

Apocalypse Whenever

KATSU MIYAUCHI



STAGEHANDS IN CHINESE UNIFORMS

swing from a suspended hoop, momentarily paralyzed. Others stack antique suitcases with geometrical finesse. Heavy-lidded women careen from sleepy meandering to wild invective on the nature of emotional possessiveness. Sitting on handmade chairs carried on stage with religious respect, they watch a film projected on a square of paper hung between the performers and spectators; it shows people with similar suitcases tramping over a mountainous ridge. The score from *The Killing Fields* is the ominous accompaniment for these universal refugees.

This is Gekidan Kaitaisha's first piece in the trilogy *The Dog*. It is an odd title for two hours of non-stop *coup de théâtre*, although one woman does wear a dog collar and describes a life of misery with Butoh-like spasms. There is more, and it is intense, as if the director initially strung a series of eye-widening photo stills together, twisted the associations, then jacked up the performers' commitment to ferocity level.

The action sometimes takes place out of view but not hearing. Footsteps grate on an iron staircase after Kenjiro Kumamoto's impassioned tirade containing only country names. Six women hiss like snakes or beat a painful flamenco percussion on their bare thighs while another dances, all adding up to a palpable atmosphere of angst. For founding director Shinji Shimizu, the performance depicts a woman treated as a possession, but also a dog's perception of how humans interact.

Gekidan Kaitaisha, or "theater of deconstruction," is an amalgamation of every diverse influence found in contemporary Tokyo theater. Name it, Kaitaisha encompasses it: theater of the absurd, Butoh (watch the company's cross-eyed and slack-jawed Hiruko Hino), the democratization of overweight or unattractive bodies, a skimpy narrative thread—the entire gamey lot. What the group does, according to the relentlessly obtuse Shimizu, is take a wealth of inspiration and churn out theater. "What we are trying to do is take the spontaneity of street theater, where nobody knows the program notes, and place that in the context of mainstream theatrical activity."

Kaitaisha first started testing the theatrical waters a decade ago with work on texts from Noh theater, but the limitations of indoor space soon propelled them outdoors. Here the audience follows the performers from one location to another, since Shimizu believes that context is integral to visual perception. The group's visual extravaganzas have included "locomotion theater" at Kawaguchi World Festival three years ago, where they performed *Shining Heights* on huge scaffolding erected at the station itself (courtesy of enlightened support from JR East). Kaitaisha shows no regard for the comforts of the viewer. We are expected to stand on a disused railway platform or dam, in a warehouse, dormitory or a courtyard, or in extreme climatic conditions at the Toga and Hinoemata festivals.

Critics maintain that Kaitaisha has made outdoor performance its own. "We want to be free from the fixed images of theater, and recklessly make theater which overwhelms the

By blending every theatrical influence in Tokyo, Gekidan Kaitaisha has made outdoor performance its own.

visual boundaries of the viewer," explains Shimizu. His company's wanderings give the viewer a "sense of desolation," according to critic Hidenaga Otori; there is also alienation, plus all its attendant analysis ("searchings of the late twentieth century," Shimizu calls it). While

Shimizu re-interprets themes from Kantor, Homer and Dante, his finished product approaches the atmosphere, not the substance, of the classics. This theatrical ploy is particularly effective in Kaitaisha's *The Drifting View*, adopted from Homer's *Odyssey*. An audience which moves with or around the performers is an unexceptional conception that can be radically applied to make the spectator intrinsic to the performance.

But for this month's performance, *Saint Orgie*—the last in the trilogy and an extension of Kaitaisha's 1993 performances at the Atlanta Arts Festival and Charlotte Innovative Theatre—the spectators become "permanent residents." The images created at Hongo Dok, the space Kaitaisha operates in Hongo-sanchome, are a far cry from the alarming potential of outdoor performance. But Shimizu claims the concept of mobility can survive even when the audience is stationary. "We transform the concept of theatrical space," he says. "We hope this gives birth to thoughtfulness." For theatrical midwives, the beer after the performance is usually ¥200. See Listings for details.

— Gilles Kennedy



LISTINGS

★ denotes editor's picks.

BALLET

Vaganova Ballet Academy From St. Petersburg. A chance to see who will be the top Odette/Odile of the next century in a selection of classical take-outs. 7/3, 2pm. Shinjuku Bunka Center. 7/21 & 22, 6:30pm. Tokyo Bunka Kaikan. ¥12,000, ¥10,000, ¥8,000, ¥6,000. Jiku Sozo (3491-9999).

Bolshoi Theatre Yuri Grigorovich Grigorovich's hand-picked team of young talent, particularly geared to earning hard currency in Japan. *The Nutcracker*, 7/7, 8 & 9, 7pm. Showa Women's Univ. Hitomi Memorial Hall. ¥14,000, ¥12,000, ¥10,000, ¥8,000, ¥6,000. Musica (5458-7777).

Asami Maki Ballet Dances *Swan Lake*. Perf. Tamiyo Kusakari and Narinobu Yamamoto (7/16), Ritsuko Obatake and Naoya Kojima (7/17). 7/16 & 17, 7/16, 6pm; 7/17, 2pm. Shinjuku Bunka Center. ¥5,000, ¥4,000, ¥3,000. At the end of the month the company is dancing its annual outdoor spectacular *Summer Night Ballet* at Setagaya Museum of Art. Send an *ofuku-hagaki* (return postcard) by 7/4 with your name, address, phone number, age and occupation to win a free ticket. The program includes scenes from *Don Quixote* and *Sleeping Beauty*. 7/31, 7pm. Setagaya Bijutsukan (3415-6011), bus from Yoga Sta. (Shin-Tamagawa Line). Asami Maki Ballet (3360-8251).

★ **Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo Japan Tour 1994** Men in tutu on toe. 7/22-8/19. 7/22, 7pm; 7/23, 6pm & 7/24, 2pm. Nakano Sun Plaza. 7/26, 7pm. Yamanashi Kenmin Bunka Hall. 7/28, 7pm. Fuchu no Mori Geijutsu Gekijo. 7/30, 6pm. Omiya Sonic City. 7/31, 4pm. Utsunomiya-shi Bunka Kaikan. 8/2, 7pm. Yokosuka Geijutsu Gekijo. 8/4, 6:30pm. Matsudo

07/94 TOKYO JOURNAL 43

in New York—this may be an amalgamation of traffic patterns or queues outside the Guggenheim; whatever—it will definitely show some geometric forces at work. 7/9, 3:30 & 7pm. Sogetsu Hall. ¥3,000. An Creative (5458-0548).

Mami Kitamura Presents her latest work *Circus Circus—in the Mirrors*. Basing the work on a Michael Endé novel, Kitamura attempts to get the audience to reflect on reality as presented in a mirror and on what we consider actual reality, taking advantage of the stage structure of Aoyama Round Theater. Expect more geometric pacing here. 7/29-31. 7/29, 7pm; 7/30, 2 & 7pm; 7/31, 2 & 6pm. Aoyama Enkei Gekijo. ¥3,800. Kitamura Jimusho (3729-0853).

MUSICALS

Stepping Out Tap dancing by Richard Harris in this musical made famous on screen starring Liza Minnelli. The stage version is perf. in Japanese by Nana Kinomi. Dir. Tamiya Kuriyama, mus. Masato Kai. Until 6/27. 6/24-25 & 27, 6:30pm; 6/26, 2pm. Art Sphere. ¥7,000, ¥5,000. Art Sphere (5460-9999).

Mama, I Want to Sing Black gospel musical incorporating a host of theatrical aspirations. Unbelievably enthusiastic cast. Until 7/3. Tue., Thur. & Fri., 7pm; Wed. & Sat., 2 & 7pm; Sun., 2pm. Closed Mon. Tokyo Koscinenkin Kaikan. ¥7,500, ¥6,500. Ems Entertainment (3796-6057).

KATSU MIYAUCHI