

③英語のネイティブスピーカー、又はそれに準じる方の部 最優秀賞

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The Internationalization of Nohgaku

From my five years of watching, nay devouring Nohgaku, every month, one thing is beyond doubt – Nohgaku is for the world. And yet, from the howling of the *hayashi* musicians to the susurrations of the *jiutai* chorus and the slow steps of the actor's dance, it appears to herald another world at some remove from our own. What *hashigakari* is needed to bridge this theatre, so deeply informed by the traditions of Japan, with audiences from other cultural backgrounds? What action must be taken to promote this medieval art form on the modern stage? I offer my humble advice.

First of all, I bow before the collaboration between the National Noh Theatre of Japan and Richard Emmert. Without his meticulous renderings of the Noh scripts into limpid English, I would never have gotten so far in my love affair with Nohgaku. We must not underestimate how strange its performance strategies are to audiences used to the conventions of Western musical theatre. There are hardly any props to confirm setting, and even the emotions of the characters seem hidden in the actor's restrained movements. Only the text can guide us into feeling, but without a thorough grounding in classical Japanese, we are lost in its subtle web of allusions. Can we really expect an international audience, unaided, to look at the bare stage of *Yokihi* and perceive, with their mind's eye, the vast palace about which the chorus sings? The Noh world is strange, but it is in this strangeness that magic works; given a little help in a language with which we are familiar. If we are serious about taking Nohgaku to audiences whose ears are unaccustomed to classical Japanese, then we must be serious about investing in surtitles.

My second point concerns programming. The Noh repertoire is vast; it is a truly daunting task that faces us in choosing only one or two plays for an international audience. Nonetheless, we should be confident in the fact that while Nohgaku has roots which go deep into Japanese history, it also has

branches that reach right across the world. Each and every time I watch *Kanawa*, this melodrama about betrayal in marriage and the demonic wound which it inflicts, I am reminded how hearts break in the same places, even when we are countries apart. Likewise, when I was fortunate enough to catch a revival of *Shōjō*, a much lighter, celebratory play featuring a sprite that loves to guzzle alcohol, I was never more convinced of the proximity between Japan and the rest of the world. By focusing on our shared humanity, we will be able to select those Noh plays which resonate with an international audience.

At the same time, it would be foolish to overlook the participation of the Japanese themselves in our endeavour. I am referring not only to the Japanese performers and organisers within Nohgaku, I am also addressing the wider public, especially young Japanese people. As fervent and sincere as the appreciation of Nohgaku around the world may be, this will amount to little if we do not attract young Japanese to the Noh theatre. Let us imagine it as a kindling of interest, as a great enthusiasm sparking off from Japan to other countries. How might we stoke those flames? One answer, garnered from years lecturing on Noh at a college in Tokyo, is to have a deep, intrepid think about the word 'traditional'. All too often, this single, unstable term is used to coerce the attention of young people. But it is not enough in the case of Nohgaku, what we need are fresh details that whet the appetite.

For instance, the *metsuke-bashira*. Untutored, would an audience member in any country know that this pillar holds up not just the roof of the stage, but the entire performance as it orientates the actors through the teeny slits of their masks? The Noh actor is in constant peril of stepping too far and falling off the stage. Wobble then splat. My students gasped, some giggled. It wasn't awe, it wasn't deep reverence yet it certainly wasn't boredom.

Surtitles, sensitive programming and the support of young Japanese will bring the world to Nohgaku.