

Nostalgia

Jennie Fitzhardinge February 16, 2009

Nostalgia

Perth International Arts Festival event

Directed by Yukichi Matsumoto

Performed by Ishinha

Perth Convention & Exhibition Centre until February 21.

[Tickets \\$35-\\$70](#)

"The past is a foreign country - they do things differently there."

While there is no acknowledged link between the famous opening lines of LP Hartley's novel *The Go-Between*, the Japanese production *Nostalgia* nevertheless explores the concept in a very literal way.

Nostalgia tells the story of Japanese migrants who emigrated to South America to escape poverty in turn-of-the-century Japan. The nostalgia of the title is for both the migrants' homelands and for the unfulfilled promises of migration. For writer and director Yukichi Matsumoto doesn't give his protagonists an easy ride – they are buffeted by revolution, war, displacement and separation in a sequence of events that is meant to represent our collective journey through the 20th Century.

It isn't an easy ride for audiences either, but there are rewards for the well-prepared. *Nostalgia* is performed in Japanese and Portuguese in a style Matsumoto has dubbed *jan jan opera* – phrases are chanted en masse or out of sync between individuals and the music dance that accompany it are rhythmic and driving.

Matsumoto started his career as a visual artist and the tableaux he creates as the play moves from Japan, to Brazil, across a desert, to a hospital in Peru to the hellish gold mines of El Dorado and on to the promise and threat of New York are arresting and beautiful. They are worth the price of admission alone and will linger in the memory long after the play is over.

Perhaps it is because he is so fluent in the visual, musical and physical, that he didn't think it was necessary to provide surtitles.

He has said the rhythm of the language and the action on stage is enough to convey meaning. That can be debated, but one effect of not having the language translated is that we the audience effectively became migrants too – we could understand the general gist of what was happening while the detail was out of our reach – creating a very visceral experience of what was being represented on stage.

For those who prefer to know a little more about the country they are travelling to, the event program is available for downloading at <http://www.perthfestival.com.au/theatre/nostalgia/> and I recommend reading it and the other material on the site before attending the show.