

2019 愛丁堡藝穗節 – 《無耳琴師》 Hoichi the Earless

Hoichi the Earless

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mumbletheatre.net

Script: ★★★★★ Stagecraft: ★★★★★

Performance: ★★★★★ S.O.D: ★★★★★



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.

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