



ARTS

Edited by Stephen Bevis



A sense of NOSTALGIA

THEATRE

Nostalgia
Written and directed by Yukichi Matsumoto; Ishinha company
Perth Convention Exhibition Centre
Review: Ali Taulbut

I am probably not alone in that the very little acquaintance I have with Japanese theatre is limited to that of the three classical forms kabuki, noh and bunraku puppet theatre.

Everything from music, costume, make-up and a strictly codified performance style adds up to a theatre experience that is intensely hard for a Western audience to comprehend. The cultural reference points differ so greatly that any attempt at meaningful explanation is nigh on impossible. I remember trying way back in the dark ages of my university drama days.

This is not the case with world-famous director Yukichi Matsumoto's production of Nostalgia. The text is spoken/sung in the dialect of Japan's Osaka region against the superb musical orchestrations of avant-garde improvisational composer Kazuhisa Uchihashi.

Uchihashi's score is dynamically diverse throughout and at the

climax, simply thrilling. Depicting the journeys of early 20th century Japanese migrants in South America, Nostalgia explores themes of love, displacement and self-fulfilment.

The vast depth of the enormous, purpose-built black-clad studio stage impresses and, even en masse, the 26 actors are dwarfed by a cinema-sized rear projection screen. The set design ranges from stark near-emptiness and carefully shot film projection to simple but brilliantly used scaffolds and cage-like structures. It cranks up the wow factor for the spectacle of distant burning crops as seen through a Brazilian newspaper's office windows.

Performed in a style Matsumoto has dubbed jan-jan opera, Nostalgia is a highly stylised blend of opera and contemporary dance. The performers vocalise and dance in unison or canon; like a vast human assembly line they perform their choppy, almost military, formations like an ultra-modern Busby Berkeley troupe. But out of the white-faced uniformity, a tender personal story unfolds. Nothing is sloppy, the precision of the entire theatrical event is absolute; these artists demonstrate discipline and artistry of the highest degree.



Stylised: The themes of love, displacement and self-fulfilment are played out in a blend of opera and dance

The program notes talk of nostalgic memories and scenes are accordingly presented in a dream-like fashion.

Repetition of text, movement and spatial patterns seem to evoke a sense of replaying scenes from one's past, skipping the detail and recalling only the essence.

Costume design is credited to the whole company; the palette is muted and monochrome, which is far from dull and gives the impression of a giant sepia photograph. Bowler hats feature a lot, not the least of which is the comically giant one for the 4m monster puppet known as He.

The giant is said to be a symbol of an era in which mankind became

“fat” and in Japan's early relations with the West, the country resisted cultural exchange but eventually adopted that quintessential icon of English gents — the bowler hat.

In the end this is not the kind of text-driven theatre that scholars can sit around psychoanalysing. It is total theatre and absolutely has to be experienced as a live performance.

Matsumoto is clearly an astonishing director with an exceptional vision. I loved this production's unashamed theatricality and the pure joy of a story well told and an audience well entertained.

Nostalgia ends on Saturday



WHAT'S ON TODAY

Art and Today: Eleanor Heartney's Concert Hall address at 6.30pm

Stimmung: Theatre of Voices perform Stockhausen at Winthrop Hall at 8pm. Pre-concert talk at 7.15pm.

Camille O'Sullivan: Cabaret in the Beck's Music Box at 8.30pm

Films: You the Living (Somerville); Shall We Kiss? (Joondalup Pines)