

Written by [Sarah Wells](#)

Sunday, 15 February 2009



Nostalgia is Yukichi Matsumoto's ambitious Jan-Jan Opera epic about, the creator says, "the memories of people who lived through the 20th Century."

Beginning in Japan with children at play on a beach, *Nostalgia* follows Japanese immigrants as they make their way through the world, to Brazil, Peru, the United States of America and beyond. It encompasses sugar cane plantations, a hospital, a quarantine, a world war, a gold mine, New York City skyline and a 12' giant man in a bowler hat, and is accompanied by Kazuhisa Uchihashi's elegant electronic score, and of course, the chanting that is the central facet of the Jan-Jan style.

Jan-Jan refers to the old working class district of Osaka where Matsumoto's company Ishinha is based. Their style is removed from traditional Japanese opera, centralising instead in the Osakan dialect and intonation, an "Osaka Rap" that carries a highly urbanised and modern cadence. With a company of around 25 performers on stage at once, the sound is unique and engaging. Having said that, although the company suggest that non-Japanese speakers will enjoy the work as much as those who understand the language, there were a few moments when I felt a niggling need to know what the words were, and I found that to try and concentrate on the chants as sounds rather than words was helpful. There are brief notes in the programme as to what is being said and I would definitely recommend arming yourself with a reading before embarking on the performance.

On an enormous set in one of Perth Convention Exhibition Centre airport hangar-like spaces – indeed, Ishinha more normally build their own sets outside to accommodate their enormity – the production is visually spectacular. The piece uses a combination of sets and film projected on the back wall to give even more of a sense of the vastness of the landscape, and sets and flags roll in an out at speed. There are many places to look at at once. Movement 5, Seven Tempo Samba, set on a property in the cane fields of Brazil, is particularly impressive, as is the city-scape of New York City at the end of Movement 12.

This is a highly energetic piece and the cast are highly synchronised and impressive in their cohesion. Stand out scenes for this reviewer were the physical examination on the immigrants arrival in Brazil (Movement 3), and in Movement 9, where chanting birds perch and twitch on a jungle gym.

Scenes of the central couple *Ann* and *Noichi* roaming the desert are a little drawn out, but the drama of Movement 12, El Dorado, with the heavy drums of Uchihashi's score stepping up to facilitate such tight suspense are worth waiting for, and after this crescendo we are lowered gently back down to earth by the innocence, humour and charm of a child in an oversized stolen bowler hat. It is a unique piece of good scope and is worth seeing for its energy, originality and universality.

Ishinha presents

Nostalgia

Part of the 2009 Perth International Arts Festival

Venue: Perth Convention Exhibition Centre Pavilion 6

When: Fri 13–Sun 15 Feb, 7.30pm

Tue 17–Sat 21 Feb, 7.30pm

Sat 21 Feb, 2pm

Duration: 1hr 10min no interval

Prices: A Reserve \$70/Friends \$60 B Reserve \$50/Conc \$45 C Reserve \$35

Bookings: 9484 1133 perthfestival.com.au Festival Info 6488 5555
