

AVIGNON OFF: “HOICHI THE EARLESS”, A DARK AND ENCHANTING JAPANESE FOLKTALE

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For its first appearance on the French scene, in Avignon, the **Hong Kong-based company Theatre Ronin** offers a dark and enchanting tale of the Japanese folklore: “**Hoichi the Earless**”. This horror story will transport you to medieval Japan while making you think about what really is the hideousness of our world.



The piece, entirely played in Cantonese and with surtitle in French and English, is adapted from *Hoichi the Earless*, a tale collected by Lafcadio Hearn, a 19th century Irish journalist and writer keen on Japanese culture and folklore.

The tale tells the misfortunes of Hoichi, a blind singer, whose voice is able to move even the dead. It is especially famous for the lament of the Dan-No-Ura battle where numerous young men died decapitated. Since that time, it has been said that their spirits are haunting the bay, doomed to eternal torment. Neither the temple erected in their honour, nor the burial of their bodies had succeeded in appeasing them.

One night, the singer is noticed by the emperor Antoku and a cold hand pulls her away toward the latter.

Over the days, Hoichi's attitude becomes stranger and stranger. The monk who took her in troubles himself over it. Can he save her? Nothing is less certain... The tune played on her biwa and her song seem to be the only thing able to move the dead who find comfort with her. To them, she has become special, and she takes pride of it. How then could she be a simple temple singer again?

On stage, whereas it is easy to identify the monk, Hoichi's character seem to be personified by several actors, as if she had no identity or was losing it. The audience never really knows who she is: is she the musician, kneeling on a mat in the back of the stage and singing what sounds like a lament, or is she the young woman whose blindness is marked by a veil?

The departed are also present on stage, in a more discrete way, personified by inanimate objects: the paper butterfly, fragile and ephemeral, with which Hoichi symbolises the souls of the dead. Lanterns, according to Japanese tradition, are supposed to guide them. Here on the contrary, they rather seem to lead Hoichi to the spirit world, appearing and disappearing to the sound of clattering crotales. When spirits are at work, atmosphere is tinged with a mysterious aura radiating blue and red colours. Music gets more modern and resonates in the theatre hall. Yet the most tangible evidence of the presence of the dead remains a golden skeleton, personification of the emperor Antoku, leader of the damned souls of Dan-No-Ura bay, the one who will cause Hoichi's downfall.

This skeleton, present all along the show, acts as a *memento mori*, so that we remind ourselves that we may see countless things due to our vanity, even when blind. Just like our desires, we must know how to dominate it, otherwise it will cause our downfall...This is something to meditate on...

Informations pratiques :

Hoïchi le sans oreilles, mise en scène et adaptation d'Alex Tam, présenté par la compagnie du théâtre Ronin, dans le cadre du festival Off d'Avignon, du 20 au 29 juillet 2018, à 14 heures 05, au théâtre Laurette. Durée : 1 heure.

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