



## NOSTALGIA Twentieth Century Revisited

**Japan's Isinha company presents *Nostalgia* as part of the *Perth International Arts Festival* from February 13 -21 at the Perth Convention & Exhibition Centre.**

**It is the storm before the storm.**

Throughout Pavilion 6 at the Convention Centre an army of workers both from the Perth Festival and the Isinha company run around, dodging roadcases and stage props awaiting instalment. They are building *Nostalgia*.

Created by noted Japanese director, Yukichi Matsumoto, it tells the little-known story of the migration of thousands of Japanese workers to Brazil in the early 20th century. It is about a time and a place as well as places in the heart. Where do we belong?

As a hive of activity swirls around him, Mr Matsumoto exudes a profound calm, taking time to speak with *X-Press Magazine* through an interpreter about this production which, ironically, is rarely staged outside Japan.

**It's been nine years since you were last in Australia with your production, *Water City*. How's it feel to be back with a new and different work?**

In English, what we call what Isinha does is Jan Jan Opera. And when I was in Australia last time, in Adelaide, that was the beginning of developing that particular, very specific style. But this time, our style has matured, so we will be able to show you the product of that.

**The phrase 'Jan Jan Opera' has a real physicality about it. Can you discuss what it means to you?**

Listening to your English, the word 'physical' was the one I understood. Indeed, it is something that has a very strong physical element. It has singing and it has lots of moving of bodies, it has lots of spoken language as well. It's an extremely contemporary style.

**For the performers I believe it is often a case an un-learning, rather than learning, in order to master the mode of performance?**

Jan Jan Opera is not something which is already perfected; it's something which is going to grow and evolve from now on. It's something that's going to continually undergo a process of transformation and it involves negating things that we've done, that the actors have done, until now. And although that does involve some suffering, there are also very pleasant things about that process as well. Enjoyable things.

Yes, certainly. It has a future and we're experimenting.

**I've heard of a 'musicality of words' in Jan Jan Opera – does that allow for a more universal experience?**

In Japan we have a word, Kototama. Koto refers to language and Tama means a power or a spirit. Since ages old, there has been

a belief that there's been a spiritual power in words and language. For example, if people in a drought stricken area were longing for rain, then they repeated 'Ame ame ame', the word for rain again and again and again. The rain would indeed fall from heaven and the word itself had the power to make that happen, that was what was believed in old Japan. I don't know whether a similar phenomenon exists in English but nevertheless, I do believe that there is a musicality in language.

**For many people nostalgia as a yearning or a state of mind runs deep, but for you it is even deeper. Why is that?**

Well, this time, our performance's theme is migration. In my own case, even within Japan, I came from a very small island and I moved to the great metropolis of Osaka.

Throughout the long history of human kind, people move, they relocate. When people do move from one place to another, the place that they have left becomes a place of nostalgia, of yearning. I think that's a kind of instinct in human beings.

**Youth culture seems very much about the now – and when it references the past it seems often merely to loot from it without dwelling upon meaning. I believe you want young people to evoke a nostalgia of their own even if they do not possess it?**

In Japan now, most of the young people were born and brought up in an apartment block. In the old days, people had a Hudikado, a place which was usually in the countryside; but now the young people don't come from the countryside, they come from the cities. So they don't have that Hudikado, that native place. However, young people, they do possess the word nostalgic, and in Japanese, that word is Gashi. They do understand that feeling of nostalgia, even if they don't have a countryside place to feel that about. Nostalgia seems to be something that's a kind of distant memory for human beings and even though it may not emerge as a word, still as a concept, as a feeling, it does exist.

It's hard to give a specific, concrete example but for example, in Japan, African drumming is really enjoying tremendous popularity amongst young people. They really like beating on those drums, even though they haven't actually heard African drumming as such. There is still this popularity that's come up.

**The story of Japanese immigrants to Brazil is not widely known, certainly not here in Australia. Was it an aspect of history that always fascinated you?**

Japan is a very strange place, we had centuries of self imposed isolation, which we called Sakoku. For that reason, for Japanese to leave Japan and go far away, that is just so unusual and awesome; especially in the historical setting of that immigration. Japanese people themselves do have the knowledge that there was that immigration.



**What moves you most about the people who moved to Brazil in those times – their solitude, their disappointments or their resilience?**

Well, speaking in terms of actual phenomena, it was right at the very juncture when Japan suddenly stopped being just an Asian country and started moving towards the West. For example, young people discarded their kimonos and started to wear western clothing and hats, and they cut off their ponytails.

**What do you hope audiences will take away from *Nostalgia*?**

Actually, in the show we put on in

2000, we had very little Japanese speaking in it; it was mainly something that appealed to the visual sense. But this time, there's a lot of Japanese language in it, so I'm a little bit worried.

This time, even though it's a bit odd to use the words 'road movie', when we're talking about a large stage production, nevertheless, there's something road movie about it. We have these protagonists and things are happening to them and the tempo is fast and the scenes keep changing and changing.

So I think the audiences here will respond to that feeling of speed.

