

# TOKYO DONTAKU (toe-kyo doan-tah-koo) = Tokyo day-off

## OTHER NAMES:

**Koresa hyotan** -- the first line of the song

## BACKGROUND:

In Japan, *O-Bon* is an annual 3-day Buddhist feast of the dead, held in mid-July, to welcome home for a visit the spirits of departed ancestors. Quoting Vyts Beliajus in his folk dance magazine *Viltis*:<sup>1</sup>

Its origin dates back to the Buddhist beginning in India where it was known as Ullambana, corrupted into the Japanese Urabonye and commonly called Obon. It reached Japan about 657 and at first it was observed in the Imperial court and by the nobles, but it eventually became a universally observed festivity in Japan or wherever Japanese live.

In Hawaii, *O-Bon* is celebrated on weekends throughout the summer, with the festival being held at different temples each weekend. Temple courtyards are swept and surrounded with banners and prayer scrolls. Guiding lanterns are lit, food is prepared for the living and the departed, and cheerful *Bon Odori* (*Bon* dances) are performed by young and old alike. Musicians, usually including a gyrating *O-Daiko* (barrel-drum) drummer, occupy a raised wooden platform around which long lines of dancers circle. New dances are constantly being added by Japanese-trained dance masters, and old classics are performed, modified, or forgotten by participants through the folk process. Most temples conclude their ceremonies by blessing and launching down rivers or on the outgoing night tide, tiny wooden spirit boats carrying food and lanterns to accompany the departing spirits.

Madelynne Greene learned *Tokyo Dontaku* from the Japanese community in Honolulu, and presented it to U.S. folk dancers in 1961. Richard Geisler tells us that it mimics the gestures of a Tokyo traffic cop. For 30 years, it was second only to the Japanese Coal Miners' dance, *Tanko Bushi*, as the U.S. folk dancer's "Japanese" dance. Recently, the Okinawan example of *Bon Odori* called *This Is July* (*Shti Gatzu Debru*) has gained preeminence.

## STYLING:

Costumes influence dance style, and in this dance, dictate the dance movements themselves. *Yukata* (cotton *kimonos*) are worn by all dancers and you will see the influence of their large sleeves and relatively tight "skirt" in this dance. Stand with toes pointed a bit inward and with knees together and slightly bent. Men dance more vigorously than women, and wear the little cotton towels passed out by temples around their heads as sweatbands.

## FORMATION:

Circle of dancers, all facing CCW around the room. Hands are relaxed but straight, with fingers more or less parallel.

<sup>1</sup> Most of this information on Japan, the *O-Bon* Festival, Japanese costume, and *Tokyo Dontaku* can be found in various issues of *Viltis*, and especially in articles by the editor, Vyts Beliajus, and by Mary Scott, a leader of the Honolulu Folk Dance Group.

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## BARS ACTION

4/4 Introduction.

8 No action. Our record, Victor V-40871, has 8 bars of instrument music for introduction.

1. Walk forward and back. Start with the singing.

1 Walk forward 2 steps onto: R foot, L foot, clapping hands together in front of chest on each step (cts 1,3).

2 Leaving weight on L foot in place, step forward onto R foot, bending R knee a bit (but don't bow) and sweeping hands down: from chest to extended straight down beside body with palms facing inward (ct 1), step back onto L foot, swinging hands up (ct &), step beside L foot onto R foot, clapping hands

together in front of chest (ct 2).

The rhythm is slow, slow, quick-quick, slow: clap, clap, down-up, clap.

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### **Tokyo Dontaku** (continued)

#### 2. Paddle back and push forward.\* + See important note below.

- 3 Step back onto L foot, swinging both arms down and to L with palms facing back as if paddling a boat (ct 1), step back onto R foot, "paddling" to R (ct 3).
- 4 Step forward onto L foot, raising L hand to L ear, L elbow forward, L palm facing back, and L fingers pointing up; push R hand forward and straight from R shoulder with R palm facing forward and fingers pointing up (ct 1), step forward onto R foot, pushing L palm out and pulling R hand to R ear (ct &), step forward onto L foot, switching hand positions again (ct 2).

#### 3. Trees.

- 5 Turning to face away from center, step diagonally forward to R onto R foot with knees bend deeply, and touch fingertips of palm-up hands down below knee level (ct 1), rise, touching L toe to R ankle [or floor if you can't balance on one foot], and sweep hands apart, up, and together overhead to touch fingertips of palm-up hands overhead with arms gently rounded (ct 3).
- 6 = 5, with opposite footwork (make a tree, facing inward, on L foot).

#### 4. Turns.

- 7 Turn as far as is comfortable -- 1/2, 3/4, or once -- CW to R with 3 flat-footed steps onto: R foot, L foot, R foot (cts 1,&,2). Hold R hand head-high with R palm facing back and R forearm vertical. Keep your R *kimono* sleeve from swinging with your L hand: L forearm horizontal before stomach and L palm facing in.
- 8 = 7 (switch hand positions and turn just as far to L). End facing CCW around the room, as at the beginning of the dance.

Repeat bars 1-8 until the music ends. On our recording, it ends after a bar 4.

\* You should be aware of a major variation in this part of the dance:

- 1 Madelynne Green taught *Tokyo Dontaku* at both Oglebay and Stockton Folk Dance Camps in 1961, and used dance descriptions prepared by Mary Scott, then leader of the Honolulu Folk Dance Group. Both sets of notes describe 2 steps back during the "paddling."
- 2 Stockton errata were issued later with the message that those 2 steps back were actually 2 steps forward. Oglebay notes and uncorrected Stockton notes continued to describe the steps moving back.

Here began the split between East Coast and West Coast versions of *Tokyo Dontaku*.

- 3 The corrected notes with steps forward were picked up and published by *Let's Dance*, June/July, 1962 issue, and re-taught at Stockton Folk Dance Camp in 1978 by Grace Nicholes. *Viltis* and Maine Folk Dance Camp's *Pioneer Press* did not pick up the correction, and published the dance with steps back, even unto today.

- 4 The lesson here is to learn dances from an instructor, not from the notes. And even then, check the notes word-for-word if you like the dance.
- 5 Both these versions are firmly entrenched in the U.S. international folk dance movement; when you dance with other groups, be careful not to paddle into someone else's waters!

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**Tokyo Dontaku** (concluded)

Words on our recording:<sup>1</sup>

<i>Koresa hyotan dokoe yuku?</i>	Where will this gourd <sup>2</sup> go?
<i>Uewa Shinagawa Daiboki.</i>	To Shinagawa Daiboki. <sup>3</sup>
<i>Uita uitano ohayashiwa</i>	This nice band music
<i>kawano mukouka? Supponpon.</i>	is from across the river? <i>Supponpon.</i> <sup>4</sup>
<i>Takato tombiga kenkashite:</i>	Hawk and falcon fight each other:
<i>ohyara hyarariko, don don don.</i>	flap flop, <sup>5</sup> dum dum dum. <sup>6</sup>
<i>Kotosha kabochano ataridoshi.</i>	This is a good year for pumpkin. <sup>7</sup>
<i>Kawai anokoga mede maneku.</i>	That cute young girl speaks to me with her eyes.
<i>Hitomeborekato yoku mitara.</i>	Love at first sight? -- then I look more carefully.
<i>Nandei berambomei yabunirami!</i>	[EXPLETIVE DELETED] [STRONGER EXPLETIVE DELETED] she was frowning!
<i>Tonda omaewa tarabigusa.</i>	Strange girl, you, [untranslatable].
<i>Fukurezurashite. Supponpon.</i>	(My) cheeks puff in a temper tantrum. <i>Supponpon.</i>
<i>Negio tamboni burasagete,</i>	(While) I'm hanging onion sprouts in a rice field, <sup>8</sup>
<i>nozoku yokochono pachinkoya.</i>	I am looking into a downtown gambling arcade.
<i>Uchija oyajiga namaakubi,</i>	My father is yawning at home,
<i>Tokyo dontaku. Supponpon.</i>	Tokyo day-off. <i>Supponpon.</i>
<i>Kaeruno medamanii kyusuete.</i>	On the frog's eye, I practice moxibustion. <sup>9</sup>
<i>soredemotobunara tondemina</i>	If you still can jump, go ahead.

Notes on the translation:

- 1 This is a strange song, sung in 1950s dialect, and heavy with now-obsolete, vulgar slang. Our good friend and regular Friday night dancer, Yosuke Kimura, transcribed, transliterated, and translated it as best he could without dictionaries of archaic slang.
- 2 In this case, gourd is an exceedingly familiar and somewhat derogatory term referring to a man, presumably, the man singing the second verse.
- 3 Shinagawa Daiboki is a place, presumably in Tokyo.
- 4 *Supponpon* seems to be a nonsense word, used for alliteration.
- 5 *Ohyara hyarariko* represents the sounds of wings flapping.

- 6 *Don don don* represents the sounds of that *O-Daiko* I was telling you about earlier.
- 7 No, this isn't an agricultural dance. Here, pumpkin refers to women or girls. The line means "There are a lot of nice girls in this dance."
- 8 Sorry, we can't figure this one out.
- 9 **mox'a**, n. [Chinese and Japan.]
1. the down of the mugwort of China; a soft substance prepared in Japan and China from the young leaves of *Artemisia moxa*, and burned on the skin as a cauterizing agent or counter irritant.
  2. any substance whose gradual combustion on or near the skin is used for the relief or cure of disease.

End of **TOKYO DONTAKU**.