaku* team MC were obvious. Even though the name 'Nakamura' was

⁶ It was rumoured in the press that the witty presenter Kume Hiroshi of TV Asahi's flagship news program was asked to be the General Chairman for the 50th *Kōbaku*, but he declined (Penn 1999:16). This invitation, however, seems very unlikely considering NHK's commitment to using its own on-screen talent.

already well-known in Japan due to its strong connections with the *kabuki* theatre tradition, Nakamura Kankurō had recently become a national celebrity in his own right during 1999. Every Sunday night on NHK, Nakamura appeared as Kuranosuke Oishi, the lead role of in the familiar legend ‘*Chūshingura (genroku ryōran)*’ (‘Forty-Seven Loyal Samurai of the Genroku Era’), in the 49-episode *samurai* drama.⁷ He showed great promise as a *Kōhaku* team MC: he was a prominent actor with television experience, he was already familiar to NHK viewers and, due to his older age, he would provide a contrast to Kubo’s youthful vitality (see Plate 8).⁸

The Song Performers

Following months of media speculation, rumours were finally confirmed and denied when NHK released the official list of *Kōhaku* song performers to the media at 3:00pm on 1 December. In keeping with tradition, the song performers were also publicly named on NHK-G television news programmes, initially on the 7:00pm bulletin and later at 9:00pm and 11:00pm. Eager fans, however, directly telephoned the NHK *Shichōsha* Centre (Television Viewer Centre) and received the information first-hand.⁹

The members of the 50th *Kōhaku* Community were now known, presented simply as alphabetised names on a list (see Table 2.1 overleaf) because the order of performance would not be disclosed until the programme was broadcast. Even so, the media and fans were familiar with all of the acts (see Appendix B for profiles). Some had performed in *Kōhaku* regularly over the years, others had appeared less frequently and 10 of the acts were newcomers to the programme. This mix of newcomers and veterans was typical when compared with past *Kōhaku* (see Appendix C) and, in line with a more recent trend, all of the 50th *Kōhaku* acts hailed from Japan.¹⁰

⁷ ‘*Chūshingura*’ or ‘*Kanadehon chūshingura*’ are broad terms for the *kabuki* and *bunraku* puppet theatre plays about an epic tale from 1702 whereby 47 loyal *samurai* avenge the death of their lord who was forced by a shogunate official to commit suicide (Kojima and Crane 1987:43).

⁸ Later in December, Nakamura’s public image was slightly tarnished when the media revealed that he “may have unwittingly avoided some taxes” (Penn 1999:16). This indiscretion was not, however, damaging enough for his status as White MC to be revoked.

⁹ Makiyama’s book *Omoide no kōhaku utagassen*, a fan’s guide to *Kōhaku*, also documents this practice (1996:38).

¹⁰ The vast majority of soloists, group and band members are born in Japan and are of Japanese descent (see Tokyo News Tsūshinsha (1999) for the birth dates and places of selected song performers). The two song performers born overseas (not of Japanese descent) are Tommy Snyder (USA), the drummer for White Team band Godaigo, and Marc Panther (France), a rapper for Red Team band, globe. Panther also claims Japanese nationality. It should be noted that both Snyder and Panther have lived in Japan for decades and can speak fluent Japanese. They have, moreover, demonstrated their intimate knowledge and understanding of Japanese culture

Table 2.1 The 50th Kōbaku Song Performers^a

<i>Red Team</i>	<i>White Team</i>
Amuro Namie	Itsuki Hiroshi
Ishikawa Sayuri	Kaguya hime (Moon Princess)
Every Little Thing	Kayama Yūzō
Kawanaka Miyuki	Kitajima Saburō
Kiroro	GLAY (Grey)
globe	Gō Hiromi
Kōzai Kaori	Godaigo ^b
Godai Natsuko	Saijō Hideki
Kobayashi Sachiko	Sada Masashi
Sakamoto Fuyumi	Something ELse
Shigemori Ayumi and Hayami Kentarō	19
Suzuki Ami	SMAP
SPEED	Sans Filtre (Without Filtre)
Tendō Yoshimi	Tanimura Shinji
Nakamura Mitsuko	DA PUMP (The Pump)
Nagayama Yōko	TOKIO (Tokyo)
Hamasaki Ayumi	Toba Ichirō
Harada Yuri	Hosokawa Takashi
Hysteric Blue	Horiuchi Takao
Fuji Ayako	Maekawa Kiyoshi
MAX	Mikawa Ken'ichi
Matsu Takako	Minami Haruo
Matsuda Seiko	Mori Shin'ichi
Mōningu Musume. (Morning Daughters)	Yaen (Wild Monkeys)
Yashiro Aki	Yamakawa Yutaka
Yuki Saori and Yasuda Sachiko	Yoshi Ikuzō
Wada Akiko	L'arc~en~Ciel (Rainbow)

Source: *Uta wa jidai o katatta~yume o tsumuida kōbaku 50kai* 1999:Television Programme

^a This table follows traditional alphabet order according to Japanese syllabary. All of the names of song performers are romanised and, where applicable, English translations are provided in parentheses.

Capitalisation, punctuation and use of symbols, however, have not been altered from the original form. Only the Japanese names of song performers will be referred to in this study and not the English translation of names (refer to Appendix B for a reminder of the English translations and further discussion of these names).

^b It is acknowledged that the band spells its name 'Godeigo' in English, but in Japan it is commonly written in *katakana* as 'Godaigo', a spelling which is adopted for the 50th Kōbaku and is therefore also used in this study.

In light of the magnitude of the 50th celebrations, it had been widely anticipated that the number of acts would exceed that of recent years. As expected, the 50th Kōbaku was shaping up to be a contest of considerable scale—not since the 43rd Kōbaku (1992), which had featured 56 acts, had there been so many song performers. A total of 54 acts (including singers, bands and groups) were announced for the 50th Kōbaku, meaning there were 27 acts for each team.

and behavioural practices in numerous appearances on television programs under the guise as Japanese—not foreign—music stars. While they are still regarded as being 'not-Japanese', they are considered to be 'less foreign' than most *gaijin* (people who are not Japanese).

At this early stage, the 50th *Kōbaku* Community of song performers were yet to come together as a group and would not, in fact, do so until the day of the contest. Most of the newcomers, however, gathered at NHK's Broadcasting Centre in Shibuya, Tokyo, for photos and interviews with the media on 1 December when the list of performers was announced (see Plate 9). Here, amid flashing cameras and smiles and waving hands from the newcomers, the names of the 50th *Kōbaku* performers were quickly relayed by the media. Fans and the press pored over the list: who was included? Who was noticeably omitted? The long-awaited information was examined and dissected for days.

NHK had often excluded performers from *Kōbaku* who were reputedly tainted by scandal. In 1999, however, this unofficial policy was seemingly relaxed. Curiously, Ishikawa Sayuri was invited to perform in the 50th *Kōbaku* in spite of being “reportedly linked to a fraudulent loan deal by the failed Kokumin Bank” earlier in the year and Gō Hiromi was also included, despite word that his “agents were indicted for staging a live street concert without police permission in Shibuya” (Suzuki 1999:3). The indiscretions of popular singer Tendō Yoshimi were also overlooked. Despite a tax audit revealing that she failed to declare her total income and had “intentionally concealed 100 million yen” (“Singer Receives Fine for Concealing Income” 1999:2), she was also invited. NHK's leniency was indicative of a general relaxing of ethical standards in Japan in the late 1990s and NHK needed to uphold its image as a figure of authority without being unjustly strict. At the 1 December press conference, for example, the former *Kōbaku* chairman Kawaguchi Mikio noted that

there used to be various authorities in society, such as that of one's father, family or school, but nowadays, people's views of authority have diversified, greatly affecting the way the year-end song program is produced. (Kawaguchi cited in Suzuki 1999:3)

NHK's desire to keep in touch with its audience and ‘move with the times’ was evident in the type of acts selected for *Kōbaku*. The falling ratings in recent years meant that “only those singers who really want to appear on it” would be invited and only “viewers who really want to watch it” would tune in (Suzuki 1999:3). NHK needed to provide an exciting range of performers and genres in order to appeal to its audience. This was achieved by including heavy rock bands, electronic-based dance groups, and lighter-style ballad singers, all of which can be categorised into broad genre

classifications such as J-pop, modern children’s television songs, *dōyō* (20th century children’s songs) and *kayōkyoku*. Overall, there were a greater proportion of J-pop and *enka* acts, suggesting that programme favoured these two popular music genres (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.2 Summary of Song Performer Genre Classifications in the 50th *Kōbaku*

<i>Basic genres</i>	<i>Totals</i>
J-pop	28
<i>enka</i>	22
<i>kayōkyoku</i>	2
Children’s television songs	1
<i>dōyō</i> (20 th century children’s songs)	1
TOTAL ACTS	54

Source: Adapted from the classifications used by Tower Records, Shibuya, Tokyo, 1999.

This table outlines the types of genres the *Kōbaku* performers are associated with but it is worth noting that although there were 54 acts in the 50th *Kōbaku*, a total of 56 songs are featured in the programme (as previously outlined in the introduction to this study). The other two songs, namely ‘The 50th *Kōbaku* Community Song’ and ‘The *Kōbaku* Finale Song’, are collaborations between the members of the Community and thus the performers of these songs cross many genre boundaries. It is therefore useful to consider the genre that each song, and not performer, falls into with regard to these two songs. As such, the first song can be considered J-pop and the second song can be considered *shōka*, thus broadening the range of genres presented in *Kōbaku*. See Appendix D for a complete list of acts (including these two songs) and their associated genres.

Programme Themes

Around the same time that NHK released the list of song performers to the media, the programme’s two themes were also announced. These not only provided a glimpse into the programme’s direction, but also the types of songs that would be performed. For example, the major theme, ‘*Utao mirai e ~ jidai to sedai o koete ~*’ (‘Looking to the Future Through Song: Spanning Eras and Generations’) (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:3, Takahashi 2000:3), suggested that songs representative of specific eras would be performed and symbolically passed on to future generations in the new millennium—*Kōbaku* would act as a time capsule. This concept was also reiterated in the 50th *Kōbaku*’s minor theme, ‘*Nijūisseiki ni tsutaetai uta*’ (‘Songs We Would Like to

Pass on for the 21st Century’)¹¹ (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:3). NHK also stated that the 54 acts would unite onstage and together perform a special song described as “*ōki na imi de no rabu songu*” (“a love song in its broadest sense”) (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:3). This song, as previously mentioned, is classified here as ‘The 50th *Kōbaku* Community Song’ and will be discussed later in this chapter.

The Selection Process for the 50th *Kōbaku* Community

The exact criteria by which NHK selects song performers is a closely guarded secret. It is, therefore, unknown if acts (and/or their songs) were chosen to suit the 50th *Kōbaku* themes or if the themes were devised after the acts were decided.¹² Regardless, “NHK has long prided itself” on basing the *Kōbaku* song performer list on “average viewers’ tastes” and selects performers according to the outcomes of three surveys (Schilling 1997:96). The first is a nation-wide questionnaire asking members of the general public to “list freely three of their favorite male and female Japanese personalities” (Endo 2000:Internet).¹³ The second survey asks the same of contestants in NHK’s long-running amateur singing contest ‘*Nodojiman*’ (‘Pride In My Voice’)¹⁴ and the third is an “in-house survey of NHK employees” (Schilling 1997:96).

The first survey offers the most potential to understanding why the general public prefers certain artists for the 50th *Kōbaku*. Before undertaking a detailed examination of the results of this survey, it is important to note that NHK’s selection process has been widely criticised. It has been claimed that this process gives the broadcaster “a veto over selections” which, in turn, “makes it easier for NHK to pressure top-line talent into appearing on ‘*Nodojiman*’ [(‘Pride In My Voice’)] and other NHK programmes for a fraction of the fees they would command from commercial networks” (Schilling 1997:96). Clearly, performers must maintain a good relationship

¹¹ Due to this translation’s length and inelegance, it will be abbreviated hereafter to ‘Passing on Songs for the 20th Century’.

¹² In his brief discussion of the song performer selection process for the 40th *Kōbaku* (1989), Hiroshi Ogawa notes that *Kōbaku* staff “first decide how many singers will be chosen from each genre, then start selecting candidates in each category” (Ogawa 1990:33). Considering the 40th *Kōbaku* was an atypical *Kōbaku*, with many new and unusual aspects (such as playing old footage of past *Kōbaku* performances in the program’s first half, see Chapter One), it is unlikely that this selection process was also used for the 50th *Kōbaku*.

¹³ The term ‘personality’ encompasses a wide range of entertainment professionals including actors, comedians, models, singers and musicians.

¹⁴ See Hosokawa (2000a and 2000b) for fascinating insights into this program, as viewed in both Japanese and South American contexts.

with NHK if they want to be selected for *Kōbaku*. They must also avoid any major scandal and preserve respectability in the public eye so to comply with NHK's unwritten policy of rejecting performers of disrepute (although NHK has been lenient with this policy, as discussed). Let us now turn our attention toward the nation-wide questionnaire, titled 'NHK's Favourite Personalities Poll', to see how this poll assists in the creation of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community.

NHK's Favourite Personalities Poll

NHK's poll was conducted throughout September 1999.¹⁵ Male and female respondents were asked to rank three favourite male 'personalities'—famous people in the public eye—and, in a separate list, rank their three favourite female personalities. From these responses, two lists were created: the first, a definitive 'top ten' list for male personalities; the second, a 'top ten' list for female personalities. These lists are combined and presented in Table 2.3 overleaf.

Although respondents named celebrities from a variety of professions (such as film and fashion industries), an overwhelming proportion of each list featured stars from the music industry (such as soloists, bands and singing groups). These music stars constituted 60 percent of the male category and 80 percent of the female category (stars from the music industry are identified in Table 2.3 footnotes). NHK clearly used the results of the 'Favourite Personalities Poll' to guide the song performer list for the 50th *Kōbaku*. Indeed, of the 14 music personalities represented in the two 'top ten' lists, all except Utada Hikaru (for reasons explained later) were song performers in this *Kōbaku*.

¹⁵ Of the 3600 randomly selected subjects 2134 people returned their answers to NHK by mail, with a "validity ratio" of 59.3 percent. Respondents were aged seven and older and categories were divided according to sex and the following age groups: 7–12 years, 13–19 years, 20–29 years, 30–39 years, 40–49 years, 50–59 years and 60 years or older (Endo 2000:Internet).

Table 2.3 Ten Favourite Male and Female Personalities in NHK's Survey

Rank	Male	Female
1	Akashiya Sanma	Utada Hikaru ^{ab}
2	Kitajima Saburō ^a	Wada Akiko ^a
3	Itsuki Hiroshi ^a	Amuro Namie ^a
4	Takeshi Kitano	Tendō Yoshimi ^a
5	Tokoro George	Ishikawa Sayuri ^a
6	Kimura Takuya ^a (member of SMAP)	Kobayashi Sachiko ^a
7	GLAY ^a	Matsushima Nanako
8	SMAP ^a	Suzuki Ami ^a
9	Mori Shin'ichi ^a	Nakayama Miho
10	Oda Yūji	Hamasaki Ayumi ^{ac} Fujiwara Noriko ^c

Source: Endo 2000:Internet

^a A soloist, band or singing group.

^b A singer but not appearing in the 50th *Kōhaku*.

^c Hamasaki Ayumi and Fujiwara Noriko tied for 10th place.

NHK's summary of results from the survey identified three key trends that are also seen in the 'top ten' music personalities lists (Endo 2000:Internet). Firstly, a correlation between high-ranking music stars and the frequency of their appearances on television was found. In this sense, younger respondents tended to nominate music stars who hosted programmes or music stars who

did not have their own regular TV programs but enjoy[ed] extremely high TV exposure through commercials, video clips and their topicality. These points indicate[d], as essential factors for winning popularity among younger generations, frequent appearances in advertisements and the competitiveness of their music. (Endo 2000:Internet)

Secondly, younger respondents selected very different music personalities compared with those chosen by older respondents. Clearly, respondents from specific age groups favoured certain artists. Thirdly, and most strikingly, it was found that fewer music stars were

now popular across a wide age band [compared with previous years]. Accordingly, even popular stars [comprised]...only a relatively small proportion of the total valid responses. [As such, NHK found] a lack of what might be called stars for all the people. (Endo 2000:Internet)

The three trends from this survey could also be applied to the 50th *Kōhaku* Community of song performers. In accordance with the first trend, the Community included television programme hosts (SMAP) and artists that enjoyed "extremely high TV exposure" (Endo 2000:Internet), such as Hamasaki Ayumi, Suzuki Ami and GLAY. In acknowledgment of the second trend, some acts were especially selected to appeal to younger *Kōhaku* audience members and others for older audience members. Finally, in

keeping with the third trend, the Community included personalities with appeal across a wide range of age groups, such as Kimura Takuya from SMAP, Kitajima Saburō, Wada Akiko and Tendō Yoshimi, despite the lack of “stars for all the people” (Endo 2000:Internet).

The survey was also useful in identifying the ‘top three’ male music stars and ‘top three’ female named by respondents from the same age group (see Table 2.4). Several stars achieved identical scores and thus more than three personalities were ultimately named in each of the respondents’ age groups. Most notably, every ‘top three’ music star identified in NHK’s survey was later selected to be a song performer in the 50th *Kōbaku*, again, with the exception of Utada Hikaru.

Table 2.4 Favourite Music Personalities According to Respondents’ Age Group^a

<i>Respondents Age Groups</i>	<i>Male Personalities</i>	<i>Female Personalities</i>
7-12	KinKi Kids GLAY SMAP	Amuro Namie Utada Hikaru ^b Suzuki Ami SPEED
13-19	GLAY Kimura Takuya (member of SMAP) L’arc~en~Ciel	Amuro Namie Utada Hikaru ^b Suzuki Ami Hamasaki Ayumi
20-29	Kimura Takuya	Utada Hikaru ^b
30-39	GLAY SMAP Kimura Takuya	Amuro Namie Utada Hikaru ^b
40-49	Kimura Takuya Kitajima Saburō	Tendō Yoshimi Ishikawa Sayuri Wada Akiko Utada Hikaru ^b Amuro Namie
50-59	Kitajima Saburō Itsuki Hiroski	Wada Akiko Kobayashi Sachiko Tendō Yoshimi
60 and older	Kitajima Saburō Itsuki Hiroski Mori Shin’ichi	Kobayashi Sachiko Ishikawa Sayuri Fuji Ayako Wada Akiko Tendō Yoshimi

Source: Endo 2000:Internet

^a The combined answers from both male and female respondents when asked to list their ‘top three’ favourite male and female personalities. Names are not in order of ranking.

^b Not a song performer in the 50th *Kōbaku*.

The types of music personalities named in this survey shed light on the music genres preferred by each age group. Respondents aged seven to 12 years preferred J-pop

performers, and nominated idol singing groups (SMAP, SPEED and KinKi Kids), a rock band (GLAY) and pop singers (Amuro Namie, Suzuki Ami and Utada Hikaru). Those aged between 13 and 19 also demonstrated a similar fondness for J-pop but nominated a different rock band (L'arc~en~Ciel) and two pop singers (Kimura Takuya from SMAP and Hamasaki Ayumi). From these responses, it is evident that pre-teen and teen respondents favoured personalities from rock and pop music genres.

Although respondents aged between 20 and 29 preferred J-pop performers, they did not select any rock performers and, furthermore, only two pop personalities (Kimura and Utada) were named. Those aged between 30 and 39 also selected these two artists, but also nominated a pop singer (Amuro), a pop vocal group (SMAP) and a rock band (GLAY). The music artists selected by respondents aged between 40 and 49 included pop singers (Kimura, Utada and Amuro), *enka* singers (Kitajima Saburō, Tendō Yoshimi and Ishikawa Sayuri) and a J-pop cross-genre singer (Wada Akiko).¹⁶ The next age group, consisting of respondents aged between 50 and 59, also selected the latter singer (Wada Akiko), however, other artists from pop and rock genres were notably absent. *Enka* soloists (Kitajima Saburō, Itsuki Hiroshi, Kobayashi Sachiko, Tendō Yoshimi) were clearly favoured. Finally, all respondents aged 60 and older demonstrated a strong preference for *enka* singers (Kitajima Saburō, Itsuki Hiroshi, Mori Shin'ichi, Kobayashi Sachiko, Ishikawa Sayuri, Fuji Ayako, Tendō Yoshimi) and a J-pop cross-genre singer (Wada Akiko).

This survey revealed broad patterns in the music genre tastes of the Japanese public: those under 50 enjoyed pop music, all respondents aged under 50 (except those between 20 and 29) liked rock music, those aged 40 and above enjoyed *enka* and jazz/*kayōkyoku*. The results of this survey generally assisted NHK staff in selecting performers affiliated with a particular genre so to ensure the 50th *Kōhaku* programme (or selected segments) would appeal to a wide range of age groups.

¹⁶ It is difficult to categorise Wada Akiko, in particular, because she is known to perform a variety of styles including jazz, *kayōkyoku*. In this study, Wada is labelled a J-pop singer, based on the Tower Records classification system outlined in Appendix D.

Song Performer Negotiations

The process of selecting song performers for the 50th *Kōhaku* Community was not without problems. The media closely followed the movements of invitees, and acts which were invited to perform but had declined were dubbed *Kōhaku kyōbi* (*Kōhaku* refusers) (Penn 1999:14). When the final list was announced, the media scrutinised NHK's selection and queried why some artists who had been popular during the year were excluded.¹⁷

One singer who was the most likely candidate for inclusion was 16-year-old Hikaru Utada. She had been voted the most popular female personality in NHK's poll (see again Table 2.3 above). During the year, her debut album 'First Love' had topped the charts and exceeded long-established sales records, making her an obvious selection.¹⁸ It was, moreover, expected that Hikaru would perform in *Kōhaku* considering her prestigious *geinōkai* (entertainment world) heritage; her mother is retired *enka* singer Keiko Fuji, a performer in *Kōhaku* during the 1970s.

The media carefully chronicled NHK's negotiations with Hikaru. In early September, one entertainment news website quoted NHK president Ebisawa Katsuji as saying Hikaru was a likely candidate for the song contest ("NHK, hikaru ni Kōhaku shutsuin kōshō" 1999:Internet). Nevertheless, rumours that Hikaru was reluctant to perform began circulating. Upon realising the programme would be without Japan's biggest star of the year, NHK reputedly attempted to entice Hikaru by offering her the role of Red MC which would imply "a higher status than any other singers" ("Hikaru Utada to be the Youngest MC For Singing Contest" 1999:Internet). If accepted, this would make Hikaru the youngest Red MC in *Kōhaku* history, surpassing the record set by Matsu Takako at the 47th *Kōhaku* (1996). By 16 October, however, speculation had abruptly ended when Hikaru flatly refused any participation in the contest, declaring that she needed "more time to concentrate on her studies" ("Hikaru Utada skips Kōhaku" 1999:Internet). One newspaper cited a statement from her official website

¹⁷ Acts that had either been overlooked or refused the *Kōhaku* invitation included Southern All Stars, Kinki Kids, Matsutoya Yumi (commonly known as 'Yuming'), Yoshida Takuro, Takeuchi Mariya and Yazawa Eikichi (Kobayashi 1999:3, Penn 1999:14).

¹⁸ Hikaru's album was the first in Japan's to sell more than 7 million copies and one single from the album, titled "Addicted To You", sold "1.06 million copies in its first week of release" (Kobayashi 1999:3).

(<http://www.toshiba-emi.co.jp/hikki/>) in which she apologised to her large fan base and provided a different explanation for her refusal:

I've heard about the anticipation of fans who live in regions where they can only receive NHK or who live in countries where '*Kōbaku*' is the only Japanese program they can watch...But I cannot do two things—write new songs and appear on TV—at the same time. I'm sorry. See you on TV some day. (Kobayashi 1999:3)

Less than a year after this incident, Hikaru also declined to perform in the 51st *Kōbaku* (2000) and, in doing so, made a surprising statement that sheds light on her 1999 refusal. Claiming that that geographical constraints were reason enough not to come (she is based in New York), she admitted she had never watched the programme. Believing that her lack of *Kōbaku* knowledge would mean she would have to spend at least “a week” in rehearsals, she stated “if I have that kind of time, I'd rather spend it in the recording studio” (“Hikki Explains Why She Won't Attend Kouhaku” 1999:Internet). Although Hikaru's attitude toward the programme was atypical in 1999, it indicates a shift in perceptions about the programme, particular by younger J-pop stars.

Staging Preparations for the 50th *Kōbaku*

From mid to late November—well before the singers were selected—two committees began planning the staging for *Kōbaku* (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:41). The Direction committee created the stage effects and the Arts committee planned the stage layout using miniature models. Designs for the sets, props and backdrops were sketched and with only two weeks before the contest, were passed on to craftsmen and subsequently brought to life on 29 December.¹⁹ After the concert, *Kōbaku* staff spent the early hours of the New Year clearing the stage. Sadly, the sets were destroyed. This was perhaps because their large scale would make them difficult to store but it also ensured that this *Kōbaku* would remain unique in the eyes of viewers and it could never be re-created.

Pre-Programme Publicity

Prior to 1999 and throughout that year, the 50th *Kōbaku* was in the back of minds for fans and the media but as December approached, fan websites and media sources

¹⁹ Reportedly, the pressure placed on the staging staff members during this time is so overwhelming that most lose five or six kilograms (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:41).

breathlessly reported any information pertaining to *Kōbaku*. Once NHK officially revealed the song performers and hosts for the contest, *Kōbaku* was suddenly at the forefront of entertainment news.

Print Media

In the lead up to the programme, television magazines—even those not affiliated with NHK—strongly promoted the 50th *Kōbaku*. Magazines published during the week before the concert were bursting with gossip and rumours and editions pertaining to 31 December were laden with special articles, glossy photographs of the 54 acts and speculation as to which songs would be performed. These magazines also listed NHK's *Kōbaku*-related television programmes that were broadcast throughout December (see 'NHK Television' later in this chapter) and non-NHK programmes where the *Kōbaku* performers would be appearing as guests. *Kōbaku*, and its song performers, was clearly the lead story in Japan's entertainment world.

Many different kinds of entertainment magazines featured articles on *Kōbaku*. *TV Kids*, a television guide for teenagers, dedicated two pages to 50th *Kōbaku* performers which focused on newcomers to the programme and young J-pop artists such as the popular vocal group SMAP, Amuro Namie and SPEED (1999:26–27). The publication *Gekkan za terebijon* (Monthly Publication: The Television), for example, also focused on newcomers and, as such, featured the star Suzuki Ami on the cover and on a pullout poster. Other *Kōbaku* performers such as Matsu Takako and the band Every Little Thing featured in special articles about famous 'people of the month' (1999:11–17). Furthermore, two pages were devoted to a report on the 50th *Kōbaku* which listed all performers and speculated which songs they would sing (1999:38–39).

TV Life (1999) contained a foldout poster for the 50th *Kōbaku*, listing the names and photographs of the 54 acts, and the number of previous *Kōbaku* performances made by each act. Also included were 'anticipated highlights' for the show and a photograph of the Team MCs (1999:14–15). Similarly, *Telepal* (Television Pal) (1999) contained four pages containing an interview with long-time *Kōbaku* performer Wada Akiko, quotes from 50th *Kōbaku* newcomers, a discussion of memorable moments from previous *Kōbaku* and photographs of costumes worn by *enka* singer Kobayashi Sachiko over the past nine years. General television magazines

such as *TV gaido* (Television Guide), *TV Life* and *TV pia* (Television Pia) featured SMAP as cover stars and another guide, *Uikurī za terebijon* (The Television Weekly), also included smaller photographs of the Red and White MCs and other 50th *Kōbaku* stars such as Suzuki Ami on the cover.²⁰ This magazine presented a range of material pertaining to *Kōbaku*: scattered throughout were advertisements for new albums and forthcoming New Year concert tours by 50th *Kōbaku* performers but there were also several in-depth articles about the singers, such as Matsu Takako, Suzuki Ami and SMAP. In addition, there was a three-page article about the contest itself which listed the various song performers, presented photographs of newcomers and contained speculation as to who would perform at what stage in the programme (*Weekly za terebijon* 1999:19–21).²¹

Some magazines presented comprehensive articles about *Kōbaku* and devoted a significant amount of publication space to the story. *TV pia*, for example, presented in-depth commentary on the 50th *Kōbaku* which listed song performers according to team and contained photographs of newcomers, various commentaries, personal statistics and a list of songs which the artists were likely to perform (1999:27–31). In a similar vein, *TV gaido* (Television Guide) (1999) presented photographs of the 54 acts across six pages along with their personal statistics and the number of past appearances in *Kōbaku* (*TV gaido* 1999:20–25). Details about the Team MCs were also included as were ‘special *Kōbaku* moments’, a brief description of the programme’s history and statistics pertaining to all contests from the 1st–49th *Kōbaku* (1951–1998).²² Perhaps the most interesting section pertaining to *Kōbaku* was at the end of this magazine, where editorial staff had compiled the complete lyrics of 54 songs that were most likely to be performed so to enable viewers to sing along on the night (*TV gaido* 1999:129–137).

In acknowledgment of the milestone programme, one publisher created a special issue about the upcoming “50th Anniversary” *Kōbaku* (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999). *TV gaido zōkan: uta no hon bestu hitto '99* (TV Guide Additional Issue: Best Hits

²⁰ Throughout the year, SMAP had appeared on the cover of many magazines but as *Kōbaku* drew nearer, the image of the five young men seemed to be on more than ever before.

²¹ This article also presented many photographs of the Team MCs and, for example, presented them with a smile and with fists raised in a friendly ‘battle’ pose. Other magazines such as *TV gaido* and *TV Life* displayed small photographs of the Team MCs in similar poses on the cover.

²² These statistics included the program ratings, the number of acts per team and which team had won.

1999 Song Book) comprised special interviews with newcomer and veteran *Kōbaku* performers, ‘interesting points’ to look for in the show, brief profiles of each act and the songs previously performed in *Kōbaku*. To thoroughly prepare viewers, lyrics from four signature songs associated with each of the 54 acts were printed in anticipation of the song that would be performed (1999:19–129). Another section reviewed scenes from past *Kōbaku* and proclaimed the post-childbirth comeback performance from J-pop star Amuro Namie as the most memorable from the 49th *Kōbaku* (1998). In the magazine, each emotional moment of her performance was relished and re-lived:

...[Amuro] walked forward to the audience and bowed. Some called out “welcome back!”—she began to weep. Whilst clutching her microphone in her right hand, large teardrops began to fall. She continued to bow whilst she was tearfully singing and she concluded the last line of the song...with a smile (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:19)

Conjecture followed reminiscence: would Amuro appear in the 50th *Kōbaku*? Would her song performance be just as memorable? This media promotion, in effect, not only evoked nostalgia for the programme, but also its singers and their performances.

Commercial publishers were not the only print media organisations to report news about *Kōbaku*. NHK produced its own special commemorative issue, titled ‘*Kōbaku 50kai: eikō to kandō no zen kiroku*’ (The 50th *Kōbaku*: A Record of the Glory and Deep Emotions) (Takahashi 2000), to celebrate the landmark 50th *Kōbaku*. One novel feature of this publication was a chart whereby viewers could award numerical scores for each act. The accompanying blurb noted that performances could be graded according to three separate *saiten* (marking criteria), namely *uta* (song), *ishō nado* (costumes etc.) and *sōgō* (general aspects) (Takahashi 2000:3).²³ Although the chart was informally presented, these criteria were set out by NHK and shed light on aspects noted by the official *Kōbaku* judges. The commercial publication ‘TV *gaido zōkan: uta no hon bestu hitto ’99*’ (TV Guide Additional Issue: Best Hits 1999 Song Book) provided a similar aid, although not endorsed by NHK. Presented alongside the names of *Kōbaku* song performers was a ‘points column’ and a blurb inviting readers to write scores out of ten. Statements such as: “you can be a judge at your dining table. Can you guess the

²³ The latter criterion, although somewhat ambiguous, may denote how various elements of the performance gel together. Oddly, the publication does not propose a maximum number of points to be awarded—this is left to the discretion of the viewer.

winner?” invited viewers to participate in judging the contest even if they were not part of the select voting audience inside NHK Hall (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:7).

Internet

A great many details about the 50th *Kōbaku* were announced via NHK’s official *Kōbaku* web page which also featured the list of song performers and related photographs.²⁴ *Kōbaku* press releases from the NHK president and Executive Director-General of Broadcasting were posted separately on NHK’s public relations web pages. Although these authoritative sites were accurate, *Kōbaku* fan sites contained significantly more details about the 50th *Kōbaku* in particular, and the programme in general. In the months preceding NHK’s formal announcement of the singers for the 50th *Kōbaku*, unofficial *Kōbaku* chat rooms fuelled the ephemeral gossip. Comprehensive sites created by *Kōbaku* fans hastily confirmed, denied and perpetuated rumours about who would be invited. Both knowledge and propaganda were rapidly exchanged among the *Kōbaku* internet community. Wide-ranging details about the performers and Team MCs (such as height, weight, favourite colour and blood type) were ubiquitous. *Kōbaku* websites became a complex web of intertwined internet links and an up-to-the-minute source of information—whether accurate or speculative.

Commercial Television

Understandably, rival commercial television stations did not promote NHK’s *Kōbaku*. The song contest was, nonetheless, informally discussed in panel-style chat shows or music programmes. Surprisingly, *Kōbaku*’s major promotional vehicle on commercial television came via a CM (commercial/advertisement) for drink manufacturer Suntory’s ‘Boss Seven’ canned coffee.²⁵ The advertisement’s setting is New Year’s Eve and a father, his daughter and son are watching *Kōbaku* on television together in the family home. *Enka* singer Kobayashi Sachiko appears on the family’s television, in full song and hovering mid-air on a stage. She is dressed in an illuminated cocoon costume—perhaps one worn at a recent *Kōbaku* (see Chapter One).²⁶ The “grouchy”

²⁴ This web page (www.nhk.or.jp/event/prog/kouhaku.html) was quickly removed after the concert. Months later, it reappeared, this time presenting information pertaining to the 51st *Kōbaku* (2000).

²⁵ The advertisement first appeared on 13 November and continued to be screened into December (Suntory Limited 1999:Internet).

²⁶ The commercial did not actually include excerpts from NHK’s *Kōbaku*, but was shot independently at Shibuya *Kōkaidō* (public hall) (Suntory Limited 1999:Internet).

father questions why the singers concentrate more on “flashing lights” and “making spectacles of themselves” than the singing itself (Hanna 1999:14).²⁷ Suddenly, the CM takes an unexpected turn:

one minute [the father] is openly criticizing the singers in the security of his home and the next he is suspended in midair, face-to-face with Kobayashi. With an air of lethargy and yet with complete honesty, she admits that singing alone wouldn't get her too far. “Why do you think I'm doing this?” she asks. In the perfect Boss moment, the man takes a sip of the coffee, his hands shaking and his eyes still fixed on [Kobayashi] the goddess of gaudiness. (Hanna 1999:14)

By poking fun at Kobayashi's well-known fondness for extravagant *Kōbaku* costumes, this advertisement inadvertently served to promote the 50th *Kōbaku*. Viewers were reminded that in only a few weeks time, Kobayashi would undoubtedly don an elaborate costume (similar to the one she wore in the CM) for the 50th *Kōbaku*. The CM also voiced a widespread concern about the direction that *Kōbaku*, with its focus on visual aspects of costume and staging performances, has taken in past years. This provoked many questions: would the 50th *Kōbaku* feature exhibitionistic performances from artists other than Kobayashi? Would the milestone concert carry on the trend and perhaps be more extravagant than ever? In addition, Kobayashi's candid and good-humoured rhetorical question confirmed what the father and others had suspected—she was indeed reliant on her costumes and staging because her singing ability was not enough to sustain *Kōbaku* viewers' interest. Her reply was, however, inaccurate. Kobayashi is a highly skilled and versatile singer but when presented with so much visual information in her *Kōbaku* performances, this can be overlooked (Wilson 2003:Internet).²⁸ Would Kobayashi use her performance in the 50th *Kōbaku* to answer her critics, concentrating more on her voice and less on her costume?

²⁷ See the Suntory website for the complete script for this advertisement: <http://www.suntory.co.jp/enjoy/cm/log/sd33.html> (Suntory Limited. 1999:Internet).

²⁸ In an interview with Kobayashi, Wilson reflects on the singer's versatility, noting that she is “usually billed as an *enka* singer, [but she] is in fact much more, as she can sing pop and jazz with equal verve” (2003:Internet). In addition, Wilson observes that Kobayashi's vocal embellishments have changed throughout her career as an *enka* singer. Today she uses strong vibrato (*ko-bushi*) but

earlier in her career it became so strong, and sometimes harsh, that it was off-putting to some listeners. She obviously became aware of this and made a conscious effort to moderate it. Ever the professional, she has made sure it has never surfaced again; her voice is now powerful but pleasing. (Wilson 2003:Internet; my italics)

NHK Television

NHK television contributed significantly to the hype leading up to the 50th *Kōbaku*. In the latter half of December, many television ‘specials’ specifically about the song contest were aired on NHK-G or NHK BS-2 channels. Ranging from brief and informal panel-style chat shows to comprehensive epics lasting several hours, the various programmes recalled memorable *Kōbaku* moments, reflected on the contest’s history and generated viewers’ interest in the 50th *Kōbaku*. With the strong likelihood of an exclusive ‘behind the scenes’ account from a past *Kōbaku* performer or even rare footage of the early years, these programmes were consistently marked as ‘recommended viewing’ by many TV magazines and were programmed in popular afternoon and/or evening timeslots.

According to one television guide, the first *Kōbaku*-related programme of the month was broadcast on 16 December, titled ‘*Kōbaku: hanseiki no butai ura~takeato kara umareta utagassen*’ (*Kōbaku: The Background Story Tracing Half a Century ~a song contest born from fiery ruin*) (1999:Television Programme). This NHK-G programme was a ‘retrospective’, focusing on performances from the early years of *Kōbaku* and its development following Japan’s defeat in World War II.

The number of programmes about *Kōbaku* increased dramatically as New Year’s Eve draw nearer. From 20 to 29 December, at least one *Kōbaku*-related show was aired every day. The most informal and light-hearted of these was a series of ten-minute chat shows titled ‘*Za kōbaku*’ (*The Kōbaku*), broadcast over eight days on NHK-G in either an 8:45pm or 10:45pm timeslot (1999:Television Programme).²⁹ Special guests joined the programme’s host, the Red MC Kubo Junko, to comment on specific *Kōbaku*-related themes, footage of past *Kōbaku* performances and the forthcoming 50th *Kōbaku*.

The topic for one episode of ‘*Za kōbaku*’ was a review of *Kōbaku* debuts made by women. The male comedy duo Bakushō mondai (Tanaka Yuji and Ōta Hikari) and idol singer Suzuki Ami who was due to make her *Kōbaku* debut in the 50th, joined Junko in a panel and made humorous yet respectful observations about past Red Team

²⁹ Episodes of ‘*Za kōbaku*’ (*The Kōbaku*) were frequently re-run during this period.

debut performances. As the show progressed, Junko held up a sign listing the five debut acts for the Red Team for the 50th *Kōbaku* and asked Suzuki about her own impending *Kōbaku* debut. The programme also included extracts of interviews with other Red Team newcomers from the 1 December press conference for the 50th *Kōbaku* debut acts. Another episode of ‘*Za kōbaku*’, hosted by Junko with Bakushō mondai as guests, similarly focused on the five debut acts for the 50th *Kōbaku* White Team and displayed their names on a sign. Correspondingly, Junko and the members of Bakushō mondai commented on footage of past White Team debut performances and brief interviews with some of the new acts, taken from the same press conference, were shown. These two episodes of ‘*Za kōbaku*’ not only familiarised viewers with the new *Kōbaku* acts, but also positioned these new performers within the broader context of the programme’s extensive history.

Kōbaku’s staging, technology and ceremonial aspects have always been an important part of the programme. ‘*Za kōbaku*’ highlighted these aspects in an episode dedicated entirely to the various ‘opening ceremonies’ in *Kōbaku*, illustrated by footage from the programme’s television history. In this episode, Junko and the members of Bakushō mondai also discussed how the song performers have been introduced at the start of *Kōbaku*, which varied from teammates walking among the audience during the 14th *Kōbaku* (1963), to simply marching onstage with the names of the performers scrolling on-screen for the 32nd *Kōbaku* (1981). Ceremonial aspects such as declaring the contest ‘open’ and the ritual passing of the *Kōbaku* banner were also recalled as were historically significant ‘openings’. One of the most memorable was when the bearer of a replica Olympic torch ran through the Tokyo streets, came inside the *Kōbaku* venue and walked onto the stage at the 14th *Kōbaku* (1963).

At the conclusion of ‘*Za kōbaku*’, Junko offered a ‘sneak preview’ into the new stage design for the 50th *Kōbaku* by unveiling a miniature model of the stage. It had been noticeably redesigned from the previous year’s *Kōbaku*. One impressive addition was a tiered staircase (henceforth ‘tier’) that would enable many people to be on stage simultaneously. The model was painted white, presumably to keep the vivid lighting and colour scheme a secret until the concert.³⁰ In all, this episode of ‘*Za kōbaku*’ created

³⁰ Despite the neutral colour, it was assumed that tradition would be maintained and the women’s team would occupy the Red corner at stage right and the men’s team would occupy the White corner at stage left.

a new sense of excitement about the 50th *Kōbaku*. Viewers were not only given an exclusive insight into the staging of the forthcoming programme, but imaginations were also stimulated and expectations about the grand opening were raised—would the 50th *Kōbaku* eclipse contests from previous years?

One episode of ‘*Za kōbaku*’ examined significant moments in *Kōbaku*. In the first half of the programme, Junko and her guest, the distinguished *Kōbaku* singer Yoshi Ikuzō, discussed surprising and humorous *Kōbaku* incidents from past years. An especially unexpected comic moment occurred at the 42nd *Kōbaku* (1990) when Ishibashi Takaaki and Kinashi Noritake from the comedic duo Tonneruzu (Tunnels) turned their backs toward the audience and revealed a painted message asking viewers to pay the NHK licence fee. This incident would later be recalled at the 50th *Kōbaku*. The latter half of ‘*Za kōbaku*’ took a more sombre tone when Junko and Yoshi discussed emotive performances including Miyako Harumi’s tearful and controversial encore performance in the 35th *Kōbaku* (1984) and the dramatic scene in the 49th *Kōbaku* (1998) where Wada Akiko lowered her microphone and sang to the NHK audience without amplification.

Similarly poignant moments were recalled in a separate episode of ‘*Za kōbaku*’ which examined instances where retiring artists made their final performance on *Kōbaku*, usually occupying the venerated *tori*, or last place, position for their team. Appropriately, long-time *Kōbaku* singer Kitajima Saburō, who had performed in the *tori* position for the White Team eight times previously, was Junko’s guest. Together, they discussed the stirring, pre-retirement performances from Miyako Harumi at the 35th *Kōbaku* (1984) and Amuro Namie at the 48th *Kōbaku* (1997). The honour of performing last in the team was also discussed and supplemented by past footage of famous *tori* performances. Hosokawa Takashi’s first ever *tori* performance, occurring at the 34th *Kōbaku* (1983), was particularly memorable because he continued to sing while gently shedding tears. Another related occasion was Misora Hibari’s performance at the 23rd *Kōbaku* (1972). This was her 10th consecutive *tori* performance and, unbeknownst at the time, it was also her last. These episodes of ‘*Za kōbaku*’ reinforced the status of the *tori* position. This, in turn, stirred thoughts about the 50th *Kōbaku*: who would be the *tori* singers for each team? Furthermore, upon viewing significant moments in *Kōbaku*’s

history, it was clear that the contest induced impassioned and stirring performances. Would tears be shed at the 50th *Kōbaku*?

NHK screened several substantial *Kōbaku*-related programmes in addition to ‘*Za kōbaku*’, one of which being ‘*Uta wa jidai o katatta~yume o tsumuida kōbaku 50ka?*’ (‘Song Tells the Story of the Eras~Nurturing Dreams of the 50th *Kōbaku*’) (1999:Television Programme). This two-part NHK-G programme chronologically examined *Kōbaku* contests in relation to significant moments in world history. Footage from NHK’s vast archives formed the basis of this programme and was supplemented by commentary from an unseen male narrator. The first part screened on 26 December from 7:20 to 8:35pm and focused on the early *Kōbaku* years and events occurring in the Showa era. The second part, screening on 27 December from 8:00 to 8:45pm, examined the Heisei era. Covering only 10 years—considerably fewer years than the first part of the series—this programme paid greater attention to broader cultural trends occurring in Japan during this time. One highlight was the prominence of women’s fashion trends, such as *cha-patsu* (lit. ‘tea hair’) light-brown dyed hair, that was inspired by idol singer Amuro Namie.³¹ In addition, the episode examined how *Kōbaku* responded to national events, such as when the performers of the 42nd *Kōbaku* (1990) sang in acknowledgment of those affected by the Unzen-Fugendake volcano eruption. The formation of patterns in *Kōbaku*’s staging were also observed over time such as Kobayashi Sachiko’s spectacular outfits (as noted above in ‘Commercial Television’) and aerial stunts. In addition, this programme briefly looked at comic skits undertaken between songs such as Hosokawa Takashi and Maekawa Kyoshi donning humorous costumes and makeup to mimic fellow *Kōbaku* song performers.

Near the conclusion of the Heisei era episode of ‘*Uta wa jidai o katatta~yume o tsumuida kōbaku 50ka?*’, viewers were introduced to the three compères for the impending 50th *Kōbaku*. The location was outside the Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre, where *Kōbaku* was previously held (see Chapter One). Red MC Kubo Juno and Nakamura were dressed in traditional formal clothing, while the General Chairman Miyamoto Ryūji wore a black suit. The Team MCs amiably discussed their expectations

³¹ Fans who copied Amuro’s specific fashion style, which was “signified by wavy long hair, sharply colored and thinly trimmed eyebrows, tight short pants, an exposed belly-button, and long high-heeled boots”, were known as “Amurors” (Aoyagi 1999:123).

about the contest and their teams' rivalry, while Miyamoto occasionally interjected. The programme concluded with footage of NHK Hall while the list of song performers and *Kōbaku*'s broadcast time slowly scrolled on screen.

An exclusive two-part programme about *Kōbaku* was broadcast solely on NHK's satellite station NHK BS-2. Titled '*Nen matsu nen tokushū~omoide no kōbaku utagassen*' ('The year-end and Beginning of Year Special Collection~Memorable *Kōbaku* *Utagassen*'), the programme showed selected highlights of song performances from specific *Kōbaku* (1999:Television Programme). The first part screened from 3:00 to 5:45pm on 27 December and focused on the 29th *Kōbaku* (1978) while the second part examined the 34th *Kōbaku* (1983) and was broadcast on 28 December in the same timeslot. The final *Kōbaku*-related programme broadcast on NHK BS-2 was '*Nama hōsō~anata ga erabu omoide kōbaku~kandō no kōbaku*' ('Live Broadcast~Your Choice Memorable *Kōbaku*~Emotional *Kōbaku*') (1999:Television Programme). This programme featured some of the most-requested 'memorable' and 'emotional' moments in *Kōbaku* history, as nominated by viewers. Screening from 7:30 to 11:00pm on 29 December, this was also the last substantial programme about *Kōbaku* that aired before the 50th *Kōbaku*.³²

Consistent screenings of *Kōbaku*-related shows reminded viewers of the contest's many traditions and placed the forthcoming contest within a historical context. Moreover, footage of famous performances refreshed the memories of *Kōbaku* devotees and created a sense of nostalgia. NHK's final 'teaser', however, was to broadcast select footage from the 31 December rehearsals for the 50th *Kōbaku* (as described later in this chapter) which appeared at the end of the NHK-G 7:00pm news, only minutes before the contest's broadcast. This heightened anticipation for the 50th contest itself—the climax of the *Kōbaku* hype.

Rival Music Programmes on New Year's Eve

Kōbaku's longstanding reputation as a high-rating programme did not dissuade commercial television networks to broadcast rival music programmes head-to-head with the 50th *Kōbaku* or to overlap with its 7:30 to 11:45pm timeslot. Some *Kōbaku* acts

³² An episode of '*Za Kōbaku*' aired from 8:45–8:55pm, but '*Nama hōsō~anata ga erabu omoide kōbaku~kandō no kōbaku*' concluded at the later time of 11:00pm.

performed live in several of these programmes (as had always been the case) and quickly moved from venue to venue throughout the night.

One programme, titled ‘*Ūrudo kauntodaun sūpā supesbaru 24 jikan marugoto raibu LOVE LOVE 2000*’ (‘World Countdown Super Special 24 Hours Entirely Live Love Love 2000’), screened from 9:00 to 11:00pm in direct competition with the 50th *Kōhaku* (1999:Television Programme). This was a ‘marathon edition’ of the extremely popular Fuji TV programme ‘*Love Love Aishitteru*’ (‘Love, Love, I Love You’), co-hosted by popular male idol group KinKi Kids and others. One television magazine articulated the dilemma that viewers faced on New Year’s Eve 1999 following the emergence of this new programme:

Kōhaku versus this program: confused as to which to watch!? If you seriously prefer young performers, then naturally, [tune in] here! (*Telepal* 1999:37)

This magazine and others implied that *Kōhaku* would have far fewer young performers than the extended version of ‘*Love Love Aishitteru*’. This was indeed true; Fuji TV’s programme was certainly directed toward younger viewers, while NHK’s *Kōhaku*, with its mix of songs for all ages, was designed for all age groups.

Another ‘special edition’ programme for younger audiences was scheduled for New Year’s Eve alongside *Kōhaku*. Titled ‘*Omedetō! 2000nen mūjīkku suteshon supesbaru*’ (‘Congratulations! Year 2000 Music Station Special’), this TV Asahi show was billed as a year-end edition of the renowned weekly J-pop show ‘*Mūjīkku suteshon*’ (‘Music Station’), and claimed to feature 100 famous compositions for the year 2000. The programme did not, however, go to air. At the last minute, it was replaced by an ‘international millennium countdown’ programme (possibly to avoid competing with *Kōhaku* for ratings) that traced the arrival of the New Year in 68 countries.

Kōhaku was also up against music programmes which featured non-Japanese performers. The satellite station WOWOW, for example, televised ‘*Mireniamu raibu*’ (‘Millennium Live’), an eight-hour live-performance show broadcast from 5:00pm to 1:00am which featured both American and Japanese artists (Television Programme:1999). The programme was divided into three segments: the first was a recent live concert called ‘centre stage tour 1999 “Power”’, featuring the soloist Fumiya Fujii who was a former member of the 1980s group Checkers; the second segment was

the live broadcast of a concert held at Osaka Dome by American bands Aerosmith and Mr. Big which were touring Japan at the time; and the final segment traced the history of Aerosmith from its rise to fame in the 1970s.

One significant programme to rival *Kōbaku* was ‘*Dai 32kai toshiwasure nippon no uta*’ (32nd Year-End Party: Songs Of Japan’) broadcast from 5:00 to 9:30pm (Television Programme:1999). Although it was not a song contest, this TV Tokyo show had similar elements to the 50th *Kōbaku*. It, too, was broadcast live, boasted an extensive history (this was its 32nd year), was long in duration (over four hours) and featured songs from a broad range of music genres. The content was surprisingly analogous, and included “famous songs representative of generations...[and] songs of the heart” as well as live performances from established stars, such as *enka* singers Kitajima Saburō, Itsuki Hiroshi, Ishikawa Sayuri and Hosokawa Takashi (*TV gaido* 1999:216). Moreover, the TV Tokyo programme contained a similar theme to both the 50th *Kōbaku* (as noted above in ‘Programme Themes’) and the abandoned special edition of ‘*Mūjikkū suteshon*’ (‘Music Station’), promising ‘*nijūisseiki ni nokoshitai uta*’ (songs [to be carried over and] to remain for the 21st century) (*TV gaido* 1999:216).

The most prestigious programme to challenge *Kōbaku* was the long-running ‘*Nihon rekōdo taishō*’ (‘Japan Record Awards’), subtitled ‘*Dai 41kai kagayaku!*’ (‘For The 41st Time It Shines!’) (Television Programme:1999). This award ceremony screened from 6:00 to 8:50pm on TBS TV and honoured Japan’s most successful recording artists of 1999. Not surprisingly, many of the 50th *Kōbaku* song performers received commendations at the event.³³ Some singers, such as Hamasaki Ayumi, 19 and GLAY, performed in both *Kōbaku* and the ‘*Nihon rekōdo taishō*’ programmes, no doubt adopting

³³ The official internet site for the ‘*Nihon rekōdo taishō*’ provides a summary of the awards conferred to 50th *Kōbaku* performers (“History: Dai 41kai nihon rekōdo taishō” 2000:Internet) The rock band GLAY achieved the ceremony’s highest accolade, the *taishō* (Grand Award), while J-pop singer Gō Hiromi received the *saiyūshō kashōshō* (Most Superior Singer Award). The songwriter for Mōningu Musume. was granted the *sakkyōkushō* (Composer’s Award) for the group’s song “*LOVE mashin*” (“Love Machine”). The *henkyōkushō* (‘Arranger’s Award) was, furthermore, granted for the arrangement of “*Kimikagesō ~suzuran~*” (“Lily of the Valley”) which had been popularized by *enka* singer Kawanaka Miyuki. The lyricist for *enka* star Sakamoto Fuyumi was awarded the *sakushishō* (Lyricist’s Award) for “*Kaze ni tatsu*” (“To Stand Against the Wind”). In addition, the *tokubetsushō* (Special Award) was granted to the high-selling children’s song “*Dango 3 kyōdai*” (“The Three *dango* Brothers”), performed by Shigemori Ayumi and Hayami Kentarō. Other 50th *Kōbaku* acts such as 19, Harada Yuri, Hamasaki Ayumi and Something ELse were among multiple recipients of the *yūshū sakubishō* (Best Work Award).

kamikaze tarento (talent with a death wish) behaviour as they frantically travelled between venues.³⁴

The NHK Hall Audience Experience

Scenes Outside NHK Hall, Shibuya

In the cold late-afternoon of 31 December, a subdued scene was unfolding outside NHK Hall compared with the brisk-pace of the *Kōhaku* rehearsals inside the venue. Along the tree-lined boulevard, people casually walked dogs and made their way between Harajuku and Shibuya districts. Food stalls, powered by noisy generators, sold hot corn-on-the-cob, *okonomiyaki* (savoury pancake) and *yakisoba* (fried noodles) and the stall owners and their few customers sat motionless, avidly listening to portable stereos while a crowd of *Kōhaku* ticket-holders gathered.

A large sign positioned on NHK grounds clearly stated the procedure for admission to the venue: ticket-holders must join a line and entry into the hall would commence from 5:45pm. Seating was not pre-allocated and a place at the head of the line ensured a seat with a good view of the stage inside the hall. Ticket holders presented their pass to NHK security guards (see Plate 10) and joined the winding rows of people, separated by blue metal partitions (see Plate 11). As night fell, the line extended down the boulevard. The majority of people appeared to be unaccompanied but a few were in pairs (see Plate 12) and there were a limited number of large groups (see Plate 13). It is common for people to attend *Kōhaku* alone, primarily because they have only won a single ticket. In the rare event of one person obtaining multiple tickets, it is likely that he or she would invite friends from across Japan to come to Tokyo for the honour of being part of the NHK Hall audience.

Most ticket-holders wore heavy winter coats and scarves, nevertheless, it was clear by the variety of casual clothing and traditional *kimono* that each person had a different view as to the formality of the occasion. They were all quietly reserved, with

³⁴ It is interesting to note that Utada Hikaru appeared in the '*Nibon rekōdo taishō*' ('The Japan Record Awards') and performed her song "Automatic", despite publicly declaring she would not be involved with any program on New Year's Eve, including the 50th *Kōhaku*. This perhaps suggests that some artists hold the '*Nibon rekōdo taishō*' in higher regard than *Kōhaku*.

their tickets safely kept from view.³⁵ Tickets were irreplaceable. Despite the moderate level of security in place, several men paced alongside the crowd, outside NHK property, and discretely (but illegally) trying to sell scalped *Kōbaku* tickets.³⁶ A scalped ticket would not necessarily guarantee entry. NHK Hall staff prohibited forged tickets and held a clear record of the postcards successfully drawn in the ballot and, therefore, the names of the principal ticket-holder. Clearly the (inflated) price and the risk associated with a scalped ticket, not to mention the shame of being discovered and publicly refused, was too great for some. Lining the small wall along the boulevard were several hopeful people holding banners that politely appealed for spare audience tickets from legitimate ticket-holders who were willing to part with them. Two middle-aged women sat alone, holding signs that requested tickets (see Plate 14). A group of three youths held a similar sign (see Plate 15); people of all ages wanted to see *Kōbaku*.

Inside NHK Hall

Upon gaining entry to NHK Hall, ticket-holders gained access to the inner world of *Kōbaku* that relatively few had encountered. One woman recounted her experience as a 50th *Kōbaku* audience member on her website (“*Kōbaku Utagassen*” 2000:Internet). After joining the line at 5:30pm and entering the main Hall doors around 7:00pm, she was able to purchase gifts and sandwiches from the lobby. Upon entry into the Hall itself, she received a *Kōbaku* pamphlet, a penlight torch and instructions as to how and when to use the torch during the performances. A double-sided circular paper fan featuring a caricature of each Team MC (see Plate 16) was also distributed as a means of voting at the end of the contest.

Technical Preparations

While the media and public deliberated over *Kōbaku*, internal preparations for the contest were well underway in December. Fifteen cameras ranging from small remote control models to roaming hand-held cameras were positioned around NHK Hall (Nippon Hōsō Gijutsu Kyoku Seisaku Gijutsu Centā 2000:467). Over 1300 lights were in place to illuminate the stage and audience seating areas, guided by approximately 350

³⁵ The women in my photographs only revealed their tickets at my request.

³⁶ I approached one scalper to ask the cost of a ticket, but he avoided my gaze, did not answer and quickly walked away. Perhaps, as the only *gaijin* (a person who is not Japanese) in the area, I seemed suspiciously out of place and he surmised that I could jeopardise his unlawful trade or report him to authorities.

pre-programmed cues (Nippon Hōsō Gijutsu Kyoku Seisaku Gijutsu Centā 2000:469, 471). This was one of the largest *Kōbaku* ever to be staged.

A variety of new and innovative technical equipment were employed especially for this grand-scale *Kōbaku*.³⁷ For the first time, two six-metre camera cranes were positioned above each team corner to capture elevated shots of the stage and Hall audience and a new lighting desk was employed to field the large volume of lighting cues (Nippon Hōsō Gijutsu Kyoku Seisaku Gijutsu Centā 2000:468, 469).³⁸ In addition, the camera system within NHK Hall was upgraded to high definition digital which allowed superior picture quality for those viewing the broadcast in Hi-Vision.

As with each year, new props and stage designs were created for the song performances. The most striking were eight enormous sphere-shaped glowing balloons, designed to glow various colours during Matsu Takako's song performance (Nippon Hōsō Gijutsu Kyoku Seisaku Gijutsu Centā 2000:470). Additionally, the large rear projector was used specifically to create a "three dimensional stage" during Sachiko Kobayashi's performance and a "dynamic laser-like effect" for Saijō Hideki (Nippon Hōsō Gijutsu Kyoku Seisaku Gijutsu Centā 2000:470). Lastly, in keeping with *Kōbaku* tradition, between 10 and 20 kilograms of falling paper 'snow' was used onstage (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:41)

Final Rehearsals

Small-scale rehearsals had taken place throughout December so to finalise the technical requirements associated with the staging and live-broadcast. In the days preceding the concert, private rehearsals for large groups of *Kōbaku* performers were undertaken at NHK Hall. The final dress rehearsals, however, took place on the day of the concert.³⁹ These included blocking, performing to camera and a run-through of the entire programme. Security was extremely tight. The stage entrance at the rear of NHK Hall was declared a restricted area and was manned by numerous guards and staff who

³⁷ Many precautionary measures were undertaken to prevent power supply problems anticipated by Y2K. See Nippon Hōsō Gijutsu Kyoku Seisaku Gijutsu Centā (2000) for examples.

³⁸ Overall, there were more than 400 lighting cues (Nippon Hōsō Gijutsu Kyoku Seisaku Gijutsu Centā 2000:469).

³⁹ Limited footage from the 50th *Kōbaku* rehearsals was, however, broadcast in a brief news story on the NHK-G 7:00 news, as described later in this chapter.

monitored activities via surveillance screens.⁴⁰ A security desk was located at the entrance in order to sign in authorised members of the press, and present them with identity cards.⁴¹ These were the only *Kōbaku* rehearsals to which members of the press were invited and conditions of entry were strict. Identification cards that clearly stated one's name and affiliated media organisation were to be worn at all times. Visitors were given a list detailing acceptable and unacceptable conduct in order to preserve the privacy of the song performers. For example, only photographs directed toward the stage, and not the audience seating area where some singers would rest during leisure time, were permitted. It was also important to maintain the secrecy and mystery surrounding certain performances. NHK staff did not want the programme's unique features to be publicly revealed until the broadcast and photographers were, in particular, banned from shooting for Mikawa Ken'ichi and Kobayashi Sachiko's rehearsals.⁴²

Throughout the day, a large number of backstage, technical and production staff swiftly and professionally conducted sound checks and camera and lighting rehearsals. The Team MCs, also wearing casual clothes, read from paper scripts or auto cues and rehearsed every aspect of their roles. Elaborate stage effects requiring precision timing, such as moving sets on and off stage, were reviewed and full-scale song rehearsals and 'dry runs' were undertaken so to synchronise the large number of performers and musicians involved.

Despite the importance of these rehearsals, nearly all of the performers were dressed informally and devoid of elaborate makeup or hairstyles. Wardrobe staff, instead, held performance costumes in front of song performers when they blocked their onstage movements (see Plate 17). Gowns, suits and *kimono* were neatly draped from coat hangers to avoid creasing but occasionally, song performers would wear their garments to test its appropriateness among the lighting and stage design. Even so,

⁴⁰ When in this area, I noticed several *Kōbaku* dancers and song performers (such as the members of Hysteric Blue) walking around or casually sitting on chairs, smoking.

⁴¹ As a 'member of the press' at the 51st *Kōbaku* (2000) rehearsals, I received a press card upon which I wrote my name and publication for which I worked. This pass was only valid for the day and was to be returned upon exit. I also received a handout with the running order of the rehearsals for the day and a preview of the order of song performances and the songs themselves for the *Kōbaku* concert.

⁴² The NHK-G 7:00pm news, however, presented a glimpse into Mikawa Ken'ichi's song performance and showed him without makeup, seated on a gold throne. See Chapter Five for further discussion of this stage design and costume.

rehearsals ran to a tight schedule and, to hasten proceedings, a stage crew member would often stand in place of a song performer and wear a sign around his/her neck bearing the performer's name.

Every segment was rehearsed, although not always in programme order. Segments ranged from the formal introduction of the Team MCs at the start of the programme, to the counting of the audience's voting fans and the distribution of yellow balls by judging officials at the end. During the rehearsals for the latter segments, results for each team were displayed numerically on signs.⁴³ The *Kōbaku* 'countdown to midnight' segment which was to take place after the programme's conclusion, was also strictly rehearsed (as discussed later in this chapter). When the festivities associated with this segment concluded, crew members rapidly swept away streamers and paper snow from along the stage area with the knowledge that the start of the concert was only moments away.

The 50th *Kōbaku* Programme

The 50th *Kōbaku* took place at NHK Hall, Shibuya, Tokyo on Friday 31 December 1999, witnessed by the in-house NHK audience and broadcast in Japan on NHK-G and NHK BS-2. To accommodate the larger scale of the production, the 50th *Kōbaku* commenced at 7:30pm: 30 minutes earlier than usual. Not since the 44th *Kōbaku* (1993) had the programme occupied this timeslot. Furthermore, with a duration of four hours and 15 minutes, this was the longest *Kōbaku* since the 44th *Kōbaku* (1993).

Programme Summary

While the structure of the 50th *Kōbaku* was typical of recent *Kōbaku*, the grandeur of the occasion was unrivalled (see Appendix E for an overview of the programme). *Kōbaku*'s setting was immediately established in the opening frames of the programme, with a bird's eye view of Tokyo by night, before landing in NHK Hall; a reminder that this is Japan's contest, taking place in Japan's capital and on grounds belonging to the national public broadcaster. Inside NHK Hall an exciting opening ceremony set the scene and members of the White and Red Teams gathered onstage. For the first time,

⁴³ These numbers were created for the purpose of rehearsing the segment and did not correspond with the actual scores achieved later that evening in the real contest. Remarkably, the rehearsal scores were 1324 for the Red Team and 1889 for the White Team, correctly predicting the White Team's victory.

the 50th *Kōbaku* Community was together. From here, the programme seamlessly shifted between a variety of entertaining segments and song performances.⁴⁴ After a ten-minute newsbreak at 9:20pm, the second half of the programme commenced. At the end of the contest, the votes were tallied and the White Team was declared the winner. In celebration, the offstage *Tōkyō hōsō kangengakudan* (Tokyo Broadcasting Orchestra) played an 8-bar melody (best known as an extract from the Chorus “See, the Conquering Hero Comes” from Handel’s oratorio *Judas Maccabeus*).

The Song Performances

This study identifies 56 song performances in the 50th *Kōbaku*, 54 of which are presented by individual performers (for example, soloists/bands and groups) and are numbered according to programme order. The other two song performances are closing songs for each half of the contest and are not referred to by number, in keeping with patterns established in previous *Kōbaku*.

The first half of the programme features 26 Red and White acts, performing (almost always) in alternation, concludes with a performance of the ‘love song in its broadest sense’ which NHK alluded to in early December (see Table 2.5 overleaf). This song is performed by ‘The 50th *Kōbaku* Community’. Unlike the other song of the first half which are numbered from one to 26, this song is an addition to the programme and is therefore unnumbered.

⁴⁴ Video footage from an episode of the chat show ‘*Za Kōbaku*’, broadcast in 2000, revealed some of the action taking place backstage during the 50th *Kōbaku* (2000:Television Program). Here, hundreds of additional performers waited in lines that extended down long corridors and into the bowls of NHK Hall. Staff shifted large sets into place and had other sets standing by for upcoming performances. *Kōbaku* song performers had their hair and makeup adjusted in the wings and practiced their dance moves before entering the stage. Some song performers even used the backstage area as private place where they could get to know fellow Community members—*enka* singer Tendō Yoshimi and the vocalist Tama from the J-pop band Hysteria Blue, for example, shared a few jokes and observed that they were both from Osaka.

Table 2.5 Order of Song Performances in the First Half of the 50th Kōbaku

Starting time (pm)	Team		Song Performer	Song Title
7:33:15	Red	1	Mōningu Musume.	“LOVE <i>mashin</i> ” (“Love Machine”)
7:36:31	White	2	DA PUMP	“We can’t stop the music”
7:39:57	Red	3	Hysteric Blue	“ <i>Haru ~spring~</i> ” (“Spring”)
7:43:05	White	4	Something ELse	“ <i>Rasuto chansu</i> ” (“Last Chance”)
7:47:30	Red	5	Shigemori Ayumi and Hayami Kentarō	“ <i>Dango 3 kyōdai</i> ” (“The Three <i>dango</i> Brothers”) ^a
7:50:58	White	6	Toba Ichirō	“ <i>Asbizuri-misaki</i> ” (“Cape Ashizuri”)
7:54:49	Red	7	MAX	“ <i>Issho ni...</i> ” (“Together...”)
7:59:30	White	8	GLAY	“ <i>Sabaibarui</i> ” (“Survival”)
8:09:14	Red	9	Harada Yuri	“ <i>Tsugaru no hana</i> ” (“Flowers of Tsugaru”)
8:12:26	White	10	Yoshi Ikuzō	“ <i>Fuyu no sake</i> ” (“Winter’s <i>sake</i> ”)
8:15:54	Red	11	Matsu Takako	“ <i>Yume no shizuku</i> ” (“Droplets of a Dream”)
8:19:52	White	12	19	“ <i>Ano kamibikōki kumorizora watte</i> ” (“That Paper Plane Will Break Through the Cloudy Sky”)
8:23:28	White	13	Yamakawa Yutaka	“ <i>Amerika-bashi</i> ” (“America Bridge”)
8:26:24	Red	14	Kōzai Kaori	“ <i>Bōkyō jūnen</i> ” (“Ten Years of Nostalgia”)
8:29:57	White	15	Saijō Hideki	“ <i>Bairamosu</i> ” (“Let’s Dance”)
8:32:50	Red	16	Nakamura Mitsuko	“ <i>Kawachi-zake</i> ” (“Kawachi <i>sake</i> ”)
8:35:58	Red	17	Kiroro	“ <i>Nagai aida</i> ” (“A Long Time”)
8:39:19	White	18	Horiuchi Takao	“ <i>Zoku: take tonbo ~seishun no shippo~</i> ” (“Sequel: Bamboo Dragonfly ~the tail-end of youth~”)
8:43:00	Red	19	Godai Natsuko	“ <i>Kazemachi minato</i> ” (“Waiting for a Favourable Wind in the Harbour”)
8:47:08	White	20	TOKIO	“ <i>Ai no arashi</i> ” (“The Love Storm”)
8:50:46	Red	21	SPEED	“my graduation ‘99”
8:56:41	White	22	Godaigo	“ <i>Byūtsufuru nēmu</i> ” (“Beautiful Name”)
9:00:18	Red	23	Every Little Thing	“Over and Over”
9:04:11	White	24	Kayama Yūzō	“ <i>Kimi to itsumademo</i> ” (“You, Forevermore”)
9:07:18	Red	25	Fuji Ayako	“ <i>Onna no magokoro</i> ” (“A Woman’s Earnest Sincerity”)
9:11:01	White	26	Mackawa Kiyoshi	“ <i>Tōkyō sabaku</i> ” (“Tokyo Desert”)
9:15:01	The 50 th Kōbaku Community (The 50 th Kōbaku Community Song)			“ <i>Nijūsseiki no kimitachi e</i> ~A song for children~” (“For the People of the 21 st Century~A Song for Children~”)

Source: Adapted from 50th Kōbaku *Uttagassen* 1999:Television Programme

^a The number ‘3’ in the Japanese title of this song is pronounced as ‘san’.

The second half presents the remaining individual performances, numbered from 27 to 54 and the programme concluded with long-held tradition of singing “*Hotaru no hikari*” (“The Light of Fireflies”) (see Table 2.6 overleaf). This song, identified in this study as ‘The *Kôbaku* Finale Song’, performed by ‘The 50th *Kôbaku* Community and others’, is also unnumbered.⁴⁵ The first of these songs unites the members of the Community members to perform a song especially composed for the occasion. In a similar manner, the second of these songs brings together the Community members, this time to perform an established song customarily used to conclude the programme.

Throughout the evening an exhilarating sense of anticipation was maintained, chiefly because the neither the order of programme nor the songs were publicly known. Who would perform next? Which song would they sing? Due to the unpredictable nature and immediacy of live television, there was also an expectation that something embarrassing, humorous or poignant might happen without warning as in past years (see Chapter One). This was heightened by the ‘song performance preludes’. As a form of introduction, the Team MC would speak at various lengths about the performers, interview them or speak to special guests/persons immediately before the song performance. As NHK staff had undoubtedly intended, audiences remained uninformed until the moment the song was announced on the programme and the songs were always received with great applause.

⁴⁵ Consult DVD examples 1–4 (or the corresponding still images in Appendix H if the DVD is inaccessible) for selected song performances from the first half. See DVD examples 5–7 (or Appendix H) for selected song performances from the second half.

Table 2.6 Order of Song Performances in the Second Half of the 50th Kōbaku

Starting time (pm)	Team		Song Performer	Song Title
9:30:27	White	27	Yaen	“Be Cool!”
9:34:26	Red	28	Hamasaki Ayumi	“Boys & Girls”
9:38:04	White	29	L’arc~en~Ciel	“HEAVEN’S DRIVE”
9:41:48	Red	30	Suzuki Ami	“BE TOGETHER”
9:45:17	White	31	SMAP	“Fly”
9:50:20	Red	32	Amuro Namie	“RESPECT the POWER OF LOVE”
9:54:48	White	33	Sans Filtre	“Yei Yei” (“Yeah Yeah”)
9:59:01	Red	34	globe	“You Are The One”
10:12:41	Red	35	Yashiro Aki	“Funa uta” (“Sailor’s Song”)
10:16:45	White	36	Kaguya hime	“Kanda-gawa” (“Kanda River”)
10:20:34	Red	37	Nagayama Yōko	“Sadame yuki?” (“Destiny Snow”)
10:23:26	White	38	Hosokawa Takashi	“Sakura no hana no chiru gotoku” (“As if Cherry Blossoms Were Falling”)
10:32:26	Red	39	Kawanaka Miyuki	“Kimikagesō ~suzuran~” (“Lily of the Valley”)
10:35:16	White	40	Mikawa Ken’ichi	“Eien ni bara no toki o” (“Happy Times for All Eternity”)
10:39:45	Red	41	Matsuda Seiko	“SWEET MEMORIES”
10:43:57	White	42	Gō Hiromi	“GOLDFINGER ‘99”
10:47:35	Red	43	Sakamoto Fuyumi	“Kaze ni tatsu” (“To Stand Against the Wind”)
10:51:49	White	44	Minami Haruo	“Genroku meisōfu~ Tawaraboshi Genba ~” (“The Famous Spear Song of the Genroku Era~Tawaraboshi Genba~”)
10:57:41	Red	45	Kobayashi Sachiko	“Yancha sake” (“Mischievous sake”)
11:02:35	White	46	Sada Masashi	“Ki seki~ōkina ainoyōni~” (“Miracle~Like an Overwhelming Love~”)
11:07:30	Red	47	Yuki Saori and Yasuda Sachiko	“Furusato” (“Hometown”)
11:11:13	White	48	Mori Shin’ichi	“Ofukuro-san” (“Mother Dear”)
11:15:12	Red	49	Ishikawa Sayuri	“Amagi-goe” (“Amagi Pass”)
11:18:50	White	50	Tanimura Shinji	“Subaru” (“The Pleiades”)
11:23:42	Red	51	Tendō Yoshimi	“Kawa no nagare no yō ni” (“Like the River’s Flow”)
11:27:27	White	52	Itsuki Hiroshi	“Yo-zora” (“The Night Sky”)
11:30:56	Red	53	Wada Akiko	“Ano kane o narasu no wa anata” (“You Are the One Ringing that Bell”)
11:35:26	White	54	Kitajima Saburō	“Matsuri” (“Festival”)
11:43:08	The 50 th Kōbaku Community and others (The Kōbaku Finale Song)			“Hotaru no hikari” (“The Light of Fireflies”)

Source: Adapted from 50th Kōbaku Utagassen 1999:Television Programme

Supplementary Segments

An eclectic variety of segments supplemented the song performances in the 50th *Kōbaku*. The ceremonial and introductory segments were part of the contest's general proceedings others addressed broader cultural aspects (see Table 2.7, overleaf, for selected categories and examples, consult Appendix E for a full descriptions of all segments). The team events, in particular, showcased the talents of each *Kōbaku* team. In the Team Talent Finale, for example, male and female team members participated in sex-specific Japanese performing arts traditions: Red Team members joined women from the all-female Takarazuka revue in a song and dance routine and White Team members collaborated with male actors from the male-only *kabuki* tradition and enacted scenes from a play (see Appendix E from clock 10:04:56). These not only highlighted the versatility of the *Kōbaku* song performers and the division between the sexes, but also linked *Kōbaku* with other long-standing traditions in Japan.

Some supplementary segments such as the *Kōshukōtai* (lit. 'Alternating Battling') took place in the team corners at either the side of stage, were very brief and involved few participants. Others utilised the main stage and featured hundreds of additional performers in sophisticated song and dance routines, such as the Sporting Hero Segment. Regardless of location, magnitude or participants, these supplementary segments provided diversity within the limiting confines of a 'song contest' and served as a welcome contrast to the 54 song performances.

Table 2.7 Selected Examples of Supplementary Segments of the 50th *Kōbaku*

Category ^a	Type	Description
Ceremonial	Opening Ceremony	Setting the scene outside and inside NHK Hall, with choir, team members and Team MCs.
	End of the First Half	Brief conclusion to the first part of <i>Kōbaku</i> , with the General Chairman.
	Vote Acquisition and Tallying	Audience members and judges vote, yellow balls are divided into baskets, Team MCs throw the balls into the audience and the White Team is declared the contest's winner.
	Presentation of the <i>Kōbaku</i> Pendant	The White MC (on behalf of the White Team) is presented with the <i>Kōbaku</i> pendant.
Cultural	Traditional New Year Segment	A Japanese New Year folk tale is enacted.
Introductory	Introducing the Team MCs and General Chairman	Introducing the Team MCs and General Chairman.
	Introducing the Panel of Judges	Each judge is introduced by the General Chairman.
	'Other Segment' Introduction	The preamble for a new segment, such as Sporting or Team Battling.
Sporting	Sporting Hero Segment	Children dance and the male J-pop duo Kinki Kids (not <i>Kōbaku</i> performers this year) sing. Various sporting identities are honoured.
	<i>Shō kōnā</i> (lit. 'Show Corner')	A 'Sports Hero Show' with <i>Kōbaku</i> song performers, acrobats, cheerleaders, the male pop group V6 (not <i>Kōbaku</i> performers this year) and sportspeople who will represent Japan at the Olympic Games.
Team Battling	<i>Shō kōnā: kōshukōtai</i> (lit. 'Show Corner Alternating Battling')	Team MCs rally support from judges, <i>Kōbaku</i> song performers or outside sources.
	<i>Kōshukōtai</i> (lit. 'Alternating Battling')	A brief comic skit using puppets bearing a likeness to the Team MCs.
Team Events	Red Team Talent Segment	Red Team song performers present a complicated hand-eye coordination routine.
	White Team Talent Segment	White Team song performers participate in a <i>kabuki</i> name-giving ceremony.
	Team Talent Finale	Red and White Teams showcase separate Talents and come together for a finale.

Source: 50th *Kōbaku Utagassen* 1999:Television Programme

^a Segments are listed alphabetically according to category and are not in programme order.

The Panel of Judges

During the programme's first half, the General Chairman introduced the *Kōbaku* judges and described their various professions (see Table 2.8). Most were current cultural icons or well-known personalities who had been in the public eye during the past year.⁴⁶ Others, such as university student Ototake Hirokata, were present to ensure the panel would broadly represent all ages of the community. Only the lyricist Aku Yū was associated with the music industry.⁴⁷ In keeping with *Kōbaku* tradition, the panel included an NHK representative and to ensure a fair result for the contest, both men and women were equally represented.

Table 2.8 Judges for the 50th *Kōbaku*

	<i>Judge name</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Sex</i>
1	Dejima Takeharu	<i>Ōzeki</i> rank (second highest) <i>sumō</i> wrestler	Male
2	Matsushiba Maka	Actor	Female
3	Uchitake Makiko	Writer	Female
4	Nomura Mansai	<i>Kyōgen</i> actor from the <i>nō</i> theatre	Male
5	Tamura Yōko	<i>Jūdo</i> athlete	Female
6	Tsukigawa Masahiko	Actor	Male
7	Kusafue Mitsuko	Actor	Female
8	Aku Yū	Popular song lyricist	Male
9	Fukushima Akiko	Golfer	Female
10	Ototake Hirokata	Politics and economics student at Waseda University	Male
11	Itō Ritsuko	Manager of NHK <i>Seisaku</i> (Programme Production Department)	Female

Source: 50th *Kōbaku Utagassen* 1999:Television Programme

Contest Results

After the final song performance, the judging process was rapidly underway. Birdwatchers frantically scanned the Hall, counting the number of red or white paper fans held by NHK Hall audience members, representing votes for the preferred team. Meanwhile, the judges voted for their preferred team by depositing a yellow ball in either the Red or White compartment of a large voting box.

⁴⁶ Dejima Takeharu, for example, had claimed first prize at a *sumō* tournament in Nagoya and Nomura Mansai had won a distinguished award in recognition of his work in the *nō* theatre tradition (see Appendix E, clock 7:45:47, for further details).

⁴⁷ A renowned lyricist, Aku Yū's songs have been performed by many past and present *Kōbaku* performers, including the 1970s pop duo Pink Lady and *enka* singer Itsuki Hiroshi. At the 50th *Kōbaku*, Aku was the judge of performances of his own lyric compositions, namely "Funa uta" ("Sailor's Song") performed by Yashiro Aki and "Ano kane o narasu no wa anata" ("You Are The One Ringing That Bell") performed by Wada Akiko.

The votes from the audience were tallied. Soon after, screams of delight and surprise emanated from the crowd when the close scores were revealed on separate placards: 1217 for the Red Team and 1479 for the White Team. This result was, after all, a preliminary indication of the contest's outcome. Ultimately, however, it was not the quantity of audience votes that mattered but how these votes were dispersed among NHK Hall's ground level and two balconies. The team acquiring the majority of audience votes from each level would be allocated a yellow ball. Tensions ran high as this was determined and the three yellow balls were placed in the voting box among the 11 balls already deposited by the judges. The audiences' votes held less weight than the judges, but were still very important. Altogether, there were 14 balls—an even number—and it was therefore a very real possibility that the contest could result in a tie.

Despite the impending climax, the two MCs chatted amiably throughout the voting process and still preserved the thrilling but tense atmosphere. The 14 balls were allocated into separate wicker baskets for each team. Holding their respective baskets, the MCs simultaneously pitched their balls into the crowd one at a time. After each MC had thrown five balls, Kubo Junko upturned her basket to indicate her team had none remaining. With a great cheer, the White Team was declared the outright winner, with nine balls compared with the Red Team's five balls.

This victory held significance not only for the 50th anniversary *Kōbaku*, but also in the context of the *Kōbaku* historical tally of victories.⁴⁸ Prior to the 50th *Kōbaku*, the Red Team had won 25 *Kōbaku*, while the White Team had won 24. The White Team's dramatic victory in 1999 levelled the scores and ensured an even playing field for the start of the new millennium.

Post-Programme

The Countdown to Midnight

Following *Kōbaku*'s conclusion at 11:45pm, the time-honoured programme '*Yuku toshi kuru toshi*' ('The Year Gone By, The Year To Come') was broadcast on the NHK-G

⁴⁸ As first described in Chapter One, the *Kōbaku* historical tally is the record of accumulative wins by each team throughout the contest's history.

channel. In keeping with tradition, the programme presented footage of peaceful, snow-capped Buddhist temples and Shintō shrines from across the Japan. This year, however, the footage only lasted a few minutes before a unique segment was introduced: to commemorate the arrival of the new millennium, there was a live cross-back to NHK Hall at 11:58pm. Here, the *Kōbaku* song performers and hall audience members joyfully counted the seconds until midnight and celebrated the occasion with great fanfare. The *Kōbaku* revelry lasted for approximately 20 seconds into the New Year, then the programme screened various images of fireworks over various Japanese cities, gatherings crowds outside famous temples in Tokyo and, later, footage of celebrations in Sydney, Shanghai and Bangkok as the world observed the arrival of the new millennium.

Reportage and Ratings

On the night of 31 December, photographs of the 50th *Kōbaku* graced the front covers of evening newspapers such as *Deiri supōtsu* (Daily Sports) and *Supōtsu hōchi* (Sports News). Dedicated *Kōbaku* websites immediately dissected every aspect of the programme from the songs performed to the costumes worn and the contest's outcome. It was not until days later, however, that tangible evidence of *Kōbaku*'s success was revealed through Video Research's published ratings. Overall, the 50th *Kōbaku* was well received throughout Japan (see Appendix F for ratings from all applicable Japanese regions). In the Kantō region, it achieved a maximum of 45.8 percent of viewers during the programme's first half (Video Research Limited 2000a:1).⁴⁹ The second half, on the other hand, peaked at 50.8 percent—a significant decline from the previous year's second half rating of 57.2 percent (Video Research Limited 2000a:1).⁵⁰ The media also published the maximum ratings achieved during the 54 scheduled song performances, indicating the most and least popular singers.

⁴⁹ This surpassed the 45.4 percent record for the first half of the program, set at the 49th *Kōbaku* (1998) (Video Research Limited 2000a:1).

⁵⁰ Several unusual events in 1999 could account for the poor ratings during the program's second half, particularly as the midnight hour drew nigh. It was, for example, well publicised that the Tokyo train systems would shut down well before 12:00am to avoid Y2K problems. As such, *Kōbaku* viewers planning to travel after the program's conclusion (to a temple or shrine, a new-millennium party, their workplace to monitor Y2K or other destinations) may have tuned out earlier than usual to use the train system while it was still operational.

The programme's first half was clearly styled toward J-pop fans and the second half toward *enka* fans. As expected, the highest ratings during the first half were achieved by J-pop acts (SPEED and Godaigo) and the lowest by *enka* singers (Kōzai Kaori and Godai Natsuko) (see Appendix F: Figure F.1). Unexpectedly, however, *enka* singers (Yashiro Aki and Hosokawa Takashi) rated the lowest during the second half of the programme and J-pop acts (SMAP and Gō Hiromi) were the highest.⁵¹ Overall, ratings were lowest during Godai Natsuko's performance and the highest during Gō Hiromi's performance.

After establishing the general background for *Kōhaku* and the specific context for the 50th *Kōhaku* in Part One, we now can view the 50th *Kōhaku* Community as one which is historically and culturally significant. This community not only stands with the trials and tribulations of 50 'editions' of *Kōhaku* beside them, but it is also a fresh, new incarnation of the *Kōhaku* Community in 1999 which 'looks to the future through song'.

⁵¹ Gō Hiromi's popularity is most interesting considering he was absent from respondents answers in NHK's Favourite Personalities Survey (see again Table 2.3)



Plate 1

NHK's Radio Studio One is full to capacity with singers,
musicians and audience members.

—The 2nd *Kôbaku* (1952)

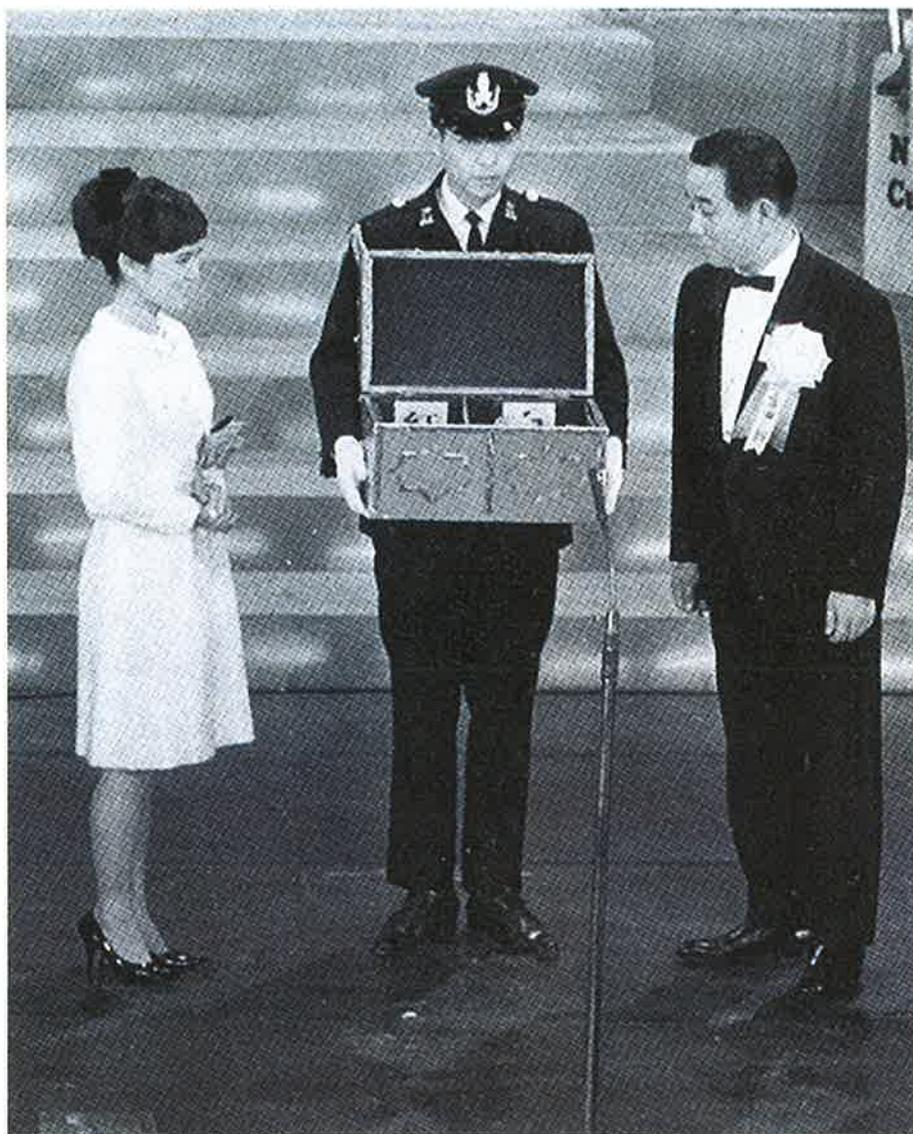


Plate 2

A security guard presents the Team MCs with a chest filled with voting balls at the end of the contest.
—The 16th *Kōbaku* (1965)



Plate 3
The grand stage of NHK Hall, *Kōbaku*'s new home.
—The 24th *Kōbaku* (1973)



Plate 4

White Team singers rally support for fellow teammate Minami Haruo (centre) during his song performance.

—The 26th *Kōhaku* (1975)



Plate 5

An emotional Miyako Harumi (centre) following her farewell performance.

—The 35th *Kōbaku* (1984)



Plate 6

Kobayashi Sachiko as '*Nijūisseiki no yuki onna*' ('21st Century Snow Woman'), one of the highlights of her stage design and costume battle with Mikawa Ken'ichi.

—The 47th *Kōbaku* (1996)



Plate 7

Mikawa Ken'ichi wearing an elaborate costume to rival fellow *Kōbaku* performer Kobayashi Sachiko.
—The 49th *Kōbaku* (1998)



Plate 8

White Team MC Nakamura Kankurō (left) and Red Team MC Kubo Junko in a magazine promotion for the 50th *Kōbaku*.



Plate 9

Newcomers to the 50th *Kōhaku* pose for photographs at a press conference in early December 1999.



Plate 10

A woman presents her 50th *Kōbaku* audience ticket to a security guard and is ushered to join the line outside NHK Hall.



Plate 11

Rows of blue metal partitions and white rope are in place to guide the 50th *Kōbaku* ticket holders.



Plate 12

Two women at the start of the line outside NHK Hall display their 50th *Kōbaku* audience tickets.

Plate 13

A group of young girls in the middle of the line, which extends down the boulevard alongside NHK Hall, display their 50th *Kōbaku* audience tickets.





Plate 14

In the boulevard alongside NHK Hall, women sit silently on their own, holding signs that request audience tickets for the 50th *Kōbaku*.



Plate 15

A group of youths holding signs, hoping to obtain audience tickets for the 50th *Kōbaku*.



Plate 16

A 50th *Kōbaku* voting fan featuring a caricature of the Red Team MC, Kubo Junko, used by NHK Hall audience members to vote at the end of the contest.



Plate 17

Surrounded by the stage crew, singer Matsuda Seiko (centre) blocks her position during the final rehearsals for the 50th *Kōbaku* while a wardrobe staff member holds Matsuda's performance outfit nearby.



Plate 18

Three panels depicting a pink *sakura* cherry blossom tree create a striking backdrop.

Hosokawa Takashi

“*Sakura no hana no chiru gotoku*”

(“As if Cherry Blossoms Were Falling”)

Song Performance 38

—The 50th *Kōbaku*



Plate 19

The eight members of Mōningu Musume。 (front of stage, right and left) join in the fan dancing for the song performance by Nakamura Mitsuko (centre).

Nakamura Mitsuko
“*Kawachi-zake*” (“*Kawachi sake*”)
Song Performance 16
—The 50th *Kōhaku*



Plate 20

Three panels of *ukiyo*e prints form an imposing backdrop for Nagayama Yōko's song performance.

Nagayama Yōko
“*Sadame yuki*” (“Destiny Snow”)
Song Performance 37
—The 50th *Kōbaku*



Plate 21

Song performer Sakamoto Fuyumi (right) clenches her fist whilst *onnagata* Umezawa Tomio dances beside her.

Sakamoto Fuyumi

“*Kaze ni tatsu*” (“To Stand Against the Wind”)

Song Performance 43

—The 50th *Kōhaku*



Plate 22

The trio Hysteria Blue (centre) are joined onstage by various characters from the 'Peanuts' comic strip.

Hysteria Blue
"Haru ~spring~" ("Spring")
Song Performance 3
—The 50th *Kōbaku*



Plate 23

Teammates in red coats join song performer Harada Yuri (centre) onstage, copy her hand gestures and sing along.

Harada Yuri

“*Tsugaru no hana*” (“Flowers of Tsugaru”)

Song Performance 9

—The 50th *Kōbaku*



Plate 24

Members of the bands 19 and Sans Filter (rear of stage, right) play guitars during the song performance by Yamakawa Yutaka (left) and his duet partner (centre).

Yamakawa Yutaka
“*Amerika-bashi*” (“America Bridge”)
Song Performance 13
—The 50th *Kōbaku*



Plate 25

Fellow Community members applaud the four members of SPEED (front) at the conclusion of the group's final *Kōhaku* performance.

SPEED

“my graduation ‘99”
Song Performance 21
—The 50th *Kōhaku*



Plate 26

The eleven members of Yaen, wearing red and white costumes, reveal a message painted on their backs which reads 'Year of the Dragon'.

Yaen

"Be Cool!"

Song Performance 27

—The 50th *Kōbaku*



Plate 27

Song performer Yashiro Aki, dressed in a red gown, sings directly to camera.

Yashiro Aki
“*Funa uta*” (“Sailor’s Song”)
Song Performance 35
—The 50th *Kōbaku*

part two

Song Performances
of the 50th *Kōhaku* Community

Part Two focuses on the 50th *Kōbaku* and draws on selected song performances in order to explore key issues surrounding the Community. As outlined in the Introduction, these issues relate to the individual, to the collective, to the historical *Kōbaku* Community, and to the nation. The following chapters focus on key elements of song performance: the performance of music and lyrics, the lyric themes, the staging, and the performing relationships. While it is useful to consider these elements in discrete chapters, the intention here is to gradually construct a fuller picture throughout Part Two without disregarding the connections between the elements. Nevertheless, some elements receive closer attention than others because of their greater potential to reveal insights into the Community. For example, the relationships between song performers are explored in detail in order to illustrate the internal dynamics of the Community. By contrast, other elements such as song keys and musical notation—although considered interesting in their own right—are not addressed because they are less pertinent to the objectives of this study.

Before proceeding, a short editorial comment is appropriate. In general, the selected lyrics cited in this part are English translations which can be found, in full, in Appendix G alongside the original Japanese. In order to retain pertinent aspects associated with the live performance of lyrics, the text formatting adopted for Appendix G is also applied to all citations within Part Two. To maintain the context of the performance, all lyric citations are followed by the name of the song, the English translation of the title, the song performer and the song number in the programme order, as appropriate. As noted previously, The 50th *Kōbaku* Community Song and The *Kōbaku* Finale Song are not numbered.

3

Performing the Music and Lyrics

There are many elements that make up a song performance, from the structure of the lyrics to the types of instruments employed. In order to shed light on the 50th *Kōbaku* Community, the fundamental elements of song performance—the music and lyrics—are examined. This chapter is presented in two sections. The first section, ‘performing the music’, provides an overview of the musical characteristics in order to gain a broad understanding of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community’s performances over the course of the programme. Here, the types of ensembles, song styles, instrumentation, as well as the live and pre-recorded elements for each of the 56 *Kōbaku* songs are summarised in one table to allow comparisons at a glance. The table is also the basis for discussion of other element of the songs.

The second section, ‘performing the lyrics’ considers the verbally articulated lyrics in conjunction with the lyric texts as presented on-screen. It also examines key elements including foreign words, text effects, historic language terminology, Japanese-language ‘cover songs’ and lyric variations in the live setting. Each of the four issues that are central to the discussion of community in this study is considered. That said, however, this chapter chiefly addresses the character of the song performers as individuals while pointing to the diversity of popular song in Japan as a nation at the end of the 1990s.

Performing the Music

When considering the performance of the music, it is important to remember that the songs presented in the 50th *Kōbaku* are (most often) reinterpreted and abridged versions of pre-existing songs. In some songs, the standard instrumentation has been adapted in order to correspond with the musical flow of the programme as the evening progresses, while others rely on pre-recorded backing music. Table 3.1 (overleaf)—presented in-text for immediate relevance to this section—lists selected song elements in each *Kōbaku* song, while discussion following the table addresses these elements in relation to the Community.

Table 3.1 Overview of Selected Song Elements

<i>Act</i>	<i>Song title</i>	<i>Ensemble</i> ^a	<i>General song style</i>	<i>General Instrumentation</i>	<i>Music and Additional Vocals: Live or Pre-recorded</i>
1	Mōningu Musume _e “LOVE <i>masbin</i> ” (“Love Machine”)	Vocal group	•J-pop •energetic dance/disco •Fast-tempo	Synthesisers, drums, electronic drum beat, electric guitars, syncopated bass	Pre-recorded
2	DA PUMP “We can’t stop the music”	Vocal group	•J-pop •Vibrant rap/hip-hop •Mid-tempo	Synthesisers, syncopated electric guitars, strong emphasis on electronic drum beat	Pre-recorded
3	Hysteric Blue “ <i>Haru ~spring~</i> ” (“Spring”)	Pop/rock band	•J-pop •Lively pop/rock •Fast-tempo	Piano, drums, electric guitar, electric bass, synthesisers	Pre-recorded
4	Something ELse “ <i>Rasuto chansu</i> ” (“Last Chance”)	Acoustic pop band	•J-pop •Anthemic simple pop •Mid-tempo	Acoustic guitars, electric bass, tambourines, handclaps	Live
5	Shigemori Ayumi and Hayami Kentarō “ <i>Dango 3 kyōdai</i> ” (“The Three <i>dango</i> Brothers”)	Vocal duo	•children’s television song •Cheerful pop •Mid-tempo tango beat	Double bass, accordions, violin, piano, various percussion	Live
6	Toba Ichirō “ <i>Ashizuri-misaki</i> ” (“Cape Ashizuri”)	Vocal solo	• <i>enka</i> •dramatic, commanding •slow-tempo	Trumpet, slap electric bass, strings, synthesisers, brass, Electric guitar, <i>taiko</i> , mandolin	Live
7	MAX “ <i>Issho ni...</i> ” (“Together...”)	Vocal group	•J-pop •Christmas pop ballad •mid-tempo	Synthesisers, sleigh bells, chime bells, electronic drum beat, acoustic guitar, synthesised strings	Pre-recorded
8	GLAY “ <i>Sabaibarū</i> ” (“Survival”)	Rock band	•J-pop •upbeat heavy rock	Distorted electric guitars, electric bass, drums, synthesiser	Pre-recorded
9	Harada Yuri “ <i>Tsugaru no hana</i> ” (“Flowers of Tsugaru”)	Vocal solo	• <i>enka</i> •mid-tempo upbeat	Strings, woodwind, acoustic guitar, mandolin, saxophone	Live
10	Yoshi Ikuzō “ <i>Fuyu no sake</i> ” (“Winter’s sake”)	Vocal solo	•Melancholy <i>enka</i> •mid-tempo pensive	Strings, drums, electric bass, electric guitar, synthesisers	Live
11	Matsu Takako “ <i>Yume no shizuku</i> ” (“Droplets of a Dream”)	Vocal solo	•J-pop •mid-tempo pop ballad	Electric piano, electronic beat, synthesisers, acoustic guitar	Pre-recorded
12	19 “ <i>Ano kamibikōki kumorizōra watte</i> ” (“That Paper Plane Will Break Through the Cloudy Sky”)	Acoustic pop/neo-folk	•J-pop •mid-tempo upbeat	Mouth organ, acoustic guitar, drums, electric guitar	Pre-recorded
13	Yamakawa Yutaka “ <i>Amerika-bashi</i> ” (“America Bridge”)	Vocal duet	• <i>enka</i> •mid-tempo lilting	Strings, synthesiser, acoustic guitars, electric bass, brass, accordion	Live

<i>Act</i>	<i>Song title</i>	<i>Ensemble</i> ^a	<i>General song style</i>	<i>General Instrumentation</i>	<i>Music and Additional Vocals: Live or Pre-recorded</i>
14	Kōzai Kaori “ <i>Bōkyō jūnen</i> ” (“Ten Years of Nostalgia”)	Vocal solo	•Melancholy <i>enka</i> •slow-tempo mournful	Synthesiser, strings, mandolin, electric bass	Live
15	Saijō Hideki “ <i>Bairamosu</i> ” (“Let’s Dance”)	Vocal solo	•J-pop •upbeat dance	Flamenco acoustic guitar, castanets, electric beat, synthesisers, bass	Pre-recorded
16	Nakamura Mitsuko “ <i>Kawachi-zake</i> ” (“Kawachi <i>sake</i> ”)	Vocal solo	• <i>enka</i> •upbeat joyful	mandolin, strings, electric bass, brass, woodwind, drums	Live
17	Kiroro “ <i>Nagai aida</i> ” (“A Long Time”)	Piano/vocal Duo	•J-pop •slow-tempo ballad	Grand piano	Live
18	Horiuchi Takao “ <i>Zoku: take tonbo ~seishun no shippo~</i> ” (“Sequel: Bamboo Dragonfly ~the tail-end of youth~”)	Vocal solo	•pop-style <i>enka</i> •mid-tempo	Electric bass, acoustic guitar, electric guitar, drum kit, synthesiser, strings, brass	Live
19	Godai Natsuko “ <i>Kazemachi minato</i> ” (“Waiting for a Favourable Wind in the Harbour”)	Vocal solo	•Melancholy <i>enka</i> •slow-tempo mournful	Slap bass, strings, woodwind, acoustic guitar, electric bass, brass, synthesiser, electric guitar	Live
20	TOKIO “ <i>Ai no arashi</i> ” (“The Love Storm”)	Rock band	•J-pop •fast-tempo lively rock	Synthesiser, distorted electric guitars, electric bass, drums	Pre-recorded
21	SPEED “my graduation ‘99”	Vocal group	•J-pop •mid-tempo soulful pop	Chiming bells, synthesisers, strings, drums, electric guitar	Pre-recorded
22	Godaiigo “ <i>Byūjifuru nēmu</i> ” (“Beautiful Name”)	Pop/rock band	•J-pop •mid-tempo cheerful pop	Electric guitar, electric piano, drums, brass, electric bass	Pre-recorded
23	Every Little Thing “Over and Over”	Pop band	•J-pop •mid-tempo soulful ballad	Electric piano, piano, electric beat, strings, synthesisers, drums, piano, electric guitar	Pre-recorded
24	Kayama Yūzō “ <i>Kimi to itsumademo</i> ” (“You, Forevermore”)	Vocal solo	• <i>kayōkyoku</i> •mid-tempo ballad	Synthesiser, drums, strings, flute, acoustic guitar, electric guitar	Live
25	Fuji Ayako “ <i>Onna no magokoro</i> ” (“A Woman’s Earnest Sincerity”)	Vocal solo	•Melancholy <i>enka</i> •mid-tempo	Acoustic guitar, synthesiser, brass, electric bass, drums	Live
26	Maekawa Kiyoshi “ <i>Tōkyō sabaku</i> ” (“Tokyo Desert”)	Vocal solo	•Pop-style <i>enka</i> •mid-tempo.	Synthesisers, strings, electric guitar, piano, drums, brass	Live
	The 50 th <i>Kōhaku</i> Community “ <i>Nijūisseiki no kimitachi e~A song for children~</i> ” (“For the People of the 21 st Century~A Song for Children~”)	Vocal ensemble with some instruments	•J-pop •mid-tempo ballad	Synthesisers, strings, harmonica, choir, piano, brass, drums, electric bass	Pre-recorded

<i>Act</i>	<i>Song title</i>	<i>Ensemble^a</i>	<i>General song style</i>	<i>General Instrumentation</i>	<i>Music and Additional Vocals: Live or Pre-recorded</i>
27	Yaen	Vocal group	•J-pop •mid-tempo rap/singing.	Electric guitar, synthesisers, electronic drum beat, brass,	Pre-recorded
28	Hamasaki Ayumi	Vocal solo	•J-pop •upbeat joyful dance	Synthesisers, electronic beat, electric guitar, electric piano	Pre-recorded
29	L'arc~en~Ciel	Rock band	•J-pop •mid-tempo lively rock	Electric bass guitar, electric guitars, drums, brass, synthesisers	Pre-recorded
30	Suzuki Ami	Vocal solo	•J-pop •mid-tempo joyful dance	Synthesisers, electronic beat	Pre-recorded
31	SMAP	Vocal group	•J-pop •mid-tempo funk pop	Wah-wah electric guitar, electric bass guitar, drums, synthesisers, brass	Pre-recorded
32	Amuro Namie	Vocal solo	•J-pop •mid-tempo soul pop	Electric piano, electric bass, electric guitar, handclaps, electronic beat	Pre-recorded
33	Sans Filtre	Pop band	•J-pop •12 bar blues, upbeat mid-tempo	Electric guitars, electric bass, drums, electric organ	Live
34	globe	Pop band	•J-pop •mid-tempo melancholy pop and rap	Electric piano, acoustic guitar, electric bass guitar, synthesiser, drums	Live
35	Yashiro Aki	Vocal solo	•Melancholy <i>enka</i> •slow tempo	Synthesiser (oboe), drums, strings, brass, electric bass, piano, electric guitar	Live
36	Kaguya hime	Folk band	•J-pop •slow tempo folk, acoustic	Violin, double bass, acoustic guitars, mandolin, electric piano	Live
37	Nagayama Yōko	Vocal solo	• <i>enka</i> •mid-tempo not	Electric guitar, electric bass, strings, brass, <i>shamisen</i> , synthesisers, drums	Live
38	Hosokawa Takashi	Vocal solo	• <i>enka</i> •mid-tempo	Strings, drums, electric guitar, mandolin, synthesisers	Live
39	Kawanaka Miyuki	Vocal solo	• <i>enka</i> •mid-tempo	Acoustic guitar, strings, brass, mandolin, synthesisers, drums	Live
40	Mikawa Ken'ichi	Vocal solo	• <i>kayōkyoku</i> •mid-tempo upbeat	Synthesisers, electric bass guitar, strings, brass, castanets, drums	Live
41	Matsuda Seiko	Vocal solo	•J-pop jazz-influenced •slow-tempo ballad	Saxophone, piano, drums, electric guitar, electric bass, electric guitar	Live
42	Gō Hiromi	Vocal solo	•J-pop •fast-tempo upbeat dance	Synthesisers, electronic beat, brass, electric guitar	Pre-recorded

<i>Act</i>	<i>Song title</i>	<i>Ensemble</i> ^a	<i>General song style</i>	<i>General Instrumentation</i>	<i>Music and Additional Vocals: Live or Pre-recorded</i>
43	Sakamoto Fuyumi “ <i>Kaze ni tatsu</i> ” (“To Stand Against the Wind”)	Vocal solo	• <i>enka</i> •mid-tempo upbeat	Electric bass guitar, strings, piano, synthesiser, drums	Live
44	Minami Haruo (“ <i>Genroku meisōfu ~Tawaraboshi Genba~</i> ” (“The Famous Spear Song of the <i>Genroku</i> Era ~Tawaraboshi Genba~”))	Vocal solo	• <i>enka</i> •spoken segments, mid-tempo upbeat	Strings, brass, drums, <i>shamisen</i> , <i>taiko</i> , acoustic guitar, electric bass	Live
45	Kobayashi Sachiko “ <i>Yancha sake</i> ” (“Mischievous <i>sake</i> ”)	Vocal solo	• <i>enka</i> •mid-tempo	Synthesised <i>shakubachi</i> , wooden clapper sticks, synthesiser, mandolin, strings, drums, electric bass, <i>taiko</i>	Live
46	Sada Masashi “ <i>Ki seki~ōkina ainoyōni~</i> ” (“Miracle~Like an Overwhelming Love~”)	Vocal solo	•J-pop •Mid-tempo, middle-of-the-road ballad	Piano, strings, acoustic guitar, electric guitar, brass, drums, electric bass, synthesisers	Live
47	Yuki Saori and Yasuda Sachiko “ <i>Furusato</i> ” (“Hometown”)	Vocal duet	• <i>dōyō</i> •mid-tempo	Strings, harp, piano	Live
48	Mori Shin’ichi “ <i>Ofukuro-san</i> ” (“Mother Dear”)	Vocal solo	•Melancholy <i>enka</i> •mid-tempo ballad	Synthesisers, strings, drums, mandolin, electric guitar, electric bass	Live
49	Ishikawa Sayuri “ <i>Amagi-goē</i> ” (“Amagi Pass”)	Vocal solo	•Melancholy <i>enka</i> •mid-tempo	Electric guitars, wooden clapper sticks, drums, synthesisers, slap electric bass, brass	Live
50	Tanimura Shinji “ <i>Subaru</i> ” (“The Pleiades”)	Vocal solo	• <i>enka</i> , mid-tempo ballad	Brass, acoustic guitar, drums, strings	Live
51	Tendō Yoshimi “ <i>Kawa no nagare no yō ni</i> ” (“Like the River’s Flow”)	Vocal solo	• <i>enka</i> •mid-tempo ballad	Acoustic guitar, synthesiser, strings, drums, brass, electric bass guitar	Live
52	Itsuki Hiroshi “ <i>Yo-zora</i> ” (“The Night Sky”)	Vocal solo	•Pop-style <i>enka</i> •mid-tempo with a slow-tempo middle section	Strings, electric guitar, drums, brass	Live
53	Wada Akiko “ <i>Ano kane o narasu no wa anata</i> ” (“You Are the One Ringing that Bell”)	Vocal solo	•J-pop •Mid-tempo ballad	NHK organ, harp, bell, brass, strings, drums,	Live
54	Kitajima Saburō “ <i>Matsuri</i> ” (“Festival”)	Vocal solo	• <i>enka</i> •mid-tempo lively upbeat	<i>Taiko</i> , <i>shakubachi</i> , strings, brass, synthesiser, electric guitar, electric bass guitar, saxophone solo	Live
	The 50 th <i>Kōhaku</i> Community and others “ <i>Hotaru no hikari</i> ” (“The Light of the Fireflies”)	Vocal ensemble	• <i>shōka</i> • mid-tempo	Strings, percussion, brass	Live

^a ‘Ensemble’ refers to the *Kōhaku* song performers. This term does not include any additional musicians or singers.

From the mid-tempo J-pop songs at the start of the contest to the melancholy *enka* presented near the end, it is clear that the 50th *Kōbaku* song performances cover a wide breath of musical ground over the course of the programme. Texture ranges from the heavily produced, synthesiser and drum-machine-driven song by Mōningu Musume., to the sparse strings harp and piano used for Yuki Saori and Yasuda Sachiko's song. Some songs, however, present very similar instrumentations which can be explained by the use of offstage vocal and instrumental ensembles supplied by NHK, namely *Mihara Namiki to za nyū burīdo* (Mihara Namiki and the New Breed), the strings and woodwind orchestra *Tōkyō hōsō kangengakudan* (Tokyo Broadcasting Orchestra), and additional instrumentalists *Sashi gakeki* (*Sashi* Instrumentalists) (Nihon Hōsō Gijutsu Kyoku Seisaku Gijutsu Centā 2000:472). Acts using pre-recorded backing tracks, however, incorporate instruments and sound effects that cannot be produced by NHK's backstage ensembles, such as the sleigh bells and chime bells in the song by MAX. Such songs are grouped together, side-by-side, as are songs which use live music and additional vocals, most likely in accordance with the technical demands of the production. Other patterns emerging from Table 3.1 include the grouping of similar kinds of ensembles together. This is often linked with genre—*enka* singers are more likely to be soloists, for example, whereas J-pop acts are most often bands or groups consisting of multiple members. In considering the two halves of the contest, it is evident that J-pop ensembles dominate the first half while *enka* soloists predominately occupy the second half, especially the final songs of the evening.

The songs presented by the members of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community are representative of Japan's (commercial) popular music landscape in 1999 and are also indicative of Japan's popular music past. We can hear evidence of Japan's adoption of Western instruments such as strings (violins, viola, cello, bass), brass (saxophone, trumpet, trombone etc), percussion (timpani, cymbals etc), in addition to standardised rock band instruments (electric guitars, electric bass, drum kit, synthesisers etc). Furthermore, the general song styles presented by Community members are indicative of the kinds of genres Japan has borrowed from the 'West' and reappropriated, as seen in Matsuda Seiko's blues-orientated J-pop song which includes a saxophone solo, and Sans Filtre's 12-bar-blues chord progressions, reminiscent of 1960s pop from the

Group Sounds era. Other songs have a Latin tinge, such as Saijō Hideki's song which includes flamenco acoustic guitar and castanets.

By contrast, some *Kōbaku* songs include elements that can be identified as having a distinctly 'Japanese' flavour. Many *enka* songs, for example, incorporate sounds of the *shakuhachi*, *taiko* and *shamisen*—instruments which are predominantly associated with traditional musical styles—and, consequently, the songs sound as if they are rooted in the past. Even so, the timbres of these instruments are often reproduced by synthesisers, thus adding a modern touch while blending seamlessly with other instruments in the mix such as strings, sustained brass, solo guitars and trumpets. The distinctive vocal techniques employed by *enka* singers are the most obvious indicator of 'Japanese' elements within *Kōbaku* songs. Minami Haruo, for example, adopts very fast, dramatic and highly rhythmic *shigen* narrative recitative style during his performance, alluding to the *rōkyōku* tradition of telling stories. Other song performers vary their vocal timbre and use the expressive elements vocal ornaments which are characteristic of *enka*. Godai Natsuko, for example, shifts between the chest voice of *jigoe* and the falsetto voice of *uragoe* and also produces harsh guttural sounds that resolve into the wide, wavering vibrato known as *yuri*.

Through the summary presented in Table 3.1 (above), we can see the songs of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community as a snapshot of Japan's popular music genres at the end of the century. On their own, these songs are individual expressions of musical identity for the performers, demonstrating the performer's character, talents and individuality. Collectively, however, these songs illustrate how the nation has adopted, integrated and domesticated aspects of cultures from outside its shores, or shopped from "the cultural supermarket of its day" (Mathews 2000:31) while retaining elements which are unique to Japan. The nation—as depicted through the music in *Kōbaku*—is seen as adaptable, modern and in touch with modern trends, by incorporating Western instruments and musical styles. The Community is, as such, proud to preserve and display the elements which are the hallmarks of Japan's cultural and musical distinctiveness, from traditional instruments to quintessentially 'Japanese' vocal techniques. In this way, we can see a balance of new and old in the songs of the *Kōbaku* Community; it appeals to both

young and old viewers, demonstrating a belief in a common culture, in all of its diversity, in 1999.

Performing the Lyrics

Although an in-depth linguistic analysis is beyond the scope of this study, this section examines the various ways that language is employed in *Kōbaku* songs and what this reveals about the 50th *Kōbaku* Community. Language—as used in song lyrics—is fundamentally linked with identity formation. Indeed, scholars have noted that the Japanese are connected with and defined by their language at both personal and national levels (Gottlieb 2005, Laura Miller 1995, Roy Miller 1982 and 1986, Stanlaw 1992).¹ Therefore, when performers come together in *Kōbaku*, language and how it is delivered is an important means by which the Community defines itself.

As would be expected, Japanese language lyrics predominate in the songs of the 50th *Kōbaku*. But what exactly are ‘Japanese language lyrics’ in the modern times of globalisation in the late 1990s? When considering a definition, it is important to remember that in the context of the mediated *Kōbaku*, ‘Japanese language lyrics’ refers to the verbally articulated lyrics which are performed by the singers, as well as the language as visually represented in text form, presented on-screen for the broadcast audience. Regarding written forms of Japanese, this study adopts Gottlieb’s definition which includes

kanji (Chinese characters as used in Japan), two phonetic scripts (*hiragana* and *katakana*, collectively known as *kana*), Arabic numerals [and] the roman alphabet in certain contexts. (2005:78; my italics)

Language constantly evolves and is typically influenced by other languages. Indeed, the Japanese language can hardly be described as self-contained (despite the country’s limited contact with outside nations during the Edo period) and over the course of the nation’s history, many words have been borrowed from other

¹ Japanese is a heavily gendered and hierarchal language, with styles of language ranging from polite, women’s speech to colloquial slang used by teenagers. It would also be enlightening to analyse the types of language used between community members during non-song performance segments—a task best undertaken in future research.

languages.² In more recent times, Japan's quest for modernisation during the Meiji era has seen a pronounced integration of foreign languages—most notably English—into the Japanese vocabulary. English words were peppered throughout everyday speech to “spice a conversation” and was seen as “fashionable” and, later, as a sign of “personal prestige” (Stanlaw 1992:59–60). By the 1990s, however, “all Japanese, except those in the pre-war generation...learned some English during the course of their education” and thus “English is a universal referent system with which most Japanese have had personal contact” (Stanlaw 2001:237).³ Even a cursory glance at Appendix G shows the many occurrences of English words (using the Latin alphabet) in the songs of the 50th *Kōbaku*, a summary of which can be seen in Table 3.2.⁴

Table 3.2 Songs of the 50th *Kōbaku* which Employ English Lyrics

<i>Presence of English</i>	<i>Songs in the First Half</i>	<i>Songs in the Second Half</i>	<i>Total</i>
In Song Title	6	10	16
Only in Song Title (not in lyrics)	1	2	3
In Lyrics	8	8	16
Only in Lyrics (not song title)	0	0	0

Source: compiled from Appendix G

A significant number of the 56 songs in the contest employ English in addition to Japanese. Sixteen songs, for example, use English words in the song title and the same number again use English words in the body of the song. Neither practice is new. For decades, *Kōbaku* has featured songs containing English language lyrics and/or titles. Nevertheless, many songs of the 50th *Kōbaku* are ‘new’ and are representative of the year 1999. All of the songs, however, are deemed suitable to be passed on to the people of the 21st century, as per the contest’s minor theme.⁵ With this broader context in mind, it is interesting to note the extent to which English has been integrated into

² In a brief summary of this history, Tomoda notes that

in ancient times, the main sources of new words were Chinese, Sanskrit and Korean. Since the fourteenth century, contact with European languages has provided new sources of loan-words of which Portuguese, Spanish, Latin and Dutch were early contributors while German, English, French and Russian have had considerable influence since the nineteenth century. (Tomoda 1999:231)

³ Despite this familiarity, it is not known if Japanese people always comprehend the meanings of English words, as noted by Tomoda (1999) and Seaton (2001).

⁴ To a far lesser extent, Spanish is also present, a fact which will be discussed later in this section. As a general observation, it can be said that mainly J-pop acts, rather than *enka* performers, use foreign language lyrics in *Kōbaku*.

⁵ *Kōbaku*'s minor theme is ‘*Nijūisseiki ni tsutaetai uta*’ (‘Passing on Songs for the 21st Century’).

lyrics, so much so that the Japanese themselves regard it as characteristic of Japanese song.⁶

In Japan, English is often ‘misused’ or employed with ‘poor’ grammar. This is also true of 50th *Kōbaku* songs (see for example Appendix G: Song 41D line 4). Rather than superficially listing such instances and identifying them as ‘mistakes’, it is more useful to observe how English is given meaning in *Kōbaku*, especially considering English is “used in Japan for Japanese purposes” (Stanlaw 1992:75). Some songs use block stanzas of English, such as DA PUMP’s “We can’t stop the music” (see Appendix G Song 2B) and Matsuda Seiko’s “SWEET MEMORIES” (Song 41D), to reinforce the lyrics through repetition. By contrast, other songs use only a few English phrases to add ‘spice’ or ‘colour’. In general, English words are likely to be a variation of or identical to the song’s title, as the following examples demonstrate:

Over and Over Over and Over

Every Little Thing—“Over and Over”
Song Performance 23

ow! ride on heaven’s drive

L’arc~en~Ciel—“HEAVEN’S DRIVE”
Song Performance 29

RESPECT the POWER OF LOVE

Amuro Namie—“RESPECT the POWER OF LOVE”
Song Performance 32

By contrast, other songs use English phrases sporadically and playfully, as noted in the original Japanese lyrics in the left column:

Imagoro aitsu to Twist And Shout

Now you twist and shout

with that so-and-so guy,

Ore wa Knock Down Jealousy

I’m knocked down by jealousy.

Kuyashigaru dake muda ni narunara Stop

If being bitter is a waste, stop!

Sans Filtre—“Yei Yei” (“Yeah Yeah”)

Song Performance 33

When viewing the above Japanese lyrics, it is clear that the subject matter of the song continues seamlessly, despite the rapid leaps between English and Japanese. In this sense, English is used for language variety and for the unique meanings that English words hold—meanings which cannot be reproduced in Japanese. The lyrics “Twist and

⁶ See Lancashire (2004) for further discussion on the prevalence of English lyrics in J-pop.

Shout”, for example, not only refer to a 1960s style of dancing, but also alludes to the song made popular by the Beatles, a band that was (and is) extremely popular in Japan. Indeed, if the phrase “Twist and Shout” was translated and written in Japanese script, this meaning would not be conveyed with such immediacy.

It is curious to note that within some J-pop songs, English is present only in the song’s title and not the body of the song (see again Table 3.2 above), examples of which include SMAP’s “Fly”, Hamasaki Ayumi’s “Boys & Girls” and Hysteria Blue’s “*Haru ~spring~*” (“Spring”). This could be a strategy whereby the English immediately draws interest to the song and marks it as fashionable and/or modern. An English title also adds a sense of foreign exoticism that cannot be created with Japanese words. English titles are also used to enforce, explicate and/or mirror the Japanese lyrics from the body of the song; they are not chosen arbitrarily or without relation to the song’s subject matter. In SMAP’s song, for example, the English title “Fly”, is related to the song’s subject matter:

kimi wa ima sugu tobitateru no sa

You can spread your wings
and fly right now.

SMAP—“Fly”

Song Performance 31

Hysteria Blue’s song uses both English and Japanese in its title, “*Haru ~spring~*” (“Spring”). The word ‘spring’ initially seems superfluous, considering ‘*haru*’ translates as ‘spring’. Nevertheless, the Red MC states both components of the title when introducing the song performance and, to reinforce this, the title also appears on-screen. The English word ‘spring’ appears after the *kanji* ideograph ‘*haru*’ at the end of the title, possibly to elucidate meaning (much like *furigana* is used to decode difficult *kanji*). It is, however, doubtful that Japanese viewers would not recognise this common ideograph. The order of these words, thus, are not of great significance—in all likelihood, the English term is used here as a modernising device to add zest to the title and, by implication, the entire song.

Spanish is the only other foreign language used in *Kōbaku* songs, and it solely appears in Saijō Hideki’s “*Bairamosu*” (“Let’s Dance”). Like the title of Hysteria Blue’s song “*Haru ~spring~*” (“Spring”), the title of this song is somewhat repetitive: here,

the Spanish word ‘*bairamosu*’ (lit. ‘we dance’) appears alongside the similar English phrase ‘let’s dance’. Unlike Hysteria Blue’s song, however, this song also uses foreign languages within the body of the song and, as the example below demonstrates, both Spanish, English and Japanese are brought into play within the one stanza:

Woh Woh Woh...Tonight we dance	Woh Woh Woh...Tonight, we dance
Woh Woh Woh... <i>hanasanai</i>	Woh Woh Woh...I won’t let you go
Woh Woh Woh... <i>umareta mama de</i>	Woh Woh Woh...As naked as at birth
te quiero <mi amor>	I want you <my love>
	Saijō Hideki—“ <i>Bairamosu</i> ” (“Let’s Dance”)
	Song Performance 15

The presence and use of two foreign languages in the one song doubly heightens the sense of the exotic. It is an unusual combination which functions in a similar manner to the inclusion of English. Thus, the striking presence and playful use of foreign language marks the 50th *Kōhaku* Community as modern, globally-aware and open to experimentation with language.

Another aspect of performing lyrics involves ‘loan words’ or *gairaigo* (lit. ‘language that came from the outside’) (Tomoda 1999:232). These are used intermittently in the songs of the 50th *Kōhaku* Community. Loan words are presented on-screen using Japanese *katakana*: the syllabary used to write foreign words phonetically. Examples of English-derived loan words in song titles include “*Byūtifuru nēmu*” (“Beautiful Name”) by Godaigo and “*Rasuto chansu*” (“Last Chance”) by Something ELse. Notably, within the body of these songs, the same words are not written in *katakana* but in English, as seen in the chorus for “*Byūtifuru nēmu*”:

Every child has a beautiful name	Every child has a beautiful name,
A beautiful name, a beautiful name	A beautiful name, a beautiful name.
	Godaigo —“ <i>Byūtifuru nēmu</i> ” (“Beautiful Name”)
	Song Performance 22

Similarly, Something ELse’s song title “*Rasuto chansu*” is written in *katakana* while the chorus—which contains very similar words to the title—appears in English:

give me a chance	Give me a chance.
<i>saigo ni kakete mitainda</i>	I want to risk it all this one last [time].
once more chance	One more chance.
	Something ELse—“ <i>Rasuto chansu</i> ” (“Last Chance”)
	Song Performance 4

The shift between *katakana* and the Latin alphabet in the one song is intentional: in the context of *Kōhaku*, *katakana* song titles provide phonetic assistance to television audiences who are unfamiliar with, or unable to read, Latin script.⁷ This is in accordance with NHK's a policy of "minimizing the use" of loan words and providing explanations for words which staff "consider to be not yet stabilized in the language" (Tomoda 1999:240). In general, young viewers are familiar with Latin script due to years of compulsory English language training at school. Typically, it is the older members of the *Kōhaku* broadcast audience who have difficulty comprehending and/or pronouncing words in Latin script. Understandably, *enka* songs (which are favoured by older people, according to NHK's Favourite Personalities Poll; see Chapter Two) rarely contain *katakana* or Latin script lyrics or titles. Conversely, J-pop songs (preferred by younger to middle aged people) frequently contain these kinds of lyrics and titles. As such, in order for all of the on-screen text to be read with ease by all audience demographics, NHK converted one song title that was originally written in Latin script, into *katakana*; Saijō Hideki's "*Bairamosu*" was, according to his official website, originally released under the Latin-script title "*Bairamosu* ~Tonight we dance ~" ("Hideki Single Grafiti [sic] 1999" 1999:Internet).

The onscreen lyrics give *Kōhaku* a distinctly *karaoke* feel. Indeed, like *karaoke*, the lyric prompts are presented at the bottom of the television screen and are, for the most part, perfectly synchronised with the *Kōhaku* vocalist's lyrics. By actively encouraging and guiding the broadcast audience to sing along with members of the 50th *Kōhaku* Community, these on-screen lyrics assist in creating a sense of quasi-intimacy between audience member and performer, as visual cues which draw viewers into the 50th *Kōhaku uchi* and, in a broader context, unite the viewing nation through unisonance (see Anderson 1991 [1983]). It is, therefore, useful to observe not only the types of languages that are sung, but also how lyrics are presented in written form by NHK. In *Kōhaku* J-pop songs, on-screen English lyrics are often artistically styled for visual impact. For example, English lyrics are strongly emphasised when repeatedly written as a block of capital letters:

⁷ The *hiragana* phonetic syllabary is similarly used to represent more complex *kanji*.

YOU ARE THE ONE
 YOU ARE THE ONE
 YOU ARE THE ONE

globe—"You Are The One"
 Song Performance 34

The eye is immediately attracted to capitalised lyrics because the increased size makes words appear of greater importance than nearby Latin script or Japanese ideograms on-screen. It is unlikely that capitals are used to emphasise the meaning of these words, but rather to draw attention to the fact that these words are indeed English. This effect is similarly created through the abundant use of the exclamation mark in another song:

Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey!
 Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey!

—
 wow wow wow
 Just be! Just be cool!

Yaen—"Be Cool!"
 Song Performance 27

Symbols are also used for visual effect and they also serve another function: to replace other words. Such symbols most commonly appear in the middle of English words. The ampersand, for example, appears in the phrase "Love & pride" from DA PUMP's "We can't stop the music" and again in the title of Hamasaki Ayumi's song "Boys & Girls". While this clearly is an abbreviated and more compact form of language, this symbol is also visually distinct and creates interest. The Japanese have a special fondness for abbreviations and readily and playfully experiment with language. In *Kōhaku* songs, symbols are sometimes used as a substitute for, or a contraction of, a word. The song below, for example, uses the following Western shorthand

X'mas Eve

SPEED—"my graduation '99"
 Song Performance 21

to refer to 'Christmas Eve'. Similarly, the song below uses a combination of numbers and Japanese text

12gatsu

MAX—"Issho ni..." ("Together...")
 Song Performance 7

to indicate ‘December’. In a similar way, numbers are also abbreviated. The year 1999, for example, is abbreviated to ’99 for the title of Gō Hiromi’s “GOLDFINGER ’99” as well as SPEED’s “my graduation ’99”. While Gō’s song was indeed released during that year, SPEED’s song was originally released in 1998 under the title “my graduation”. Although SPEED’s 50th *Kōhaku* song was a slightly abridged version of this 1998 song, it is fundamentally the same song. The inclusion of “’99” in both this and Gō’s song, therefore establishes a time for each song, marking them as songs ‘of the moment’.

Another aspect of performing lyrics is the use of symbols as text effects. This is most pronounced in the J-pop band 19’s “*Ano kamibikōki kumorizora watte*” (“That Paper Plane Will Break Through the Cloudy Sky”). In this song, the ellipsis, question mark, Japanese parentheses (「 and 」) and punctuation mark (。), are used liberally for visual effect, as the left column indicates:

「genki desuka?」	“How are you?”
・ kimi wa ima mo kanashī kao sbite iruno?	You still have a sad face, don’t you?
「daijōbu sa?	“I’m alright.
uragirareru koto wa mō nareterukara...。」	I’m already used to being betrayed...”
「ima dewa sora gawarawanai kara	“Now, because the sky doesn’t smile,
boku wa 「warai kata」 o wasurete shimatta yo ...。」	I forgot ‘how to smile’”,
kimi wa tsubuyaki, soshite wararu...。	You mumble, then you smile...
	19—“ <i>Ano kamibikōki kumorizora watte</i> ”
	(“That Paper Plane Will Break Through the Cloudy Sky”)
	Song Performance 12

Considering that J-pop is targeted toward a young demographic, it can be said that these text effects are designed to appeal to this audience in particular. In all likelihood, however, J-pop fans would already be familiar with these songs and their lyrics prior to the 50th *Kōhaku*. Furthermore, on-screen lyrics are present for the benefit of all viewers and are designed to unite all audience members—regardless of age or genre preferences—to join together in song. Furthermore, these examples of text effects illustrate the Japanese’s flexibility with language and written scripts for song lyrics at this point in time, at the end of the 20th century.

While some songs in *Kōhaku* use foreign language or text effects to perform ‘modern’ Japan, others—most notably *enka*—employ terms that are rarely-used today

in order to perform ‘traditional’ Japan, thus evoking a sense of ‘pastness’. One such historic term is “*senri*” from Kōzai Kaori’s “*Bōkyō jūnen*” (“Ten Years of Nostalgia”), of which the counter “*ri*” is old measure for distance.⁸ Another term is “*chibiro*” from Toba Ichirō’s song “*Ashizuri-misaki*” (“Cape Ashizuri”), whereby “*biro*” is a counter measure for nautical fathoms.⁹ In the context of both songs, these historic terms indicate an unlimited distance or depth in general; perhaps modern terms could not invoke this meaning as accurately. It is more likely, however, that the inclusion of such terms demonstrates a connection with old ways of speaking and language use. Indeed, *enka* is a genre that has ‘old-sounding’ lyrics in addition to ‘old-sounding’ music. By preserving language terms which are infrequently used in 1999 and re-presenting them through *Kōbaku*, these *enka* songs both safeguard and evoke nostalgia for the language of ‘old Japan’. Indeed, these terms, although perhaps foreign to young generations, are more likely to be recognised and understood by mature audiences members—the key demographic for *enka* songs. Nevertheless, through *Kōbaku*, such terms appear in both written and sung forms to a national audience of millions. Thus, whether intentionally or inadvertently, the Japanese are reminded of (or perhaps in the case of younger viewers, newly-introduced to) a little-used part of their language.

When considering the songs of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community as indicative of Japan’s music scene in the late 1990s, it is worth noting the inclusion of Japanese-Language cover songs. In previous *Kōbaku*, domestic artists performed Japanese-language versions of, for example, British, American, French and Spanish songs.¹⁰ It is, therefore, not surprising that two of the 56 songs in the 50th *Kōbaku* are modelled on hybrid Spanish/English-language songs. The first is Gō Hiromi’s “GOLDFINGER ‘99”, a Japanese-language version of Puerto Rican singer Ricky Martin’s song “Livin’ La Vida Loca” (lit. “Living the Crazy Life”).¹¹ The second is Saijō Hideki’s “*Bairamosu*” (“Let’s Dance”), a version of Spanish singer Enrique Iglesias’s “*Bailamosu*” (“Let’s

⁸ *Senri* is 1000 *ri* (approximately four kilometers) (see Appendix G: Song 14A).

⁹ *Chibiro* is 1000 fathoms (approximately 1,800 meters) (see Appendix G: Song 6B).

¹⁰ See Chapter One for past examples of cover songs performed in *Kōbaku*, including Saijō Hideki’s cover of the Village People’s “Y.M.C.A.” and Miyazawa Rie’s cover of David Bowie’s “Fame”. This kind of cross-cultural musical/lyrical appropriation is not, however, exclusive to *Kōbaku* or even Japan. In Papua New Guinea, for example, local cover versions of foreign songs are common and fall under the genre known as “*kopikat*” and may include a total or partial substitution of lyrics (Webb 1993:104).

¹¹ Ricky Martin, who has a strong Latin American fan base, also recorded this song in Spanish.

Dance”). These cover songs were released in Japan in 1999, the same year of Ricky Martin and Enrique Iglesias’s ‘original’ releases, and thus both the covers and the ‘originals’ were competing simultaneously in the Japanese popular music market.¹² It is important to note, however, that when these songs were released, Gō Hiromi and Saijō Hideki’s respective record companies duly acknowledged the true origins of the cover songs. Even today, a section of Gō’s official website pertaining to “GOLDFINGER ‘99” clearly states that it is a Japanese language *kabā kyoku* (cover song) and recognises both the song’s ‘original’ singer and ‘original’ title (“Hiromi Go Goldfinger ‘99” 1999:Internet). Saijō Hideki’s official website grants that his song, too, is a cover song and similarly names the ‘original’ singer and song title yet also includes a brief description of world-wide sales figures of the ‘original’ song (“Hideki Single Grafiti [sic] 1999” 1999:Internet).¹³ Despite such frank and formal admissions, none of this information is disclosed in the 50th *Kōbaku*. The White MC—usually adept at providing a brief background to the song or the performer as a lead-in to song performances—does not divulge the names of the original songs or singers. In fact, the only indication that these are indeed covers comes from the song writing credits which are fleetingly presented on-screen in small print at the beginning of each performance; here, the Japanese lyricists are listed in conjunction with the composers. The inclusion of cover songs—whether acknowledged as such or not—sheds light on the character of the Community. These songs are, after all, deemed significant to be in the 50th *Kōbaku* ‘time-capsule’ of songs to be passed on to the next century.¹⁴ As adaptations of originals, these songs are not wholly unique and perhaps they may be considered of less worth in Western thought. However, in the mind of NHK (and, in all likelihood, *Kōbaku* audiences) the fact that these songs are covers does little to diminish their merit. After all, these songs contain Japanese lyrics and are performed by established *Kōbaku* singers—they are marked as Japanese. The reasons for their inclusion are evident: they

¹² The song “*Bairamosi*” was also released in other parts of Asia although not likely in its original form. Saijō Hideki’s version was, for example, re-covered by a Canto-pop artist and subsequently popularised in Hong Kong and Singapore (Iwabuchi 2002b:98). See Ogawa (2004) for further discussion of Japanese pop music and covers in Hong Kong.

¹³ Hideki is known for covering Spanish-language songs. In 1989, for example, he released a cover of a Spanish-language which was originally performed by Enrique Iglesias’s father, Julio Iglesias (“Hideki Single Grafiti [sic] 1999” 1999:Internet).

¹⁴ See again, the minor theme ‘*Nijūisseiki ni tsutaetai uta*’ (‘Passing on Songs for the 21st Century’).

are indicative of Japan's post-war custom of adapting foreign popular songs to suit Japanese tastes and, moreover, represent the internationalisation of the Japanese music market in 1999.

The final aspect of performing lyrics discussed here is variations of lyrics with the live setting. *Kōbaku*'s songs are purposefully abridged to comply with the programme's time restrictions and it is not surprising that singers occasionally confuse the order of lyrics or even forget words altogether for these newly-modified songs. Clearly, the intense pressure of singing live to a broadcast audience of millions is also a contributing factor, as is the knowledge that an error reflects badly on the individual performer and the team. In *Kōbaku*, such mistakes cannot be concealed. A lyric error is immediately noticeable to audiences even if they are unfamiliar with the song. This is because the vocal presentation is unexpectedly inconsistent with the on-screen lyrics. There are, for example, substantial sections of lyrics which are altered in DA PUMP's performance of "We can't stop the music" and Kayama Yūzo's "*Kimi to itsumademo*" ("You, Forevermore") and minor alterations in Hosokawa Takashi's "*Sakura no hana no chiru gotoku*" ("As if Cherry Blossoms Were Falling"). What is notable is that unlike the group DA PUMP which performed in *Kōbaku* for only the second time, this was Kayama's 14th performance and Hosokawa's 25th performance in *Kōbaku*. These instances demonstrate the fallibility and 'humanness' of the *Kōbaku* performers, suggesting that with or without extensive experience on the *Kōbaku* stage, anyone can make a mistake. While these performers do not give visible indications that they are aware of making an error, other 50th *Kōbaku* acts knowingly incorporate new lyrics for a specific purpose. During one song performance, for example, the all-male comedic group Yaen refers to the contest itself. Instead of singing the on-screen lyrics

Either black or white, it's neither one.
So is a label necessary?
Be Cool!

Yaen—"Be Cool!"
Song Performance 27

Yaen sings

Either white or red, it's *Kōbaku*
So dear Saburō 'won big' [as the final singer]
with the song "*Matsuri*" ("Festival")!

These new lyrics suggest that either the Red Team or White Team could win. The group then scandalously reveals top-secret information about the 50th *Kōbaku*, that Kitajima Saburō (affectionately nicknamed ‘*sabu chan*’) will perform in the 50th *Kōbaku*’s final *tori* position and that the song will be “*Matsuri*” (“Festival”). In the closed world of *Kōbaku*, where the song list and programme order is strictly guarded, any disclosed information is relished. As such, the in-house audience members were noticeably thrilled and a new sense of vigour was injected into the programme. An unexpected event had occurred and this opened the door for similar song performance stunts to take place. Indeed, the next (and final) time an ‘unscheduled’ reference to *Kōbaku* was made in a song’s lyrics was during Kitajima’s *tori* performance. Unlike Yaen, however, Kitajima does not reveal *Kōbaku* secrets—the contest is nearly over by that stage, in any case—and only alters one lyric in the final line of his song. Whereas the on-screen lyrics read

This is the festival of Japan!

Kitajima Saburō—“*Matsuri*” (“Festival”)
Song Performance 54

Kitajima sings

This is the festival of *Kōbaku*!

Kitajima Saburō—“*Matsuri*” (“Festival”)
Song Performance 54

In effect, this subtle word exchange shifts the song’s meaning. Instead of being a song that celebrates just the nation, it now also includes *Kōbaku*, of which Kitajima is an important part, at that very moment. Other elements of performance relating to this important song performance are addressed in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

By examining the performance of music and lyrics in the 50th *Kōbaku*, we can view the Community members as discrete individuals, as demonstrated through their styles of music, their vocal delivery, and their spontaneous and playful use of language. This is complemented by the lyric variations in the live setting which highlight the ‘humanness’ of these performers and provide points of identification and empathy for *Kōbaku* audiences. When considering these individuals as part of a collective, it is clear that the lyric variations, in conjunction with the on-screen presentation of text, serve as an invitation for the audiences to join the televisual *uchi* that is 50th *Kōbaku* Community.

At the same time, lyrics referring to *Kōbaku* demonstrate the Community's awareness of this unique institution and its extensive historical Community of which the 50th *Kōbaku* song performers are now part. At a another level, the presence of 'non-Japanese' aspects, such as 'Western' instruments and English lyrics, illustrates the 'internationalisation' of the nation in 1999 and is in keeping Japan's proclivity for borrowing from other cultures and integrating select aspects into their songs, evidenced most tellingly by the inclusion of cover songs. With these aspects of the 50th *Kōbaku* forming a backdrop, it is now possible to examine the next element of song performance.

4

Lyric Themes

A song assumes new meaning when performed in the 50th *Kōbaku*. It is no longer isolated and self-contained; rather, it becomes one of the many lyrical stories which together create an ongoing narrative throughout the programme. The songs performed by the 50th *Kōbaku* Community are lyrically diverse, with subject matter ranging from lost love, to overcoming hardship, to remembering one's hometown. Despite these obvious differences, many songs share similar themes and this gives the programme a sense of cohesion and continuity. These songs are, after all, selected by NHK in accordance with the 50th *Kōbaku*'s major theme, '*Utao mirai e ~ jidai to sedai o koete ~*' ('Looking to the Future Through Song: Spanning Eras and Generations'), and its minor theme, '*Nijūisseiki ni tsutaetai uta*' ('Passing on Songs for the 21st Century') although, ultimately, it is the members of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community who bring the lyrics to life through song performance.

This chapter looks at selected recurring lyric themes with a view to understand how the 50th *Kōbaku* Community shapes a sense of nationhood for Japan. It draws on Mita's (1992) study of lyrics as emotional symbols in Japanese popular songs prior to 1963, and Yano's (1995) follow-up research pertaining to *enka* songs from 1963 to the mid-1990s. Like these studies, this chapter also identifies patterned expressions in popular songs and considers them as a key to understanding "the feelings of the masses for a particular era" (Mita 1992:5), namely at the end of the millennium. Unlike Mita and Yano who examine the types and frequency of specific words in songs, this chapter is intended neither to be a linguistic analysis nor a study of the gendered nuances of the Japanese language. It is instead concerned with patterns of lyric themes pertaining to the four issues identified in the Introduction, noting in particular that in the context of this landmark event, there is a focus on the nation. This chapter therefore looks at the evocations of the nation—from physical locations and landmarks, to the distinctive seasons and the heavens above, to the culinary landscapes of Japan—before reflecting on the nation's history and future. Throughout this discussion, however, we will also see connections between the individual and the nation.

Landscapes of Nation and the Individual

The Japanese have a great affinity with their land. Since the ‘beginning of time’ when the physical landscape was born from the union of the god Izanagi and goddess Izanami as decreed in the Japanese Creation myth, the land has been regarded as divine (Kobayashi 2002:95). The Shintō faith, furthermore, deems mountains, valleys, seas and rivers as sacred homes for *kami* deities, thus promoting a spiritual connection between the people and the natural topography. The land also serves a practical purpose. As an island archipelago, surrounded by water and isolated from other nations, the earth (and sea) were once the sole sources of food and industry for centuries. The scenic landscapes have always, however, been a source of pleasure as they are constantly renewed and articulated through the colours of turning seasons from the yellow-to-orange-to-red maple leaves of autumn to the white and pink of plum and cherry blossoms in spring. The land and its people are also keenly affected by seasonal weather, such as the humid rainfalls of summer and the heavy snowfalls of winter. It is easy to see why the various landscapes of Japan are so intricately connected with life and serve as a source of inspiration in music, theatre, literature, visual arts and fashion.

This section examines the articulation of Japanese landscapes in *Kōhaku* songs. Four kinds of landscapes are identified here: locations and landmarks; the seasons; the heavens; and culinary landscapes. Before proceeding, it is first important to understand the symbolism that is associated with cities and rural areas in Japan. The economic growth in the mid-1960s to mid-1970s contributed to the consolidation of cities and by 1999, the vast majority of the nation’s population was living in cities. Tokyo, in particular, had become the nation’s locus: the throbbing heartbeat of a modern, technologically advanced and fast-paced Japan. By contrast, rural townships—now significantly depopulated—could be positioned in contrast with Tokyo as being unmodern, somewhat primitive and stagnant. In spite of a nation-wide rail network and the widespread availability of media such as NHK serving to physically and technologically bind remote locations to cities, Japan remained symbolically divided. Even today, this divide is, however, not so much ‘city vs. country’ or ‘urban vs. rural’,

but rather Tokyo vs. ‘not-Tokyo’ (Yano 2002:19, Ivy 1993). The locations that comprise ‘not-Tokyo’, can be organised into three key areas with varying meanings:

chihō [provinces], which defines lands that are outside Tokyo, is most neutral; *inaka* [rustic countryside] imparts a sense of cultural backwater as well as physical distance; [and lastly,] *furusato* [hometown] is the most emotionally binding. (Yano 2002:19–20, 1999:162–163)

The concept of “rusticity” binds these three areas: even largely populated cities such as Osaka, Nagoya and Yokohama (which lies in close proximity to outer Tokyo suburbs) are considered ‘rustic’, if not rural. The elements that define ‘not-Tokyo’ are, therefore, “not based on population density, strict geographical location or even economic base, but on cultural distance from a single national centre, Tokyo” (Yano 2002:20). Although the various localities of ‘not-Tokyo’ are symbolically unified, the visibly distinct but often minute differences between localities do not become homogenised when integrated. Instead, varying regional landscapes and climates of ‘not-Tokyo’—the foods consumed, the accents and dialects spoken, the clothing worn, and the songs performed—are all celebrated as a part of a longing for old-Japan, a sense of past, the ‘traditional’ and ‘authentic’. Moreover, “when these differences come together under the umbrella of *furusato* [(one’s hometown)], then being a ‘local’ means being a national citizen” (Yano 2002:21; my italics). Thus, most importantly for this discussion, these differences simultaneously mark a region as being distinct from others and also serve to represent the nation as a whole.

Locations and Landmarks

In *Kōbaku*, both regional difference and a sense of national unity are evoked through song lyrics. Comparisons between regions are never made within a single song, but over the course of the contest, a sense of Japan’s regional diversity becomes apparent. Locations and landmarks, for example, are mentioned most frequently and directly in *enka* songs. Referring to nationally famous places by name helps to establish a song’s setting, plays on the Japanese people’s love of travelling (Nelson Graburn 1983) and reminds them of their heritage (Hendry 1987:167). However, when lyrics refer to ‘not-Tokyo’ locations, *Kōbaku* audiences are given a taste of the ‘internal exotic’; the locations described are appealing, unfamiliar, out-of-the-way rustic places, that are

symbolically far from Tokyo and located not offshore but within Japan.¹ Moreover, the landscape's "long-codified elements", such as mountains and views, take on "added semiotic weight through their new importance as guarantees of a past that still [coheres]" (Ivy 1995 100–101). The uniquely Japanese landscape, in all its diversity, becomes a physical symbol of 'old' Japan, unspoiled Japan.

Songs that refer to locations and landmarks serve an additional function in the context of *Kōbaku*. Through NHK's extensive broadcasting network, the programme reaches the most remote villages and provides a welcome source of entertainment. Therefore, when song lyrics refer to such a region, it indicates to the region's inhabitants that they are not forgotten; it says that although *Kōbaku* is staged in Tokyo, the nation's epicentre, the songs are not only about Tokyo. In this sense, viewers—regardless of their location in Japan—can be assured that they are part of the national *uchi* and that this truly a programme for all Japan. One such location described in *Kōbaku* is Tsugaru, the setting for Harada Yuri's song "*Tsugaru no hana*" ("Flowers of Tsugaru"). This area, located in the remote Northern Honshū region, has a notoriously harsh climate. Bitterly cold winters intensify the already rough terrain of the Shirakami mountains, the imposing Mount Iwaki and Iwaki River. In addition to the extreme weather and seasons (discussed below), Harada Yuri's *enka* song also describes the northerly location of this area and its well-known water feature:

The North's Tsugaru...

...the Iwaki River, the Iwaki River.

Harada Yuri—"Tsugaru no hana" ("Flowers of Tsugaru")
Song Performance 9

Tsugaru's remoteness, caused by the isolating landscape, has affected the area's inhabitants in such a way that they have developed a distinctive dialect and unique cultural habits. Even though the dialect's rough, guttural tones markedly distinguish it from the 'bona fide' and mellifluous Japanese spoken by Tokyoites, it is considered appealing:

¹ Ivy explores the creation of an internal exotic through Japan National Railway's official 'Discover Japan' campaign in the 1980's which urged the Japanese to embark on a "(re)discovery of native Japan" (1995:45). For discussion of the internal exotic in relation to Japanese popular music, see Mitsui (1998a).

The Tsugaru language is kind...

Harada Yuri—"Tsugaru no hana" ("Flowers of Tsugaru")
Song Performance 9

and rustic, and is therefore celebrated as an aspect of the 'internal exotic'. Another remote Japanese location referred to by name is Cape Ashizuri, a sea-fronted peninsula located on the southernmost tip of the Shikoku island. This cape is known for its steep cliffs and craggy rock formations that face powerful swell from the Pacific Ocean. Toba Ichirō describes this location in the song "*Ashizuri-misaki*" ("Cape Ashizuri"), and its harsh elements:

The ocean splits, the rocks howl.
At Ashizuri, when I stand upon the cape of rough waves
Toba Ichirō—"Ashizuri-misaki" ("Cape Ashizuri")
Song Performance 6

Despite the ferocity of Cape Ashizuri, the area is home to fishing villages and ports where the sea is major source of food and income. Because the life of a fisherman is far removed from the bustling modern world of Tokyo, it is considered to be a rustic occupation, steeped in the tradition of 'old Japan'.

Enka singer Ishikawa Sayuri also recalls natural locations and landmarks in her song, "*Amagi-goe*" ("Amagi Pass"), set in the Shizuoka prefecture's Izu peninsula and home to the rugged landscape of the Amagi mountain range inside a popular national park. The most famous sites are directly named:

... the Jōren waterfall

...the Amagi pass...

...the Kanten bridge

Ishikawa Sayuri—"Amagi-goe" ("Amagi Pass")
Song Performance 49

as is the nearby marshland where Japanese horseradish is commercially produced:

The *wasabi* marsh...

Ishikawa Sayuri—"Amagi-goe" ("Amagi Pass")
Song Performance 49

It is not only regional locations and landmarks such as these that are identified by name. Several songs, instead, refer to Tokyo. Maekawa Kiyoshi's "*Tōkyō sabaku*"

(“Tokyo Desert”), for example, is set in this large city. Kaguya hime’s “*Kanda-gawa*” (“Kanda River”), however, alludes to a specific area of Tokyo by identifying the Ochanomizu district’s landmark river in the song’s title and through lyrics that describe a unique student lifestyle in detail. Songs about Tokyo do not typically describe elements of ‘rusticity’, but Yamakawa Yutaka’s song “*Amerika-bashi*” (“America Bridge”)—concerning a bridge in Ebisu in Shibuya ward, Tokyo—does evoke a sense of the ‘internal exotic’ in a way that songs about regional areas also do. For example, the lyrics describe a memory of how the bridge used to look:

The cobbled road, the cobbled road...

Yamakawa Yutaka—“*Amerika bashi*” (“America Bridge”)
Song Performance 13

This nostalgically brings to mind old-world, traditional Tokyo, before the city’s modernisation. The cobbled road described above stands in direct contrast with the bridge’s asphalt-covered appearance at the time of Yamakawa’s performance in the 50th *Kōbaku*. Moreover, the bridge was not particularly well-known (nor was it an imposing landmark) despite its interesting history.² In this respect, the bridge has a similar appeal to that of hidden, secret or out-of-the-way places in rural Japan which are the subject of many ‘not-Tokyo’ *enka* songs.³ However, the reality of Tokyo as being a bustling, modern city is acknowledged in other songs. In Maekawa Kiyoshi’s “*Tōkyō sabaku*” (“Tokyo Desert”), for example, urban life is anonymous, harsh, dirty and cruel. The individual becomes lost in the crowd, thus inciting a sense of loneliness (Mita 1992:103) such that Tokyo seems desolate and bleak like a desert:

The river in the ravine between buildings can’t stream,
Only dark waves of people flow.

Maekawa Kiyoshi—“*Tōkyō sabaku*” (“Tokyo Desert”)
Song Performance 26

² The bridge’s official name is the Ebisu *minami-bashi* (Ebisu South Bridge). It was purchased by the Japanese at a trade fair in the U.S.A. in the 1900s and later erected as the nation’s first steel structure, a symbol of modernisation and progress at the time. Decades later, American military troops and General MacArthur were stationed near to the bridge which prompted the nickname ‘*Amerika-bashi*’.

³ In a recent (2002) interview, Yamakawa described the suitability of the bridge as a song subject matter because of the “nostalgic atmosphere” it had when it was cobbled and how this made it “a good topic for the lyrics of a song” (Wilson 2002a:Internet).

The image of the city as a desert is reinforced in other songs:

The city is now a desert.

—
Everyone is lonely.

Wada Akiko—“*Ano kane o narasu no wa anata*”
 (“You Are the One Ringing that Bell”)
 Song Performance 53

Individuals travel to cities such as Tokyo to find work and, as such leave behind their hometowns (*furusato*).⁴ This term, *furusato*, has been loosely described in this chapter as one’s hometown, but it also encompasses the “place of one’s birth, one’s parents (especially mother), one’s ancestors, one’s childhood” and, because of its links with nostalgia, it is also “the source of one’s feelings” (Yano 1995:434). While one’s *furusato* may be ‘real’, the nostalgia for it is “primarily a construct of urban armchair philosophy” because it is “viewed from afar” and, consequently, it becomes “highly selective and sentimental, emotive, romanticized, imagined memory” (Palmer 2005:13). This idealised memory of *furusato* is (re)created through song. Unlike the locations and landmarks which are referred to by name, songs about hometowns are idealised and typically set in “generalized, abstract places” (Mita 1992:108) which are unnamed such that they could be thought of any location in Japan or even Japan in general. One’s hometown is the antithesis of Tokyo; it is located in the country, where there are beautiful landscapes, clean air and water, and an abundance of wildlife:

That mountain where I chased rabbits,
That river where I fished for little carp,
Even now, my dream returns:
My unforgettable hometown.

—
The green mountains of my hometown,
The pure waters of my hometown.

Yuki Saori and Yasuda Sachiko—“*Furusato*”
 (“Hometown”)
 Song Performance 47

In the journey of life, one leaves their hometown far behind. The distance between the city and one’s hometown is vast, suggesting a sense of ‘pastness’ as well as nostalgia for better times, for the unspoilt Japan which no longer exists:

⁴ This is a recurring theme throughout Japan’s history of popular song (c.f. Mita 1992, Yano 1995).

Without knowing it,
I have walked this long, narrow road.
When I look back, far away in the distance,
I can see my hometown.

Tendō Yoshimi—“*Kawa no nagare no yō ni*”
 (“Like the River’s Flow”)
 Song Performance 51

Hometowns are longed for. This results from “an attachment to one’s previous life and experience, a state of mind which faces toward the past” (Mita 1992:109).

The hometown I long for...

Kōzai Kaori—“*Bōkyō jūnen*” (“Ten Years of Nostalgia”)
 Song Performance 14

Indeed, if *furusato* symbolises one’s childhood, it is clear that one cannot ever return,

I hold back my tears, my heart’s hometown.
I look back but can’t return.

Horiuchi Takao—“*Zoku: take tonbo ~seishun no shippo~*”
 (“Sequel: Bamboo Dragonfly ~the tail-end of youth~”)
 Song Performance 18

even though one wants to:

I want to return once my heart has decided.

Kawanaka Miyuki—“*Kimikagesō ~suzuran~*”
 (“Lily of the Valley”)
 Song Performance 39

After I fulfil my ambitions,
I’ll go back [there] someday.

Yuki Saori and Yasuda Sachiko—“*Furusato*”
 (“Hometown”)
 Song Performance 47

Songs which refer to locations and landmarks—whether named or unnamed—not only remind viewers of the physical aspects of the country. They also call on viewers to unite as an imagined community and collectively reflect on the nation’s past, creating a sense of communal longing for days gone by when life was simple, and for a idealised world which can never be experienced or reclaimed ‘in real life’ except through created memories.

The Seasons

Before identifying specific references to the seasons in *Kōhaku* songs, it is worth considering the broader significance of nature in relation to the national consciousness. The 18th century writer Motoori Norinaga noted that a “spontaneous sensitivity to nature” was a fundamental characteristic of what it means to be “uniquely Japanese” (Motoori in Morris-Suzuki 1998:111, 129).⁵ This aesthetic sensitivity is most deeply felt toward Japan’s four distinct seasons because of their dramatic effect upon the natural landscape. It is also rooted in the Shintō and Buddhist faiths, whereby nature can be seen as expression of the *kami* (gods) as well as the embodiment of the Zen concept of transience. The Japanese maintain a deep psychological engagement with seasons, as seen through Japan’s rich legacy of artistic expression such as the *waka* syllabic poems of the Heian period and the *haiku* of the Edo period. Seasonal landscapes are also presented as images in the visual arts, such as *shiki-e* (the four seasons) paintings on *fusuma-e* (sliding door panels), as well as music, where themes may, for example, mimic the chirping of summertime cicadas.⁶

Songs of the 50th *Kōhaku* similarly use seasonally themed lyrics to establish the temporal setting for the song. Mita notes that lyrics about the seasons can also be seen as symbols of the human emotions which are shared by all Japanese—these are “commonly sensed emotional values of the nouns within a given culture” (1992:131). It is this widespread sentiment that unites the 50th Community and the *Kōhaku* audience, even if members of this audience—from the very young to the elderly—may interpret seasonally themed lyrics in different ways. Lyrics about a particular season may not strike a chord with those who have not experienced a season so profoundly—*Kōhaku* viewers from northern Hokkaidō, for example, would have a greater empathy for descriptions of harsh, snowy winters than viewers from the tropical southern Ryūkyū islands. Nevertheless, it is the articulation of “ethnic patterns of empathy, cultural phonetic preferences, and traditional mannerisms of expression” which enable

⁵ For a detailed account of the changing and developing relationship between nature and national identity in Japan, see Morris-Suzuki (1998:35–59).

⁶ Kikkawa notes that the musical sense of the Japanese is such that the sounds of nature—wind blowing through bamboo, for example—cannot be distinguished from that created ‘real’ musical instruments (1987:86–88). This suggests that the Japanese regard nature and music to be inseparable.

such words to resonate among all Japanese, regardless of age (Mita 1992:132). The 50th *Kōbaku* Community's lyrics speak to Japan's people as a whole, drawing in the viewing nation through an understanding of the shared emotional symbols, thus helping to confirm their place within the national *uchi*.

In *Kōbaku*, the long-standing national sentiment toward the seasons is most readily expressed in *enka* lyrics and winter and spring are mentioned most frequently. In Japan, a strong visual indicator of winter is snow (*yuki*). The texture of snow can vary from pleurably powder-soft to dangerously icy and melting; negotiating this unpredictable terrain becomes metaphor for fate and human life. Walking through snow with certainty and conviction therefore becomes a symbol of bravery:

Valiantly, with grace,
I tread firmly in the destiny snow.

Nagayama Yōko—"Sadame yuki" ("Destiny Snow")
Song Performance 37

Wind (*kaze*) is a common characteristic of winter and it often exhibits a life of its own. Unlike a moist and warm summer breeze, a bitterly cold winter wind cuts through layers of clothing to chill one to the bone and can emit a distressing, human-like wail. In the *enka* song below, a woman's feelings of sadness and loneliness as she longs for her lover are symbolised by the harsh winter wind which also, in her mind, represents his cry. Mita also notes that the wind is an emotional symbol of impermanence (1992:135) and in the context of the song below, the wind also signifies that the romance did not last. The wind, and these emotions, are felt deeply in the woman's heart:

The biting cold winter wind with the sunset in the distance,
Become your calling in my heart.

Kōzai Kaori—"Bōkyō jūnen" ("Ten Years of Nostalgia")
Song Performance 14

Her desperation is heightened by the 10 long years she has suffered alone, such that winter seems to be never-ending—a symbol of painful longing, constant suffering and diminishing hope:

For ten years I've wanted to see you under the winter sky...

Kōzai Kaori—"Bōkyō jūnen" ("Ten Years of Nostalgia")
Song Performance 14

A cloudy and grey winter sky is unwelcoming during the daytime but is even more so during the night. In a song about loneliness, sorrow and drinking, a clear night sky reveals the moon and stars which also take on the characteristics of this cold, heartless season:

Winter's night, winter's moon,
Winter's stars...

Yoshi Ikuzō—“*Fuyu no sake*” (“Winter’s sake”)
Song Performance 10

Winter also presents the harshest of nature’s elements, symbols of obstacles one must face and overcome in life’s journey. The most common metaphors are driving winds, pelting rain and strong waves—if a person can persevere in spite of the prevailing weather, then they will succeed in life:

There are also times when
The driving rain and wind batters me and I hang my head.

—
Even if I am engulfed by
The waves and winds of the changing times,
I will do my best to stand up to the hardship,
Without panicking or complaining.

Sakamoto Fuyumi—“*Kaze ni tatsu*”
 (“To Stand Against the Wind”)
Song Performance 43

Even if I am beaten by rain and blown by wind,
I will keep singing as long as I live.

Mikawa Ken’ichi—“*Eien ni bara no toki o*”
 (“Happy Times for All Eternity”)
Song Performance 40

It is raining and even though the road is muddy,
One day, once again, a clear day will come.

Tendō Yoshimi—“*Kawa no nagare no yō ni*”
 (“Like the River’s Flow”)
Song Performance 51

Winter is all consuming; snow envelops the earth, animals hibernate and trees lose their leaves. Spring, by contrast, is a season of renewal; the sun begins to shine, animals give birth and new plant growth appears. The turning of winter into to spring thus brings hope for new possibilities. The cyclical nature of seasons is predictable and, as such, one can look forward to spring and the promise it holds. Like nature, spring is a time

for humans to undergo transformations but of a personal nature, as this J-pop song describes:

With each coming of spring, I can grow.
If I don't forget that feeling,
I am able to live with strength.

—
The snow ceases to fall, the cold has gone,
Then that season will return this year.
Ah! spring will come.

Hysteria Blue—“*Haru~spring~*” (“Spring”)
Song Performance 3

The coming of spring also signals an abundance of newly blooming seasonal flowers, such as the lily of the valley:

Like a sprinkling of little white bells,
The flowers of the lily of the valley is in bloom.

Kawanaka Miyuki—“*Kimikagesō ~suzuran~*”
 (“Lily of the Valley”)
Song Performance 39

Flowers (*hana*) in general are long-established symbols of beauty in Japan. In popular song, they function as emotional symbols joy or love and longing (Mita 1992:133). As such, the flowers of springtime that are described in *Kōbaku* songs, are often suggestive of joyful times:

Absolutely, positively, definitely, we will seize our happiness.

—
Apple and cherry trees bloom together.
The North's Tsugaru is in the height of spring and is covered in blooms.

Harada Yuri—“*Tsugaru no hana*” (“Flowers of Tsugaru”)
Song Performance 9

In other *Kōbaku* songs, however, a blooming flower becomes an emotional symbol for love. This is an emotion that deeply penetrates one's heart. In the song below, a woman yearns for man to love her and her alone:

I wish I were a flower blooming in your heart, only.

Fuji Ayako—“*Onna no magokoro*”
 (“A Woman's Earnest Sincerity”)
Song Performance 25

The rose (*bara*), with its particularly strong fragrance, is an emotional symbol of good fortune, joy and hope (Mita 1992:134). Its perfume, more so than its exquisite colour and petals, brings pleasure that, like these emotions, are felt in one's heart:

A red rose has flowered.
 My heart is stained by the fragrant flower's perfume
 Mikawa Ken'ichi—"Eien ni bara no toki o"
 ("Happy Times for All Eternity")
 Song Performance 40

A flower that blooms before spring, in spite of the inhospitable winter climate, is symbolic of a victory against all the odds. A deeply felt sensitivity to nature allows the *Kōhaku* audience to draw strength, inspiration and motivation from this image, as articulated by the following member of the 50th Community:

The flower which blooms before spring:
 I am inspired by this image.
 —
 A twig bends
 Plum blossom, covered in snow, blooms.
 It can't become a flower if it doesn't risk its life
 Nagayama Yōko—"Sadame yuki" ("Destiny Snow")
 Song Performance 37

It is rare for flowers to bloom before winter's end. Generally, a tree must endure the cold months in order to bud, bloom and bear fruit in spring. This image is a metaphor for human life: people must also endure harsh conditions, such as failed romance, and patiently wait for happiness and love to arrive:

After it endures the bitter cold of mid-winter,
 The flowers will bloom, [the trees] will bear fruit.
 I've fallen in love and been hurt many times
 [But now] spring has also come for me...
 Harada Yuri—"Tsugaru no hana" ("Flowers of Tsugaru")
 Song Performance 9

The cherry-blossom (*sakura*) is Japan's unofficial floral symbol and the most beloved of all flowers. Although it is widely cultivated, it still grows wild in Japan and has the added appeal of being native to the island archipelago (Baird 2001:48, Spencer 2002:12). Cherry blossoms are only found during the height of spring. The nation watches with fascination as media fervently reports the blooms as the *sakura-zensen* (lit. 'cherry blossom front') gradually sweeps up and across Japan. Due to Japan's vast longitudinal

spread and varied climate, the flowers first appear in the southern islands during the end of March, move to the central part of the country at the start of April and then travel northward thereafter. Cherry blossoms are actively celebrated and many people embark on special outings (*hanami*) to view the beautiful display during springtime. *Kōbaku* lyrics acknowledge this seasonal pastime that is unique to Japan:

In spring there is cherry blossom-viewing...

Shigemori Ayumi and Hayami Kentarō—“*Dango 3 kyōdaï*”
 (“The Three *dango* Brothers”)
 Song Performance 5

The beauty of cherry blossom not only lies in its soft pink hue and delicate petals, but also in the brevity of its blooming period. Flowers bloom simultaneously in a cluster and then completely disappear only a few days later, often blown away in a cloud of snow-like petals by a brisk spring breeze. In this way, the ephemeral cherry blossoms embody the Zen concept of impermanence, where nothing in this world lasts and that life too is fleeting. In *Kōbaku* lyrics, cherry blossoms and flowers in general are symbolic of this concept:

The life of a flower is short

Mori Shin'ichi—“*Ofukuro-san*” (“Mother Dear”)
 Song Performance 48

Life is transient.

Is this world a dream or an illusion?

As if cherry blossoms were falling.

Hosokawa Takashi—“*Sakura no hana no chiru gotoku*”
 (“As if Cherry Blossoms Were Falling”)
 Song Performance 38

In general, cherry blossoms are emotional symbols of gallantry and tranquillity (Mita 1992:132). The profound beauty of the cherry blossom, in spite of its brief life, is seen as valorous. It symbolises ‘seizing the day’ and living life to the fullest whereas falling cherry blossoms are a metaphor for death (Baird 2001:48). Indeed, the life of any flower is short and the purity and fullness of that life—signified by its bloom, spirit and/or its fragrance—is a quality to be admired and emulated by people. Thus, these lyrics sung by members of the 50th Community to the *Kōbaku* audience are words of inspiration:

Seek your adventure and bloom like a flower.

Hosokawa Takashi—“*Sakura no hana no chiru gotoku*”
 (“As if Cherry Blossoms Were Falling”)
 Song Performance 38

“The grace of the flower’s spirit
 Lives with strength’, [this] you taught me.
 Your, your truthful [words],
 I will never forget them.

Mori Shin’ichi—“*Ofukuro-san*” (“Mother Dear”)
 Song Performance 48

Such strength can be smelt in its perfume.
 I will take it, that spirit—
 I will also be a woman flowering in the snow.

Nagayama Yōko—“*Sadame yuki*” (“Destiny Snow”)
 Song Performance 37

As this small sample of songs demonstrates, lyric references to the seasons and their effects on Japan’s physical landscape also symbolise the emotional landscapes of the individual. They also reveal rich and varied ways in which the ‘feelings’ of the nation are enunciated in song, and provide insight into how the individual is articulated to a particular place, region, or, in this case, the nation.

The Heavens

The sky, like the land, is meaningful to the Japanese people. It is valued for its aesthetic beauty and ever-changing qualities—the rainbows, clouds, sunrises and sunsets by day and the moon and stars by night. This appreciation for the sky’s nuances is part of the broader and uniquely Japanese sensibility toward nature and the seasons. Japan’s connection with the sky was first recorded in Japan’s primary historical chronicle, the *Kojiki* (Records of Ancient Matters), during the Nara period. Krupp notes that in this tome, the heavens are revered as the arena where Creation took place (1997:198). In accordance with Shintō Creation folklore, the supreme sun goddess Amaterasu omikami—daughter of Japan’s creators—sent her grandson to earth to establish the Japanese empire and subsequently begin the lineage of ruling emperors (Kojima and Crane 1987:7–8). As such, the Japanese Imperial Family has long-declared a special bond with the heavens. Despite the relatively recent dispelling of the emperor’s ancestral origins, symbols of the sun and moon are still used for the family’s banners in

recognition of the sun goddess and as elements of the sky (Krupp 1997:197).⁷ In pre-Meiji times, the Japanese people looked to the sun and moon to provide structure for their daily lives via the foreign-introduced lunar-solar calendar and Gregorian solar calendar.⁸ Used as the chief source of chronology, the changing state of the heavens helped to shape annual cyclic events such as *matsuri* festivals (Caillet 1998:15). As such, a profound respect for the heavens still remains today and is expressed through worship of, for example, prominent sun *kami* (gods) such as Amateru (Heaven Shining) and Amateru Mitama (Heavenly Shining Sacred Spirit) at shrines and honoured through festivals and other traditions (Matsumae 1993:345–346).

References to various elements of the heavens, such as the sky, sun, moon and stars, are abundant in songs of the 50th *Kōbaku*. Due to the religious and aesthetic connections the Japanese people have with these elements, these lyrics are not merely descriptive, but are also symbolic of powerful emotions—feelings that are privately felt by everyone at some time, and here, in *Kōbaku*, are publicly articulated by the 50th Community.

In popular song, lyrics about the sky (*sora*) can, for example, signify hope or nostalgia, sorrow and loneliness (Mita 1992:134). In this sense, the sky's vast spatial scope lends itself to reflect emotions that have a sense of eternalness. The sky becomes a “hyperbolised” and “ultimated” form (Mita 1992:8). In the *enka* song below, for example, the endlessness of the night sky mirrors feelings of solitude and loneliness that are similarly never-ending. As an exaggerated form, the expanse of sky also heightens and intensifies these emotions:

All the more, I am lonely, lonely, in this heart.
The night sky is long and endless!

Itsuki Hiroshi—“*Yo-zora*” (“The Night Sky”)
Song Performance 52

In this same song, the nostalgia felt for a lost love is equally magnified. The likelihood of finding the loved one is remote—she could be anywhere—and this is expressed

⁷ This belief was propagated for centuries until Japan's defeat in World War II prompted the then Emperor Hirohito to denounce his claim to divinity.

⁸ *Tenmongaku* (‘scientific astronomy’) was not officially established in Japan until early in the Meiji era (Hirose 1983:104).

through the endlessness of the night sky. In this song, however, the sky is punctuated by an abundance of stars, representing a crowd of people among whom she is lost. This further amplifies the nostalgia and sorrow felt by the man who longs for her:

That girl, I wonder where she is?
The endless starry sky...

Itsuki Hiroshi—"Yo-zora" ("The Night Sky")
Song Performance 52

In another *enka* song, a son finds the sky to be a source of memories which elicits a flood of emotions. Lyrics describing an umbrella, used by his dearly departed mother to shelter him from rain, become a metaphor for mother herself and how she protected her son from life's hardships. In this context, rain (*ame*) is symbolic of many emotions, including sadness, lingering attachment, indifference, quiet longing and gentleness (Mita 1997:134). The son, as such, experiences these feelings when he looks to the sky:

Mother dear, oh, mother dear,
If I look up to the sky, [you are] the sky.
On rainy days, you become my umbrella;
'One day, you too will be an umbrella
For others in the world', [this] you taught me.
Your, your truthful [words],
I will never forget them.

Mori Shin'ichi—"Ofukuro-san" ("Mother Dear")
Song Performance 48

The sky is often personified and can adopt human expressions of emotion. The *enka* song below, for example, describes a sky that sobs with sorrow because of the hazy city pollution. This mirrors the emotions felt by a man, saddened by the city dwellers' lack of humanity and kindness:

The sky is sobbing because of the soot and pollution.
Where have people discarded their kindness?

Maekawa Kiyoshi—"Tōkyō sabaku" ("Tokyo Desert")
Song Performance 26

In this J-pop song, however, the sky is personified and its facial expression influences rather than reflects an individual's sadness:

“Now, because the sky doesn’t smile
I forgot ‘how to smile’”...

19—“*Ano kamibikōki kumorizōra watte?*
 (“That Paper Plane Will Break Through the Cloudy Sky”)
 Song Performance 12

The above examples indicate that in *Kōbaku*, the sky is more often an emotional symbol of nostalgia, sorrow and loneliness than hope. When the sun is present, however, the sadness usually associated with the sky’s endlessness no longer occurs. The sun, instead transforms the scene into one symbolic of optimism:

The light floods the far-reaching sky...

GLAY—“*Sabaibarū*” (“Survival”)
 Song Performance 8

Moreover, a colourful rainbow—sunlight shining on droplets of rain—is symbolic of hope and success against adversity. This J-pop song below, for example, describes the realisation of a dream, articulated through the metaphor of a paper plane cutting through a gloomy sky and forming a rainbow:

A dream written on the back of the test paper—
I’ll make a paper aeroplane from it and throw it to tomorrow.
Someday, it’ll break through this cloudy sky
And should make a rainbow.

19—“*Ano kamibikōki kumorizōra watte?*
 (“That Paper Plane Will Break Through the Cloudy Sky”)
 Song Performance 12

Indeed, the sun and the dawn of a new day are common signifiers of hope, the world over. In Japan—the land of the rising sun—it holds further meaning. It is therefore surprising that in *Kōbaku*, lyrics about the setting sun are more prevalent than those of a rising sun. In such songs, the setting sun (*yūhi*) becomes an emotional symbol of sadness. An entire day, furthermore, is a metaphor for a human life. A setting sun, therefore, signifies a life’s end, as seen in this pop-styled *enka* song:

Like the setting sun, a man’s life also draws to a close.

Horiuchi Takao—“*Zoku: take tonbo ~seishun no shippo~*”
 (“Sequel: Bamboo Dragonfly ~the tail-end of youth~”)
 Song Performance 18

The in-between state of twilight (*tasogare*) is an emotional symbol of sadness and loneliness in Japanese popular song (Mita 1992:135). At this moment, the sun is betwixt and between; its diffused rays can still be seen and yet it has just set below the

horizon. In one *enka* song, the looming twilight signifies the impending sadness that will soon befall a man when he parts from his childhood sweetheart, following a chance meeting on a bridge:

At the end of the America Bridge, twilight will soon fall.

Yamakawa Yutaka—“*Amerika bashi*” (“America Bridge”)
Song Performance 13

Just as the day’s end represent life’s end, so too does twilight represent the latter stage of this man’s life. Similarly, in the *enka* song below, twilight signifies the closing of an era; an image that aptly signifies the 50th *Kōhaku* concert on the eve of a new millennium:

Slowly, many eras pass.

Ah, like the river’s flow!

Endlessly, the sky is imbued with [the colours of] twilight.

Tendō Yoshimi—“*Kawa no nagare no yō ni*”
 (“Like the River’s Flow”)
Song Performance 51

Evening (*yoi*) is also symbolic of sadness and loneliness (Mita 1997:133). In the following *kayōkyoku* song, the evening sky (coupled with the unhappiness that it represents) is positioned in opposition to a couple’s feelings of endless love. Here, the evening sky and setting sun signify the temporal nature of a day—now that the couple has found happiness and companionship, the sad and lonely emotions will, like the day itself, indeed end. Their love, by contrast, remains everlasting:

Whereas the sun sets again this evening and time passes on,
Our feelings will never change, forevermore.

Kayama Yūzō—“*Kimi to itsumademo*”
 (“You, Forevermore”)
Song Performance 24

Lyrics about the moon, unlike the sun, are scarce in *Kōhaku* songs. One song, however, acknowledges the moon in relation to a traditional cultural activity, namely moon-viewing. In mid-autumn it is customary to pray and give offerings to the full moon so to receive a good harvest of rice.⁹ Observing the beauty of the moon has long been considered “an elegant pastime for enjoying a poetic atmosphere” and a source of

⁹ According to the lunar calendar, this is usually held on 15 August, which is approximately 29 September in today’s calendar (Kojima and Crane 1987:369).

inspiration for composing *haiku* poetry since the Heian period (Kojima and Crane 1987:369). Moon-viewing still finds resonance in contemporary Japan and is duly acknowledged in this children's song:

In autumn there is moon-viewing...

Shigemori Ayumi and Hayami Kentarō—“*Dango 3 kyōda?*”
 (“The Three *dango* Brothers”)
 Song Performance 5

In contrast with the pleasures of moon-viewing, the moon (*tsuki*) itself can be an emotional symbol of loneliness, impermanence and “feelings from afar” in Japanese popular song (Mita 1997:133). Similarly, stars (*hoshi*) can represent hope or impermanence (Mita 1997:134). As such, the moon and stars are often paired together in *Kōbaku* songs to heighten the emotional symbolism. Yoshi Ikuzō's *enka* song “*Fuyu no sake*” (“Winter's *Sake*”), for example, pairs multiple emotional symbols in the lyrics “winter's moon” and “winter's stars” to convey an all-encompassing sorrow, as referred to earlier in relation to winter. In the J-pop song below, moreover, the moon and stars form the backdrop of ‘unreality’ and impermanence against the enduring ‘realness’ of a young couple's love:

The ceramic moon, the plastic stars,
 You and I are the only reality.

Suzuki Ami—“BE TOGETHER”
 Song Performance 30

In *Kōbaku*, stars are frequently used as ultimated forms (Mita 1992:8); the number of stars in the sky is truly unfathomable, as is their respective distance from Earth. As such, lyrics about stars aptly capture a sense of the infinite. In one *kayōkyoku* song, for example, the abundance of stars in the night sky becomes a metaphor for immeasurable happiness:

Ah, the dewdrop of many thousands of stars
 Like it is watering your eyes.
 Ah, even if there are many thousands of mornings,
 Happy times for all eternity.

Mikawa Ken'ichi—“*Eien ni bara no toki o*”
 (“Happy Times for All Eternity”)
 Song Performance 40

The prominent star cluster Pleiades is the focus of Tanimura Shinji's song "*Subaru*" ("The Pleiades").¹⁰ It is one of the most luminous in the Japanese sky and in this song, its glow is a symbolic source of hope for the future:

Ah, the scattered stars of destiny,
At least you secretly light me.

Tanimura Shinji—"Subaru" ("The Pleiades")
Song Performance 50

This sense of hope is similarly presented in another *Kōhaku* songs. Here, for example, the star-like glow in a lover's eyes represents optimism for a happy future:

Tomorrow, a wonderful happiness
Will come again.

—
Your eyes are shining like stars.

Kayama Yūzō—"Kimi to itsumademo"
("You, Forevermore")
Song Performance 24

Nevertheless, all stars, even the brilliant Pleiades, fade as the night turns to day, thus mirroring the impermanence of human life:

Ah, the rustling nameless stars,
At least you end your life with brilliance.

Tanimura Shinji—"Subaru" ("The Pleiades")
Song Performance 50

A shooting star (*nagare-boshi*) is another powerful emotional symbol of impermanence (Mita 1997:133). Its burst of light—a fleeting moment of splendour seen only for an instant—represents the beauty and brevity of life, as seen in this J-pop song:

A shooting star falls,
The night is shedding tears.
I'll become a shooting star someday.

SMAP—"Fly"
Song Performance 31

¹⁰ The astronomical legends about the Pleiades vary according region in Japan. One such legend is that the main seven stars (although six are more commonly recognised) represent the *shichi-fukujin*, the seven deities of good luck associated with the Japanese New Year (Uchida 1973 in Renshaw and Ihara 1996:Internet). In this sense, it is timely that Tanimura performs this song in *Kōhaku* considering it is broadcast on New Year's Eve.

A shooting star's impermanence is a metaphor for the short time that lovers spent together before parting. In the song below, a man makes a wish on a shooting star for his lover's return:

That girl, please come back [to me],
I called softly to a shooting star.
Nobody will answer,
Only white flowers fall.

Itsuki Hiroshi—"Yo-zora" ("The Night Sky")
Song Performance 52

The futile nature of his wish is represented by the falling sparks of a shooting star which are not unlike falling petals of a flower—also a symbol of impermanence.

Culinary Landscapes

Many aspects of Japanese culture are addressed throughout this study, but this section focuses on the distinctive consumables by which Japanese people define themselves (Ashkenazi and Jacob 2000:61–65). Food is not a common subject matter in *Kōbaku* songs. When it is referred to, however, it is exclusively Japanese food, as opposed to Western food, despite the latter's integration into the modern Japanese diet and its strong presence in cities such as Tokyo. Some *Kōbaku* songs evoke a sense of nostalgia for Japanese food items that are not usually consumed on a daily basis, such as traditional delicacies and rustic local fare. Others describe complementary combinations of Japanese food and drink. In Yashiro Aki's "*Funa uta*" ("Sailor's Song"), for example, *abutta ika* (grilled squid) is described as a preferred snack when drinking *sake*.

I prefer *sake* warmed up,
I prefer grilled squid for a side dish.

Yashiro Aki—"Funa uta" ("Sailor's Song")
Song Performance 35

The most prominent food item in *Kōbaku* is, however, the sticky rice ball *dango*, the focus of the children's song "*Dango 3 kyōdai*" ("The Three *dango* Brothers") performed by Shigemori Ayumi and Hayami Kentarō. In this song, the three dumpling balls are personified as lively brothers and positioned hierarchically upon a wooden skewer according to age.

The top one is [the eldest son], ‘Chōnan’,
 The lowest one is [the youngest son], ‘Sannan’,
 In between is [the middle son], ‘Jinan’,
 The three *dango* brothers!

Shigemori Ayumi and Hayami Kentarō—“*Dango 3 kyōdaï*”
 (“The Three *dango* Brothers”)
 Song Performance 5

During their adventures, they are

Painted with a soy sauce...

Shigemori Ayumi and Hayami Kentarō—“*Dango 3 kyōdaï*”
 (“The Three *dango* Brothers”)
 Song Performance 5

and they later become hard in the heat of the morning sun. They have a brotherly

quarrel about their grill marks

Shigemori Ayumi and Hayami Kentarō—“*Dango 3 kyōdaï*”
 (“The Three *dango* Brothers”)
 Song Performance 5

and they also want to be

...covered in lots of *koshian*, becoming *an-dango*

Shigemori Ayumi and Hayami Kentarō—“*Dango 3 kyōdaï*”
 (“The Three *dango* Brothers”)
 Song Performance 5

which is the name for *dango* that are coated in the sweet red bean paste *koshian*. The many descriptive references to the physical attributes of *dango*—its texture, shape and taste—tangibly keep the song close to home. Overall, the references to food in *Kōbaku*, however brief, serve to reinforce Japan’s culinary uniqueness.

The most recurrent symbol of Japanese culture in *Kōbaku* songs is the rice wine *sake*, deemed Japan’s national drink.¹¹ Although *sake* and its associated drinking customs are typically the subject matter of songs performed by male *enka* singers, *sake* is also referred to by female *enka* singers.¹² *Sake* has many functions in songs of the 50th *Kōbaku*. As a celebratory beverage, *sake* is frequently associated with *matsuri* (festivals),

¹¹ Although occasionally called ‘*nibonshū*’ (Japanese rice wine), rice wine is generally called ‘*sake*’ which is also a general term for liquor.

¹² Even a cursory glance at *enka* song titles show the prominence and frequency of the word ‘*sake*’; see, for example, “*Fuyu no sake*” (“Winter’s *sake*”) by Yoshi Ikuzō, “*Kawachi-zake*” (“Kawachi *sake*”) by Nakamura Mitsuko and “*Yancha zake*” (“Mischievous *sake*”) by Kobayashi Sachiko.

happy times and social, public events.¹³ *Sake* is also linked with emotions and is can be consumed alone in order to ‘drown one’s sorrows’. *Sake* is also meaningful in the rituals of Shintō faith as a sacrament, an offering to the *kami* (gods) and as a “purifier of the profane” (Huffman 1998:223). It is therefore, interesting to note that in the body of both “*Funa uta*” (“Sailor’s Song”) by Yashiro Aki and “*Yanba sake*” (“Mischievous *sake*”) by Kobayashi Sachiko, the honorific term *osake* (honourable rice wine)—as opposed to the more familiar term *sake*—is used to indicate its veneration.

The method and manner in which one consumes *sake* is also addressed in *Kōbaku* lyrics, thus highlighting culturally-specific traditions associated with the drink. Yoshi Ikuzō’s “*Fuyu no sake*” (“Winter’s *Sake*”), for example, tells of a preference to drink hot *sake* at times and cold *sake* during others. The same song also refers to a tiny *ochoko* cup, a vessel especially designed for holding *sake*:

Drinking warm *sake* from *ochoko* at night,
Yoshi Ikuzō—“*Fuyu no sake*” (“Winter’s *sake*”)
Song Performance 10

Nakamura Mitsuko’s “*Kawachi-zake*” (“*Kawachi sake*”), however, describes the square, wooden-box container named *masu* which is traditionally used to serve *sake* at festive occasions:

When I drink it from the *masu*...
Nakamura Mitsuko—“*Kawachi-zake*”
 (“*Kawachi sake*”)
Song Performance 16

For the Japanese, drinking *sake* with in social situations provides an opportunity to instigate, restore and maintain bonds.¹⁴ Consequently, drinking alone is not simply a private act but it “takes on the meaning of social isolation, a state so abhorrent in Japan as to evoke pathos in the observer” (Yano 1995:283). In *Kōbaku*, songs about drinking alone take place in a bar—a location usually filled with people—thus making the solitary experience even more poignant. Drinking alone also goes hand in hand with

¹³ Refer to previous discussion regarding Nakamura Mitsuko’s “*Kawachi-zake*” (“*Kawachi sake*”) and Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s party.

¹⁴ At weddings, for example, the bride and groom’s families drink *sake* together as a symbol of the two families uniting (Hendry 1987:127). At a less formal level, drinking *sake* with work colleagues and one’s employer at the end of the day is an occasion to network and establish mutually-satisfactory ties.

feelings of loneliness. Ironically, the act of drinking *sake* is undertaken in order to forget, but it also incites tears and the return of painful memories. The *Kōbaku* audience becomes both a witness to, and an empathiser with, this anguish. Truly, *sake* cuts deeply to the very heart of emotions:

With this *sake*, the memory of you fills me to the core.

Yoshi Ikuzō—“*Fuyu no sake*” (“Winter’s *sake*”)
Song Performance 10

If I drink to the core, then

Only the memories from the core will come flooding back.

When a teardrop wells up and spills over...

Yashiro Aki—“*Funa uta*” (“Sailor’s Song”)
Song Performance 35

Here, it is men who drink *sake*.¹⁵ In a culture where it is more socially acceptable for men than women to drink, this act becomes part of being a man (Yano 1995:281). In this sense, *sake* is associated with power and masculinity:

When I am drunk, I argue freely: That’s a man’s strong spirit.

Nakamura Mitsuko—“*Kawachi-zake*”
 (“Kawachi *sake*”)
Song Performance 16

Drinking also relieves the pressures of social restraint.¹⁶ One can, however, drink to excess—a common occurrence at year-end and New Year—sometimes eliciting bad behaviour which, in turn, affects others. When men are drunk, it is women who pick up the pieces:

If he doesn’t drink *sake*, he is a nice fellow.

But when he does drink, his mischievous vices [appear].

It’s okay, it’s really okay, it’s a burden I’m happy to bear.

Kobayashi Sachiko—“*Yanba zake*” (“Mischievous *sake*”)
Song Performance 45

What becomes clear through these examples is that the many references to food and beverages in the 50th *Kōbaku* serve to reinforce Japan’s culinary landscape, reminding audiences of yet another aspect of the nation’s distinctiveness.

¹⁵ As previously discussed, it is not considered unusual for a female singer to perform a song that is told from a man’s perspective, using men’s language and male-specific narrative. Yashiro Aki’s performance of “*Funa uta*” (“Sailor’s Song”) is an extremely well-known example of this phenomenon.

¹⁶ Historically, Japan’s pleasure houses of the floating world were environments where one could also find release through entertainment and *sake*.

The Nation's Past and Future

The contest's themes position the 50th *Kōbaku* as a vehicle to convey songs of the past to the generations of the future.¹⁷ Here, songs are used both literally and figuratively to evoke Japan's historical and cultural past. Some lyrics plainly describe a specific historical event, while others briefly allude to a figure of significance. In any case, it is a constructed memory of Japan, performed and shaped by the singer and, through television, recalled by a captive collective—the nation itself.

Enka, a “genre that looks old and sounds old”, is primarily used to recall the nation's past in *Kōbaku*, more so than J-pop (Yano 2002:17). *Enka* Singer Nakamura Mitsuko, for example, alludes to the Sengoku Civil War Age (1467–1568) in her “*Kawachi-zake*” (“Kawachi *sake*”). This upbeat, light-hearted song describes joyous times of dancing, singing and drinking *sake*. The title sets the location for these festivities in the old Kawachi province, located in the south eastern part of today's Osaka prefecture, but it is the fleeting lyric “*taikō-san*” (“Mr. Taikō!”) which hints at the past; *taikō* (a retired *Kampaku* or regent to an adult emperor) was the title bestowed upon the famed feudal leader Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–1598) in the latter part of his life, and the name by which he is commonly known.¹⁸ At first glance, Toyotomi Hideyoshi has little to do with the song's subject matter of celebration and revelry (see Appendix G Song 16). *Kōbaku*'s audience, however, would know of the famous party of great extravagance held by Toyotomi before his untimely death only weeks later. The gathering took place at the Daigo (southeast of Kyoto) where Toyotomi and his guests viewed cherry blossoms and feasted upon a variety of local and international delicacies. Only the finest Japanese *sake* was served, presumably *sake* from Kawachi as

¹⁷ The major theme is ‘*Utao mirai e-jidai to sedai o koete*’ (‘Looking to the Future Through Song: Spanning Eras and Generations’) and the minor theme is ‘*Nijūisseiki ni tsutaetai uta*’ (‘Passing on Songs for the 21st Century’).

¹⁸ Toyotomi's life is an inspirational and well-known rags-to-riches tale. He was born into poverty to a peasant family without a *samurai* lineage and later rose to become ruler of the nation. His impact on Japan's history can be traced from his service as a general to the feudal ruler Oda Nobunaga when, following Oda's death, Toyotomi took control of his territory and became the defacto successor. His vision was to unify Japan, not under totalitarian rule but with co-operative and independent feudatories, so to restore peace. Together with fellow feudal leader Tokugawa Ieyasu, Toyotomi ended the long period of fighting and conflict spanning the Sengoku Civil War Age. His rule, however, ended prematurely when he was murdered. Today, he is remembered affectionately for his peaceful endeavours, sense of loyalty and the single-mindedness which helped him rise from obscurity to power and wealth. Toyotomi's cultural legacy included the formation of a distinct class of *samurai*—only they were allowed to bear arms. Toyotomi also unsuccessfully invaded Korea in a quest for the extension of Japan's power across Asia. See Berry (1982) for further discussion on Toyotomi's life.

suggested by the song's title. In this capacity, the connections between Toyotomi and the song become clear:

Both song and dance are at their height,
I drink with all my spirit! ...
This is Kawachi *sake*...

Nakamura Mitsuko—"Kawachi-zake"
("Kawachi *sake*")
Song Performance 16

Through the combination of these celebratory lyrics and the reference to "taikō-san", Nakamura's song recalls a great figure in Japanese history. *Kōbaku* audiences are invited to share this mediated, collective memory—brought to life by a member of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community—of a man and a previous era that is still carries great significance.

Another reference to Japan's historical past is in *Kōbaku*'s 'oldest sounding' *enka* song, "Genroku meisōfu ~Tawaraboshi Genba~" ("The Famous Spear Song of the Genroku Era ~Tawaraboshi Genba~") performed by the contest's oldest singer, Minami Haruo. Through the song's distinct *nanivabushi*-styled lyrics, it is reminiscent of the Edo period when this type of story telling with *shamisen* accompaniment was devised, and also refers to the Meiji era when the genre was greatly popularised. Adding to the overall sense of 'oldness' is the setting of Minami's song in the past: the Genroku era at the beginning of the Edo period. It is during this period that the historical epic *Chūshingura*, the story of the 47 loyal *rōnin* (masterless *samurai*), took place (see Appendix G Song 44 and associated notes). The story of *Chūshingura* is well-known to many Japanese, but in 1999 it would have been especially fresh in the minds of *Kōbaku* audience members'. Throughout that year, NHK had screened a programme re-enacting the story of *Chūshingura*. It is also timely that Minami's song be performed in *Kōbaku* because the night of the *rōnin*'s attack (*uchiiri*) had been publicly commemorated just weeks prior, on 14 December.

Minami's song keeps to the storyline of *Chūshingura* but it also includes a mythical character, Tawaraboshi Genba: a sword master who guards the bridge while the *rōnin* (from Akō, a locality in what is now Hyōgo prefecture) seeks revenge on their master's killer:

...the man named Genba.
 He became Akō *rōshi*'s shadow and
 Dedicated his faith solely to the spear...

Minami Haruo—"Genroku meisōfu~ Tawaraboshi Genba ~"
 ("The Famous Spear Song of the Genroku Era~
 Tawaraboshi Genba ~")
 Song Performance 44

The song describes Genba as a man of strength, loyalty and pride—character traits which were highly desirable in the Genroku era (1688–1704) and, in 1999, are still admired. Moreover, the concept of the 'the way of the *samurai*', which is the crux of *Chūshingura*, still remains relevant in modern Japan. In this respect, Minami's song vividly captures a time, place and sentiment, one that may well evoke a sense of national pride in audiences.

Enka singer Toba Ichirō's song also presents official history through song. In "*Ashizuri-misaki*" ("Cape Ashizuri"), he refers to a Japanese figure of historical and cultural importance—the famous fisherman Nakahama 'John' Manjirō (1827–1898). Japan was still under a self-imposed policy of national isolation in the late Edo period when the young Nakahama became shipwrecked and was later rescued by an American ship. His subsequent decision to live and be educated in America gave him first-hand knowledge of the benefits of 'free' America and its government, ethics and technology. This was in sharp contrast with the restrictions of his homeland. In the years following Nakahama's return to Japan, his unique account of American/Western life helped to shape Japan's perspective of the outside world and contributed to the country's restoration in the Meiji era.¹⁹

Unlike Minami's elaborate description of *Chūshingura*, Toba Ichirō's "*Ashizuri-misaki*" ("Cape Ashizuri") merely alludes to Nakahama's enormously significant life:

...Manjirō's
 Happy and yet stormy life,
 Floating on the waves to the ends of the ocean.

Toba Ichirō—"Ashizuri-misaki" ("Cape Ashizuri")
 Song Performance 6

¹⁹ See Bernard (1992) and Manjirō (2003 trans. Nagakuni Junya and Kitadai Junji) for detailed accounts of the life of John Manjirō.

This reference to Manjirō sits comfortably among lyrics about the joy and simplicity of life on the open sea. This is, after all, a song about a fisherman. In a broader context, however, Manjirō is symbolic of cultural engagement, goodwill and friendship. Moreover, his spirited life highlights the possibilities for change and growth in new eras to come. Framed by the 50th *Kōbaku*—an internationally broadcast concert—this song also brings the concept of globalisation to the fore. Through an historical story well-known to Japanese audiences and relatively unknown to those from other nations (with perhaps the exception of the US), delivered by a Japanese singer, these lyrics speak directly to the Japanese nation.

Horiuchi Takao's J-pop song "*Zoku take tonbo ~seishun no shippo~*" ("Sequel: Bamboo Dragonfly ~the tail-end of youth~") also brings historical Japan to the fore in modern times. Although not the primary subject matter, this song refers to the famous freedom-fighting visionary Sakamoto Ryōma (1836–1867), from the late Edo period and early Meiji era. Sakamoto was a samurai, a zealous advocate of free trade and a key figure in uniting several forces against the military feudal government of Tokugawa. This alliance ultimately led to its defeat and the transference of executive power back to the emperor—a significant step toward a modernised and unified nation.²⁰ In all, Sakamoto's brief but passionate life and his tragic murder have won him hero status in Japan.

In this song, Horiuchi Takao reminisces about popular games he and others of his generation played in their youth. Aside from the *take tonbo*²¹ (lit 'bamboo dragonfly') as mentioned in the song's title, Horiuchi also recalls mimicking the prowess of a childhood hero:

Playing sword fights like Ryōma.
Holding on to the tail-end of youth.

Horiuchi Takao—"Zoku: take tonbo ~seishun no shippo~"
("Sequel: Bamboo Dragonfly ~the tail-end of youth~")
Song Performance 18

Despite its brevity, this reference to Sakamoto is a reminder of the nation's past and brings to mind Japan's early path to democracy. Here, at the 50th *Kōbaku*, on the eve of

²⁰ See Jansen (1971) for a detailed account of Sakamoto Ryōma's life and participation in the Meiji restoration.

²¹ *Take tonbo* is also a simple bamboo toy designed to take to the air like a dragonfly.

a new millennium, this reminder is indeed timely. Through the songs of the 50th *Kōhaku* Community, performers are similarly united and a sense of unanimity, through a shared national identity, prevails.

Songs of the 50th *Kōhaku* also recall recent events in the nation's history. Unlike the overt lyrics concerning the historical incidents and persons indicated above, references to modern Japan are understated and often implicit. For example, several songs in the *Kōhaku* of 1999 were released prior to that year and previously employed as themes for occasions of both national and international significance. For example, Godaigo's "*Byūtifuru nēmu*" ("Beautiful Name") was Japan's campaign song in 1979 for the UNICEF 'International Year of the Child'. The song's lyrics suggest that a child's name—written in ideographic script and thus offering alternative readings/meanings—is distinctive and 'beautiful'. This is a metaphor for the uniqueness of children in general, thus the song was suitable for the occasion. More recently, the song "*Furusato*" ("Hometown"), performed in *Kōhaku* by Yuki Saori and Yasuda Sachiko, was the closing ceremony song for the 1998 Nagano Winter Olympic Games. This song describes mountains, rivers and wildlife, inviting those involved in the Nagano Olympics and the audience of millions viewing it on television, to reflect upon the country's unique characteristics long after the Games concluded.²² Neither song explicitly describes, or even alludes to, such occasions, yet when they are performed on the *Kōhaku* stage, the alternate contexts for these songs are revived in the minds of audience members. Subtly, through these songs, some cultural events in Japan's recent past are recalled.

Some *Kōhaku* songs, by contrast, recall somewhat-forgotten aspects of everyday life in modern Japan. Kaguya hime's "*Kanda-gawa*" ("Kanda River"), for example, reminisces about the poverty and associated hardships of student life in the 1970s. This 1973 song is typical of folk songs of that time. Lyrics tell of cramped, shared accommodation, washing at the low-priced public baths and the exhilaration of youth in the Bunkyo-ku University district of Ochanomizu in Tokyo, where the Kanda River flows:

²² It is also likely that this song was selected for the Nagano Winter Olympic Games because Nagano was the birthplace of Tatsuyuki Takano who penned the lyrics to "*Furusato*" ("Hometown").

Our small boarding room, three *tatami* mats wide.

—
The public bathhouse, off the main street, where we went.

—
Back then, when we were young
And fearless...

Kaguya hime—“*Kanda-gawa*” (“Kanda River”)
Song Performance 36

These lyrics invite the audience to reflect on what was, for many, a lived experience. Middle-aged audiences—the ‘baby boomers’ born post-war—commonly endured such conditions in their youth as students. Moreover, this song also brings to mind the radical student uprisings of the late 1960s and early 1970s and, in many ways, is symbolic of reform and progress in Japan.

The majority of songs in the 50th *Kōbaku* were released during 1999. As such, the contest—a summary of that year’s hits—arouses various memories of that year for many audience members. Such songs had functioned as a soundtrack to everyday life.²³ In the rarely silent public spaces of Tokyo, for example, J-pop songs were omnipresent; they were broadcast inside shops, at train stations and were also transmitted across giant television screens in the city streets. As soundtracks to CMs (commercials/advertisements), J-pop songs also entered the private spaces of the home through radio and television, promoting products such as cosmetics, food, minidisks and cameras.²⁴ In addition, J-pop and *enka* songs were used as incidental music or major themes in television programmes, and to promote limited-edition products or seasonal campaigns.²⁵ These songs, as such, became intimately associated with a particular month or time of year during 1999.

²³ The function and effects of music in everyday life has been widely explored, for example, by Crafts, Cavicchi and Keil (1993), DeNora (2000), Sloboda and O’Neill (2001) and Frith (2003).

²⁴ The 50th *Kōbaku* performer Hamasaki Ayumi and her song “Boys & Girls” appeared in a television CM for the Crush Pearl lipstick from the Sofina Aube (lit. ‘Orb’) cosmetic range. In the CM, Hamasaki plays a futuristic billiard game where the balls are crystal orbs that shatter on contact when she performs the ‘break’. She wears the Crush Pearl lipstick and it shimmers like the glittering orbs. The advertisement uses the opening 30 seconds of her song while the song title momentarily appears on-screen to solidify the link between the product, performer and song. Other female song performers appearing in the 50th *Kōbaku* featured in CMs for cosmetics during 1999. Matsu Takako and her song “*Yume no shizuku*” (“Droplets of a Dream”) featured in a CM promoting the Whitia product line for Shiseido cosmetics and Amuro Namie and her song “RESPECT the POWER OF LOVE” promoted the Visée range for Kosé cosmetics.

²⁵ Saijō Hideki’s “*Bairamosu*” (“Let’s Dance”), for example, was used as an opening song for the TV Tokyo program ‘*Ongaku teki ryūkō*’ (‘Music In Vogue’) and Yamakawa Yutaka’s “*Amerika bashi*” (“America Bridge”) was a theme song for the TBS TV drama series ‘*Inochi no genba kara*’ (‘From the Scene of Life’) in 1999. Another song,

Many *Kōbaku* songs received substantial, frequent and nation-wide exposure through CMs and ‘tie-in’ cross-promotions. This high level of media saturation had ensured that *Kōbaku*’s audience members were already (and perhaps unwittingly) acquainted with many of its songs prior to the concert, even if they were not usually fans of that genre. Thus, the performance of a *Kōbaku* song acts as symbolic communication, evoking “a whole time and place, distant feelings and emotions, and memories of where [*Kōbaku* viewers] were, and with whom, the first time [they] heard the song” (Lewis 1992:135). Viewers, as such, may recall their own personal experiences associated with the song. In this sense, the publicly communicated songs of *Kōbaku* unlock highly-individualised memories pertinent to 1999, reminding viewers of a not-so-distant past.

Just as historical Japan and modern Japan is recalled through *Kōbaku* songs, so too is the nation’s future addressed. Notably, it is the first and last songs for the teams—bookends that frame the contest—that cite the Japanese nation most directly. The opening song “LOVE *mashīn*” (“Love Machine”) by J-pop act Mōningu Musume_o sets an up-beat scene for the evening. Lyrics acknowledge recent economic hardships but express optimism for the future:

Even if there’s a recession, love is inflation.

—
In the bright future, I hope to find a job.

Mōningu Musume_o—“LOVE *mashīn*”
 (“LOVE Machine”)
 Song Performance 1

This self-assurance invokes a sense of unity and national pride. Japan is depicted not only as desirable, but also as enviable on a global scale:

Japan’s future...
The world envies it...

Mōningu Musume_o—“LOVE *mashīn*”
 (“LOVE Machine”)
 Song Performance 1

Suzuki Ami’s “BE TOGETHER”, was the summer campaign song for hamburger chain MOS Burger and 19’s “*Ano kami hikōki kumori zora watte*” (“That Paper Plane Will Break Through the Clouds”) was the spring campaign song for TBS TV. In addition, Shigemori Ayumi and Hayami Kentarō’s “*Dango 3 kyōdai*” (“The Three *dango* Brothers”) was the January song-of-the-month for the NHK-E children’s program “*Okaasan to issbō*” (“Together With Mother”).

The *tori* song for the White Team, Kitajima Saburō's "*Matsuri*" ("Festival"), also refers to a prospering Japan represented through the hoisting of the *hinomaru*—the centuries-old state symbol for Japan which is customarily used as a national flag—aboard a fishing boat (see Chapter Five for further discussion regarding this flag).

Look! The red sun rises!

Kitajima Saburō—"Matsuri" ("Festival")
Song Performance 54

In the context of *Kōhaku*, the rising flag is symbolic of new beginnings and an optimistic future (as opposed to a flag at half-mast which signifies death or mourning). Coupled with lyrics describing "a year of abundance" and expressing gratitude to the gods for "this past year", this song simultaneously reflects on the nation's good fortune of 1999 and also looks toward the future. As one of the last songs in the final *Kōhaku* for the millennium, it also subtly invites audiences to contemplate *Kōhaku*'s extensive history: a past is recalled in order to look to the future.

The selected lyric themes explored in this chapter all demonstrate a continued sense of pride in the nation, as expressed by the members of the 50th *Kōhaku* Community. Here, Japan is presented as having a distinct culture and a noteworthy history which is reflected upon and re-imagined. The landscapes, the seasons, the heavens and the food of the nation are also seen as inextricably connected with the Japanese people. By considering lyrics as patterned expressions of human emotions, we can also see sentiments of the nation as collectively expressed and shared by the song performers. Ultimately, through recurring lyric themes, the Community paints a portrait of Japan as unique, reminding the viewing nation of their heritage and 'essence' and affirming a sense of Japan as a united *uchi*.

5

Staging

Each song performance in the 50th *Kōbaku* is staged uniquely. A variety of elements is used, ranging from material objects (sets, background designs and props) to additional performers (dancers, vocalists and musicians) as well as the costumes (clothing garments, shoes, accessories, jewellery, makeup and hairstyle) worn by the song performers. Together, these staging elements are designed to create memorable individual performances, as well as sustain the audience's interest throughout the entire concert. In the context of *Kōbaku*, with its unique red and white colour theme, we can also see staging as a visual expression of each song performer's team affiliation and status as a Community member. Staging themes are not, however, limited to *Kōbaku* colours—they also highlight broader cultural traditions in Japan. This chapter considers several of the issues outlined in the Introduction when examining staging. It begins with a table that summarises the notable stage designs for each song performance and is followed by a discussion of the various staging patterns which emerge throughout the programme. The remaining three sections then explore the ways the individual, the 50th *Kōbaku* Community and, finally, the nation are 'staged' through song performance.

Overview: General Staging Characteristics

Stage design—the configuration of major elements on stage such as additional performers, instruments, sets, props and backdrops—is the foundation for *Kōbaku*'s highly varied yet aesthetically cohesive song performances.¹ The tight timing of the live-to-air broadcast means that all material items are designed to quickly enable removal, resulting in stage designs that are simple, practical and at the same time make a dramatic impact. Table 5.1 (overleaf) provides a summary of the stage designs used in song performances of the 50th *Kōbaku*, demonstrating changing elements over the course of the programme.

¹ Other staging elements such as costume and lighting as discussed in subsequent sections.

Table 5.1 Summary of Staging Designs for Song Performances

Act	Song Title	SP ^a with Instrument	Additional Performers Onstage				Sets/Props/ Backdrops	Major ^c Backdrop	SP ^a Alone
			Vocalists	Dancers	Musicians	Other ^b			
FIRST HALF									
1	Mōningu Musume。	“LOVE <i>mashīn</i> ” (“Love Machine”)						T	✓
2	DA PUMP	“We can’t stop the music”						T	✓
3	Hysteric Blue	“ <i>Haru ~spring~</i> ” (“Spring”)	✓				✓	T	
4	Something ELse	“ <i>Rasuto chansu</i> ” (“Last Chance”)	✓					T	
5	Shigemori Ayumi and Hayami Kentarō	“ <i>Dango 3 kyōdai</i> ” (“The Three <i>dango</i> Brothers”)		✓	✓	✓	✓	T	
6	Toba Ichirō	“ <i>Ashizuri-misake?</i> ” (“Cape Ashizuri”)			✓		✓	T	
7	MAX	“ <i>Issho ni...</i> ” (“Together...”)		✓				T	
8	GLAY	“ <i>Sabaibarai</i> ” (“Survival”)	✓		✓			T	
9	Harada Yuri	“ <i>Tsugaru no hana</i> ” (“Flowers of Tsugaru”)		✓			✓	T	
10	Yoshi Ikuzō	“ <i>Fuyu no sake</i> ” (“Winter’s <i>sake</i> ”)			✓		✓	T	✓
11	Matsu Takako	“ <i>Yume no shizuku</i> ” (“Droplets of a Dream”)			✓		✓	T	
12	19	“ <i>Ano kamibikōki kumorizora watte</i> ” (“That Paper Plane Will Break Through the Cloudy Sky”)	✓				✓	T	
13	Yamakawa Yutaka	“ <i>Amerika-bashi</i> ” (“America Bridge”)		✓				T	
14	Kōzai Kaori	“ <i>Bōkyō jūnen</i> ” (“Ten Years of Nostalgia”)						T	✓
15	Saijō Hideki	“ <i>Bairamosu</i> ” (“Let’s Dance”)		✓				T	
16	Nakamura Mitsuko	“ <i>Kawachi-zake</i> ” (“Kawachi <i>sake</i> ”)		✓				T	
17	Kiroro	“ <i>Nagai aida</i> ” (“A Long Time”)	✓					T	✓
18	Horiuchi Takao	“ <i>Zoku: take tonbo ~seishun no shippo~</i> ” (“Sequel: Bamboo Dragonfly ~the tail-end of youth~”)						T	✓
19	Godai Natsuko	“ <i>Kazemachi minato</i> ” (“Waiting for a Favourable Wind in the Harbour”)						T	✓
20	TOKIO	“ <i>Ai no arashi</i> ” (“The Love Storm”)	✓					T	✓
21	SPEED	“my graduation ‘99”						T	✓
22	Godaiigo	“ <i>Byūtifuru nēmu</i> ” (“Beautiful Name”)	✓	✓	✓			T	
23	Every Little Thing	“Over and Over”	✓	✓	✓			T	
24	Kayama Yūzō	“ <i>Kimi to itsumademo</i> ” (“You, Forevermore”)						T	✓
25	Fuji Ayako	“ <i>Onna no magokoro</i> ” (“A Woman’s Earnest Sincerity”)						T	✓
26	Maekawa Kiyoshi	“ <i>Tōkyō sabaku</i> ” (“Tokyo Desert”)						T	✓
	The 50 th Kōhaku Community	“ <i>Nijūisseiki no kimitachi e~A song for children~</i> ” (“For the People of the 21 st Century~A Song for Children~”)	✓	✓				T	

Act	Song Title	SP ^a with Instrument	Additional Performers Onstage				Sets/Props/ Backdrops	Major ^c Backdrop	SP ^a Alone
			Vocalists	Dancers	Musicians	Other ^b			
SECOND HALF									
27	Yaen							S	✓
28	Hamasaki Ayumi				✓			S	
29	L'arc~en~Ciel	✓						SU	
30	Suzuki Ami			✓				SU	
31	SMAP							SU	✓
32	Amuro Namie		✓					C	
33	Sans Filtre	✓			✓			C	
34	globe	✓	✓		✓			C	
35	Yashiro Aki							T	✓
36	Kaguya hime	✓						T	✓
37	Nagayama Yōko				✓		✓	T	✓
38	Hosokawa Takashi				✓		✓	T	✓
39	Kawanaka Miyuki						✓		
40	Mikawa Ken'ichi				✓		✓	C	
41	Matsuda Seiko				✓		✓	C	
42	Gō Hiromi				✓			C	
43	Sakamoto Fuyumi				✓			C	
44	Minami Haruo						✓		✓
45	Kobayashi Sachiko						✓		✓
46	Sada Masashi							S	✓
47	Yuki Saori and Yasuda Sachiko				✓			S	
48	Mori Shin'ichi							S	✓
49	Ishikawa Sayuri							C	✓
50	Tanimura Shinji							C	✓
51	Tendō Yoshimi							T	✓
52	Itsuki Hiroshi							T	✓
53	Wada Akiko							T	✓
54	Kitajima Saburō				✓		✓	T	
	The 50 th Kōbaku Community and others		✓				✓	T	

^a Song performers. ^b Additional performers not classed as singers, dancers or musicians.

^c Major backdrops are indicated as T = tier, S = spaceship, SU = spaceship and upper spaceship, C = columns along the rear stage wall.

When viewing Table 5.1, a number of patterns emerge; these can now be discussed with reference to song performers' respective genres (see Appendix D) and footage from performances (see Appendix E).

Firstly, it is clear that few *Kōbaku* song performers have instruments onstage for their performances. As expected, it is predominantly J-pop ensembles that normally play instruments in other live performance contexts which also play instruments in the 50th *Kōbaku*. Some performers clearly play their instruments 'live', such as the pianist from Kiroro. However, other ensembles such as the bands Hysteric Blue and L'arc~en~Ciel mime to an instrumental backing tape. Presumably, the technical logistics and rapid changes between song performances restrict larger ensembles from playing their instruments live and therefore must rely on pre-recorded material. In general, these kinds of ensembles are scheduled for the first half of the programme and at the beginning of the second half. Their instrument-rich performances are in contrast with those presented by the final 18 *Kōbaku* song performers in the contest who are non-instrumentalists, an arrangement which privileges the vocal performances at the end of the programme.¹

Secondly, the majority of song performances incorporate additional performers.² In general, they enliven the staging by providing eye-catching movement and colour and, in the case of vocalists and musicians, enhance the auditory dimension of the performance. Additional performers do not appear in every song performance but are instead carefully used to ensure variety as the evening progresses. At times, only one type of additional performer is featured—only dancers, for example, are found in Saijō Hideki's song performance. On occasion, however, a variety of additional performers are simultaneously onstage, as seen in Shigemori Ayumi and Hayami Kentarō's song performance which incorporates vocalists, dancers, musicians and participants wearing character costumes.

¹ Even so, the majority of these performers sing *enka*, a genre that is typically performed with a backing tape or orchestral accompaniment. Occasionally, an *enka* performer may, however, play a traditional instrument such as the *shamisen* (three-stringed lute) during a performance but this does not occur in the 50th *Kōbaku*.

² Several additional performers have appeared in other *Kōbaku* concerts over the years. For example, the accordion player coba plays in Shigemori Ayumi and Hayami Kentarō's "*Dango 3 kyōdai*" ("The Three *dango* Brothers") in the 50th *Kōbaku* and had also performed in the 44th *Kōbaku* (1993).

Thirdly, it is clear that additional performers are used in varying number within a single song performance. A large number of additional performers greatly assists the creation of a dynamic atmosphere. *Enka* singer Toba Ichirō's song performance, for example, includes nearly 100 additional performers bearing flags, fans and *mikoshi* palanquin in a lively *matsuri* parade. By contrast, when only a few additional performers appear, they create a subtle staging effect without diverting attention from the performer. The J-pop soloist Matsu Takako, for example, is accompanied by a classical guitarist who is discreetly positioned behind her and, moreover, wears black, inconspicuous clothing.

Fourthly, it is evident that *Kōhaku*'s stage designs are typically created in conjunction with one of two imposing background sets: an elevated tier and a circular spaceship. The tier is used for every song performance in the first half of the programme while the spaceship and its variant—a smaller elevated upper spaceship—are only present during the second half, perhaps to invigorate the programme following the short newsbreak. When neither background set is used, a column-like structure which spans the width of the rear stage wall and features several lighting panels is exposed, as seen in Amuro Namie's "RESPECT the POWER OF LOVE", Sans Filtre's "Yei Yei" ("Yeah Yeah") and globe's "You Are The One".³ Several performances are staged using sets, props and backdrops in addition to the tier and spaceship, but mainly those from the second half of the programme when solo acts predominate. At this point of the evening, many soloists are alone onstage and the additional sets, props and backdrops serve to fill the vacant space and to establish a sense of intimacy on the large NHK Hall stage. Matsuda Seiko's staging, for example, features an enormous silver sphere suspended in mid-air and Minami Haruo's song performance is set against an imposing screen stretching the width of the stage as a backdrop.

Fifthly, almost half of the *Kōhaku* song performers are alone onstage, unembellished by additional performers, sets, props or backdrops. This minimalist staging technique is used throughout the *Kōhaku* programme by J-pop and *enka* singers

³ It is likely that the columns remain onstage for the entire program but are most prominently visible when the large background sets are removed.

alike to draw attention toward the song performer and to create an intimate atmosphere. Occasionally, several consecutive acts are alone onstage in order to provide contrast with song performances that include many additional performers. This is most effectively seen in the latter part of the whole programme when six consecutive soloists are quickly followed by the grandiose *matsuri* staging of Kitajima Saburō who is accompanied on stage by hundreds of additional performers, colourful props and backdrops.

After examining these patterns, it is useful to consider the relationship between *Kōbaku* songs and their staging. A song's subject matter is often reflected in the staging. The most literal interpretations can be seen in the festival staging of Kitajima Saburō's "*Matsuri*" ("Festival") and the sea-themed staging of Toba Ichirō's "*Ashizuri-misaki*" ("Cape Ashizuri"). Several song performances, however, use less explicit methods to bring a song's subject matter to life. Nagayama Yōko's "*Sadame yuki*" ("Destiny Snow"), for example, features dancers dressed in silvery white *kimono* and floating veils that twirl across the stage like the snow of which she sings. Correspondingly, Tanimura Shinji's "*Subaru*" ("The Pleiades") is staged to simulate the highly luminous star cluster mentioned in his song. During this performance, the stage area is dramatically transformed into a stylised version of the Pleiades when hundreds of shafts of light beam down onto the stage and surround Tanimura. Itsuki Hiroshi's star-themed "*Yo-zora*" ("The Night Sky") also uses light to reflect the subject matter of the song and at one point during his performance, the camera pans across the various NHK Hall audience members who are holding penlights which simulate bright stars in a night sky. The effect is a dream-like stage, typical of *enka* performance.

Staging may also be unrelated to the song's subject matter. Suzuki Ami's "BE TOGETHER", for example, describes naïve young love, yet the staging has a tough urban street theme: additional performers wear modern, street-wise clothing such as shiny plastic pants, trench coats and sunglasses, hold rubbish bin lids in the air and use drumsticks to vigorously beat the bins. While Suzuki's fluffy pink feather coat, knee-high pink boots and long sparkling silver nails are consistent with her youthful *kawaii* (cute) image they seem incongruous with the urban street theme of her staging. Suzuki is far removed from the scene unfolding behind her and only acknowledges the

presence of the additional performers when two dancers assist her with the removal of her coat. Broadly speaking, this energetic performance is characteristic of J-pop staging style and is designed purely for entertainment purposes and to reflect the vivaciousness of youth.

For the most part Mikawa Ken'ichi's staging is largely unrelated to the subject matter of his song. Indeed, "*Eien ni bara no toki o*" ("Happy Times for All Eternity") describes a quest for love and happiness yet the staging has a discrete, structured narrative that draws from Egyptian mythology. Through his clothing, however, Mikawa provides a tenuous connection: at the start of the performance, he wears a sparkling red headdress shaped like a rose (*bara*) in acknowledgement of the dual-meaning of *bara* which appears in the song's title and in the body of the song: in the former it is translated as 'happiness' and in the latter it means 'rose' (see Appendix G: Song 40A). This is typical of Mikawa's playful witticism, but also shows the complex interplay between the visual, aural and interpretative aspects of the song performance.

Unlike Suzuki who appears detached from her staging narrative, Mikawa is the protagonist in his staging narrative. His performance setting is immediately established as ancient Egypt, signified by two large sphinxes acting as a backdrop and the Egyptian-styled clothing and footwear worn by the additional performers. In many ways, Mikawa's staging is a fantastical, modern interpretation of the myth of Medusa, the evil snake-haired woman who was beheaded by the hero Perseus. Mikawa is, for example, unexpectedly pulled toward the rear of the stage where an aeroplane engine suddenly appears and through an optical illusion, the spinning blades appear to behead him. Nevertheless, he later emerges intact from the stage wings, dressed as a pharaoh and seated in an ornamental throne decorated by carvings of intertwining snakes.

Kobayashi Sachiko's song performance staging is also unrelated to the subject matter of her song. "*Yancha sake*" ("Mischievous *Sake*") describes a devoted woman caring for a troublesome man. Her staging, by contrast, portrays elements of a well-known Japanese fairy-tale, "*Taketori monogatari*" ("The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter"), written in the Heian period by an unknown author. It is the story of *Kaguya hime*, the moon princess who as a tiny child was found by a bamboo cutter inside a bamboo

stalk and later as a beautiful adult, is courted by many young men. *Kaguya hime* promises to marry whoever will bring what she desires, but none succeed. One night by the light of the full August moon, she sadly confesses that she is not of this earth but from the moon. At this point, a group of heavenly beings cover her in a robe of feathers and return her to her home. In clear acknowledgement of this folktale reference, and in keeping with her practice of naming her stage designs and costumes in *Kōhaku* (see Chapter One), Kobayashi's performance is titled '*Kaguya hime*' ('Moon Princess').⁴ At first she wears a red jacket, designed to look like a *kimono*, and an ornate headdress. Suddenly, in the manner of a *kabuki hayagawari* (rapid change), her red jacket is removed, revealing an aqua-coloured *kimono* decorated with a peacock feather pattern and a several white feathers hanging from one sleeve. The feather design—reminiscent of the moon princess' robe of feathers—is further reinforced through tall fabric screens which are similarly decorated with peacock feather patterns and fan out behind her. Propelled by an upward-rising platform, Kobayashi is thrust high above the stage and stands high above swirling clouds of dry ice, to mirror the *Kaguya hime*'s ascension into the heavens. Finally, two large yellow fans unfurl behind her 'robe' and eventually meet, thus forming a semicircular moon—*Kaguya hime*'s home.

From this overview of the general staging characteristics and staging themes employed in *Kōhaku*, we can see that performances are treated individually yet a sense of cohesion is maintained for the contest. Overall, this section provides a solid foundation for the following sections which examine selected performances in closer detail, with a view to see what they reveal about the 50th *Kōhaku* Community and the issue surrounding it, beginning firstly with how the individual is staged.

Staging the Individual

A song performance is an expression of the individual song performer's style. This section examines three ways in which song performers express their individuality within the group context of the collective, firstly through their star personae and

⁴ *Kaguya hime* is also the name of a band in the 50th *Kōhaku*. In acknowledgement of the shared name, the lead singer of the band, Minami Kōsetsu, introduces Kobayashi's song performance along with the Red MC (see Appendix E from clock 10:57:07). Even though Minami Kōsetsu is a member of the White Team, he dons a red shirt and displays a red handkerchief in his jacket pocket to show his affiliation with the Red Team during this segment.

staging style, secondly through their costume, and thirdly, through cross-gender performance. Overall, by looking at how individuals are staged, we can see the diversity of the song performances and how this sheds light on the character of the Community as a whole.

As noted in the Introduction, each song performer in the 50th *Kōhaku* is a professional performer with an established ‘star persona’: a highly-crafted image that is “produced and packaged by marketing organisations and popularised by the mass media” (Aoyagi 1999:11). This public face is clearly distinct from the private self. It is not useful, however, to attempt to ‘unmask’ a song performer in order to find the inner or ‘true’ self; indeed, Japanese people are not interested in locating the ‘real’ but instead appreciate “the art of faking” (Buruma 1984:69). Instead it is more helpful to view stars as composed of multiple, rather than single, selves and these emerge as each context requires (Lebra [1994:118] in Yano 1995:409). The section, as such, considers the various star personae presented by the song performers within the context of *Kōhaku*.

Style is “a personal articulation of a genre” (Aoyagi 1999:23) and in *Kōhaku*, each song performer’s staging style is inextricably linked with his/her genre and reflected through costume, staging and gestures. For example, female *enka* singers who usually wear *kimono* when singing in other performance contexts will also do so in *Kōhaku*. By contrast, the adult J-pop singer Saijō Hideki presents a sexy, modern staging style for his song performance which is in keeping with his public image as a heartthrob. He wears a striking outfit consisting of tight black leather pants and a long, brown crushed velvet overcoat with an upturned collar. He later removes the coat, revealing a long black leather jacket with numerous slashes so that his chest can be seen underneath. His skin, moreover, is tanned dark brown and hair is highly styled with blonde streaks, giving him the impression of a desirable and exotic Latin lover, as suggested by the Spanish-influenced song “*Bairamosu*” (“Let’s Dance”). His sexually-explicit gestures also reinforce this image: several times during the performance, he seductively glides his hand up the microphone stand and at one point has his legs spread either side of the stand which is used as a phallic symbol. Meanwhile, the *musumeyaku* performers from the Takarazuka revue fall to the floor and gaze up at him adoringly.

Song performers readily incorporate ‘trademark’ aspects of their persona into their *Kōbaku* staging. J-pop soloist Hamasaki Ayumi, for example, is well-known for her decorated fingernails and in *Kōbaku* they are very long and glittering with silver polish. Similarly, the J-pop singer Amuro Namie exhibited her “mature and sensual image” (Aoyagi 2000:318) described as the “so-called ‘Amuro style’” (Aoyagi 1999:123), the trademarks of which are her light-brown hair and thin eyebrows. Although singers wear different costumes and occasionally act in a manner that is in contrast with their star persona during various additional segments, they always uphold their well-established persona for their song performance and present it through personal staging style.⁵

Along with their persona, costume is an important aspect of how the individual is staged.⁶ Costumes—all types bodily adornments, from clothing and shoes to jewellery accessories, makeup and hairstyles (as defined in Chapter One)—are highly varied from performer to performer. From the deliberately controversial red and white body paint donned by Tonneruzu (Tunnels) at the 42nd *Kōbaku* (1991) to the breathtaking beauty of the expensive *kimono* worn by Misora Hibari for her comeback performance at the 30th *Kōbaku* (1979), *Kōbaku* song performers have typically used costumes to make statements about themselves. The term ‘costume’ has an element of disguise associated with it, indeed “Western tradition tends to characterize clothing as façade...[but] in Japan, clothing and wearer merge” (Dalby 1993:4). In a sense, the *Kōbaku* song performers don costumes in order to reinforce their respective star personae, but the term ‘costume’ also indicates a sense of occasion and formality that is well-suited to a large-scale event such as the 50th *Kōbaku*.

⁵ This can be seen, for example, during the White Team talent segment whereby selected singers adopt *kabuki* makeup and costumes and enact a scene from a play (see Appendix E clock 7:58:00). In this segment, the stars are completely transformed into *kabuki* actors and except for their names appearing on the bottom of the television screen, are virtually unidentifiable. In other additional segments, however, stars often reveal aspects of their persona. During a Red Team talent segment, for example, there is a comical moment when *enka* singer Tendō Yoshimi, who is known for her diminutive stature and often jokes about it, has difficulty performing a task because legs are too short (Appendix E clock 9:48:49).

⁶ The 50th *Kōbaku* song performers change their costumes several times over the course of the evening to suit their different roles, such as participating in a skit or introducing a fellow singer’s performance. In this sense, changing costumes is an act of “building up and casting aside [the] different identities” (Tarlo 1996:1) which are required for the varied roles and contexts with in the program.

Costume plays both a symbolic and communicative role in the construction of identity. It adorns the body, making it culturally visible (Silverman 1986:147) and therefore culturally meaningful. It can indicate a person's affiliation with a group (Bell 1976), as discussed in this chapter with reference to the use of red and white colours to demonstrate team and Community identity. Costume can also distinguish a person from another and, therefore, be used as an expression of selfhood. In the context of the 50th *Kōhaku*, song performers use costume for aesthetic purposes: to 'stand out' to the judges and to demonstrate their unique style as individuals. Indeed, costume, and in particular, clothing "is one of the most pliable aspects of selfhood, most easily changed and manipulated [such that it] defines our precious persons" (Dalby 1993:4).

One of the most obvious ways song performers define themselves is by choosing to wear either *yōfuku* (Western attire) or *wafuku* (traditional Japanese clothing), for their performances. Whereas *yōfuku* immediately marks the performer as Westernised and modern, *wafuku* points to the wearer's associations with traditional Japan. Examples of *yōfuku* are readily seen in the dresses worn by female J-pop performers such as the members of MAX and Hysteria Blue, and the formal tuxedos worn by male *enka* singers such as Ichiro Toba and Kayama Yūzō. One of the most prevalent examples of *wafuku* in *Kōhaku* is the *kimono*; a time-honoured garment which is deeply associated with Japan's traditional arts, such as *nihon-buyō* (Japanese dance). *Kimono* is also the costume of choice for the majority of female *enka* singers in *Kōhaku*.⁷ Unlike other costumes, including Western garments, *kimono* holds additional meaning according to the way in which it is worn. Indeed,

it is possible to speak of the true form of a *kimono* only after it has been put on a human body. In other words it is the wearer who, according to his proficiency, creates the form. It is this potential to highlight and express a person's personality that makes *kimono* so different from western styles of dress. (Yamanaka 1982:9; my italics)

⁷ Even though J-pop singers do not wear *kimono* for their own song performances, they often change into *kimono* for song performance preludes for *enka* singers, for variety, and to show support for their fellow teammate. For example, three members of the J-pop group Mōningu Musume. wear *kimono* during the prelude for *enka* singer Godai Natsuko's "*Kazemachi minato*" ("Waiting for a Favourable Wind in the Harbour") (see Appendix E from clock 8:42:28) and J-pop soloist Matsuda Seiko wears *kimono* during the prelude for *enka* singer Tendō Yoshimi's "*Kawa no nagare no yō ni*" ("Like the River's Flow") (see Appendix E from clock 11:23:14). The connection between *enka* and *kimono* is extremely strong and, in another song performance prelude for a different *enka* singer, Kawanaka Miyuki, a member of Mōningu Musume. wears a *kimono* and makes a humorous but genuine attempt to briefly sing in an *enka* style (see Appendix E from clock 10:31:56).

Consequently, the types of *kimono*—and how they are worn—shed light on the kinds of song performers in *Kōbaku*. Certainly, the *kimono* can reflect one's status within a social group but it can also indicate one's age, the season and the formality of the situation. There are many kinds of beautiful *kimono* which reflect such aspects in *Kōbaku*. As the examples in Appendix E demonstrate, we can see novel twists on traditional *kimono* which highlight the performer's individuality. For instance, instead of a subdued and modest *kimono*, the cheerful and lively Nakamura Mitsuko wears a contemporary, green and gold 'lightning bolt' design along the rear fold of her *obi* and the silver sticks and gold-tinged red circular ornaments in her glittery hair. Some performers adopt poses to best display their *kimono* for the camera (cf. Yano 1995:349–359). Indeed, the camera often lingers over a singer, surveying her from head to toe or zooming out to an all-inclusive wide shot. Nagayama Yōko, for example, extends her arms out to the side of her body (at a right angle) to display the beautiful shape and pattern of her *kimono* and to let her sleeves fall evenly. Fuji Ayako holds her arms in a similar manner to display her *kimono*. It is not a coincidence that they, and other women in *Kōbaku*, perform these gestures at the start of their song performances, directly after they have bowed. The gestures serve as a way of introducing themselves through the *kimono*. As Yamanaka has noted above, the *kimono* only takes its true form when it is worn (1982:9) and in this sense, the colours and patterns of a *kimono*—and all other aspects of this costume—can be used to reflect a singer's personality/persona.

Much like persona and costume, cross-gender performance can also be used as a means of expressing individuality in *Kōbaku*. By 'cross-gender performance' is meant those performances where men adopt gender attributes (femininity) of women or when women adopt expressions of gender attributes (masculinity) of men. Japan's vast and rich history of cross-gender performance in theatre is well documented by scholars (see for example Robertson 1998, McLelland 2000, Morinaga 2002, Fujita 2004).⁸ Today, examples of cross-gender performance can be seen in time-honoured performing theatre traditions such as the *onnagata* 'female impersonators' from the exclusively male *kabuki* and in contemporary forms such as the *otokoyaku* 'male impersonators' in the female-only Takarazuka revue. Like *kabuki* and Takarazuka, the

⁸ See McLelland (2004) and Henshall (1999:46ff) for examples of non-theatrical cross-dressing in Japan.

50th *Kōbaku* is theatrically staged and features cross-gender performance, but it is also primarily a television programme. Japanese audiences regard depictions of cross-gender performance on television in a similar manner as they do in the theatrical context: they neither regard it as subversive nor identify it with sexual identity such as homosexuality.⁹ Instead audiences “understand the entertainment world to be quite separate from reality” and see cross-gender presentations as “an individual’s act or performance” which demonstrates “a skill” and does not necessarily communicate “an inner state or identity” (McLelland 2000:45). The skill that cross-gender performers use is mimesis, the ability to adopt representative gender markers in order to transform oneself, to varying degrees, ‘into’ the opposite sex.¹⁰ In terms of performance, the skill of gender crossing in Japan is read in such a way that

the essence of a gender can only be truly objectivised and understood by someone not belonging to that gender, for those who are born into it are guided by instinct and unable to understand how or why they behave as they do. (Henshall 1999:45)

Gender is clearly an important aspect of performance, for a number of reasons. A brief summary of the typical gender markers of femininity and masculinity used by acts that are not cross-performing can reveal how these markers are imitated. They may be performative, such as “characteristic movement[s], and gestures” or rendered as physical aspects in the form of makeup, clothing and hairstyles, or aural aspects such as vocal styles and the kinds of songs performed (Beeman 1992:17). Naturally, these markers vary between the ages of performers and their associated genres and the discussion below is intended as a general guide.

⁹ For example, “Japanese people generally do not regard the flamboyant [cross-dresser] Mikawa Ken’ichi as ‘gay’” (McLelland 2000:46) and some even consider him “asexual” (Yano 2002:159).

¹⁰ The following section draws from discussions of typologies of mimesis, used in traditional theatre performance in Iran (Beeman 1992) and in an analysis of cross-gender performance in *enka* during the 1990s (Yano 1995). Yano identifies three categories of mimesis, as originally defined by Beeman, that are used in *enka* performance. Firstly, a “total mimetic depiction” whereby the ‘real’ sex of the performer is not easily deciphered by audiences; secondly, a “pretended mimetic depiction” whereby sexual markings are so overt and over-imitated that the performer’s biological sex is easily recognised (for example parody or drag performance); and thirdly, a “non-mimetic depiction” whereby the performer’s biological sex is instantly recognisable because he/she “is not meant to mimic the opposite sex at all” and instead “conventional semiotic devices” are employed to “convey gender/sexuality” (Yano 1995:412). In addition, Yano has identified two categories pertaining to *enka* performance, namely a “partial mimetic depiction” whereby the performer’s sex is not in dispute, despite the cross-performance, and the effect is “serious...not comic”; and finally a “restricted mimetic” depiction which limits the imitation to certain aspects of the performance and by omission, the performer may convince the audience that he/she is indeed a member of the opposite sex.

In general, the physical markers of femininity include wearing dresses, skirts or *kimono*, decorative objects such as jewellery and hair ornaments, long hair (whether tied back or hanging loose) and makeup such as lipstick and eye shadow. Generally, spatial indicators include standing still onstage and using small, graceful and controlled hand gestures, as is the case with many female *enka* singers. Some female J-pop groups such as Mōningu Musume. and SPEED specialise in coordinated dance routines which involve feminine gestures.¹¹ Songs performed by women often describe love, longing, relationships and life (as discussed in Chapter Four) and they can be performed tenderly and with passion, often using voices that have a high register. In all, these markers indicate that women are fragile, mild and perform songs from the heart.

The physical markers of masculinity include wearing tuxedos, suits, or trousers, short hairstyles and the absence of makeup. Men may stand stoically in one position on stage as generally seen in performances by male *enka* singers, or they may aggressively prowl the entire stage area, like members of the male J-pop band GLAY. Other male vocal groups such as DA PUMP and SMAP also occupy large areas of the stage in order to enact coordinated dance routines. In general, men's songs project "public virility" and describe life's journey, but also appear "outwardly strong but inwardly vulnerable to love and heartbreak" (Yano 2002:154). Lyrics may allude to sexual prowess, such as Saijō Hideki's "*Bairamosu*" ("Let's Dance") and Gō Hiromi's "GOLDFINGER '99" and are usually sung with a deep and/or sexy voice. In all, these markers of masculinity indicate that men are dependable and strong.

After providing a general overview of the markers of gender, it is timely to examine selected examples of mimetic performance in the 50th *Kōbaku*.¹² The most obvious example is a total mimesis by Umezawa Tomio.¹³ In this context Umezawa is

¹¹ Dance groups such as Mōningu Musume. and SPEED are crafted by talent agencies and are, as Aoyagi notes, taught to use "predominantly feminine gestures [such as] rocking the body back and forth, turning the body left and right [and] moving the body in a bouncy way" (1999:117).

¹² Yano cites Umezawa Tomio, Sakamoto Fuyumi, Yashiro Aki and Mikawa Ken'ichi as examples of cross-gender performers, all of whom perform in the 50th *Kōbaku*. While the following discussion refers to these performers (among others), it does not, however, simply reiterate her findings. Instead it reveals how these and other performers 'cross' within *Kōbaku*—a framework unexplored by Yano.

¹³ Umezawa is member of a *taishū engeki* troupe—a small theatre group providing regional or 'folk' entertainment (lit. 'theatre for the masses') including that is heavily influenced by *kabuki* (cf. Jenkins 1998, Ivy 1995)—which requires him to present both serious and comic impersonations. He has also appeared as a song performer in his own right in previous *Kōbaku*.

an additional performer—not a *Kōbaku* song performer—and he comes onstage dressed as an *onnagata* and dances beside Sakamoto during her presentation of “*Kaze ni tatsu*” (“To Stand Against the Wind”). Even though Umezawa is impersonating a woman, the broadcast audience immediately knows that he is a man because his name appears on the bottom of the television screen, as is NHK’s custom. Nevertheless, from the moment he enters the *Kōbaku* stage he presents himself as a performing *geisha*, the ultimate idealisation of woman. As a *geisha*, he wears an elegant *kimono*, a beautiful *obi* and *marumage* black wig with hair ornaments and white makeup. Umezawa dances using deliberate, slow-moving ‘feminine’ gestures and openly displays his *kimono* so that audiences can marvel at its beauty. His *kimono* is a predominantly red in colour; an unambiguous demonstration of his support for the women’s team, the Red Team.¹⁴ The staging is devoid of masculine elements that may suggest his real sex and he does not need to disguise his manly voice because as an *onnagata* dancer, he is not required to speak (Yano 1995:427). As such, the overall effect is one of complete transformation.

Sakamoto Fuyumi presents a different type of cross-gender performance which can be described as partially mimetic. She is an archetype *enka bijin* (*enka* beauty)—and is introduced as such by the Red MC—and this is expressed through her feminine costume for her song performance. Here, Sakamoto is immaculately dressed in a cream *kimono* with a colourful blossom pattern, long hanging *furisode* sleeves and a navy blue *obi*. Her brown hair is adorned with several silver ornaments and softly styled away from her face, forming a large ‘bee-hive’ bun at the crown. She wears red lipstick and tastefully understated makeup. In all, Sakamoto is flawlessly feminine. Sakamoto’s gender crossing, however, can be seen in her restrained but masculine gestures and by the fact that she performs a man’s song (Yano 1995:416)—behaviour which is at odds with her feminine image. To outwardly demonstrate strength and perseverance, she frowns, scowls and frequently clenches her hand into a fist. Meanwhile, she sings of fighting and overcoming obstacles in life’s journey in “*Kaze ni tatsu*” (“To Stand Against the Wind”). While she does not directly refer to herself as a man, her song

¹⁴ Although red is the predominant colour, the *kimono* also has a white lining (which is rarely seen) and a white, silver and red *obi*, which are, nevertheless, colours of the Community.

describes a “road” and “path” on life’s journey (see Appendix G: Song 43), in other words, the path of a man (*otoko michi*)—a subject often articulated by male *enka* singers (Yano 2002:148, 152–153). She is a woman singing a man’s song.¹⁵ Tellingly, Sakamoto and Umezawa present their mimetic performances (respectively, ‘partial’ and ‘complete’) simultaneously onstage. At first glance, they share similar characteristics: both are dressed in *kimono* and have comparable height and body frame. Even when Umezawa is framed in the same camera shot as Sakamoto—who is, by comparison, a real woman in ‘natural’ form—his true sex is masked such that it cannot be easily determined.

Another prominent example of cross-gender performance is seen in Mikawa Ken’ichi’s presentation of “*Eien ni bara no toki o*” (“Happy Times for All Eternity”). Mikawa has long maintained a reputation as a man who sings women’s songs (Yano 2002:159) and he also performs a women’s song in the 50th *Kōbaku*. While the lyrics do not directly position him as a woman, the various themes which describe boundless love and happiness clearly identify it as a woman’s song (see Appendix G: Song 40). The crossing, moreover, occurs when Mikawa sings with his distinctively nasal but masculine voice. Clearly, he is a man and because his true biological sex is revealed his performance can be regarded as partially mimetic.

A key feature of Mikawa’s cross-gender performance is costume. Yano has observed that Mikawa “boosted his career by gradually adopting more feminine clothes” but notes that “he never wears a dress or skirt” and “his makeup is modest” (2002:158). In this sense, his performances have maintained an element of ‘crossing’ but within clear limitations. McLelland similarly comments that Mikawa “rarely completely cross-dresses (*josō*), [instead] preferring to wear flamboyant jackets, jewellery and make-up” (2000:46). Indeed, Mikawa presents feminine-styled costumes for his 50th *Kōbaku* song performance but—most surprisingly—he also incorporates

¹⁵ Another example of gender crossing through song can be seen in Yashiro Aki’s performance of “*Funa uta*” (“Sailor’s Song”). Like Sakamoto, Yashiro’s costume is unambiguously feminine. The red colour of her sequined gown, hair-tie and lipstick, furthermore, confirm that she is a member of the Red Team, the women’s team. At odds with this image, is the fact that Yashiro, like Sakamoto, sings a man’s song. Although the lyrics do not directly refer to the singer as a man, they do describe ‘manly’ activities such as drinking *sake*, and also refer to heterosexual relationships (“I prefer women” and “my sweet maiden”) (see Appendix G: Song 35). See Yano (2002:156–157) for similar observations regarding Yashiro Aki’s performance of this song in other contexts.

attire that can be categorically described as ‘women’s clothing’. At the start of his performance, for example, he wears a red and sparkling gold multi-layered dress. After a costume change, he reappears wearing a bejewelled gold and blue dress and although the hanging sleeves somewhat disguise the shape of the garment, the tight bodice is clearly visible and unmistakably identify it as dress. A close up of Mikawa’s face, moreover, reveals heavy eye makeup, false eyelashes and thick red lipstick. It is not known why Mikawa progressed to adopting women’s clothes and makeup but it is clear that he is not attempting to convince audiences that he is a woman.¹⁶ He is, after all, a member of the White Team, the men’s team. His *Kōbaku* costumes have become progressively lavish with each year (see Chapter One) and perhaps the grandeur of the 50th *Kōbaku* signalled a timely shift in his cross-gender performance.

Wada Akiko’s song performance of “*Ano kane o narasu no wa anata*” (“You Are The One Ringing That Bell”) can also be described as partially mimetic. In general, Wada has a somewhat masculine image. She has a solid physique, tall stature, short hair and a deep and powerful speaking voice.¹⁷ Her demeanour, moreover, is “somewhat forward and aggressive” (McLelland 2000:44) as is her blunt language, as demonstrated in the prelude before Every Little Thing’s song performance where she reprimands two unruly male comedians (see Appendix E from clock 8:59:33). Here,

“a female presenter like Wada Akiko, who chooses not to use hyper-feminine polite language (*sonkeigo*) but instead speaks in a plain form, even without the use of masculine pronouns and articles, is already straying into the domain of masculine speech” (McLelland 2000:47)

During this prelude (and indeed, in other segments) Wada is presented as a no-nonsense woman who should not be trifled with. This manner is also reflected in her clothing: she wears a simple, unembellished white suit. Her image is, however, dramatically altered for her song performance where she is *tori* for the Red Team. For the occasion, she adopts highly feminine clothing, such as a formal, floor-length

¹⁶ McLelland has noted that in the Japanese music industry, “there are also many pop stars who employ transgender elements in their personae but do not attempt to pass as a woman” and cites “transgendered groups (where the men have long dyed hair, heavy make-up and wear ‘feminine’ if not actually women’s clothes)” as examples, such as GLAY and L’Arc en Ciel, both of which appear in the 50th *Kōbaku* (2000:46).

¹⁷ Wada’s features, height and voice had initially hindered her acceptance within the *geinōkai* (entertainment world) and she was often ridiculed for being ‘man-like’ (“Wada Akiko” 2002:Internet). The hardships of her early career are well-known by the Japanese public and much of her appeal today lies in her ability to overcome personal difficulties.

strapless ball gown with a billowing yellow mesh skirt and a sequined bodice. Moreover, she wears prominent jewellery such as gold hanging earrings, a gold bracelet and a large ring, and wears bright red lipstick. Although she still retains her boyish short hairstyle, her hair is brushed forward and appears longer. It is only when Wada begins to sing that she displays masculine attributes, such as fist-clenching and, most notably, her unusually deep and robust voice.

Wada's feminine demeanour at the 50th *Kōbaku* is similar to that displayed at previous *Kōbaku*.¹⁸ This says more about the consistency of her gender presentation for song performances and her overall image. It is clear that she is not attempting to impersonate a man in this performance. Instead, the physical features of her body that are deemed 'naturally' masculine (height, voice, stature) are complemented by calculatedly masculine aspects (hair, forthright style, gestures) and, lastly, contrasted by a highly feminine costume (ball gown, makeup, jewellery). The final result is a distinctive 'look' that, as Yano notes in another context, gives Wada "a kind of chic" (Yano 1995:421).

Another example of cross-gender performance staging worthy of attention is the song performance by the J-pop act GLAY. Although the male performers in this band employ various markers of femininity, their sex is not in dispute; as such, their performances can be described as partially mimetic. GLAY, for example, is a former *bijuaru-kei* (lit. 'visual-type') band typified by both masculine 'heavy rock' clothing and feminine coiffed hairstyles and makeup. In recent years, however, the band has toned down this image although it still retains selected aspects. For their song performance "*Sabaibaru*" ("Survival") in the 50th *Kōbaku*, the band members project a tough, masculine image through their clothing: the singer Teru, for example, wears a black vinyl jacket and pants adorned with silver studs and black military boots. They also use masculine gestures such as shaking their fists in the air. By contrast, each member's hair is highly-styled and a few of the men wear makeup: the bass player Jiro, for example, has section of his long dark blue and black hair shaped into protruding spikes

¹⁸ At the previous year's concert, for example, she was the *tori* singer and wore a glittering silver and black figure-hugging floor-length dress, crystal hanging earrings and red lipstick (49th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1998:Television Program).

and wears thick black eyeliner and eye shadow. Overall, they share a masculine punk rock image—complete with scowling expressions—but these aren't hardened men; indeed they all have smooth skin and 'baby faces', indicating that underneath the tough clothing they are merely boys. GLAY's hairstyles and makeup are avenues of cross-gender exploration which are, as Jennifer Robertson notes in relation to the Takarazuka *otokoyaku*, "capable of being read or understood in more than one way" (Robertson 1998:61). They are not pretending to be women.

Overall, the inclusion of cross-gender performance in the 50th *Kōbaku* demonstrates the art as accepted entertainment in Japan at the end of the millennium. Its presence, in its varying guises, presented by members of the Community shows a continuance of past practice and is in recognition of the nation's long history of 'crossing' in theatrical contexts.

Staging the Community, Staging *Kōbaku*

The fundamental organisation of the *Kōbaku* contest is centred on the battling Red and White teams, which immediately suggests a division within the Community. This section analyses this division by examining the physical realm of the performance space and how both team and Community space is identified and negotiated. This section also considers the use of colour in song performance staging. The colour combination of red and white is a powerful visual symbol of the Community. Unlike the use of either red or white to separately demonstrate team affiliation, the red and white pairing symbolises the coming together of the competing teams. While other colours may be used in the staging to demonstrate the diversity and individuality of song performers, the combination of red and white indicates unity, belonging and a consensus of identity for the 50th *Kōbaku* song performers. Ultimately this section explores the dynamics of the Community, as divided and unified, through staging.

The spaces inside NHK Hall are divided according to how they are used and who uses them. While the seating area is, for example, the domain of audience members, the *Kōbaku* stage is undisputedly marked as the Community's space—the realm of the *Kōbaku* song performers. The *Kōbaku* stage is halfway between the team

corners and, as such, is a space where song performers can physically come together.¹⁹ This is immediately established in the opening ceremony when the acts first gather onstage but during the first half of the contest, this space is negotiated between the teams as the song performances alternate. By the end of the first half, however, resolution is found when the singers once again unite onstage and perform “*Nijūisseiki no kimitachi e~A song for children~*” (“For the People of the 21st Century~A Song for Children~”). The second half of the contest presents similar situations which require negotiation but the stage’s status as Community space is firmly restored the final song of the evening, “*Hotaru no hikari*” (“The Light of Fireflies”), when all Community members perform together onstage.

Team members are often physically separated onstage, grouped together in their respective team corners on either side of the *Kōbaku* stage. These corners are compact and self-contained, bound by the edge of the stage and by imposing solid backdrops of column-like circular sets that are illuminated in each team’s colours. By standing in either the Red or White team corner, a song performer immediately shows his/her team affiliation.²⁰ Although special guests and celebrities may also occupy these spaces (for example, to show support for a team), the corners are the domains of song performers; it is here that they interact with fellow team members, comment on performances and converse with the Team MC. The team corners are also integrated into the delivery of the song performances; nearly all song performance preludes take place in team corners before the singer traverses the symbolic boundary and moves onto the main stage and into Community space.

The precision timing required for each song performance in the 50th *Kōbaku* means that maximum impact is often needed from minimal staging. As such, the red and white colour combination—a symbol of the Community—is predominantly used in lighting, the most readily adjustable aspect of staging. GLAY’s performance of

¹⁹ The depth and breadth of the *Kōbaku* stage is the only area large enough to comfortably accommodate members of all 54 *Kōbaku* acts. It is acknowledged that people other than song performers occupy the stage, such as the Team MCs, special guests and additional performers.

²⁰ This also helps dispel confusion when, for example, a male performer is not on the predominantly men’s White Team but is actually part of the Red Team. Song performers rarely ‘cross over’ and stand in another team’s corner. In most cases, the ‘crossing’ song performer will temporarily adopt the new team’s colours as previously noted in regard to Minami Kōsetsu and Kobayashi Sachiko’s song performance prelude.

“*Sabaibaru*” (“Survival”), for example, features swirling red and white overhead lights that pass over the band members.²¹ However, in order to avoid technical problems for cameras such as over-exposure and ‘flaring’, pale blue or white-blue light is often substituted for bright white. When coupled with red, this produces a ‘red and white-blue’ colour combination that nevertheless signifies the colours of the Community. This combination generally used for illuminated areas of the stage such as the tier and can be seen in several song performances such as those by Shigemori Ayumi and Hayami Kentarō and TOKIO.

Other song performances use red and white lights in multiple aspects of staging. Kitajima Saburō’s vibrant performance of “*Matsuri*” (“Festival”) for example, features large blocks of red and white light emanating from stage floor as well as the tier. Gō Hiromi’s “GOLDFINGER ’99” similarly presents flashing red and white lights along the rear stage wall but incorporates red lights on the stage floor and sweeping white floodlights. However, it is The 50th *Kōhaku* Community’s song “*Nijūisseiki no kimitachi e~A song for children~*” (“For the People of the 21st Century~A Song for Children~”) that presents the most vivid examples of red and white lighting: the team corners are illuminated red and white respectively, the tier is red and the stage floor lights are bluish-white, as are the stairs connecting the stage to the audience area.

Wearing only red and white coloured clothing is another way song performers overtly display their membership in the *Kōhaku* Community.²² This trend is established in the first song performance where the eight members of Mōningu Musume。 are dressed in various red and white sequined dresses, long gloves, high boots and coats with feather trim for their performance of “*LOVE mashīn*” (“Love Machine”). The members of second act, DA PUMP, continue this trend by wearing white suits, white shoes, white cowboy hats and red shirts for their rendition of “We can’t stop the music”. The only other act to adopt these colours is the eleven-member group Yaen.

²¹ NHK technical staff designed the lighting such that roaming and strobing lights would be “used for young rock bands” to create “lively and energetic staging” (Nippon Hōsō Gijutsu Kyoku Seisaku Gijutsu Centā 2000:470).

²² Song performers also exclusively wear red and white clothing for other segments. During one Red Team talent segment, for example, selected Red Team song performers wear similar outfits consisting of red and white striped shirts and red or white trousers (see Appendix E clock 9:48:49).

Their outfits, worn for their performance of “Be Cool!”, are especially memorable: 10 of the men are covered in red body paint and wear red underpants and large red ‘afro’ wigs, while the remaining member is wearing an identical outfit in white.

Some song performers use the red and white colour combination in conjunction with other colours to subtly show their association with the Community. Each member of Something ELse, for example, wears a formal black suit but has a white shirt and bow tie and wide red sash draped across his chest. Moreover, the band further articulates the Community’s colours through the instruments they play during “*Rasuto chansu*” (“Last Chance”) as one of the men uses a red acoustic guitar while another plays a white electric bass. Although this is possibly coincidental—indeed, they frequently use these same instruments outside of the *Kōbaku* area—the overall effect is at this time and place is an unambiguous affiliation with the *Kōbaku* Community.

Whereas the coupling of red and white represents the *Kōbaku* Community as a whole, the use of either red or white colour in song performance staging indicates team affiliation. This is occasionally achieved through lighting.²³ Harada Yuri’s performance of “*Tsugaru no hana*” (“Flowers of Tsugaru”), for example, features red fairy lights positioned along the back of the tier and across the rear stage wall. Similarly, Ishikawa Sayuri’s “*Amagi-goe*” (“Amagi Pass”) includes approximately 20 red spotlights shining upward from various positions along the rear stage wall. The most striking demonstration of team colour is, however, seen in the team corners. While each song performance takes place on the *Kōbaku* stage, the neon lights on the singer’s associated team corner are illuminated. During the song performance by Red Team member Amuro Namie, for example, wide shots of the stage that show the Red corner lights are aglow whereas the White corner remains dark.

Song performers also display team affiliation by wearing their team’s colour.²⁴ Most commonly, white is set among similarly light colours and red is set among warm and dark colours. White Team singer Mori Shin’ichi, for example, is dressed in a white

²³ It is noted, however, that the use of white spotlights is a standard practice for performances and does not necessarily indicate link with the White Team.

²⁴ Not only song performers wear team colours. During the *Shō kōnā: kōshukōtai* (lit. ‘show corner alternating battling’) segment, the male judge Nomura Mansai wraps a red scarf around his neck to indicate that his preference at that moment is for the Red Team (see Appendix E from clock 10:02:51).

satin suit with sparkling silver lapels, a silver shirt and necktie and white shoes. Fellow teammate Tanimura Shinji similarly wears a knee-length creamy-white suit jacket, matching waistcoat and a white shirt, but also wears black trousers. Interestingly, Yashiro Aki is the only song performer to be entirely adorned in her team colour, in an extreme and unambiguous demonstration of affiliation with the Red Team (discussed later in this chapter).

In previous *Kōbaku*, red or white props and decorations were commonly used to show team membership—a red or white ribbon was, for example, often tied around a microphone onstage to indicate team affiliation. In the 50th *Kōbaku*, team-coloured props are similarly if less frequently used. Throughout the 50th *Kōbaku* Community’s performance of “*Nijūisseiki no kimitachi e~A song for children~*” (“For the People of the 21st Century~A Song for Children~”), for example, the song performers read lyrics from either red or bluish-white booklets, to mark their team association (see again DVD example 4). Moreover, during Harada Yuri’s performance of “*Tsugaru no hana*” (“Flowers of Tsugaru”), several fellow Red Team members come onstage wearing red *happi* (short *kimono* style jackets) that bear the ideograph for ‘red’.

Staging the Nation

There are many ways the song performances evoke a sense of nationhood through staging, a selection of which is explored below.²⁵ It is not surprising that symbols for the nation are used in particular, as they create “a sense of national identity, reminding its citizens of the importance of patriotism and bolstering loyalty to the nation” (Befu 1992:26). The most obvious national symbol is a country’s national flag which is “designed to cause a surge of patriotic emotion when displayed in the proper place at the proper time” (Befu 1992:26). In 1992, Befu observed Japan’s flag, the *hinomaru* to be “in jeopardy as a symbol of national identity and national pride” because it was yet to be officially declared the nation’s flag and also because of its intrinsic association with the imperial family, whose divinity was shockingly renounced post-war (32–36). In August 1999, however, the Japanese government formally recognises the *hinomaru* as

²⁵ Although this chapter only examines evidence of cultural references in song performance staging, such depictions often appear in supplementary segments. Refer to Appendix E for examples, a selection of which will be discussed in footnotes within this chapter.

the national flag (Daimon and Hani 1999:Internet). The 50th *Kōbaku*, held only a few months later, was an ideal event to display and refer to the *binomaru*, given the flag's newly official status. Even so, there are only two examples in the programme where this occurs.²⁶ Kitajima Saburō, for instance, alludes to the *binomaru* in the lyrics of “*Matsuri*” (“Festival”) (discussed in Chapter Four). However, it is the physical presence of this flag in the staging for Godaigo’s “*Byūtifuru nēmu*” (“Beautiful Name”) that says more about this symbol for the nation, the significance of which is addressed below.

The *binomaru* is not a focal point of Godaigo’s song performance, nor is it presented as a solitary flag flying proudly. The *binomaru* is instead but one of approximately 60 small flags stitched together to form a larger ‘quilt of many nations’ as a backdrop for the band. The *binomaru* does not occupy a central place in the quilt: it is inconspicuously positioned to the far (stage) left side. Moreover, its distinctive pairing of red and white colours blend with similarly coloured flags from countries such as Switzerland and Italy. As a metonym for Japan, the flag’s presence in this quilt serves to frame the nation in a broader, international perspective. This concept is in keeping with the song’s association with the ‘international’ by being Japan’s campaign song for UNICEF’s ‘International Year of the Child’ in 1979 (see Chapter Four). The notion is strengthened, furthermore, by the presence of approximately 40 children in the song performance who are clearly from a variety of nationalities. Even though several of the children are Japanese, the majority ‘look’ Asian, African and ‘Western’ (blonde hair and blue eyes). Scholars have argued that foreigners in television programmes represent the *soto* ‘other’ (Painter 1996a) in contrast with the nation-as-*uchi* and thus “provide an oppositional contrast for the construction of Japanese identity” (Creighton 1997:233). In this example, the foreign children also represent the *soto* ‘other’ but not with the intent to create a boundary between ‘us’ and ‘them’ in an ethnocentric manner. Indeed, just as the *binomaru* is connected to other flags to create a greater whole, the Japanese children are widely dispersed among the foreign children and they all come together to enact coordinated dance moves in unison. This inclusive behaviour coupled with the visible integration of the *binomaru* in the flag quilt projects

²⁶ Many other kinds of Japanese flags are presented in *Kōbaku*, most of which appear during this song performance and also in Toba Ichirō’s staging for “*Ashizuri-misaki*” (“Cape Ashizuri”) (see Appendix E from clock 7:50:58 and 11:35:26).

the image of Japan not as isolated or superior but as integrated and equal in the international realm.

Japan's national broadcaster, NHK, can also be considered as a symbol of the nation. NHK is referred to early in the programme when DA PUMP, the second act in the *Kōbaku* line up and the first performers for the White Team, set the scene in their rap opening to the song which incorporates onomatopoeic rhyming and nonsensical English amid the observation that:

...This is NHK...

DA PUMP—"We can't stop the music"
Song Performance 2

Although merely a brief remark, this reference demonstrates a greater connection. This performance is inside NHK Hall, situated on NHK's national headquarters, and is televised by NHK. This setting cannot be confused with any other. The song performers Shigemori Ayumi and Hayami Kentarō are, for example, hosts of the NHK-E children's programme '*Okaasan to isshō*' ('Together With Mother') and their song performance of "*Dango 3 kyōdai*" ('The Three *dango* Brothers') features life-sized characters from this programme. More prominent references to NHK however, are seen through the use of the NHK logo, which features the three letters each encompassed in a circle. While the NHK logo is not emblazoned on hanging banners onstage, as was the case in previous *Kōbaku*, it is present on the microphones used by song performers and, as such, it is frequently in camera shot. Most notably, the singer Katori Shingo (a member of SMAP) wears a T-shirt featuring the NHK logo during his group's performance of "Fly".²⁷ The prominence of the NHK logo is an effort at branding the event, of staking a claim to it, but its understated ubiquity can also be seen as deferring to the (comparatively) more assertive placement of the *hinomaru*, an uneasy collusion which suggests an ambivalence as to what best defines the nation: a flag or a national broadcaster.

A variety of Japan's cultural symbols are displayed in the staging of 50th *Kōbaku* Community song performances in order to demonstrate a sense of pride in Japanese

²⁷ Several supplementary segments also make reference to NHK. For example, the mascot for NHK's satellite channel BS-2—a brown, open-mouthed monster character named Domo-kun—appears as guest during one song performance prelude (see Appendix E from clock 8:38:49).

culture.²⁸ The most prominent symbol is the *sakura* cherry blossom, a metaphor for the Zen concept of impermanence and the focal point of Hosokawa Takashi's staging for "*Sakura no hana no chiru gotoku*" ("As if Cherry Blossoms Were Falling"). Here, *sakura* is presented in three different ways: firstly, as a painting, where behind Hosokawa is a very large three-screen backdrop of a mature *sakura* tree covered with pink blossoms in full bloom (see Plate 18); secondly, through additional performers positioned behind the screens, where dancers wearing pink *komono* and holding pink sheets of material above their heads gracefully move to simulate the swirling pink *sakura* as it falls; and lastly, when the three screens are moved offstage, the tier is bathed in pink light and falling *sakura* blossoms are projected on the screen along the rear stage wall. These staging aspects, coupled with lyrics that refer to *sakura*, together create a layered effect and reinforce the presence of this symbol.

Pine (*matsu*) is another enduring cultural symbol. As an evergreen, its leaves remain on the tree throughout the year and this constancy, coupled with the tree's long life, makes it a symbol of longevity. Pine is also an auspicious symbol associated with New Year in Japan and during December, homes and businesses are decorated with the pine branch *kadomatsu*.²⁹ While there are occasional references to New Year customs in *Kōbaku*, these generally occur in supplementary segments.³⁰ Pine is, nevertheless, used in *Kōbaku* song performance staging. Both Sada Masashi's "*Ki seki ~ōkina ainoyōni~*" ("Miracle ~Like an Overwhelming Love~") and Yuki Saori and Yasuda Sachiko's "*Furusato*" ("Hometown"), for example, feature two stylised three-dimensional pine trees as an ornamental backdrop. While these trees are purely decorative, other depictions of pine trees in *Kōbaku* staging are meaningful. Minami Haruo's "*Genroku meisōfu ~Tawaraboshi Genba~*" ("The Famous Spear Song of the

²⁸ It is generally accepted that the following examples are cultural symbols for Japan and appear in standard references on Japanese culture such as *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Japan* (1993) and *Kōdansha Encyclopedia of Japan* (1983).

²⁹ Pine also forms part of the unique triad *shō-chiku-bai* which includes bamboo and plum. It is commonly associated with the New Year and represents longevity constancy and purity.

³⁰ One supplementary segment, for example, makes reference to Japanese New Year mythology. Following Godai Natsuko's song performance, a modified version of the story of the *shichi-fukujin* (Seven Deities of Good Luck) is presented. According to legend, the *takarabune* (treasure ship) and *shichi-fukujin* arrive in Japan on New Year's Eve from a long journey afar, bringing luck and fortune with them (see Appendix E from clock 8:45:59 for details regarding this myth and the supplementary segment). The song performance prelude for MAX's "*Issho ni...*" ("Together...") also refers to New Year customs by presenting two *manju* buns which are usually made for New Year (see Appendix E from clock 7:53:57).

Genroku Era ~Tawaraboshi Genba~”), for example, features a large folding panelled *byōbu* screen with a painted gold background and three mature pine (*matsu*) trees immediately behind Minami. The colour of the screen and presence of the pine trees indicates that it is a *kagamiita* (lit. ‘mirror board’), characteristically used as a backdrop for *nō* theatre. In the context of *Kōbaku*, this screen both visually frames the individual song performance and explicitly highlights an enduring theatrical tradition. This symbol is adapted for the new context: unlike the pine used for *nō kagamiita*, these trees are laden with snow in recognition of the season (winter) in which *Kōbaku* is staged. These trees are, most importantly, well suited for Minami’s song which is an interpretation of the famous tale of *Chūshingura*, an extremely well-known story (discussed in previous chapters) which is often to subject of *kabuki* and *bunraku* theatre plays.

Kimono is possibly the most widely recognised, both nationally and internationally, of Japan’s cultural symbols. While earlier discussion noted this garment in the context of individuality, it is appropriate to also consider the *kimono* in its symbolic role as the national dress of Japan. Although its origins lie in a Chinese robe from the 7th century (Maxwell 2004:8), the *kimono* has developed into a distinctly Japanese garment with “official pedigree [and today] stands at the cultural core of contemporary Japanese dress” (Dalby 1993:145). The garment

has an unshakable place in Japanese psyche. Apart from being one way to express Japanese culture, wearing *kimono* in modern Japan also makes a subtle statement. Its association with tradition potentially ascribes certain traits or characteristics to the wearer. (Maxwell 2004:8; my italics)

Kimono is not, however, everyday wear. Furthermore, the complicated layers of undergarments and costliness of material make *kimono* impractical for day-to-day activities and as such, it is generally only worn for formal, festive and/or official occasions such as weddings, *matsuri* and visits to temples on New Year’s Day. For many singers, the 50th *Kōbaku* is a special occasion that requires the formal attire of *kimono*. Wearing *kimono* in the correct manner is a learned skill; an art which is subject to various social and aesthetic criteria. Occasionally, female J-pop stars will wear *kimono*, but mostly in supplementary segments. For the most part, as noted earlier in this chapter, it is female *enka* singers (and a few male *enka* singers, including Hosokawa

Takashi, Minami Haruo and Kitajima Saburō) who wear *kimono* during song performances. This is in keeping with *enka*'s image as an old-fashioned genre with roots in the past and “in wearing the *kimono*, the female singer becomes emblematic of ‘traditional Japan’” (Yano 2002:151; my italics). The ubiquitous presence of *kimono* in the 50th *Kōbaku* repeatedly enforces this connection with the wider context—a symbol that confirms to viewers that this concert is taking place in Japan and is staged for Japanese people.

Along with *kimono* and other symbols acting as defining elements of the contest, there is also the staging of the traditional Japanese cultural event, the *matsuri* (festival), in song performances of the 50th *Kōbaku*. There are two such performances, Toba Ichirō's “*Ashizuri-misaki*” (“Cape Ashizuri”) (see again DVD example 3) and Kitajima Saburō's “*Matsuri*” (“Festival”) (see again DVD example 6). Both song performances use the hallmarks of genuine *matsuri* such as *taiko* drums and *bikiyama* (portable shrine floats) as well as *uchiwa* (round paper fans with stick-like handles) and hundreds of additional performers in traditional attire to fill NHK Hall with noise, energy and festivity. These performances can be considered as ways in which the members of the Community serve to unite the nation by depicting a shared cultural heritage and by visually representing solidarity through participation in a quintessentially Japanese activity, and serve to confirm the individual's place within the national *uchi*.

It is important to note that these performances are staged using ‘real’ props and performers from regional festivals. In this way, they are presented as re-creations of actual events. The appeal of these performances, as such, stems from the idea of the ‘internal exotic’ being brought to the *Kōbaku* stage and transported to greater Japan via the television broadcast. Toba Ichirō's staging, for example, uses two giant *bikiyama* from separate fishing-themed *matsuri*, a spiny lobster *bikiyama* from a festival in Izu (Shizuoka prefecture) and a whale *bikiyama* from a whaling festival in Yokkaichi (Mie prefecture). The presence of the lobster holds additional significance for New Year celebrations. A lobster is, for example, often used as an auspicious decoration for the straw festoon *shimenawa* as a symbol of ‘longevity’ (Kojima and Crane 1987:312). Toba's song lyrics, however, do not refer to the New Year or Cape Ashizuri on

Shikoku island—a region far removed from these festivals and also from Tokyo-based *Kōbaku*. Nevertheless, by using *mikoshi* from these *matsuri*, the ocean-themed staging highlights exotic not-Tokyo regions, the ‘rusticity’ of fishing life and cultural activities that are unique to Japan. Moreover, these festivals are “severed from singular local context and re-presented (re-membered) as metonyms of a national ‘authentic’ community” (Robertson 1991:35).

In the *tori* song performance for the White Team, Kitajima Saburō sings of a non-specific *matsuri* held in an unspecified location. Nevertheless, the staging incorporates props, such as a red and gold dragon *bikiyama*, from a real festival—the famous Karatsu Kunchi *matsuri* in Saga prefecture where *bikiyama* are offered to the Karatsu shrine. It also uses elements that are not associated with the Karatsu Kunchi *matsuri*, such as large, colourful *tairyō-bata* (flags used to give fisherman good luck). As such, Kitajima’s festive scene is a generalised, if not realistic, recreation of a *matsuri*. It is, as his ‘impromptu’ lyrics suggest, “the festival of *Kōbaku*” as well as being “the festival of Japan” (as discussed in Chapter Four); an occasion to celebrate a time-honoured song contest and to create a sense of national unity by longing for *matsuri* in general, a longing for *furusato*-Japan (see Appendix G: Song 54). Overall, the vibrant *matsuri* staging is an accurate recreation of a cultural activity unique to Japan, “an avowal of [a] common past” and a reminder of what it means to be Japanese (Vilhar and Anderson 1997:7).

Japan’s extensive visual and performing arts traditions are often referred to through song performance staging.³¹ One of the first references for the evening is

³¹ Team talent segments clearly draw from traditional Japanese theatrical traditions. The first White Team talent segment, for example, is a skit based around the traditional *kabuki* name-taking ceremony, whereby a senior *kabuki* actor will enter the stage, bestow a new name to a junior actor and then present them to the audience (see Appendix E from clock 7:58:00). In this segment, the White Team MC Nakamura Kankurō—a distinguished *kabuki* performer—is seated in the centre of the stage with several members of the White Team either side of him. After the cracking of the *hyōshigi* clapper sticks and a shout of “*tōzai! tōzai!*” (“hear ye! hear ye!”) which are hallmarks of *kabuki*, the White Team members, dressed in the ceremonial wide-shouldered *kamishimo*, announce their names. During the Team talent finale, selected members perform a scene from the *kabuki* play ‘Yamatogana ariwara keizu’ and a variation of the lion dance ‘Renjishi’ which is derived from the *nō* play ‘*Shakkyō*’ (‘Stone Bridge’). In this same segment, performers from the Takarazuka gekidan tsukigumi (the Moon Troupe from the Takarazuka Theatre Group) and several members of the Red Team join in as Takarasiennes. It is interesting to note that the Japanese performing arts represented in these talent segments are sex-specific: only men are permitted to perform in *kabuki* and *nō* and only women are accepted in the Takarazuka revue. As such, these *Kōbaku* segments not only display the talents of the team members, but also highlight renowned traditions that segregate the sexes.

presented mid-way through the first half of the programme, in the staging for Saijō Hideki's "*Bairamosu*" ("Let's Dance"). Here, both *musumeyaku* (female performers specialising in female gender roles) and *otokoyaku* (female performers specialising in male roles) from the all-female Takarazuka gekidan tsukigumi (Takarazuka Theatre Group, within the subdivision of the Moon Troupe) come onstage and dance. Their Spanish-themed clothing and dancing style are in keeping with the music and lyrics, thus displaying the revue's renowned versatility. Immediately following this song performance is Nakamura Mitsuko's "*Kawachi-zake*" ("Kawachi sake"), where additional performers dance with colourful, semi-circular concertinaed *ōgi* (folding fans) in time with the music (see Plate 19). *Ōgi* are associated with many of Japan's arts practices, namely as ornamental devices in *nihon-buyō* (traditional Japanese dance), in the greeting rituals of *chanoyu* (tea ceremonies) and as "indispensable hand property" in *nō* theatre, where the fans "effectively express the mood of the performance" (Kiyota 1992:12). When used in *Kōbaku*, these fans immediately recall Japan's traditional arts practices but are also used as a staging device for the song performance, creating a distinctively joyous and vibrant atmosphere through the simultaneity of the *ōgi* movements.

Further references to Japan's arts traditions occur during the middle of the second half of the programme. The staging for Nagayama Yōko's "*Sadame yuki*" ("Destiny Snow") for example, features reproductions of three *ukiyoe* (lit. 'pictures of the floating world') woodblock prints on large panels that occupy most of the *Kōbaku* stage (see Plate 20). The prints used for this *Kōbaku* song performance staging are by the artist Utamaro Kitagawa (1753–1806) and although they are not the most famous of his works, they are taken from Utamaro's *bijin-ga* (beautiful woman) collection which depicts beautiful women from shops, tearooms and pleasure quarters in Edo (Tokyo).³² These pictures are well suited to Nagayama Yōko's song which, through various metaphors, describes a woman embracing her destiny. The presence of the women in the *ukiyoe* prints, moreover, further reinforces that this is a performance by a member of the Red Team—the women's team.

³² Of the three prints, "*Bidoro o fuku musume*" ("Woman Blowing Glass Toy") is possibly the most well-known.

There are several other references to Japan's traditional arts during the second half of the contest. The staging of Sakamoto Fuyumi's "*Kaze ni tatsu*" ("To Stand Against the Wind") for example, features the *onnagata* performer (male *kabuki* actor specialising in female impersonations) Umezawa Tomio, dressed as a *geisha* and elegantly performing *nihon-buyō* (see Plate 21). Minami Haruo's song performance, furthermore, features a *kagamiita* (lit. 'mirror board') from the *nō* theatre as a backdrop. While references to Japanese traditional arts are more commonly presented in *enka* staging than J-pop staging, it is interesting to note that these references occur in both halves of the programme. The references, moreover, are not subtle or obscure but are instead proudly displayed as important features of each song performance staging. Despite their origins, these uniquely Japanese artistic traditions clearly remain part of the Japanese cultural identity today.

The 50th *Kōhaku* presents numerous icons of Japanese pop culture in supplementary segments, from famous sports stars to life-sized characters from the Nintendo console game Pokémon (Pocket Monsters) (see, for example, Appendix E from clock 8:29:16).³³ By contrast, there are few references to pop culture in song performances. One rare example is seen in the staging of J-pop band 19's song "*Ano kamibikōki kumorizora watteru*" ("That Paper Plane Will Break Through the Cloudy Sky"). Here, the *Kōhaku* stage is decorated with three metre tall props featuring fantastical illustrations from the artist Nakamura Mitsuru (pennname '326').³⁴ Nakamura is a non-performing member of the band and, as such, it is appropriate that his designs are presented in *Kōhaku*. However, he also has a somewhat 'underground' following in his own right as the creator of *anime* books and stationary items among other products and can be seen as an emerging pop culture artist who is gaining mass exposure through *Kōhaku*'s wide broadcast reach.

³³ Icons—or at least imitations of icons—from Western pop culture are also presented in these segments. In one song performance prelude, for example, song performer Katori Shingo (from the group SMAP) appears as the flamboyant 1960s British spy Austin Powers (from the film 'Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me', released in 1999) (see Appendix E clock 10:34:48). The novelty of the situation is centred around Katori, an extremely likeable and popular star, and his engaging and hilarious imitation—the fact that Austin Powers is the creation of Canadian comic Mike Meyers and is thus foreign in origin, is not an issue for audience members.

³⁴ These props include, for example, a drawing of a devil and another of a robot which is holding a two-headed bear.

Another pop culture reference is seen in the staging of Hysteria Blue's "*Haru ~spring~*" ("Spring") which features additional performers dressed as characters from the American comic strip 'Peanuts', drawn by Charles Schulz (see Plate 22). The inclusion of Schulz's characters was not merely for decorative purposes but was also in recognition of Schulz's decision in December 1999 to retire from drawing, due to illness.³⁵ For decades, these comic book characters have found resonance with Japanese children and adults alike and, due to the longevity of their popularity, are not necessarily considered to be foreign. Their inclusion in *Kōbaku* is an appropriate and timely tribute to Schulz. Both of these examples of pop culture references in staging occurred at the start of the first half of the programme, serving to engage families and a cross-section of generations—many children, for example, would not be awake for the entire programme. Overall, however, it is clear that there are far more numerous references to traditional Japanese arts in song performance staging of the 50th *Kōbaku*. Nevertheless, references to pop culture help to establish *Kōbaku* as a programme that is in-touch with current trends and demonstrate NHK's attempt to appeal to younger generations.

The elements and themes used in the 50th *Kōbaku* Community's staging help to frame their song performances as highly entertaining theatrical events. Upon closer inspection, however, staging can be seen as a reflection of the individual performer's personal style and an extension of their star persona. The layout and use of the stage also shows these performances are more than individual presentations—the stage can be seen as a "locality...which [binds] a set of individuals into one group" (Nakane 1973:1) and we can see how the Community-as-*uchi* is shaped through "the use of space" (Kondo 1990:141). This is reinforced through the incorporation of the colours of the Community in song performance staging, which highlights the unity of the collective. Furthermore, the prominence of the red and white combination demonstrates a continuing sense of pride in *Kōbaku* tradition, importantly, at the time of the landmark 50th edition of the contest. At a broader level, we can see how the nation is staged through the inclusion of cultural symbols and references to traditional arts and popular culture. Here, the time-honoured hallmark features of Japan are most

³⁵ This information made news headlines in Japan and several television stations broadcast flash news bulletins.

clearly evoked in order to show what it means to be ‘Japanese’ in 1999. Even so, the sheer breadth of such depictions in staging contradicts the stereotypical image of Japanese culture as homogenous and “[stressing] similarity over difference”—these performances instead reflect “the diversity of Japanese society at a given moment” (Martinez 1998:2–3).

With an understanding of the visual and spatial contexts in which song performances are staged, we can now proceed to the next chapter which considers the performance of relationships.

6

Performing Relationships

The final element for consideration in this study is the relationships that are revealed through the song performances of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community. These relationships range from the fleeting associations or strong connections between people, to the intricate historical networks of past and present song performers in *Kōbaku*, and finally, to the mediated relationships between performer and audience member. In Japan where non-verbal and indirect communication is prized (Ashkenazi and Jacob 2000:147), many kinds of relationships are not discernable at first glance. However, through the heightened setting of a stage performance, such as that seen in *Kōbaku*, relationships are embodied through gesture and behaviour, enacted through song, and hinted at through costume. Thus, relationships may often only be recognised or deciphered when the viewer has pre-existing knowledge of such cues. With this in mind, the chapter begins by casting light on the relationships between members of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community as a collective, before stepping back to see how its relationship with the historical *Kōbaku* Community is articulated. It concludes with an examination of the way relationships between the 50th *Kōbaku* Community and its audience are performed in the contest.

Performing as a Collective: Structure and Dynamics

In the Introduction to this study, the 50th *Kōbaku* Community was defined as a collective or *uchi* ‘in-group’. This section explores the complex and dynamic relationships within this *uchi* and how it is expressed through song performance. The structure of the Community is in accordance with each performer’s level of experience which is measured by the number of previous *Kōbaku* performances, or in other words, length of service. There are, for example, newcomers to the contest and those with little experience (*kōbai*/juniors), those with an equal number of past performances (*dōryō*/colleagues), and veteran *Kōbaku* performers (*senpai*/seniors) who have performed in approximately 20 or more *Kōbaku*. In this way, we can see the *uchi* is structured by rank. Nakane notes in relation to Japanese social groups in general, that “the established ranking order (based on duration of service within the same group and on age, rather than on individual ability) is overwhelmingly important in fixing the social order and measuring individual social values” (1973:27). Indeed a performer’s rank is well-known by Community members and *Kōbaku* audiences alike. In the lead up to the

50th *Kōbaku*, various magazines print the performer's name followed by the number of *Kōbaku* performances in parentheses. A performer's rank is also referred to in the contest itself. When introducing a song performer, for example, the Team MCs may mention the singer's past *Kōbaku* experience. It is the order of programme, however, that most strongly indicates a performer's rank. Broadly speaking, the less experienced *kōbai* performers feature at the start of the first half, while experienced *senpai* singers perform in the second half of the programme. The most prestigious final position of *tori* is most often allocated to *Kōbaku* veterans.

The structure of relationships in the 50th *Kōbaku* Community is modelled on the vertical hierarchy of a Japanese family (*ie*), where a parent is superordinate to a child. This family-like structure also nurtures a sense of unity between members and alliance to the collective, as it is seen in other Japanese organisations whereby the “strong sense of group loyalty...binds the individual to the firm for life” (Morris-Suzuki 1998:128). This perhaps accounts for the sense of solidarity expressed by song performers and explains the loyalty of veteran performers returning year after year.

Table 6.1 (overleaf) demonstrates the various levels of experience within the collective. At a glance, it is clear that there are many more newcomers and song performers with little *Kōbaku* experience than there are veteran singers, but this is in keeping with patterns established in past *Kōbaku* (see Appendix C). There is occasionally the same proportion of male and female *dōryō* of equal standing (see, for example, those who have made 11 previous performances in *Kōbaku*) but at the lower end of the table from 23 performances onward, it is clear that there are more male veterans than female. This points to the endurance of men's music careers in Japan and also reflects NHK's selection practices for *Kōbaku*. It is also important to note that all of these veteran *Kōbaku* stars—Hosokawa Takashi, Itsuki Hiroshi, Minami Haruo and Kitajima Saburō—are *enka* singers and the fact that they continue to return year after year demonstrates *Kōbaku*'s enduring appeal for performers of this genre. Moreover, by featuring so many veteran stars, the programme gives *enka* pride of place in the programme, suggesting that “*enka* remains at the top of the music world” (Yano 1995:155).

Table 6.1 Distribution of 50th *Kōbaku* Community Members and Past Performances in *Kōbaku*

<i>Past performances</i>	<i>Red Team</i>	<i>White Team</i>
0 (newcomers)	Hysteric Blue Suzuki Ami Shigemori Ayumi and Hayami Kentarō Harada Yuri Hamasaki Ayumi	Something ELse Yaen Sans Filtre 19 Kaguya hime
1	Mōningu Musume, Kiroro Matsu Takako	L'arc~en~Ciel DA PUMP
2	Every Little Thing MAX SPEED globe	GLAY Godaigo
3	Tendō Yoshimi	—
4	Amuro Namie	—
5	Nagayama Yōko	TOKIO
6	Nakamura Mitsuko	Yamakawa Yutaka
7	Fuji Ayako Yuki Saori and Yasuda Sachiko Kōzai Kaori	—
8	—	Maekawa Kiyoshi SMAP
9	Godai Natsuko	—
10	—	Sada Masashi
11	Sakamoto Fuyumi Kawanaka Miyuki	Toba Ichirō Horiuchi Takao
12	Matsuda Seiko	Tanimura Shinji
13	—	Kayama Yūzō Yoshi Ikuzō
14	—	—
15	—	Mikawa Ken'ichi Saijō Hideki
16	—	—
17	—	—
18	—	—
19	—	Gō Hiromi
20 ^a	Yashiro Aki Kobayashi Sachiko	—
21	Ishikawa Sayuri	—
22	Wada Akiko	—
23	—	—
24	—	Hosokawa Takashi
25	—	—
26	—	—
27	—	—
28	—	Itsuki Hiroshi
29	—	—
30	—	Minami Haruo
31	—	Mori Shin'ichi
32	—	—
33	—	—
34	—	—
35	—	Kitajima Saburō

^a After approximately 20 or more appearances in *Kōbaku*, a song performer can be considered a veteran.

The rank of newcomer means different things for singers. Whereas in the past an invitation to perform in *Kōbaku* signified reaching the pinnacle of one's career, in 1999 the status of the *Kōbaku* newcomer had lost its lustre compared with previous years. As noted in Chapter Two, some artists do not accept their *Kōbaku* invitation, often regarding *Kōbaku* as old-fashioned and an unsuitable platform for cutting-edge styles of music. Nevertheless, many newcomers do accept their invitation because it is an opportunity to convey respect for their parents—a sentiment called *oyakōkō* (filial piety), or to make their elders proud through great achievements. In 1999, many *Kōbaku* newcomers referred to their *oyakōkō* spirit during the 'newcomer press conference' held prior to the concert. This was especially true of J-pop stars. One member of the band Something ELse, for example, said "I think our mothers and others will be watching. In any case, we want to sing with all of our might!" while Kenji, a member of the duo 19, said "I will be able to make my grandpa and grandma happy". Soloist Hamasaki Ayumi also noted "my mother became happy the day I heard that I was to appear on *Kōbaku*". It was *enka* singer Yuri Harada, however, who appeared to be the most moved by her selection, saying "to appear on *Kōbaku*, after debuting 18 years ago, was my heart's desire...I will sing to convey my gratitude" and then stated "at last I am able to achieve *oyakōkō*" (Kobayashi 1999:3; my macrons).

NHK officials keenly observed this sudden surge in *oyakōkō* sentiment with one spokesman (who had been involved with *Kōbaku* since the early 1970s) commenting "some people say that traditional Japanese respect for parents or the elderly has vanished. But I've heard many *Kōbaku* rookies mentioning the *oyakōkō* spirit" (Kobayashi 1999:3; my macrons and italics). In this way, we can see the shifting perceptions of newcomers to the programme at the end of the century. Even if they do not find satisfaction for themselves alone, it is felt that the opportunity of performing in *Kōbaku* for the first time will please their families because a son or daughter is a representative of the family and past ancestors. Newcomers honour their families by appearing in a prominent forum, performing to the nation. Moreover, the pleasure families take in seeing their offspring perform stems from *Kōbaku*'s historical and cultural status as an honourable event. Their son/daughter is now connected to the *Kōbaku*'s great tradition, and has been anointed as part of the *Kōbaku* historical

Community, a public acknowledgment that he/she displays qualities similar to the most revered Japanese popular music stars.

With the vertical hierarchy of the collective defined, noting how it is loosely articulated through the order of programme, it is possible to explore how relationships are expressed through song performance. The relationships between Community members are of central importance and they can be most clearly seen when performers participate in fellow Community members' performances.¹ There are six *Kōhaku* song performances which feature fellow Community members in prominent roles onstage, five of which take place in the first half of the concert thereby immediately establishing a sense of comradeship within the Community.² The level of participation varies, ranging from simple hand clapping to playing a musical instrument, and on-screen time may be brief or last the duration of the song performance. Unlike the other 'additional performers' in *Kōhaku* (non-Community members, such as dancers and backing musicians), Community members are not necessarily selected for participation based on their musical skill, but their rank within the Community. Established *Kōhaku* singers; for example, may participate in a newcomer's song performance to welcome them into the Community or fellow newcomers may participate onstage to demonstrate solidarity and support for fellow newcomers.³

Two song performances in particular demonstrate how newcomers are welcomed into the Community by fellow members. The first example is the band Something ELse's performance of "*Rasuto chansu*" ("Last Chance"). At the end of this performance, the band is joined by Community members of various ranks. These include newcomers (Kaguya hime and 19), a band which had performed twice in *Kōhaku* (Godaigo), and another band which had performed five times previously

¹ Due to the constraints of the contest's format, Red Team performers rarely take a prominent role in White Team song performances, and vice versa. Nevertheless, the sense of collaboration in spite of the hierarchical structure reinforces the collective as united and whole, rather than two separate battling teams.

² These song performances are Something ELse's "*Rasuto chansu*" ("Last Chance"), Toba Ichirō's "*Ashizuri-misaki*" ("Cape Ashizuri"), Harada Yuri's "*Tsugaru no hana*" ("Flowers of Tsugaru"), Yamakawa Yutaka's "*Amerika-bashi*" ("America Bridge"), Nakamura Mitsuko's "*Kawachi-zake*" ("Kawachi sake") and Kawanaka Miyuki's "*Kimikagesō ~suzuran~*" ("Lily of the Valley").

³ The performers ranks are also highlighted through the additional segments in the program. During the Team talent finale, for example, established *Kōhaku* performers Itsuki Hiroshi and Toba Ichirō, guide less experienced performers, members of the bands Something ELse and 19, in enacting sections of the lion dance 'Renjishi' from the *nō* play '*Shakkyō*' ('Stone Bridge').

(TOKIO). There are also established *Kōbaku* stars onstage during this time, including one who has performed in 12 previous *Kōbaku* (Tanimura Shinji), another who has performed in 19 *Kōbaku* prior to this (Gō Hiromi) and a veteran who had performed in 31 editions previously (Mori Shin'ichi). These Community members bring additional instruments such as tambourines or acoustic guitars with them and proceed to play, sing and/or clap their hands to the beat of the song while standing directly behind or alongside Something ELse. At one point Itō Daisuke (a guitarist from Something ELse) places his arms across the shoulders of Takekawa Yukihide (from Godaigo) and Minami Kōsetsu (from Kaguya hime), demonstrating a sense of closeness through touch. The three men also joyously sing together. This collaboration is not for musical purposes; the guitars, tambourines and voices are almost inaudible and do not contribute to the 'fullness' of the song. Instead, the Community members are included in the song performance to reiterate an image of fellowship within the collective. This performance indicates that singers of all ages, genres and *Kōbaku* experience can come together and collaborate through song. Moreover, by playing and singing along, the men demonstrate their knowledge of the music and lyrics, suggesting that the members of Something ELse are not merely acquaintances or *Kōbaku* newcomers but are close and intimate friends, reinforcing the sense of community.

The second performance by a newcomer which features Community members onstage is *enka* singer Harada Yuri's "*Tsugaru no hana*" ("Flowers of Tsugaru"). In a similar manner to that displayed during Something ELse's performance, Harada is joined onstage by 10 Community members who are all *senpai* (senior) to her (see Plate 23) and are among the most prestigious stars of the *enka* world.⁴ They have vast *Kōbaku* experience ranging from performances in 20 or more editions of the contest (Yashiro Aki, Kobayashi Sachiko and Ishikawa Sayuri) to less than 10 previous performances (Tendō Yoshimi, Nagayama Yōko, Fuji Ayako, Yuki Saori and Yasuda Sachiko, Kōzai Kaori and Godai Natsuko). During this performance, these Community members encircle Harada onstage and, in an act of inclusiveness, they copy Harada's simple hand motions while occasionally singing along. Although their vocal contribution is

⁴ Prior to Harada's song performance, moreover, these women gather around her and chant an encouraging message of goodwill and wish her luck.

inaudible, the fact that the women are seen to be participating vocally demonstrates familiarity with Harada's song and lyrics. Moreover, the imitative choreography, staging and vocal contributions function as welcoming and supportive gestures for the newcomer and a sense of horizontal comradeship between members is presented in spite of the vertical ranking.

Other song performances in the 50th *Kōhaku* include Community members who are *kōhai* (junior) to the singer. Yamakawa Yutaka's performance of "*Amerika-bashi*" ("America Bridge"), for example, involves selected members of J-pop bands who are new to *Kōhaku*, including 'Monsieur' Kamayatsu from Sans Filtre, and Kenji and Keigo from 19 (see Plate 24).⁵ Even though each performer's name is announced, the men are not the focus of the performance. Indeed, the newcomers play electric and acoustic guitars but the sound is inaudible and, furthermore, they are often out of camera shot, seated on stools behind Yamakawa. Their inclusion in the performance is intended to demonstrate the mutual support and sense of collaboration with Yamakawa, an established *senpai* (senior) performer. In a similar manner, the *senpai* J-pop vocal group Mōningu Musume_o participates in *senpai* singer Nakamura Mitsuko's performance of "*Kawachi-zake*" ("Kawachi sake"). The eight girls from Mōningu Musume_o are acknowledged in a voice-over and, unlike the newcomers in Yamakawa's performance, the girls take a prominent role in the performance. They wear striking *furisode kimono* with floral patterns, perform elaborate *ōgi* fan dances and are featured alongside Nakamura at the front of the stage. Their prominence is perhaps due to their slightly higher standing in the *Kōhaku* hierarchy when compared with their male counterparts in Yamakawa Yutaka's song performance—this is the second *Kōhaku* Mōningu Musume_o has performed in. In any case, the inclusion of *kōhai* song performers in performances by more established *Kōhaku* acts continues to reinforce the principle of participation and the sense of community.

The final example of Community participation relevant to this discussion is seen in Toba Ichirō's song performance of "*Ashizuri-misaki*" ("Cape Ashizuri"), a long standing *Kōhaku* member who has performed in eleven previous editions of *Kōhaku*.

⁵ Hirao Masa'aki, an additional singer who performs the duet with Yamakawa Yutaka also appears onstage for this song performance. Hirao composed the music for "*Amerika-bashi*" ("America Bridge").

The Community members participating in this performance include the four-member J-pop vocal group DA PUMP and the *enka* singer Yamakawa Yutaka. These men are *kōhai* (junior) to Toba: DA PUMP has performed in one edition of *Kōbaku* while Yamakawa, as previously stated, has performed in six. Toba's song performance is staged as an energetic sea-themed *matsuri* and appropriately, the additional Team members take part in the revelry. Hentona Issa from DA PUMP, for example, is perched on the side of the spiny lobster *bikiyama* and the other three members carry the float and garner support for other bearers. Many different levels of relationship are highlighted in this performance. DA PUMP brings a youthful exuberance to the overall staging and demonstrates that traditional cultural events are not only relevant to mature *enka* singers, but also younger Community members. Yamakawa Yutaka's involvement in this song performance, however, is in recognition of deeper links that extend beyond the *Kōbaku* Community. Yamakawa is Toba Ichirō's younger brother and, as such, his participation in this song performance acknowledges this relationship. Moreover, Yamakawa rides atop a whale *bikiyama* which is from a festival in Mie prefecture—both his and Toba's birthplace—illustrating that, despite their fame, the siblings are still proud of their roots. In this way, and through the other examples discussed above, we can see relationships that extend beyond the 50th *Kōbaku* Community, reaching out to blood relatives, the *geinōkai* (entertainment world), the historical *Kōbaku* Community and the Japanese nation-as-*uchi*.

The above discussion has highlighted how selected Community members of various ranking participate in fellow members' song performances. It is now appropriate to examine examples where the majority of Community members participate in song performance, contributing to the image of a united, harmonious collective which suggests horizontal—instead of vertical—relationships. This is seen in each team's inaugural song performances: “LOVE *mashīn*” (“Love Machine”) by Mōningu Musume, and “We can't stop the music” by DA PUMP.

“LOVE *mashīn*” (“Love Machine”) begins with the entire 50th *Kōbaku* Community onstage, and as the song performers slowly move to their team's respective areas, they reveal the J-pop group positioned in the centre of the stage (see again DVD example 1). From this opening scene, it is clear that the Community will

take a prominent role in the performance. Although the camera is focused on the key song performers, Mōningu Musume, it frequently pans across both sides of the stage, showing the Community members standing haphazardly across the sides, from the rear to the front, and also in the team corners. In this way, the Community members stay within the frame of the performance and the diversity of the group is highlighted; viewers can see veterans positioned side by side with newcomers, the elderly next to the young, performers wearing *wafuku* (traditional Japanese costumes) standing beside those wearing *yōfuku* (Western costumes). Nevertheless, their strong level of involvement in the performance shows that this is an allied collective; they join Mōningu Musume in simultaneously performing the signature hand gestures associated with the song, they also clap their hands in time with the music, and sing and dance.⁶ Overall, the image is one of *simpatico* through collaboration. This is carried over to the second song performance, by the J-pop group DA PUMP. Here, the camera also sweeps over the Community members, who remain on the sidelines of the stage, showing them clapping and enjoying themselves (see again DVD example 2). What is most interesting, however, is the activity unfolding at the rear of the stage where younger members of the collective guide an older member in performing the hand gestures associated with this song. Here, Kimura Takuya and Katori Shingo from the J-pop group SMAP assist the *enka* star Minami Haruo by showing him how to rhythmically thrust his fist into the air so to copy DA PUMP. In doing so, the men laugh together and at one point, Katori affectionately places his hand on Minami's back. In this way, we can see a different kind of relationship on display whereby less experienced *Kōbaku* performers—SMAP has performed in eight previous editions of *Kōbaku*—assist a veteran *Kōbaku* singer who has appeared in 30 editions of the programme.

Viewers are also reminded that just as newcomers enter the Community or veterans keep returning, some song performers leave. The J-pop group SPEED, for example, used their 50th *Kōbaku* performance as their final public appearance before disbanding (see Plate 25). The song “my graduation ‘99”, moreover, was a timely

⁶ The distinctive hand gestures involve forming the letter ‘L’ with the thumb and forefinger to represent the words ‘Love Machine’, and thrusting the arm in the air.

choice in that it captured and reflected this sense of moving on and forward. SPEED had limited experience in the *Kōbaku* historical Community, having only performed in two previous *Kōbaku*, yet at the end of the performance the four girls are surrounded by members of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community who applaud the group as they wave goodbye to the audience. In this way, we can see the Community rallying around its members, showing them support and regardless of their rank.

One of the most prominent song performances with the Community together occurs at the end of the first half. As previously discussed, it is customary for song performers to sing one special song together each year in *Kōbaku*. The song for this edition of *Kōbaku* is “*Nijūisseiki no kimitachi e~A Song for Children~*” (“For the People of the 21st Century ~A Song for Children~”) and it features solo lines, duets and various combinations of group singing, with waves of singers coming forward to take their turn at the microphone and then retreating to the rear of the stage to allow others to take their place. It is important to note that the performers approach the microphones in pairs or larger groups—they never stand alone—thus promoting the image of the Community as a collective. The pairing of the singers, reveals how horizontal relationships are expressed, as well as how they cut across all points of difference, such as team affiliation, *Kōbaku* experience, music genres, and internal rivalries. Red performers are, for example, paired with white performers, showing the convergence of the two teams. Newcomers, such as Mochida Kaori from Every Little Thing, are also paired with experienced performers, such as Saijō Hideki. There are J-pop stars, such as Mōningu Musume., paired with kayōkyoku singers, such as Kayama Yūzo. Furthermore, we see rivals Kobayashi Sachiko and Mikawa Ken’ichi singing alongside each other, their ‘stage design and costume battle’ set aside for this performance. In all, this performance shows the combined efforts of the Community at a time when the programme pauses for the ‘half-time’ news break, and leaves viewers with a sense of the unity of the collective.

Performing *Kōbaku*’s Past, Japan’s Past

The resonance of the historical *Kōbaku* Community lies in the ways it is imagined. This section looks at three ways the 50th *Kōbaku* Community members evoke the past,

acknowledge their heritage and imagine the historical Community through performance. This is done through the re-presentation of songs which have been previously performed in *Kōbaku*, through references to time-honoured relationships and rivalries within the historical Community, and by paying homage to the most important and representative *Kōbaku* performer, namely Misora Hibari.

Many songs and performers from *Kōbaku*'s rich history of songs and performers are found in the 50th *Kōbaku*, as a reflection on the contest's past and the nation's musical past. Table 6.2 (overleaf) outlines these songs and performers, as well as the editions of *Kōbaku* in which they were previously performed. At the outset, it is significant that 14 of the 50th *Kōbaku*'s 56 songs were performed in previous editions of *Kōbaku*. The sheer number indicates the importance placed on reflecting on the past for the occasion of *Kōbaku*'s milestone edition as these songs hold temporal and cultural significance as remnants from Japan's recent musical past, performed at a critical juncture in time at the end of the century. Moreover, the placement of the songs within the programme order establishes a sense of 'going back in time' as the evening progresses. The majority of these 'past songs' appear at the end of the first half of the programme and throughout the second half. Several, however, appear consecutively in the second half thereby reiterating a sense of nostalgia for the past, song after song, as the evening nears midnight and concludes. Most of these 'past songs' represent particular decades of the programme—a cursory glance shows most were performed in *Kōbaku* during the 1990s, while an equal number of songs were from the *Kōbaku* of the 1980s and 1970s. Only one song comes from the 1960s. Finally, the 50th programme concludes with the traditional *Kōbaku* send off for the New Year, namely the song "*Hotaru no hikari*" ("The Light of Fireflies"), which, as noted earlier, has been performed each year since the 9th *Kōbaku* (1958).

Table 6.2 Songs from the 50th *Kōhaku* Performed in Past *Kōhaku*

<i>The 50th Kōhaku</i>			<i>Past Kōhaku</i>	
<i>Programme Order</i>	<i>Song Title</i>	<i>SP^a</i>	<i>Kōhaku edition</i>	<i>SP^a</i>
FIRST HALF				
22	“ <i>Byūtifuru nēmu</i> ” (“Beautiful Name”)	Godaigo	30 th <i>Kōhaku</i> (1979)	Godaigo
24	“ <i>Kimi to itsumademo</i> ” (“You and Forever”)	Kayama Yūzō	17 th <i>Kōhaku</i> (1966) 32 nd <i>Kōhaku</i> (1981) ^b 33 rd <i>Kōhaku</i> (1982)	Kayama Yūzō Kayama Yūzō Kayama Yūzō
26	“ <i>Tōkyō sabaku</i> ” (“Tokyo Desert”)	Maekawa Kiyoshi ^c	27 th <i>Kōhaku</i> (1976)	Uchiyamada Hiroshi to kūru faibu (Uchiyamada Hiroshi and the Cool Five)
SECOND HALF				
35	“ <i>Funa uta</i> ” (“Sailor’s Song”)	Yashiro Aki	30 th <i>Kōhaku</i> (1979) 42 nd <i>Kōhaku</i> (1991)	Yashiro Aki Yashiro Aki
36	“ <i>Kanda-gawa</i> ” (“Kanda River”)	Kaguya hime ^d	43 rd <i>Kōhaku</i> (1992)	Minami Kōsetsu
46	“ <i>Ki seki ~ōkina ainoyōni~</i> ” (“Miracle ~Like an Overwhelming Love~”)	Sada Masashi	42 nd <i>Kōhaku</i> (1991)	Sada Masashi
47	“ <i>Furusato</i> ” (“Hometown”)	Yuki Saori and Yasuda Sachiko	23 rd <i>Kōhaku</i> (1972)	Yuki Saori
48	“ <i>Ofukuro-san</i> ” (“Mother Dear”)	Mori Shin’ichi	22 nd <i>Kōhaku</i> (1971) 41 st <i>Kōhaku</i> (1990) 45 th <i>Kōhaku</i> (1994)	Mori Shin’ichi Mori Shin’ichi Mori Shin’ichi
49	“ <i>Amagi-goe</i> ” (“Amagi Pass”)	Ishikawa Sayuri	37 th <i>Kōhaku</i> (1986) 48 th <i>Kōhaku</i> (1997)	Ishikawa Sayuri Ishikawa Sayuri
50	“ <i>Subaru</i> ” (“The Pleiades”)	Tanimura Shinji	38 th <i>Kōhaku</i> (1987) 42 nd <i>Kōhaku</i> (1991) 45 th <i>Kōhaku</i> (1994)	Tanimura Shinji Tanimura Shinji Tanimura Shinji
51	“ <i>Kawa no nagare no yō ni</i> ” (“Like the River’s Flow”)	Tendō Yoshimi	45 th <i>Kōhaku</i> (1994)	Kim Yonja
53	“ <i>Ano kane o narasu no wa anata</i> ” (“You Are the One Ringing that Bell”)	Wada Akiko	42 nd <i>Kōhaku</i> (1991) 45 th <i>Kōhaku</i> (1994)	Wada Akiko
54	“ <i>Matsuri</i> ” (“Festival”)	Kitajima Saburō	35 th <i>Kōhaku</i> (1984) 44 th <i>Kōhaku</i> (1993)	Kitajima Saburō Kitajima Saburō
	“ <i>Hotaru no hikari</i> ” (“The Light of Fireflies”)	The 50 th <i>Kōhaku</i> Community and others	From the 9 th <i>Kōhaku</i> (1958) ^e onward	Each year’s new <i>Kōhaku</i> Community

Source: compiled from Takahashi 2000:1–23.

^a Song performer.

^b Performed in a medley of songs.

^c Maekawa Kiyoshi was a member of the band Uchiyamada Hiroshi to kūru faibu (Uchiyamada Hiroshi and the Cool Five) which originally performed this song in *Kōhaku*.

^d Kaguya hime’s lead singer is Minami Kōsetsu who originally performed this song as a soloist in *Kōhaku*.

^e This is thought to be the first time the song was performed in *Kōhaku* (see Chapter One).

It is clear that songs from all decades of *Kōhaku* since the 1950s are represented in the 50th *Kōhaku* in order to capture the 50 years of the contest. It is most interesting to

note that these songs are consistently performed by the original performer who first presented in *Kōhaku* so many years earlier.⁷ This not only reinforces the intrinsic link between performer and song, but also shows the ongoing dedication performers have to *Kōhaku* as they re-present their songs years after the original performance. In this way, these ‘past songs’ of the 50th *Kōhaku* span decades of the programme, as well as crossing ‘eras and generations’ of the historical Community of song performers and Japan’s musical past, in line with the programme’s major theme ‘*Utao mirai e~jidai to sedai o koete~*’ (‘Looking to the Future Through Song: Spanning Eras and Generations’).

Another important aspect to consider is the interpersonal relationships within the 50th *Kōhaku* Community. Although the song performers only come together as a collective on the night of the concert, they are not strangers. Throughout the year, and in the years prior to 1999, they have had opportunities to regularly interact in a variety of other contexts—from collaborating on each other’s recordings to appearing as guests on a talk show panel—and have consequently forged relationships and rivalries as members of Japan’s *geinōkai* (entertainment world).⁸ As such, it is interesting to note that these relationships are often played out on the *Kōhaku* stage. When looking back on *Kōhaku* history, one relationship that captured the attention of the nation was the highly publicised romance between prominent J-pop stars Matsuda Seiko and Gō Hiromi. At the 35th *Kōhaku* (1984), this relationship was brought to the fore when the two singers appeared together onstage, arm in arm. In a novel twist, moreover, they were also placed side by side in the programme running order, in effect competing against each other to the delight of fans. In 1999, many years after their romance ended, Matsuda and Gō are once again positioned against each other in the running order for the 50th *Kōhaku*. This is perhaps indicative of NHK’s acute knowledge of the intricacies of the Japanese popular music world, but it also demonstrates the broader connections between the members of the 50th *Kōhaku* Community. Both Matsuda and Gō share a past which is displayed, 15 years later, through *Kōhaku* and by reflecting upon this, a

⁷ This is occasionally acknowledged by the MCs and guests in the preceding song performance preludes, such as when the White Team MC introduces Kaguya hime as being “Minami Kōsetsu’s band”. An exception, however, is “*Kawa no nagare no yō ni*” (“Like the River’s Flow”) which is performed by two unrelated singers, Tendō Yoshimi and Kim Yonja (see again Table 6.1), and is discussed later in this chapter.

⁸ Some of these relationships are highlighted in Appendix B. For example, MAX and Amuro Namie used to be in the same vocal group, Horiuchi Takao and Tanimura Shinji also used to be in a band together and many 50th *Kōhaku* performers are members of the pop idol talent agency Johnny’s (*Janīzu jimusho*).

sense of history, closeness and kinship between the members of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community is effected.

It is not only romantic relationships which are recalled in the 50th *Kōbaku*; attention is also drawn to platonic relationships and business partnerships. This is chiefly seen in the extensive network of ‘Komuro Family’ performers, that is, singers and musicians who have worked with the dance-style J-pop talent scout, producer, songwriter and performer Komuro Tetsuya. The most prominent and long-standing of such relationships in the 50th *Kōbaku* is between Komuro and J-pop star Amuro Namie. Their relationship stems from the wider sphere of the *geinōkai* and has moved into the *Kōbaku* historical Community, demonstrating its collaborative nature and interconnectedness. Indeed, Komuro has composed songs for Amuro’s previous three *Kōbaku* performances.⁹ In the 50th *Kōbaku*, this relationship is brought to the fore when Komuro, provides a lengthy and detailed introduction to Amuro’s “RESPECT the POWER OF LOVE”, a song he wrote for her.

Although some relationships may have formed outside of the *Kōbaku* context, there are significant relationships which have arisen because of performers’ continued involvement in *Kōbaku*. The most well-known relationship is the ‘stage design and costume’ rivalry between Kobayashi Sachiko and Mikawa Ken’ichi. Their battle began at the 45th *Kōbaku* (1994) and the size and complexity of their stage designs and costumes has escalated each year such that their performances are arguably the most anticipated in the contest.¹⁰ As the grand finale *Kōbaku* for the end of the millennium, it was publicly expected that an especially breathtaking battle was to take place at the 50th *Kōbaku*. While viewers may have tuned in to witness the grand spectacle of the rivalry, it is the ongoing tradition of the battle and its link with the *Kōbaku* institution that is most appealing. This was heightened by pronounced media coverage of the historical battle during the lead up to the contest, with many magazines printing photographs

⁹ Amuro performed Komuro’s “Don’t wanna cry” at the 47th *Kōbaku* (1996), and “CAN YOU CELEBRATE?” at the 48th *Kōbaku* (1997) and again at the 49th *Kōbaku* (1998).

¹⁰ Behind the scenes, Kobayashi was reputedly tiring of the demands of creating a unique design each year (Wilson 2003:Internet). Nevertheless, she and Mikawa both presented exceptionally elaborate staging for the 50th *Kōbaku* (see Chapter Five) and according to Kanto audience ratings, which cited more viewers for Mikawa (53.1 percent) than Kobayashi (52.6 percent), the male star won the battle (see Appendix F). In response, and perhaps to ease the pressure or creating a new design each year, Kobayashi announced that the 51st *Kōbaku* (2000) would be the last time she would create an extravagant costume and stage design (Wilson 2003:Internet).

and *Kōbaku*-related television programmes replaying excerpts of past performances. The continuation of this relationship demonstrates the enduring connections between the current Community and the *Kōbaku* historical Community.

Other performers imagine *Kōbaku*'s historical Community in more obvious ways. At the end of the performance of “Be Cool!”, for example, the comedic group Yaen enact a variation of a memorable moment from an earlier edition of *Kōbaku*. The members of Yaen remove their wigs to reveal a red and white painted message on their heads which reads “*Arigatō shiro 1999*” (lit “Thank you White Team 1999”). This message immediately demonstrates the group’s affiliation with that year’s incarnation of the White Team, showing they are proud members. In the group’s next surprising gesture, the members of Yaen move together in group formation and reveal a single *kanji* painted on their backs which symbolises the year of the dragon on the Chinese calendar (see Plate 26), recalling the 42nd *Kōbaku* (1991) when the duo Tonneruzu (Tunnels)—members of which are also in Yaen—also displayed a painted message on their backs. In this sense, this gesture is a new twist on a favourite stunt from that decade but it also looks to 2000, the year of the Dragon. Overall, this performance recalls the contest’s past and alludes to its future, while also demonstrating the programme’s durability.

One of the most important ways the members of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community recall the historical *Kōbaku* Community is through an homage to the late Misora Hibari (1937–1989), regarded here as the queen of *Kōbaku*. In order to appreciate Misora’s deep association with *Kōbaku* and to understand why she was, and still is, greatly revered, it is necessary to briefly look at her musical career. As Japan’s first post-war celebrity, Misora’s charisma, sincerity and ability to embody the “Japanese spirit of perseverance through adversity” made her a singer for the people and “reminded them of what was ‘authentically’ Japanese” in a time of Occupation (1945–1952) and defeat (Tansman 1996:108).¹¹ She was also one of Japan’s first television stars and greatly

¹¹ In his brief profile of Misora Hibari, Anderson notes that “it is deeply ironic that the most representative vocalist of the ‘most Japanese’ musical genre” was not ‘purely Japanese’ (2002b:323). Indeed, Misora was Korean-Japanese and she held a Korean passport—a fact that has always been overlooked or downplayed by the Japanese media, perhaps to perpetuate the myth of the great ‘Japanese’ singer which uplifted the nation through her performances.

contributed to *Kōbaku*'s success and development as a television programme during its first decade. Following her debut at the 5th *Kōbaku* (1954), Misora occupied many roles from recurring song performer and multiple *tori* singer to Red Team MC. While her relationship with NHK, as previously noted, was undoubtedly strained when she was excluded from the 24th *Kōbaku* (1973) and vowed never to return to *Kōbaku*, she did reappear for the 30th anniversary *Kōbaku* (1979) as a special guest, thus demonstrating her deep connection with the contest. Indeed, her death prompted a 'Misora retrospective' at the 40th *Kōbaku* (1989) which traced her contributions to *Kōbaku* and post-war Japanese music in general. That year also heralded the start of major transitions for the programme and, in a sense, her death signalled the end of a significant chapter in *Kōbaku* history with the knowledge that the star would never again appear on the programme. Years after her death, Misora is still considered the reigning queen of *enka* (Yano 2002:121). She may also be regarded as the queen of *Kōbaku* and, as one magazine noted in 1999, she is the "face of *Kōbaku*'s 50 year history" (Tokyo News Tsūshinsha 1999:16). The changing nature of both the programme and the Japanese popular music world since her death has meant that her *Kōbaku* 'reign' has not been succeeded—the programme relies on a large ensemble of performers rather than a small group or a sole individual, as was the case during *Kōbaku*'s formative years. Misora can, therefore, be regarded as *Kōbaku*'s only queen and she is representative of a golden era of *Kōbaku*; a time when the programme consistently achieved outstanding ratings and only featured local performers, before the programme's internationalisation during the 1980s and rebirth in the 1990s.

Misora produced countless hit songs during her four-decade career but "*Kawa no nagare no yō ni*" ("Like the River's Flow") is arguably her signature tune. It was also her final recording before her death and it was posthumously released during a tumultuous year for Japan when the emperor died and the nation shifted from the Showa era into the Heisei era. Misora's death was made even more meaningful because she "had come to symbolize postwar Japan" and when she died "she was transformed with Showa Japan into myth" (Tansman 1996:106). The song, nevertheless, is a living document of Japan's cultural and social transition and a metaphor for the closing of Misora's life, as described in the lyrics:

Slowly, many eras pass,
Ah, like the river's flow!

“*Kawa no nagare no yō ni*”
 (“Like the River’s Flow”) – Tendō Yoshimi

The song immediately found resonance with audiences and has remained a culturally significant song for Japan. In 1997, Misora Hibari’s “*Kawa no nagare no yō ni*” (“Like the River’s Flow”) was declared the best Japanese song of the 20th century in a NHK poll (‘50 Years of NHK Television’ Publishing Committee 2003b:Internet). The fact that she was named in conjunction with the song (and not just the song in isolation) demonstrates an indelible relationship—this song will always be connected with Misora.

Misora’s last public singing appearance was in late 1988 (Tansman 1996:103), before “*Kawa no nagare no yō ni*” (“Like the River’s Flow”) was released for sale and, as such, Misora never performed it in *Kōbaku*. In the years immediately following her death, this song and others were rarely performed, out of respect for Misora. After five years, it was performed for the first time at the 45th *Kōbaku* (1994) by the Korean *enka* star Kim Yonja who had developed a dedicated following in Japan. Misora’s iconic status and the song’s sacredness meant that Kim was under enormous pressure to ‘do it justice’. “*Kawa no nagare no yō ni*” become “a benchmark of singing accomplishment” and anyone covering it faced “tough scrutiny with inevitable comparison to the original” (Yano 2005:201).¹² Following Kim’s performance, the song remained absent from the *Kōbaku*’s repertoire until the 50th *Kōbaku* in 1999—the year marking the 10th anniversary of Misora’s death.

“*Kawa no nagare no yō ni*” is performed by *enka* singer Tendō Yoshimi (see again DVD example 5). During Tendō’s song performance prelude, Red Team MC Kubo Junko introduces the following song as “Misora Hibari’s song”. In addition, Kubo recognises its status as the best Japanese song of that century and comments on its timely performance for the last *Kōbaku* of the 20th century and its suitability for the

¹² Since Hibari’s death, “*Kawa no nagare no yō ni*” (“Like the River’s Flow”) has become “a benchmark of singing accomplishment” and anyone covering it faces “tough scrutiny with inevitable comparison to the original” (Yano 2005:201). Kim is, nevertheless, an accomplished and highly respected singer who is known as “Korea’s Misora Hibari” (Tajima 1997 in Yano 2004b:168). Even so, she is an outsider in Japan’s world of *enka*. Even during emotional performances in which Kim would shed tears, these would “fall inevitably as Korean tears, beyond *enka*’s bounds, out of kilter with Japanese” (Yano 2004b:168). Her rendition of “*Kawa no nagare no yō ni*” (“Like the River’s Flow”), even if it was a flawless imitation of Misora’s version, would have attached to it the stigma of being foreigner’s performance which could never live up to the ‘real thing’.

contest's minor theme '*Nijūisseiki ni tsutaetai uta*' ('Passing on Songs for the 21st Century'). In this way, we can see connections to the wider historical *Kōhaku* Community but it is a positive, if not idealised, view of Misora's relationship with the contest that is recounted, excluding any reference to her expulsion from the programme during the 1970s. It is a selective past that is recalled, intended to wipe the slate clean so the contest can begin afresh for the new millennium.

Returning now to Tendō Yoshimi's rendition of the song in the 50th *Kōhaku*, we can see that she consciously reproduces elements of Misora's original version and shows acute attention to detail. Tendō is 'covering', an art which "takes imitation short of mimicry and allows subtle variation to take place by virtue of different performing bodies, voices and personalities" (Yano 2005:199) and she "maintains ties of form to content, making [her] performance 'sincere'" (200). In an attempt to emulate Misora's trademark style, Tendō adopts a conversational, light and breathy vocal style for the opening of the song and proceeds to a full-bodied, powerful vocal timbre at the end of each stanza. Tendō similarly 'digs' the note before making a glissando octave leap and sustains the note using wide vibrato (*yuri*) that is characteristic of Misora's technique (see Appendix G Song 51A).¹³ While she does remain true to Hibari's original, subtle variations are also evident. Tendō, for example, sings in a key that is one semi-tone higher than Misora and she frequently connects phrases where Misora pauses for breath. This demonstrates Tendō's stamp of originality on a song which is so clearly connected with a venerated *Kōhaku* legend. She is simultaneously evoking nostalgia for *Kōhaku's* past through the song which is well-known and loved by many generations of Japanese, but by taking a fresh approach, she is also showing how it can be carried over to the 21st century.

Tendō also pays tribute to Misora through her costume which is similar to that worn by Misora during her final concert. In his account of that fateful evening in 1988, Tansman describes Misora's elaborate attire:

¹³ Anderson has noted that Misora's "throat and vibrato" was used in a unique way that differed from "the standard *enka* manner" (2002b:323), possibly making her singing style very difficult to imitate.

Bedecked in black and silver feathers swathing her body like a protective nest, a feathered glittering black headdress shooting four feet into the air, Hibari, her shoulders clad in armor, became a bird, a creature from another planet ready to take off, or be transformed, like Yamato Takeru, the mythological Japanese hero, into a white bird-god. (1996:103)

Over a decade later, in the 50th *Kōbaku*, Tendō is also enveloped by an ornate, multi-layered feathered dress and she wears a sparkling silver ornamental headdress adorned with long, protruding white feathers. In addition, Tendō has ‘wings’ of white feathers attached to the underside of each sleeve, making her also seem like a bird.¹⁴ Unlike Misora, however, Tendō’s costume is white. At first glance, this may simply be in keeping with *Kōbaku* colours but white is also associated with death in Japan and it is likely that this colour was selected to draw attention to the anniversary of Misora’s passing. Another layer of meaning can be inferred from Tendō’s costume in that it is evocative of the mythological white bird-god, Yamato Takeru. In this legend, outlined in the *Kojiki* (Records of Ancient Matters) from the Nara period, Yamato avoids death by turning into a great white bird that flies to the heavens. Correspondingly, Misora is “an ‘immortal bird’”; her name can be literally translated to “beautiful skies” (Misora) and “skylark” (Hibari) (Tansman 1996:106). In spite of her physical death, she remains ‘immortal’—her spirit lives on through her memorial song, “*Kawa no nagare no yō ni*” (“Like the River’s Flow”).¹⁵

Tendō stands in place of Misora in what Yano calls an act of “*migawari* (lit., ‘body exchange’; the person, act or state of substitution; self-other exchange; surrogacy)” whereby a “*dainin* (surrogate)” stands in place of the “*honnin* (lit., ‘real person’)” (2005:196). Although this is a common practice in *enka*, Tendō’s performance of this song in *Kōbaku* at this time and place in the contest’s history, Japan’s history, is an important statement. It is a public acknowledgement of Misora’s contribution to *Kōbaku* and, by surrogacy, demonstrates the connection between the historical *Kōbaku* Community and the 50th *Kōbaku* Community.

¹⁴ It should be noted that Tendō Yoshimi frequently wears elaborate costumes that incorporate feathers. For her performance at the 48th *Kōbaku* (1997), for example, she wore a black and white ball gown with feather trim along the cuffs and neckline and a feathered headdress (48th *Kōbaku utagassen* 1997:Television Program). Nevertheless, her 50th *Kōbaku* costume can be considered special because of its association with Misora Hibari.

¹⁵ Indeed, at the purpose-built museum-like Misora Hibari Memorial Hall in Kyoto, there is a theatre dedicated to “*Kawa no nagare no yō ni*” (“Like the River’s Flow”), which is described as her *memoriaru songu* (memorial song). Inside the theatre, continuous footage of flowing rivers and images of Misora performing this song are displayed across multiple screens. See <http://www.misora-hibari.com/jousetsu/index13.html>.

Performing for the Audience

Song performances allow the singer to communicate with his/her audience through music, lyrics, gesture and staging. Although this study does not intend to provide a specific survey of audiences' responses to the 50th *Kōbaku*, it is useful to look more broadly how performers work to cultivate relationships with their audiences. As previously noted, the 50th *Kōbaku* has two kinds of audiences: the NHK Hall audience who witness the live event from inside NHK Hall and the television broadcast audience which experiences the mass-mediated version that is shaped and framed by the camera. Of primary importance is the broadcast but here we can take a more inclusive approach because the televised programme regularly includes footage of the in-house audience and thus we can make general observations about their responses.

Performer/audience relationships are most easily defined by performance setting. NHK Hall is a medium-sized, auditorium which consists of an elevated central stage area and team corners extending either side of the stage, and three designated seating areas for audience members: the ground floor, first balcony and second balcony. In principle, the formal, Western concert hall layout of NHK Hall means that performer and audience are always spatially separated but this is not an uncommon performance setting for many Japanese performing arts, such as *kabuki*. Within the context of *Kōbaku*, however, the division between performer and audience can be viewed as a physical manifestation of the symbolic relationship between *uchi* and *soto* because, as Kondo notes, “*uchi* defines who you are through...the use of space” (1990:141). In this way, we can broadly view the stage area as the space occupied by the 50th *Kōbaku* Community as *uchi* and the audience seating area as the space for those outside of the *uchi*. As this study has argued, however, the Community's performances are designed to draw in audiences, inviting them experience in the close and informal relationships shared between Community members and, in a way, to be a part of the *uchi*. One way to do this would be to diminish the spatial divide between performer and audience—perhaps audience members could come onstage or song performers could the audience area. Indeed, in past *Kōbaku*, song performers would occasionally move between the audience seating area and the stage, especially during the opening ceremony (see Chapter One). Despite the presence of stairs in NHK Hall, connecting

the stage to the audience area and implying a welcoming flow-on between the spaces, this does not take place in the 50th *Kōbaku*, most likely to protect the physical safety of the celebrity singers.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the song performers use gestures and words to traverse this spatial divide and also employ various other mechanisms to reach the television audience beyond the venue.

Members of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community recognise the difference between the in-house audience and the broadcast audience. Whereas the in-house audience provides immediate feedback for the song performers and contributes to the atmosphere of the live event, the broadcast audience, does not respond in real time although many viewers provide feedback by way of the ratings outcomes that influences NHK in subsequent *Kōbaku* programmes. *Kōbaku* performances are structured so that singers can engage with both the in-house audience and the broadcast audience. Some performers pay more attention to one kind of audience, depending on their techniques of audience engagement. Performers particularly value the broadcast audience, perhaps because it is the larger of the two and it collectively symbolises the nation of viewers. Indeed, at the press conference held before the 50th *Kōbaku*, several performers expressed their desire to engage with television viewers. The J-pop soloist Suzuki Ami, for example, proclaimed “I would like to charm viewers by creating my own onstage presence”. Meanwhile, the members of the J-pop group Yaen hoped a large number of television audience members would tune in and provide feedback about their performance, stating “after we come out [on stage], we will make a firm effort to instantly rank number one with the television audience. Because it is the last year of the 1990s, we are expecting to receive viewers’ comments and criticisms. We’re looking forward to it!”. These statements demonstrate the performers’ awareness of a relationship between themselves and their audience, even before the *Kōbaku* concert has commenced.

¹⁶ Other participants in the program do, however, move between the spaces. The General Chairman Miyamoto Ryūji, for example, comes during the opening ceremony and later moves to the audience area when he introduces the panel of judges. Additional performers also move between these spaces. During Nakamura Mitsuko’s song performance of “*Kawachi-zake*” (“Kawachi sake”), for example, several *ogi* fan dancers perform in the NHK Hall audience aisles while others appear onstage.

The technical staff also consider the broadcast audience when setting up each song performance's staging, the aim being to "draw the audience into a story" using camera work and editing to "deliver fluidity and presence of the stage to the television audience" (Nihon Hōsō Gijutsu Kyoku Seisaku Gijutsu Centā 2000:467). In this sense, the theatrical elements of the stage are brought into the homes of the viewers, so that they can share in the live Hall experience, even if it is via mediated means. The camera is the most effective way to establish the setting and to symbolically draw the broadcast audience into the Hall. In *Kōbaku*, the camera generally focuses on the performers but it also shifts to wide shots which include both the stage and the Hall audience area, in addition to reverse shots, whereby the camera looks from the stage back to the Hall audience, making the audience the subject of the shot. Performers also use the camera to communicate—in what seems like a direct method—to the broadcast audience. This is most evident in the song performance by *enka* singer Yashiro Aki. Despite standing alone on the large stage which is unembellished by props, Yashiro cultivates a sense of intimacy through by singing and gesturing toward the camera (see Plate 27). At one point, for example, the camera begins with a wide shot of Yashiro and slowly zooms in to a very close shot of her face which fills the television screen as she gazes into the camera lens, suggesting she is establishing direct eye contact. Overall, her performance is personal and private, creating a close relationship between performer and broadcast audience.

Other acts pay considerably less attention to the cameras, instead directing their performance toward the Hall audience. The members of DA PUMP, for example, stand across the front of the stage, waving their arms and encouraging the audience to participate in the cheering. At one point, one of the band members even walks to the bottom of the stairs (which leading from the stage into the audience area) so as to move closer to the audience and to elicit a greater response.¹⁷ Other performers, however, remain on the main stage area but similarly use gesture to engage the Hall audience; during Sans Filtre's performance, the singer Sakai Masa'aki moves to the front of the stage and also gestures to the audience to join in the spirit of the performance by clapping his hands high in the air. By moving closer to the boundary

¹⁷ They do not, however, move into the audience area, as noted previously.

between Hall audience and performance stage, and physically gesturing toward them, the song performers not only acknowledge the audience's presence, they also invite participation, encouraging a sense of involvement in the song performances of the Community.

One of the most prominent ways song performers engage with the *Kōbaku* audience, whether in-house or broadcast, is by bowing at the start, middle and end of song performances and by thanking the audience for their attention. Harada Yuri, Horiuchi Takao and SPEED, for example, all conclude their songs with the formal acknowledgement “*arigatō gozaimashita!*” (“Thank you very much!”). Another means include spontaneous lyrics. Indeed, it is through spontaneity that the most fleeting expressions of the Community are verbally articulated. While the live-to-air format of the *Kōbaku* programme invites spontaneity of all kinds, it chiefly occurs within the flexible boundaries of the between-song segments rather than the strictly timed song performances. For this reason it is surprising when a *Kōbaku* singer is (seemingly) spontaneous during a song performance. A significant number of song performers use impromptu lyrics as a means to engage with the audience. The first of such occurrences takes place early in the contest when the DA PUMP encourages audience contribution several times through a call and response rap:

C'mon everybody, c'mon, c'mon!
 “We can't stop the music” – DA PUMP

As the concert progresses, Shigemori Ayumi and Hayami Kentarō directly invite participation and for audiences to unite in song:

Come now, everybody [sing] together!
 Shigemori Ayumi and Hayami Kentarō—“*Dango 3 kyōdai*”
 (“The Three *dango* Brothers”)
 Song Performance 5

As does the band Godaigo, calling out in a similar fashion:

So everybody, please sing together!
 Godaigo—“*Byūitifuru nēmu*” (“Beautiful Name”)
 Song Performance 22

This trend is most prevalent in the first half of *Kōbaku*, rather than the second, thus creating an atmosphere that welcomes participation and sets the scene for the evening.

At home, audiences have the additional benefit of being guided by on-screen lyrics, so that they can participate vocally. Singing along to *Kōbaku* in a home environment is not unlike performing *karaoke* at home, a popular pastime in Japan. *Karaoke* serves to satisfy the “widespread love of singing” experienced by most Japanese and it also satisfies “a desire to emulate favourite singing stars and...thus a means of fantasy fulfilment” (Kelly 1998:77). In the context of *Kōbaku*, however, the experience of simultaneity found through communal singing helps to articulate the sense that Japan is a united nation. These song performances are, as such, “occasions for unisonality, for the echoed physical realization of the imagined community” (Anderson 1991 [1983]:145).

Members of the NHK Hall audience respond to the performers’ encouragement to participate in various ways, ranging from spontaneous cheering, clapping and calling out, to pre-planned activities orchestrated by *Kōbaku* staff. At the start of the song performance by the J-pop band 19, for example, a few audience members call out the names of the performers on the spur-of-the-moment. During another song performance, this time by J-pop singer Matsu Takako, the members of the audience wave their penlights in time to the beat of the song, creating a striking display of fairy lights clearly coordinated by *Kōbaku* staff. All of these responses, regardless of how they are initiated, are intended to show appreciation for the performers and for audience members to engage at a personal level, drawing them into the performance through participation. After all, audiences come to see the staging, to hear the songs and to be in the presence of the stars. Viewers of the televised *Kōbaku* tune in for the same reason. Moreover, by seeing and hearing the in-house audience participate (at many levels) in these performances, the broadcast audience is encouraged to share in the immediacy of the live experience.

After examining several types of relationships which are performed, it is appropriate to consider the final song performance of the evening, “*Hotaru no hikari*” (“The Light of Fireflies”), which crystallises all of the relationships explored in this chapter (see again DVD example 7). Here we can see evidence of relationships between individuals within the Community. The image projected is one of friendship and alliance at the conclusion of the contest, when the winning team has already been

decided and all rivalry ceases. At the rear of the stage, we can see the members of the Red Team mingling with White Team members, interacting on a familiar level and suggesting they are all on the best of terms. Meanwhile, at the front of the stage, the two *Kōbaku* veterans and 50th *Kōbaku tori* singers Wada Akiko and Kitajima Saburō are singing side-by-side with less experienced *Kōbaku* performers DA PUMP. The *Kōbaku* vertical hierarchy is momentarily ‘flattened’ as the performers display comradeship and equality, singing in unison. At one point, the camera focuses on the J-pop singer Amuro Namie who laughs with the girls from MAX and playfully holds hands with her former band-members (see Appendix B), demonstrating a relationship that extends beyond the *Kōbaku* context and into the broader *geinōkai* (entertainment world).

This song performance differs from others presented in *Kōbaku* in that it is shorter in duration, is less structured and has an informal atmosphere, perhaps suggesting the song performers are spontaneously bursting into song. Audiences know, however, that singing “*Hotaru no hikari*” is a tradition which has continued for decades. At the end of *Kōbaku*’s landmark 50th edition, we are reminded that this custom is still upheld and, as such, “*Hotaru no hikari*” can be seen as the programme’s theme song, or anthem because it is “used to generate a collective sentiment among the members of the groups who sing” (Daughtry 2003:45). The sentiment expressed here is of wistful reflection as one era for *Kōbaku* ends and a new one begins. The 50th *Kōbaku* Community is dispersing, and the members are going their separate ways, perhaps to meet up again as Community members for the 51st *Kōbaku* the following year.

Open the next door in life and move forward,
On this morning, we must go our separate ways

The 50th *Kōbaku* Community and others
(The *Kōbaku* Finale Song)
—“*Hotaru no hikari*” (“The Light of Fireflies”)

At the same time, through this performance, the 50th *Kōbaku*’s time capsule of songs are symbolically passed over to the people of the 21st century, as indicated by the contest’s minor theme.

“*Hotaru no hikari*” may be an important part of *Kōbaku*’s musical history, but it is also meaningful in the greater context of the nation. This is a song for Japan. It spans eras and generations and, as previously noted, is well-known by the majority of

Japanese people, as it has been taught in schools since 1881 (Nakano 1983:246). The melody of this song is the Scottish folk ballad “Auld Lange Syne”, a song traditionally performed on New Year’s Eve song in many Western countries in addition to Japan.¹⁸ In addition, “*Hotaru no hikari*” also holds significance as a song which is regularly performed at celebratory gatherings and gradations in Japan. The meaning attached to this song is brought across into the *Kōbaku* context; the stirring and inspirational lyrics describing endings and new beginnings. The Japanese lyrics, authored by “Japanese poet-scholars” under instruction from the Ministry of Education, are based on a Chinese legend in which a man studies by the light of summer fireflies because he is too poor to buy oil to fuel his lamp.¹⁹ Through his resourcefulness, he is able to amass great knowledge by reading and eventually achieves glory in the name of his country. Although an abridged version of this song is performed in *Kōbaku*, the sentiment is still clear and is echoed by all who sing it; “*Hotaru no hikari*” is not only performed by the members of the 50th Community, but also the Red and White MCs, a backing choir, and the members of the NHK Hall audience. This is intended to be a collaborative performance—the demonstration of the nation united in unison—as suggested by the presence of a conductor who guides the broadcast audience by gesturing his baton toward the camera, before turning to the NHK Hall audience, and then onstage performers.

Through these selected examples, we can see many kinds of relationships performed by the members of the *Kōbaku* Community. Most evident is the internal dynamics and the hierarchical structure of collective, because *uchi* “defines who you are through...social interaction” (Kondo 1990:141). Even though the vertical structure of the group is confirmed, the collaborative song performances also suggest there are horizontal aspects which enforce a sense of community. This is the frame (*ba*) of which Nakane describes as the “...specific relationship which binds a set of individuals into one group” (Nakane 1973:1). It is also clear that *Kōbaku* experience—and thus broader links with the historical *Kōbaku* Community—is cherished, but newcomers are also welcomed into the Community ensuring the *Kōbaku* lineage continues. The historical

¹⁸ Mita notes that one reason this foreign tune has found resonance in Japan is because of its use of the *yo-na-nuki* pentatonic scale which has notable similarities with the Japanese *miyako-bushi* scale (1992:55-566).

¹⁹ Inagaki Senten has also been credited as the song’s lyricist.

Kōbaku Community, moreover, is not forgotten or glossed over, but is instead vividly and frequently imagined as past members re-perform songs from previous *Kōbaku* in the new setting of the 50th contest. These performances, by implication, also recall Japan's musical history. The relationships between performers and their audiences are also important here. By engaging with the audience, the 50th *Kōbaku* Community creates a warm and inclusive atmosphere of quasi-intimacy, not only for those inside NHK Hall, but also for the at-home television audience. Speaking directly to viewers transcends the cultural boundaries of a public performance, even just for a moment, to make a private request: an invitation to join in singing their song is an act of inclusion and indicates a casual familiarity with the viewer. Moreover, those who are marked as being *soto* (outside of the *uchi*), such as television audiences, are invited to take part in the performance and to join the televisual *uchi* that is the 50th *Kōbaku* Community. Recalling Painter's observation, "everyone can share in the close and informal relationships represented on Japanese TV precisely because those relationships are imaginary" (1996a:227).

Conclusions



With a grand flourish of strings, brass and voices, the final song of the evening, “Hotaru no hikari” (“The Light of Fireflies”), concludes. It is 11:45pm and Kōhaku is also drawing to a close. As confetti falls softly onto the stage, the members of the 50th Kōhaku Community smile and wave farewell to both the NHK Hall audience and the broadcast audience. Then, without warning, the vibrant festivities of Kōhaku are replaced by serene images of snow falling on Shintō shrines and Buddhist temples, signifying the commencement of the next programme, ‘Yuku toshi kuru toshi’ (‘The Year Gone By, The Year To Come’). I turn away from the television and concentrate on my late-night, New Year’s Eve supper. Digging my chopsticks into the bowl of toshikoshi-soba, I begin to eat the long buckwheat noodles—symbols of long life—and contemplate the year that has passed and impending arrival of the New Year. After a while, the programme then crosses back to NHK Hall where the celebrations have continued, in spite of the camera’s absence. I glance at the screen to see the song performers of the 50th Kōhaku mingling and laughing like old friends. I am with them in spirit. These are their last moments together; next year a new community of song performers will take the Kōhaku stage and the tradition will continue. Even so, the 1999 performers are now Kōhaku alumni and form an integral part of the extensive Kōhaku historical Community. The NHK Hall clock counts down to 2000 and I join the performers in calling out each second, pleased to be sharing this once-in-a-lifetime experience with the 50th Kōhaku Community and the rest of the viewing nation.

The programme shifts back to images of sacred sites and I slowly emerge from beneath the kotatsu (electric quilted table) and turn off the television. My friends and I move to the genkan (entranceway) where we slip on shoes and don heavy coats and woollen gloves, ready to trade the warmth of the apartment for the frosty night air. Outside, the suburban Minami Tanaka district exudes a serene quality that is only present during these first few minutes of ganjitsu (New Year’s Day). The streets are deserted except for small groups of adults, teenagers and children who are quietly walking in the middle of the road, beneath the glow of streetlights. They are all heading in the same direction and are guided by the grave resonance of a solitary bonshō (temple bell). Every few seconds, the bell again tolls. It will sound 108 times in observance of joya no kane, the ritual cleansing of earthly desires. We join our fellow neighbours, walking together but apart, for hatsumōde (the year’s first visit to a shrine or temple). Upon reaching the entrance gate of the local Buddhist temple, I cross the threshold and enter the sacred grounds. Inside, amid the scent of burning incense and the soft light of candles, friends and strangers exchange hushed New Year’s greetings. Hands are cleansed with holy water before prayers for happiness and prosperity in the year 2000 are softly spoken. The temple bell continues to toll and, like the 50th Kōhaku, it acknowledges the passing of one year, one century, one millennium and the arrival of another.



Stepping back from the long-established rituals of the New Year which exist side-by-side with the contemporary tradition of watching *Kōhaku*, we can reflect on how this study has approached and explored the song contest. At the outset, the 50th *Kōhaku* was selected as a significant case study, as a representative and yet milestone edition in *Kōhaku* history. The premise that the song performers are members of a community

was adopted and song performance was considered a key to understanding this group of people and, in a broader sense, the *Kōbaku* programme and the nation. In order to establish *Kōbaku*'s history and tradition, the contest's creation, crystallisation and growth over time was traced before the study provided a socio-cultural and ethnographic context by sketching a timeline of the 50th *Kōbaku* 'event' in 1999.

The second part of the study considered key aspects of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community's song performances as presentations of musical and visual information within discrete moments in time. It considered the 50th *Kōbaku* Community as a 'performing community' in two ways: as a group which performs (verb) community—a sense of closeness, familiarity and togetherness as an *uchi* (in-group); and as a group which is, by its very nature, one that performs (adjective)—indeed, its *raison d'être* is to perform (songs etc) in this contest. By viewing this Community in action, that is, in performance, as Part Two of this study has done, the following layers of meaning are highlighted.

The song performances reveal the members of the 50th *Kōbaku* Community performing as individuals. Using these song performances as continued representations of public persona, stars maintain their discrete identities as popular music stars within the broader *geinōkai* (entertainment world). Through staging, in particular, expressions of maleness and femaleness are clearly valued within the 'battle of the sexes' context and this is in keeping with other performing arts traditions in Japan. When looking at the performance of music and lyrics, we can also see the 'human', fallible sides of performers, generating a sense of quasi-intimacy which ultimately reinforces their image as friendly, 'everyday' people with whom audiences can relate. As such, when a range of emotions is publicly articulated to an audience via patterned expressions in lyrics, these individuals also articulate what the nation 'feels'.

The song performances also reveal the Community members performing as a collective. As noted above, performers continue to exhibit their own individuality but ultimately, in the context of this programme, a sense of self is bound to the 50th *Kōbaku* Community *uchi* despite differences such as sex, age and genre, and at the competitive team level. The singers also exhibit compelling performing relationships which

underscore the hierarchy of the collective and its shifts between vertical and horizontal structures. Social relations, where elders are revered and newcomers are nurtured, are not only put on display, magnified and promoted, they are also upheld as model relationships for Japanese people outside of the *Kōbaku* context—an important message conveyed to *Kōbaku* viewers at a culturally significant time on the Japanese calendar when the nation comes together.

The song performances further reveal the 50th *Kōbaku* Community as performing *Kōbaku*'s past. The 50th *Kōbaku* Community is self-reflexive, as seen through the prominence of *Kōbaku* colours in the staging, the designated spaces and the references to the contest in song lyrics. This also highlights its connections with a wider sphere of *uchi*—the historical *Kōbaku* Community—which spans eras and generations of music stars in Japan. In this way, a sense of community extends beyond the immediate collective and encompasses the song performers from past *Kōbaku*. By re-performing a significant number of songs from *Kōbaku*'s past and recalling *Kōbaku*'s key figure, Misora Hibari, on this milestone occasion, the 50th Community members act as archivists, keeping the cultural and historical value of *Kōbaku* alive.

Finally, the song performances reveal the 50th *Kōbaku* Community as performing the Japanese nation. *Kōbaku*'s history is Japan's history and by passing songs over to the 21st century, the 50th *Kōbaku* Community is creating, strengthening and preserving the nation's musical identity. By re-telling selected historical narratives, describing the locations and landscapes of Japan and highlighting cultural features through song lyrics, these performances seek to evoke a national sentiment and to remind Japanese audiences who they are and where they came from, as they enter a new century. The nation imagined here is, however, highly idealised. At a time when Japan is negotiating its place in the Asian and international arena, the Community sings of unspoiled homelands and evokes nostalgia for one's roots, for an 'old Japan' which no longer exists. In taking a closer look at the Community itself, we can also see that this collective is not entirely representative of Japan's heterogenous and complex populace—minority groups such as the Ainu of Hokkaidō, Burakumin (descendants of occupational outcast groups) and Nikkeijin (non-Japanese of Japanese descent) are noticeably absent. We can, as such, see the Community as selective and by repressing

difference through the omission of marginalised subjects, the Community constructs an identity which reinforces the misconception of Japan's homogeneity. Arguably, however, the Community uses patterned expressions of human emotions which are felt by all 'Japanese' in order to engage audiences. This, combined with quasi-intimate interactions, such as encouraging audiences to join with the Community in song, suggests viewers become part of the televisual *uchi* and, by implication, reinforces the sense of nation-as-*uchi*.

Although new insights into *Kōbaku* have been uncovered here, further research into the contest and its song performers needs to be undertaken. As a follow up to this study, the 'non-performance' segments of the 50th programme, such as comic skits and the song performance preludes, could also be examined to see if they similarly generate a sense of national belonging. It would be also be interesting to see if the 'passing on' of songs to 'the people of the 21st century' was simply a symbolic gesture at the 50th *Kōbaku* or if indeed these songs are still performed in future editions of the contest.

When considering the scope of *Kōbaku*'s history, it is clear that a more extensive documentation in English would prove to be a particularly valuable resource, enabling other fields of enquiry to be explored, such as the presentation of gender in song performance, the gender politics played out by the men's and women's teams, and the shifting status of women in the contest. In a broader sense, the changing faces and genres of popular music in Japan could be traced for discrete periods of time or over the course of the entire contest. The overview of *Kōbaku* presented in Part One provides the foundation for such a study and, moreover, Part Two's analysis could be used as a model for song performance analysis via recorded footage from past editions of *Kōbaku*.

Future investigations may also consider *Kōbaku*'s significance outside the geographical perimeters of Japan's archipelago. In recent times, scholars have turned their attention to the role music plays in the shaping of identity for diasporas (see Hosokawa 2000b, Chuh and Shimakawa 2001, Olsen 2004, Um 2005) and it would be enlightening to view *Kōbaku* in relation to issues of identity, community and nationalism for the Japanese diaspora. Furthermore, as *Kōbaku* gains popularity in Asia

and other regions, it would be useful to consider how *Kōbaku* resonates with non-Japanese audiences.

As the brief discussion above demonstrates, *Kōbaku* is an event which is ripe for future research. At this particular moment, however, we can take a glance at the way the 50th programme has advanced since its broadcast in 1999. It is clear that this programme set a precedent for future editions of the contest. As expected, the basic format has remained the same and each *Kōbaku* following the 50th has been revitalised in an attempt to remain relevant to modern Japan.¹

It is interesting to note that advances in media technology have assisted in strengthening the connections between the *Kōbaku* Community and its audience. Viewers can now receive autographs from song performers via fax and can also send messages of goodwill in real time, via their digital television remotes, which are read aloud by *Kōbaku* stars, a strategy which heightens the intimacy of the broadcast. Television audiences also play a greater role in affecting the contest's outcome, by casting votes 'at home' using their digital remotes. Furthermore, Video Research now measures the programme's terrestrial ratings for an even greater number of prefectures in Japan, enabling NHK to customise the programme according to the interests of viewers from specific regions. In the most recent *Kōbaku* (2005), however, NHK encouraged all *Kōbaku* viewers to rate the quality of the programme—including praise, criticisms and advice—via mobile phone messaging. These new methods of interaction reinforce the notion that *Kōbaku* is a show crafted both for and by the Japanese *uchi* (in-group).

NHK continues to project the image of the song performers as members of a special Community created exclusively for that year's *Kōbaku*. This is achieved through strategies similar to those used for the song performances of the 50th *Kōbaku*, as well as through the introduction of various new *Kōbaku*-related occasions in the lead-up to the programme. One notable way is via the annual 'photograph and autograph' exhibition, held in December at NHK Studiopark (the public-access studio-tour area located next

¹ Even so, ratings have fallen 10 percent on average since the 50th *Kōbaku*. For example, the first half of the 56th *Kōbaku* (2005) rated 35.4 percent and the second half rated 42.9 percent, whereas the 50th *Kōbaku*'s corresponding ratings were 45.8 percent and 50.8 percent (Video Research Limited 2006:Internet).

door to NHK Hall), featuring the members of that year's *Kōbaku* Community. Portraits and signatures from song performers are readily displayed, along with succinct messages freely expressing each performer's delight at being selected and hopes that the performances will live up to public expectations. Serving as a contrast with the immediacy of this display is footage of the previous year's *Kōbaku* Community which plays in a loop on a television in the same room, a visual and aural reminder of *Kōbaku*'s past and the changeover from the old *Kōbaku* Community to a new incarnation.

More than ever, *Kōbaku*'s extensive history is recalled and treasured in Japan. After the 50th *Kōbaku*, two public facilities began cataloguing archival *Kōbaku* footage and this is now accessible to the public via in-house viewing terminals. In 2000, videos of the 14th to the 44th *Kōbaku* (1963–1993) were introduced at The Broadcast Library (a section within the Broadcast Programming Centre of Japan, Yokohama) and in 2003, the NHK Science and Technical Research Laboratories (in Saitama) began offering a more comprehensive back-catalogue of *Kōbaku* programmes. *Kōbaku*'s extensive history has also been evoked through the programme itself. In 2005, for example, NHK called on the general public to nominate songs for the 56th *Kōbaku*, recommending over 600 hits from the past 60 years so that the programme could be a retrospective of *Kōbaku* history and Japan's musical past. In this respect, the historical value of the programme has become widely accepted and nostalgia for *Kōbaku*'s traditions is subsequently nurtured. *Kōbaku* has become a time capsule of Japan's performers and songs and, as such, it “assumes dual roles: it is technology for creating national and cultural memory and it is an archive of the nation's collective past” (Yano 2002:17).

We can view *Kōbaku* as a snapshot of music-making in Japan at a particular time and place. Each year, song performances continue to illuminate the subtleties and dynamics of the *Kōbaku* Community, demonstrating how individual and collective identity is shaped, and how communities are built. These performances emphasise the deeply held ideas the Japanese already hold about their unique history and culture, but ultimately they play an important role in the way the nation constructs itself through music.