

DANCE

The heroines of Japanese poetry and Kabuki drama accept their fates, which are usually dreadful, with passionate resignation. In Kabuki, the women's roles are traditionally played by men, but **SACHIYO ITO's** beauty, the illusion of frailty she conveys, makes the classical Kabuki dances more poignant to me. In the 1762 *Sagi Musume* which she performed at her recent Japan Society concerts, you first see her at the back of the stage, behind a scrim, in a misty light, keeping vigil with her parasol beside a stand of tall reeds ("Is it a white heron or a maiden standing dejected in the snow?"). When she enters to dance this tale of unrequited love she is like a reed herself, bending, swaying, being blown in helter-skelter little runs here and there. Her body keeps turning and settling into curves; her arms design S-shapes and figure-8s close to her body. There is nothing expansive about Kabuki women, and Ito, because of her fragility, seems imprisoned by bulky layers of kimonos. Her hands make flat, resigned gestures—"it is so, it is so"—and her head wobbles softly as if her neck weren't strong enough to hold it up. The dancing often winds back on itself, creating an illusion of uncertainty, of someone twisting back and forth to evade blows. Later, Ito, qrippled of her outer kimonos, sinks to the floor, and now you see her flinch from tortures in a real or imagined Hell.

Ito is not only a powerful performer; she has been trying ever since she came to this country to make Japanese dance more accessible to us—by giving charming lecture-demonstrations, by using words, by training American dancers in her style, by experimenting with her own choreography—untraditional, but still very Japanese in sensibility and movement style.

At Japan House, Leslie Watanabe (masked) executed a ritual warrior dance, full of brusque thrusts of the whole body and sudden stops. Ito and Teresa Richards did a very interesting duet in early Kabuki style (before the elements of drama were added). I liked being able to concentrate on the dipping, swirling movements for their own sake and was happy to see how greatly Teresa Richards has progressed since last fall. Ito translated a boisterous, comic clackety-clack little folk song, and John Genke chanted it while he and she trotted around and rolled their eyes. I liked that too although I remember it being performed with greater clarity last time I saw it.

Ito has made two dances inspired by Rilke poems (the translations given in the program are so vile that they might as well be in German for all the help they give). In *The Night*, Ito's gestures are larger and freer, but she is still contained, still resigned. She dances by herself first; then Watanabe enters and shadows her gestures like a dream lover. They dance side by side, or one behind the other, but rarely see each other. She doesn't seem to notice when he leaves, but knows he has left. She removes her outer kimono and quietly—and very beautifully—lies down to sleep. I'm glad Ito is so careful: that no gesture seems inappropriate, that she hasn't made a "modern dance." Her newest dance, *Initial*, is brief—a modest sketch that seems just to be about dancers dancing. At one point, she, Watanabe, and Richards made a little circle and danced together. Nice. But I can tell from the Rilke lines that Ito has more in mind than I'm able to see in the dance.

Ito was fortunate to have the assistance of koto player Fusako Yoshida and the remarkable Teiji Ito and Dan Erkkila to play, respectively, drum and flute, as well as various other percussion instruments.

By Deborah Jowitz