

Soran Bushi

(Hokkaido, Japan)

“Soran Bushi” is a one of the best-known Japanese folk songs and it is sung at Nishin (herring) fishing sites when moving the herring from large nets onto small boats with hand-nets. The fishing site moves from town to town and as a result, each town has developed its own dance in relation to it. There are currently about ten variations of “Soran Bushi.” Nowadays, some sites can no longer find even a single herring but despite the poor catch, this song is as popular as it was in the early days. The name of this song/dance comes from shouting encouragement to each other as well as to express the joy of successful catches.



There are many songs and dances called “Soran Bushi” but most of them have the common dance movements. The main dance position is based on each stage of the fishing process and the physical characteristics of herring. The dance introduced here is a collection of the most best-known movements.

The dance contains the movements as follows: rowing out the boat, lifting the net, putting the catch into the carrying basket,

carrying the heavy basket filled with herring on their backs, and then wiping the sweat off brow.

Pronunciation: soh-rahn bush-ee

Music: 4/4 meter

Japanese Music CD, Track 3

Formation: Individuals in a circle facing LOD (CCW). M take a wider stance than W.

Steps & Styling: Cho: A short, soft clap of the hands.

Chon: A hard, long clap of the hands.

Meas 4/4 meter

Pattern

2 meas INTRODUCTION. No action.

Footwork

Hands

1-2 Hold.

Two Cho at chest height (cts 1, &); one Cho at chest height (ct 2); repeat for meas 2.

I. ROWING THE BOAT

1-3 A long step R, turn body to L, look back L and turn back ft out (cts 1, 2); step L beside R, no wt, look fwd (ct 3, 4); repeat twice with alternating ftwk and bodywork.

Push both arms to R side, fingers cupped in as if pushing an oar (cts 1, 2); bring both hands to waist (cts 3, 4); repeat 2 times, changing from side to side.

4 Hold.

Hold (ct 1); 2 Chon (cts 2, 3); hold.

II. LIFTING THE NETS

- 1-2 Large step R (cts 1-3); touch L beside R, no wt (ct 4). Repeat with opp ftwk. Reach R arm out at 45-degree angle to R side as if grabbing a net (ct 1); reach L arm out as if to grab the net (ct 2); bring both arms back and up as if pulling in the net (cts 3, 4); repeat on L side.

III. PUTTING THE CATCH INTO BASKETS

- 1-2 Step R fwd (ct 1); hold (ct 2); touch L beside R (ct 3); hold (ct 4). Repeat with opp ftwk. Push both arms down on R side, palms out (ct 1); bring both arms up to R shldr, palms facing body as if throwing fish into basket on back (ct 2). Repeat on opp side (cts 3-4).

IV. LIFTING AND CARRYING THE BASKETS

- 1 Hold (ct 1); step R (ct 2); step L (ct 3); touch R toe beside L (ct 4). Chon (ct 1); raise elbows to shldr height, hands near chest, fingers loosely closed as if holding the straps of a shldr basket (ct 2). Hold hand position through the next two meas.
- 2 Step R (ct 1); touch L slightly back and to the side of R (ct 2); step L (ct 3); step R (ct 4). Maintain hand position (fists on chest).
- 3 Step L with deep knee bend and leaning L (ct 1); raise R behind to knee height (ct 2). Repeat with opp ftwk. Maintain hand position (fists on chest).

V. WIPING OFF THE SWEAT

- 1 Step L bkwd (ct 1); lift R and begin moving bkwd (ct 2); step R bkwd (ct 3); hold (4). Raise L arm so hand is in front of eye (ct 1); pull L elbow quickly back (ct 2); return L arm to chest height, raise R arm up to eye height (ct 3); pull R elbow quickly back (ct 4).
- 2 Hold position. Lower arms (ct 1); Cho-cho, chon (cts 1-4).

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

Presented by Iwao Tamaoki

Soran Bushi — continued

Lyrics

Chorus: E Ya-ren, so-ran, so-ran, so-ran, so-ran, so-ran, hai, hai

Oki-no kamome-ni shiodoki toe-ba Watasha tatsu tori, mani-ni kike choi Ya-sa, e-en-ya-an sa-no, dokkoisho, dokkoisho, dokkoisho	Rough translation: Seagull flying away, won't tell how the tide is.
Oki-no kamome-ga mono iunra-ba Tayori kiitari, kikasetari	If seagulls could talk, they would carry news from faraway.
Nishin kurukato inari-ni kike-ba Dokono inari-mo kon to naku	Fox God won't say anything except "kon" if you ask if herrings are coming. ⁽¹⁾
Yoichi yoitoko ichito-wa gozare Umi-ni kogane-no nami-ga tatsu	Yoichi is a wonderful place, surrounded by ocean. Come visit.
Otoko dokyo-nara go-shaku-no karada Don-to noridase, name-no uye.	Men, you must be courageous to go fishing in the ocean.

(1) In Japanese, the fox makes the animal sound "kon." Phonetically, "kon" is same sound as "not coming." Thus, if you ask a fox if the herrings are coming, the answer is always no.