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Dramatic Publishing

THE CRANE WIFE



A Folktale from Japan
by
BARBARA CARLISLE

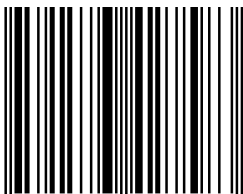
THE CRANE WIFE

This haunting tale employs a stylistic opportunity through simple staging and a mixture of narrative and theatrical conventions adapted from Japanese theatre.

Folktale with optional music. Book by Barbara Carlisle. Music (optional) by David Newsome. Adapted from Japanese folklore and based on a production idea by Randy Ward. Cast: 12 to 20 with varied mixture of male/female. In the northern province of Echigo where snow falls for nine months, the peasant Kokuro removes an arrow from a stricken Crane, who then comes in secret gratitude to live with him as Wife. When her weaving of magnificent cloth saves them from starvation, the poor peasant yields to greed and suspicion and loses his most precious gift. The peasant chorus and Samurai lord provide laughter and commentary. The crane dancers and weavers offer elegant imagery. *Open stage; simple props. Traditional peasant costumes with puppets, masks, dance. Music score available. Code: CJ3.*

(Cover logo artist: Melissa Bedinger)

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The Crane Wife



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THE CRANE WIFE

A Folktale from Japan

A Theatre Piece for Adults and Children
by

BARBARA CARLISLE

Original Production Idea
by

RANDY WARD

Music by

DAVID P. NEWSOME

Created for the production at
The University of Memphis,
November 1994.



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(THE CRANE WIFE)

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The original script of this piece was produced at Theatre 460 by the Department of Theatre Arts of Virginia Tech, February, 1991.

Original Company at Virginia Tech, February, 1991

NARRATION: Suzen Haller, David Moye, Bettina McCormick
VILLAGER CHORUS: Jodi Ivey, Debbie Hunter, Katie Grande, Aimée Bruneau, Steve Maillet
THE SIGNER: Susan Sidman
THE CRANE WIFE: Sarah Rippard
KOKURO: Paul Gobble
THE NEIGHBOR: Van Daly
The SAMURAI: David Johnson
THE CRANE DANCERS AND PUPPETEERS: Lynn Day Sharp, Ellen Reif, Katy Hope, Laurna Syner

The setting and lighting were designed by Beatte Czogalla.
The Crane puppet and the masks were designed by Cheri Vasek with technical assistance by Lynn Day Sharp
Costumes were designed by Charlotte Aiken
Original music by Steve Maillet.
Japanese coaching by Mitsuko
Crane information from the National Crane Foundation

STAGE MANAGER: Cat Domiano

The Production was directed by Barbara Carlisle
in collaboration with Randy Ward and all the artists named above

Photographs, Music and Artwork for this edition from the Production at The University of Memphis, Department of Theatre and Communication Arts, November, 1994

Directed by Joanna Helming
Choreo-direction by Susan Chrietzberg

Scenic Designer	Christopher Slaughter
Costume Designer	Douglas J. Koertge

Lighting Designer
Sound Designer and Composer
Stage Manager
Technical Director
Cover Artwork

John E. Ownes, II
David P. Newsome
Tiffany Hall McClung
Christopher Slaughter
Melissa Bedinger

The Cranes

Sheri L. Bancroft, Gloria S. Cheng, Stella R.
Faison, Kristina N. Vrettos, Susan Woody

The Villagers

Bobby Baker, Lucy Fanning, Stephanie Lubiani,
Glenda Mace, John M. Maness, Anthony Pound,
Melanie Stapleford, Nicole Tuthill, Christy
Washington

Kokuro

Jared Brandon Smith

The Crane Wife

Gloria S. Cheng

The Neighbor

John M. Maness

The Samurai

Kennerly Pillow

The Musician

Ashley Bugg

The Crane Wife is an ancient Japanese folk tale. This retelling for the theatre is based on a reading of several versions of the story. It borrows Japanese theatre conventions, particularly a narration, a very presentational style, and the use of symbolic objects to signify necessary props, but is not intended to replicate a Japanese theatre experience.

There are many Japanese words in the script to give color to the performance. Assistance should be sought from a Japanese speaker to give these words their correct pronunciation, although American speakers will inevitably have American accents. The meaning of the words is given within the context of the speeches.

The story is told by a narrator or a group of narrators who divide the narration among themselves, sometimes speaking single lines, sometimes speaking in unison, sometimes dividing up phrases or words for particular emphasis. This division should be determined for each production. The narration is omniscient, kindly, and understanding, existing in the present. The performers should create their own divisions of the text according to their own rhythms and emphases. A single narrator is also a valid choice.

The Villager Chorus acts as an intermediary for the audience and creates the antique world of the story, reacting as the villagers, and as spirits of the village, and occasionally taking other roles—the hunters, and buyers of the cloth. The villagers in this production carried masks which they wore to change themselves into hunters, and then carried as puppets, to suggest a multitude of villagers gossiping, or malicious village voices speaking in Kokuro's head. They, too, divided up the villager chorus lines among themselves as they created the performance. This script suggests five villagers, but any number could be used, and they could be mixed male and female, all male or all female.

The named characters—Kokuro, the Neighbor, the Samurai, and The Crane Wife—stick to their single roles. The Samurai is not seen until he makes his entrance during the action. He is conceived as a full blown Kabuki samurai, complete with swords, painted face and geta. His entrance is a surprise and however elaborately or simply he is created, he needs to be treated as powerful and frightening.

Properties should be very limited. No attempt should be made to disguise the materiality of any object. There might be a crock for bean curd, a kettle and a broom in Kokuro's hut, swords for the Samurai. A set of poles or 4 foot dowels carried by the villagers and passed around as needed, become bows, arrows, wood to make the loom, and loom elements in the weaving dances. Simple ribbons of red cloth can represent the blood of the wounded crane, both in the beginning and at the closing revelation.

Dancers, dressed in white, do not speak. They become the snow, the crane flock, and the weaving. They also manipulate the great snow crane, who in this production was acted by a large scale puppet. The crane could be a folded paper crane as well. The play has also been done with only an imagined crane. If there is a puppet, there should be no attempt to hide the fact that the puppet is just that. Her manipulators are crane dancers, fully in view. One production used four dancers, another five. A single dancer would work as well.

The Crane Wife is one of the puppet's manipulators, and she is not disguised as anything else when she returns to become Kokuro's wife. She is distinguished, however, from the other puppet dancers and manipulators by her traditional kimono.

A signer, using American Sign Language, was part of the company at Virginia Tech. She entered with the narrators, and began independently, but eventually interacted with the villager chorus and the characters as part of the action, returning to her platform at the close of the play.

All these performers—villagers and narrators—may play percussion instruments—bells, wood blocks, bamboo sticks, ratchets, and drums, to underscore the action. In the Memphis production a single percussionist accompanied the action in performance and recorded music accented many moments. In the Virginia Tech production two of the villagers played flute accompaniment. The musical score in this script is written for koto and flute and can be produced with a synthesizer or played on original instruments. The music accompanied the movements of each character. The musician may be a member of the villager chorus. Music is a valuable element of the script.

The Setting

The stage is open and unencumbered. It may have platforms and needs a space where Kokuro's hut can be identified. There needs to be a way for the Crane Wife to appear to be hidden from Kokuro while she is weaving. At Virginia Tech the crane dancers created weaving dances in shadow behind a large white cloth which they hung on a Torii gate.

As the audience enters: The Musician is tuning up, the dancers are doing warm up exercises, the villagers are seated in Kokuro's hut; The Neighbor and Kokuro are seated. They may be chatting softly.

CHARACTERS

Narrators

The Signer (American Sign Language)

Musician

Village Ghorus

Dancers

Kokuro

The Crane Wife

The Neighbor

The Samurai



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THE PROCESSION AND PREPARATION

(The Narrators and the Signer enter in street clothes and cross to the stage. The Villagers and Dancers bring them their kimonos or some form of dress that signals that they are becoming part of the company. The company then moves to preset all of the props. Once the stage is set the company bow to each other and take their places. The villager chorus and the narrators are always on stage in view of the audience, though each has a neutral place to which they can return when they are not the focus of the action or narration. Other characters may wait in view of the audience for their entrances, or they may be off stage. The important thing is to treat the whole event as theatrical and not illusionistic. These people are making a story for the audience and the audience must participate in imagining the events, the scenery and the characters.)

PROLOGUE

NARRATORS: *(Drums or percussion sound.)* **Mukashi mukashi**, once upon a time, **aru tokoro ni**, there was a place. In the shadow of Myoko mountains in the province of Echigo, the snow falls for nine months.

(The dancers in white dance the snow to music of the flute, and unfold a large white cloth on to the ground.)

It covers the thatched **kayabuki** and fills the village streets.

VILLAGER CHORUS: *(Interacting among themselves)*

1. Dig, good neighbor, dig, and make a tunnel.
2. Come to my house. We will smoke a pipe.
3. They will only tell each other tall tales.
4. And fill the house with smoke .
1. The snow has covered the treetops

VILLAGER CHORUS:

2. The mountain spirits whistle in the wind.
5. The great bear will come out of her house.

NARRATORS: When the snow comes the young women, **musume**, go into the weaving room to weave the beautiful Echigo cloth. Alone behind the screen, sitting straight at the loom, the women weave ramie into long strips of soft white crepe.

(During the next speeches dancers lift and move the white snow cloth, and others make movements of sitting on their knees and weaving.)

VILLAGER CHORUS:

1. Weave well, my dear.
2. Breathe deeply. In and out.
3. Keep it even, young one.
4. The crepe buyers will pay a high price.
5. Echigo cloth is famous.

NARRATORS: In March, when the snow is still deep and white upon the ground, the long strips are laid out and bleached in the snow and sun.

(The Villagers hang the snow cloth on a frame where it will be a backdrop and a screen for the shadow weaving dances. The dancers exit.)

NARRATORS: **Mukashi, mukashi, aru tokoro ni.** A long time ago the cranes lived each summer with the farmers of Echigo.

(The dancers reappear as the graceful shapes of the cranes, as the musician plays the crane theme on a bamboo flute.)

VILLAGER : We fished together in the waters of the Uono River.

VILLAGER : And the cranes kept the mice from the rice bin.

NARRATORS: But when the sun hides behind Komagatake mountain, and heavy snow falls from the burdened sky, the white, long-necked cranes rise from the icy stream and fly to their nests in the grassy meadows by the sea.

(The crane dancers dance out of sight.)

VILLAGERS:

1. Fly, *tsuru* fly.
2. Go to the ocean marshes.
3. Come back to Echigo.
4. Summer will come.
5. The snow will pass again.

All: Fly beautiful cranes.

NARRATORS: The great snow crane leads her flock up out of the valley.

(The crane dancers raise the crane puppet and animate it throughout the narration and music that follows. They circle the stage and fly off up the aisle and out.)

One by one and two by two they fly, casting shadows on the frozen earth. They swoop to catch an unsuspecting field mouse, and circle away, thin legs stretched long under their sleek bodies, suspended on the wind, wide wings carrying them to the ocean shore.

MARCH OF THE HUNTERS

NARRATION: When the cranes fly, out of their houses come the hunters.

(Drum sounds. The villagers enact the hunters, with masks, and sticks as bows.)

VILLAGER CHORUS:

1. Food must be gathered.
2. The winter is long.
3. We need new feathers for the comforter.

NARRATORS: Strong arms lift the heavy bows and draw arrows from the quiver. The hunters take aim.

VILLAGERS: Flash.

NARRATOR: The bow string snaps.

VILLAGERS: Zing.

NARRATORS: The arrow flies. Swift and sharp, seeking its mark, it crosses the sky. Arrow and crane, crane and arrow.

(The "arrow" is carried out of the theatre in the direction of the crane by one of the villager hunters. The Crane music theme is heard briefly as the hunters return to their spot on the stage and put down their "bows.")

THE STORY

NARRATORS: **Mukashi mukashi. Aru tokoro ni.** A poor young peasant named Kokuro lived alone in his little kayabuki hut at the foot of the mountain.

(Kokuro enters. There is a tune played for him, which becomes his theme.)

One day, when the hunters had gone home, he went to the woods to gather twigs to keep his tiny fire alive. He walked and walked, until his bundle was full upon his back. It was cold and nearly dark when he set out for home. The snow, **yuki**, had begun to fall.

(The crane enters, wounded.)

VILLAGER CHORUS: Bata bata, bata bata, bata bata. *(making percussion sounds to imitate the beating of wings.)*

NARRATORS: Behind him, Kokuro heard a rustling sound.

VILLAGER CHORUS: Bata bata, bata bata, bata bata.

NARRATORS: And suddenly a crane swooped down and landed on the path.

VILLAGER CHORUS: **I tai. I tai. I tai.** (*a cry of pain*)

(The crane lands. The crane wife is manipulating the head as it sinks in pain to the ground. She carries the "arrow" pole with a ribbon of red attached to it. Kokuro comes to the fallen bird as the narration continues.)

KOKURO: Oh, my beautiful friend. The arrow has pierced your wing. How you must suffer. Surely you will freeze to death if the snow continues to fall.

NARRATORS: Kokuro put down his bundle of sticks and went to the milky white bird.

KOKURO: Quiet my beautiful creature. Softly, softly. There, it is free. The terrible arrow is gone. (*taking it the pole from the Crane Wife*) Here, let me seal the wound with this pure fresh snow. Lie down, lovely bird.

NARRATORS: He cradled the crane's beautiful body in his arms, until he felt the heart beat strong again, and the proud head rise up. He watched the crane stand upon its long legs and stretch its wings. It lifted its huge silvery body and flew off into the night circling once over his head.

(The healed crane rises and flies away.)

Kokuro gathered up his pack and walked back to his cold gray hut.

KOKURO: (Singing) The snow falls again
The night is dark
The path is long
A tiny fire will warm my heart.

KOKURO: Fly, **tsuru**, fly.
Fly, **tsuru**, fly.

NARRATORS: The stars and moon were hidden by great black clouds.
The wind whistled down the mountain. Snow fell thickly
in the woods.

(Kokuro enters the area that will be his hut.)

KOKURO: *(He blows on "coals" and adds sticks to his "fire.")*
Come, little flame. Burn brightly, my friend. The blanket
is thin, and it will be a long cold night. *(Kokuro wraps
himself in his blanket and lies down to go to sleep.)*

*(The crane dancers enter in black kimonos, shrouding
the Crane Wife. They bring her down the aisle, deposit
her at the hut and circle off behind the screen.)*

NARRATORS: It was the middle of the night . . . Suddenly!

*(The Villager chorus makes 3 sharp knocks on the wood
block.)*

A knock came at the door.

KOKURO: What is this? Who can be knocking at this time of night?

(3 knocks)

NARRATORS: Kokuro hid in a corner of the hut.

KOKURO: Who can be coming for me? What have I done?

CRANE WIFE: Kokuro. Please. Come answer my knock.

VILLAGER CHORUS: *(3 knocks)*

NARRATION: The voice was beautiful. The voice was elegant. The
voice called again.

CRANE WIFE: Kokuro, I beg you, come answer my knock.

VILLAGER CHORUS: *(3 knocks)*

NARRATION: Kokuro went to the door. When he slid it open to look out, there before him stood a beautiful woman, with gleaming golden skin, and glistening black hair, sparkling with crystal flakes of snow.

CRANE WIFE: Kokuro. Kind, gentle man. Please. Let me in. It is cold and dark and the snow will soon cover my head.

NARRATION: Kokuro was struck dumb. The woman spoke again.

CRANE WIFE: Kokuro, please. Let me enter the hut. I wish to stay with you. I wish you to allow me to become your wife.

NARRATION: Kokuro could not believe his ears. He could not move. He could not speak.

CRANE WIFE: I am sorry to disturb you. Please. If you wish, I will go away. I shall only ask you once again. Will you let me become your wife?

(She steps back and Kokuro runs after her, bowing low, but trying to keep her from leaving.)

NARRATION: At last Kokuro found his voice.

KOKURO: Please. Come into my sad little hut. It is empty and poor, but, dear beautiful lady, if you truly wish it, I am honored to receive you as my bride.

NARRATION: Bowing low, Kokuro took her hand and led her, step by step, inside his dark and dingy hut.

KOKURO: I have only this tiny fire and a thin blanket. You are very fine and beautiful . . .

CRANE WIFE: I have enough to be happy. Please, let us go to sleep.

NARRATORS: Very soon the village was full of gossip.

(Lights come back to full.)

THE FIRST GOSSIP GAVOTTE

VILLAGER CHORUS: *(Chattering among themselves. The masks become puppets to accompany the villagers. The final line is punctuated by all looking at Kokuro in an accusing and suspicious pose.)*

1. Have you seen that boy Kokuro?
2. Young Kokuro has a wife.
3. The **ujigami** have smiled on him.
 1. That young man has a fine wife.
 2. Have you ever seen such a handsome bride?
 4. Where did Kokuro find such a wife?
 5. Kokuro has a better wife than he deserves.

NARRATION: Indeed Kokuro had a fine wife.

(During this narration The Crane Wife fixes up the hut by hanging cloth screens and sweeping.)

She swept the mud from the **tatami** mats. She cleaned the crocks and scoured the kettle. She mended the paper **shoji** with beeswax. She patched the straw and put pitch between the logs to keep out the wind.

KOKURO: *(praying before the hearth)* **Ujigami**, protectors of my little house. You have given me a great gift. I do not deserve it. I offer this little rice cake. It is all I have. I know I have not thanked you properly since I was a boy. Please spirits, accept my gratitude. Do not mock me with this honor and take it from me as strangely as it came.

CRANE WIFE: You are simple and kind, dear husband. You are

humble, and generous. I am honored to be at your side.

NARRATORS: But it was not an easy time. Kokuro was the poorest of the poor among the peasants.

VILLAGER CHORUS: (*mockingly*)

1. Winter is here, foolish Kokuro.
2. It is cold.
3. There is no work for you.
4. What will you feed your pretty bride?
5. Two mouths to feed instead of one. How will you manage that?

NARRATION: Each day when Kokuro looked at what he had stored away, he was poorer than the day before. His heart was heavy. Each day his wife saw his face grow darker and darker. Finally she said to him.

CRANE WIFE: **Anata**, dear husband. I see that you are troubled.

KOKURO: I am ashamed. I cannot care for you. The bean curd is gone. We have eaten the carrots. The rice is gone. The hunters have taken all the animals from the woods.

CRANE WIFE: **Anata**, dear husband. You must share your worries with me. You must not be too proud to accept my help.

KOKURO: **Omae**, dear wife. I confess. I cannot find a way. I am grateful for your offer, but what can you do?

CRANE WIFE: I see the village women weaving the Echigo cloth to sell in the market. Please, dear husband, if you will build me a loom from the wood you find in the forest, perhaps you will permit me to weave for you. I am not of this village, but I can weave one time for you, if you will allow it.

KOKURO: Dear Wife. It is true. The village women are weaving. If you like, I will build you a loom such as my mother used

when she was a girl.

NARRATION: *(Kokuro gathers the sticks from the villagers and returns to the hut with them.)* So Kokuro gathered the wood from the forest at the top of the mountain, and with his mallet and chisel he built a loom, just as his wife had asked him to do. When it was finished he gave it to her.

CRANE WIFE: And now dear husband, you must put the loom behind the **shoji** at the back of the hut. There I will weave, and you must promise never to look at me behind the screen while I work.

(Kokuro takes the sticks behind the screen where he hands them to the dancers who will use them to create a "loom" and weaving movements.)

KOKURO: I will do as you say, my wife, but why must you hide behind the screen?

CRANE WIFE: Please, I beg you. That is my request. You must never look upon me while I am weaving.

NARRATION: And so Kokuro's wife prepared herself with bathing and offerings, and went to work.

(The Crane Wife exits behind the screen.)

THE FIRST DANCE OF THE WEAVING

(Lights dim. A light comes up upstage. We see the Crane Wife in silhouette with dancers who "weave" in shadow using the sticks in the dance as abstractions of the loom. This is not so much literal imitation of weaving as capturing the rhythm and flow of weaving in the dance as the chorus recites.)

VILLAGER CHORUS: *(reciting in rhythm and using percussion beats)*
Kattan Coton Kattan Coton
Over and under, the shuttle is passed.

VILLAGER CHORUS: Over and under the fragile thread
Over and under the cloth is made.
Over and under the weaver works.

Kattan Coton Kattan Coton

Days and nights the weaver works
Days and nights she doesn't sleep
Over and under the shuttle goes
Days and nights she doesn't eat.

Kattan Coton Kattan Coton

Three days, three nights she works alone
Three days, three nights the shuttle goes
Over and under the cloth is made
She weaves and works and then is done.

(The shadows dance with the cloth, then lights go down on them and return to full on stage.)

KOKURO: How lonely it is when she is gone. What does she do that I cannot see? But she asked me to wait, and I shall wait.

NARRATION: On the fourth day his wife appeared.

KOKURO: My wife. My beautiful wife. How pale you look. Your skin is clear as glass.

CRANE WIFE: Here, dear husband. I have made you a cloth.

KOKURO: You have worked too long behind the screen. You have become ill. I swear, I shall never ask you to weave again.

CRANE WIFE: The cloth is yours. Please, take it to the market.

KOKURO: It is beautiful, my dear wife. It is finer than anyone has ever seen.