

Tanko Bushi

Tanko Bushi is the last dance we do every year. We basically play the song twice so it lasts about seven minutes. It is from the island of Kyushu, Tagawa City, near Kita Kyushu. The region is known for coal mining and Miike Tanko is the largest coal mine. Tanko Bushi is called the coal miners dance because tanko means coal and the movements mimic the actions of the coal miners. (Dig the coal, throw it over your shoulder, take a step back and wipe your brow, push the cart with the coal, and you are done – cut, cho chon ga chon.)

There are several versions of this song by various artists. The one we dance to is recorded by Keiko Kikuchi. The lyrics are about a girl and a boy, and can be sung by either. It is not noted when this song began but it is thought to have been sung by the girls who were sorting the coal by size when the mine was in operation so it is assumed that the singer is probably a female. In the song, she is pondering about when the moon comes out (tsuki ga deta deta, tsuki ga deta) will she go to meet him or not and thinking about him. And, if she does go to meet him will she go with him or not. The third line of lyrics refers to the mine that was prominent in the region – Miike Tanko. And the fourth line refers to entotsu (chimney) is high. There are the two 45 foot chimney's built in 1908 that still stand even though the mine is closed.



Tagawa City with the coal mining chimneys and surrounded by mountains and a photo of early coal mining. From <http://www.joho.tagawa.fukuoka.jp/english/history.html>

In 1932 a recording of the song was made and shortly thereafter, a dance was developed which became popular all over Japan. It became really popular after World War II because of the GI's who loved this dance because they could understand and perform the movements.

One of our dancers, Hiroko, learned this dance in Tokyo as a child. The instructions by her dance teachers were as follows and still being used today (can be found in videos):

ほつて ほつて (hotsute, hotsute -- dig, dig)

また ほつて (mata hotsute -- again dig)

かついで かついで (katsuide, katsuide -- throw, throw)

あともどり (atomodori -- back (twice))

おして おして (oshite, oshite -- push, push)

ひらいて チョチョンガチョン (hiraite, cho chon ga chon -- open, cho chon ga chon)

Teaching Video (everyone knows this dance but this is the version that we do at OBT):

<https://youtu.be/Sov94KZzFSY>

Dancing Video:

Tanko Bushi at Obon 2018

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=crXuHCDiRQQ>

Lyrics:

炭坑節 福岡県民謡

Tanko Bushi - Fukuoka folk song

Lyrics in the Keiko Kikuchi recording that is used at OBT

From CD Nihon no Bon Odori, Columbia Records, COCJ-35011, 2008 - lyrics from insert

translation by Chris Dart 09/06/2020

- (1) 月が 出た出た 月が出た ア ヨイヨイ The moon has risen (come out), has risen, the moon has risen
Tsuki ga deta deta, tsuki ga deta (a yoi yoi)
- 三池 炭坑 の上に 出た It has risen over the Miike Coal Mine
Miike Tanko no ue ni deta
- あんまり煙突 が 高いので Because the chimney is so high
Anmari entotsu ga- takai no de,
- さぞや お月さん 煙た かるう Surely the moon will look smoky
サノヨイヨイ (sa no yoi yoi)
Sazoya Otsukisan kemuta karo
(sa no yoi yoi)
- (2) 一山、二山、三山 超え ア ヨイヨイ Over one, two, and three mountains
Hito yama, futa yama, mi yama, koe (a yoi yoi)
- 奥に 咲いたる 八重椿 From the depths, multi layered camelia are blooming
Oku ni saitaru yae tsubaki
- なんぼ色よく 咲いたとて No matter what color they were when they bloomed
Nanbo iro yoku, saita-tote
- 様ちゃんが 通わにゃ 仇の花 They are meaningless if samachan does not come with me
サノヨイヨイ (sa no yoi yoi)
Samachan ga kayowanya, ada no hana,
- (3) あなたが その気で 言うのなら If what you say you intend is true (leave me)
ア ヨイヨイ

Anata ga sono ki de, yuu no nara
(a yoi yoi)

思い 切ります 別れます
Omoi kirimasu wakaremasu

Then I think I will part from you

もとの 娘の 十八に
Moto no musume no juhachi ni

If you can make me a girl of 18 again

返して くれたら 別れます
サノヨイヨイ
Kaeshite kure tara, wakaremasu
(sa no yoi yoi)

I will part with you

(4) 晴れて 添う 日が 来るまでは
ア ヨイヨイ
Harete sou hi ga kuru made wa
(a yoi yoi)

Until the day comes

心 一つに 身は 二つ
Kokoro hitotsu ni mi wa futatsu

(when) two become one heart

はなればなれ の せつなさに
Hanare banare no setsuna-sa ni

The separation is painful

夢で 様ちゃんと 語りたい
サノヨイヨイ
Yume de samachan to kataritai
(sa no yoi yoi)

I want to tell you in a dream

(same as 1)

(5) 月が出た 出た 月が出た
ア ヨイヨイ
Tsuki ga deta deta, tsuki ga deta (a yoi yoi)

The moon has risen (come out), has risen, the moon has risen
(a yoi yoi)

三池炭坑 の上に出た
Miike Tanko no ue ni deta

It has risen over the Miike Coal Company

あんまり煙突 が 高いので
Anmari entotsu ga- takai no de,

Because the chimney is so high

さぞや お月様 けむた だろう
サノヨイヨイ
Sazoya Otsukisan kemuta karo (sa no yoi yoi)

Surely the moon will look smoky
(sa no yoi yoi)