

C venues daily reviews sheet

5.8.2019

Hoichi the Earless
Theatre Ronin
ArthursSeat.com

★★★★

HONG KONG-BASED THEATRE RONIN'S HOICHI THE EARLESS SEDUCES ITS AUDIENCE WITH THE PRECISION OF ITS ACTORS, AND EFFECTIVE USE OF LIVE NANGUAN MUSIC.

Based on a tale from Japanese mythology, Hoichi the Earless focuses on a poor but exceptionally talented flute player seduced by the ghost of a dead Samurai to play for his master, and a friendly monk trying to save the musician from the out-worldly. Although famous in its country of origin, one does not need to be familiar with the story to enjoy the performance – thanks to subtitles that are easy to follow, and available in both English and French.

What makes the show particularly accessible to the foreign audiences is its focus on music, which largely fills the show. Blending cultures, the Hong Kong-based company Theatre Ronin use traditional Chinese Nanguan music – performed live at all times – as the backdrop for their Japanese tale. It is simultaneously calming and frightful, creating a mysterious atmosphere suited for a story involving ghosts and graveyards.

There's an underlying simplicity to Hoichi the Earless, which seduces its audience. Set design is kept to a minimum, and almost everything relies on the skill of its actors and symbolism of chosen costumes and props. The style of acting exhibited here is different from our western understanding – much more subtle and primarily based around movement – which, in itself, adds a dose of fascination but also works well to compliment the story and music.

Although there's nothing overly graphic in the show's content, and Theatre Ronin markets it as appropriate for 5+ year olds, the minimalism of Hoichi the Earless' storytelling would probably not interest the younger audiences. Instead, this adaptation of Japanese mythology is a subtle show that'll appeal to grown-ups who enjoy ancient mystery stories, and can follow the moderate but crucial subtitles in English and/or French.

5.8.2019

Hoichi the Earless
Theatre Ronin
Dark Chat

★★★★☆

Darkness. The soft glow of Chinese lanterns and the murmur of crickets and owls.

We are transported to a slower-moving world of ritual, chant and meditation. A terrible massacre prompts the building of a temple to protect the local community from the ghosts of the victims. This is a haunting tale, presented by Theatre Ronin from Hong Kong, involving text, movement and the music and song of Hoichi the young blind girl.

Themes of humility, vanity, greed and hypocrisy are explored to quietly devastating effect. A beautiful, understated and powerful treat

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09.08.2019

Hoichi the Earless
Theatre Ronin
Mumble Theatre

★★★★

The best theatre at the Fringe, the most diverse especially, comes from C venues. Hoichi the Earless stood out of the program at once, a Japanese folk-tale I'd come across with some wonder during my studies into oriental literature. And now it was in Edinburgh! I just had to go! Created in Hong Kong, & Supported by HKADC and HAB Arts Development Fund, I was presented with a fusion of traditional Chinese Nanguan live music and songs, innovative storytelling and elegant physicality. On the black backdrop were projected subtitles in both English & French – a little lazy perhaps, there is such a thing as separation of the parts – but I soon managed to transcend that split-second of confused focus trying to find the English words, & settled down to my cerebral sauna of song & story.

The setting is the Amidaji Temple, where Haiki, an ascetic poet of sorts, lives there out of poverty. A samurai then gets involved & at some point Haiki gets his ears chopped off. That's a basic summary of course, but I wasn't there so much for the plot, more the scent-dripping cherry blossoms of oriental theatre – & it was done magnificently. We are completely transported to a far-off place in a distant age by a lady sat cross-legged on a mat, getting amazing sounds out of her lute & vocal chords. There is a man who played the male parts, & there is a lady who donned a hood & flew a will-o'-the-wisp across the stage, or donned the sable dress of the Samurai. Multiple roles.

In the foreground we have lanterns & hither-ditherings about the stage. In the background, like a hungry rat, sniffs remembrances of the Battle of Dah-na-ura, of headless bodies floating in the sea, & other haunting visions of death & ghosts. Haiki himself is an amazing creation, essentially the golden masked mannequin torso of a terminator robot. This does not detract from the extreme escapism of the play, & it was wonderful to listen to a foreign language, rolling like waves across pebbles, projecting into drama as I sailed on an opiate carpet through the ribbony streams of Japanese culture & art.