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Dance Reviews—

Sachiyo Ito And The Spirit Of Sakura Matsuri

Although heavy rainstorms earlier in the week brought a premature demise to the delicate cherry blossoms, the spirit of Sakura Matsuri was very much alive at the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens on May 4th and 5th. Many aspects of Japanese culture, such as kyogen and noh theatre, *cha-no-yu* (tea ceremony), *ikebana* (flower arranging), *sho-do* (calligraphy), haiku and shakuhachi were displayed for the enjoyment and edification of the many hundreds of people who came to participate in the festivities.

One highpoint of this 4th annual celebration was the *odori* (classical and folk dancing) exquisitely performed by Sachiyo Ito and Company. In an all too brief

program, Ms. Ito revealed a technical virtuosity and an amazing range of styles, moods and characters that was a delightful glimpse into the heart and soul of Japanese dance.

The afternoon began with *FUJI ONDO* in which Ms. Ito portrayed a demure, gentle maiden whose elegant movements echoed the loveliness of wisteria. This was followed by *SHIRAIISHI ODORI* and *NISHIMONAI ODORI* performed by three members of her company: Jean Hurkin, Teresa Richards and

Sachiyo Ito

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Mariko Tanabe, who were accompanied on taiko and flute by Genji Ito and Yukio Tsuji. Whereas the opening solo demonstrated the highly ornamental kabuki style dance, these ensemble pieces were simple folk dances marked by cheerful, lighthearted music and straw hats from country life.

Dressed in a simple gray kimono with a pink obi, her long black hair tied back, Ms. Ito conveyed a transparent wistfulness that was hauntingly beautiful in an original piece of choreography entitled "In Between". Although always refined and understated, her control and concentration allowed Ms. Ito to create and share a world of ancient tradition that is beyond words, time and space.

Genji Ito and Yukio Tsuji gave an exciting rendition of taiko drumming during the MUSICAL INTERLUDE, thus projecting an earthier, gutsy aspect of Japanese culture. Although they were on opposite sides of the drum and could not see each other, their timing and synchronicity was superb as they built to a thrilling climax.

TAMA USAGI was a whimsical dance based on a legend about a rabbit who lives on the moon. In order to revenge an old man whose wife has been killed by a badger, the rabbit disguises himself as a woodcutter. Dressed in a masculine costume with white rabbit ears, Ms. Ito demonstrated her mastery of mime as

she vigorously pounded rice into rice cakes or wearily carried a load of wood from the forest.

Ms. Ito's special interest in Okinawan dance was represented by *NUCHIBANA* (String of Flowers) executed with a quiet dignity by the three ensemble dancers who used hand clappers to punctuate their solemn steps.

The program ended with *KANAWA*, a story based on a 15th century Noh play by Zeami. In stark contrast to the youthful serenity of the earlier dances, Ms. Ito transforms into a jealous wife whose husband has left her for another woman. Her bitterness, sorrow and desire for vengeance imbued every step and gesture with a detachment that intensified each emotion rather than pushing it to histrionic excess.

Like the delicate cherry blossoms that fade all too soon, the unforgettable work of Sachiyo Ito and Company came to an end as the applause died out and the lights dimmed for the final time. All that was left was a barren stage to remind us that art, life and beauty are to be fully enjoyed in the present moment before being released to eternity.

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