

Unagappa Ondo

(Tajimi City, Gifu Prefecture, Japan)



[Cartoon Mascot of Tajimi City]. The name comes from Una or unagi (“eel”) and gappa or kappa, the name of a mythological creature.

It was a long, long time ago, a time of endless sunny days, and the rice fields were close to drying out. Tajimi villagers began playing Taiko drums and prayed for rain day after day, asking for help from the blessed Kappa-sama, whom they knew to be a messenger of the God of Water. Much to their surprise and gratitude, it began to rain hard. The crops were saved, resulting in a good harvest that autumn.

The villagers worshipped the Kappa-sama and prayed for good rain and harvest year after year. With a large harvest coming every year, though, eventually the villagers became complacent, and they began to take Kappa-sama for granted. One day, some of the Tajimi folks decided to move his shrine to the edge of the Toki River. Kappa-sama became angry and made the rain fall in a non-stop torrential downpour so that the river overflowed its banks. “Oh, Holy Kappa! No!” the villagers cried. The whole village of Tajimi was now inundated with water. Rice fields, houses, absolutely everything washed away.

This time the villagers played the Taiko drums and pleaded for the Dragon to help them. Dragon-sama appeared suddenly before them and, turning to Kappa-sama, broke a saucer over his head. With that, the flood was sucked up into the saucer, returning the land to normal.

The small bit of water left on the saucer was the only energy source Kappa-sama had left. He began gasping and fell to his knees at the foot of Dragon-sama. Dragon-sama took pity on Kappa-sama and not only gave him a new saucer, but shared sake with him and let him to continue living in Toki River as long as he never caused any problems again for the village folk.

There are now bountiful eels in Toki River where the now-repentant Kappa-sama returned. When people come to the river to swim or fish, Kappa might pull them under the water. Usually Kappa is just mischievous, but sometimes he gets carried away.

This dance came about as a part of citywide revitalization project. The City of Tajimi created a new mascot and commissioned a writer and composer for a theme song that was called the “Unagappa Pappa Song.” Then citizens collectively came up with a dance to go with it. That song and dance were released to the public in 2009.

They soon realized they needed something everyone could dance, something suitable for Obon Festivals, so another dance was arranged in Ondo style, a slightly slower version from the original. Mr. Tamaoki was asked to choreograph a Japanese folk dance “Unagappa Ondo.” The dance Unagappa Ondo is Mr. Tamaoki’s choreography and is enjoyed by many all over Japan.

Pronunciation: ooh-nah-gahp-pah ohn-doh

Music: 4/4 meter *Japanese Music CD, Track 10*

Formation: Individuals dancing freely, hands free. Dance moves generally CCW.

Unagappa Ondo — continued

Steps & Styling: Cho: A short, soft clap.

Chon: A hard, long clap.

Kazashi: Extend both arms fwd at shldr level diag R and look R (cts 1-2). Can be done with opp handwork.

Mawashi okuri: Beg with palms down in front, arms parallel, swing arms in a full circle from down to right to up to left. Arms may swing the opp direction.

Sashi Kazashi: L hand up as if shading eyes, palm out; R arm down and slightly at side. Can be done with opp hand position.

Yama Biraki: Open arms to sides and downward. “Yama” means “mountain” and “hiraki” means “to open.”

Ryote kaiguri: Translation: “Ryote” means “both hands” and “kaiguri” means “coil.” Hands move around each other fwd.

Meas 4/4 meter Pattern

4 meas INTRODUCTION. Facing CCW, begin after “Ah, Sore” with claps: Chon, chon, cho-cho, chon. (cts 1, 3; 1, 2, 4)

Footwork

Hands

I. TWO POSES AND CLAPPING.

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| 1 | Facing CCW, step R to R (ct 1); lift L knee bent in front of R knee (ct 2); repeat cts 1-2 with opp ftwk and handwork (cts 3-4). | Open arms (ct 1); R palm slightly above head, L palm in front of stomach (ct 2); repeat cts 1-2 with opp ftwk and handwork (cts 3-4). Note: fingers are apart because the kappa had webbed hands. |
| 2 | Stand with ft together. | <u>Chon, Chon, Chon</u> (clapping on cts 1, 2, 3); hold (ct 4). |
| II. <u>TRAVELING CCW.</u> (with singing) | | |
| 1 | Walk three steps (R, L, R) and touch (or lift) L (cts 1-4). | Palms down, arms parallel, swing in a full circle from down to right to up to left. (<u>Mawashi okuri</u>) |
| 2 | Repeat meas 1 with opp ftwk and direction. | Repeat meas 1, but arms swing in a full circle in the opp direction. |
| 3 | Step R fwd (cts 1-2); step L fwd (cts 3-4). | Extend both arms fwd at shldr level diag R (R palm down, L shades eye) and twist R (cts 1-2); repeat cts 1-2 with opp handwork (cts 3-4). (<u>Sashi Kazashi</u>) |
| 4 | Step R fwd (ct 1); step L bkwd (ct 2); step R bkwd next to L (cts 3-4). | <u>Yama biracki</u> (ct 1-2); <u>Chon</u> (ct 3). |
| 5-8 | Repeat meas 1-4. | |

III. PALMS.Footwork

- 1 Bend knees (ct 1); straighten knees once (ct 2); repeat cts 1-2 (cts 3-4).
- 2 Bend knees slowly (ct 1-2) open knees to each side (ct 3-4).
- 3 Walk four steps (R, L, R, L) fwd (cts 1-4).
- 4 Step R fwd with bent knee (ct 1); step L bkwd (ct 2); step R bkwd next to L (cts 3-4).
- 5 Twist upper body L, shout “NeEE!” (cts 1-2); straighten body, ft together (cts 3-4).
- 6 Stand with ft together (cts 3-4).

Hands

- Tap thighs with palms (cts 1); hold (ct 2); repeat cts 1-2 (cts 3-4).
- Slowly stretch arms out to sides and upward (cts 1-2), rest hands above head (cts 3-4). Hands end slightly above head, forming a circle.
- Open palms and extend arms fwd and slightly to each side (R, L, R, L) with each step, elbows bending and flexing, hands popping from fingertips touching to wide open with each step.
- Ryote kaiguri fwd (cts 1-2), with elbows bent, open hands at waist level, shake open hands, palms open, to each side (cts 3-4).
- Hold hands, palms facing away from body, on either side of head (cts 1-2); chon two times (cts 3-4)
- Chon four times (cts 1-4).

IV. FIGURE III VARIATION

- 1 Repeat Fig III, meas 3, but four light running steps instead of four walking steps (cts 1-4).
 - 2 Ft together, bend knees slightly (ct 1); hold (ct 2); bend knees slightly (ct 3); hold (ct 4).
 - 3-4 Repeat meas 1-2.
- Repeat Fig III, meas 3 (cts 1-4).
- With elbows bent, open hands at waist level and shake open hands, palms open, to each side (cts 1-4).
- Repeat meas 1-2.

Sequence: Introduction, Fig I, Fig II, Fig III, Fig IV.

Presented by Iwao Tamaoki

