

Theater Kaitaisha transforms park with mystery

By Dan Hulbert

THEATER CRITIC

Theater Kaitaisha of Japan is giving the most intriguing performance of recent years at the Arts Festival of Atlanta. It uses the park itself (blissfully mild and lovely on Monday evening) as an epic stage for its dance-theater work, "Yugyo No Keshiki" ("The Drifting View"), transforming the environment into a new planet of arresting mystery.

The 90-minute work, with its dreamlike mix of speeded-up and slowed-down movement, somewhat resembles that of American directors such as Robert Wilson and Martha Clarke, who have never been seen closer to Atlanta than the Spoleto Festival USA. Thus the Arts Festival provides Atlantans a mind-expanding (not to mention bending) introduction to the genre.

The audience sits on a hillside overlooking a grassy valley. An old woman moves back and forth across a bridge. Eight women in gauzy white dresses (from the old woman's memory?)



ERIK S. LESSER/Special

Ghostly figures in gauzy dresses lend a dreamlike quality to Theater Kaitaisha's performance at the Arts Festival.

rush down from the far side of the valley toward the bridge, sometimes in playful abandon, sometimes with the ritualized precision of furies.

Elsewhere in the valley, two men in spacesuits wittily mimic the gait of weightlessness.

Meanwhile, the entire frame

of the event — sky, breeze, distant music — becomes a player. One may notice for the first time how the cars on 10th Street glide by in eerie, silent slow motion.

Suddenly, an ominous black-clad watcher on the far hill, motionless for a long time, hurtles down the hill with astonishingly

THEATER REVIEW

Theater Kaitaisha

Arts Festival of Atlanta. 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday. Performance begins near Park Drive entrance of Piedmont Park. Free. 364-0997.

high, leaping strides. He gathers up the slumping girl (Death claiming his dead?) as the dancers rush up through the audience to a performance area beside the lake. Here the configuration is intimate and intense — with ghostly figures appearing to literally rise out of the water to an unnervingly throbbing electronic score.

The third act tailed off into tiresome obtuseness. But I could have skipped this part (which involves a momentum-killing walk to the Uptown Lake Stage, anyhow), not sensing enough narrative to need an "ending."

"The Last Walk" showed, in the words of director Shinjin Shimizu, "we all are drifters in a common sea" — or seas, of time and space and consciousness.