

Entertainment

Dancer Breathes Delicacy, Exquisite Movement into Oriental Dance Form

Review

Dance Performance Seabury, Thursday

by Steven Brenman

Last Thursday Sachiyo Ito presented the Trinity community with a rare treat. The celebrated Miss Ito offered a class in Kabuki technique as well as a solo performance in the traditional Japanese dance-drama. Kabuki (literally translated: "song-dance-acting") developed during the Tokugawa Shogunate as a highly stylized mixture of Japanese culture, No drama, and puppet theatre. Although its technique is highly structured, it has never been considered esoteric; its wide popularity may be ascribed to its mixture of scatological humor, dramatic content and exquisite movement.

Miss Ito's performance of Fuji Ondo, a 150 year old dance, perfectly displayed the stylized beauty which is representative of Kabuki. Her elaborate Kimono decorated in vibrant red and green was enough to intrigue the audience. Once animated with her flowing movements the effect was nothing short of entrancing. The thematic aspects of the dance were somewhat overcome by its

elemental beauty, but this loss surely did not hamper thorough enjoyment. The movements of her fan (the essential prop in most Kabuki dance) were in themselves graceful, but difficult for the untrained observer to interpret.

The next dance dispelled any confusion about the meaning of the Kabuki vocabulary of movement by presenting a "sampler" of movements and their symbolic meaning. As western audiences understand by convention that the fall of the curtain indicates the end of an act, so too do Kabuki viewers understand the intent and meaning of certain actions. Miss Ito used her fan to demonstrate the subtle differences between the movements that make up the dramatic "sign language." Even in this piece, which was ostensibly for instructive purposes, the exceptional beauty of the dance was apparent. Sachiyo Ito has the ability to make the simple movement of her hand perfectly convey the ripples in a pond or the flight of an autumn leaf. This made possible the understanding and thus the complete enjoyment of the rest of the afternoon.

Mitsumen Komeri, the comical story of a babysitter lulling her charge to sleep, provided a look at the more dramatic elements of the dance form. Miss Ito portrays a young girl who resorts to a mask-

ed play in order to calm a crying infant (the part of the baby was adequately performed by a silk bundle). Although the dialogue was in Japanese, the universal meanings of movement served to convey the action. The change from one mask to the next was brilliantly executed in order to create the illusion of distinct characters often having a conversation with each other. In actual Kabuki performance this metamorphosis would be facilitated by an omnipresent kogen or "stage assistant." Miss Ito again displays her outstanding abilities as a performer; not only can she gracefully execute her portion of the dance, but also tests which are usually performed by others.

The performance of Ayame Tukata and Ayakomei completed the performance as it began. Once again those gathered in Seabury 49 had the opportunity to view the mysterious beauty of Miss Ito's movements. Each motion is imbued with meaning yet free of cumbersome excess. She has taken an technique which dancers have been refining for centuries, and distilled it one step further. Sachiyo Ito has given Western observers, like those at Trinity, the opportunity to marvel at the pure splendor of Kabuki, as well as to understand its movements and meaning.



Sachiyo Ito, Japanese Kabuki dancer who performed in Seabury last week.

photo by Sue Clifford