



Festival views

By SARAH McNEILL

Festivals are all about the unexpected; being surprised, delighted or shocked and being open to new ideas.

Yukichi Matsumoto's **Nostalgia** is typical festival fare, challenging audiences with an epic work on the visual scale of a Robert LePage production but with such sonorous repetition as to give one a headache.

It begins at the turn of the 20th century, the first of a trilogy to span the 20th century, as Japanese immigrants land in Brazil. Against the macrocosm of historical revolution, a small tale of a Japanese boy and a Portuguese girl unfolds.

The Japanese production makes brilliant use of the vast expanse of the Perth Convention Centre, with a grand-scale filmic backdrop, huge sliding sets, impressive lighting effects and a four-metre puppet representing the "fat" west. But in what Matsumoto describes as Jan-Jan opera (jan-jan being a district dialect in Osaka) the rhythmic chanting to an incessant pounding beat accompanied by staccato choreography is at first hypnotic and compelling and at last exasperating.

Samuel Beckett's **Fragments** at UWA's

Octagon Theatre, both challenges and entertains with four short playlets and one poem in an hour-long performance. Directed by English icon Peter Brook, who befriended the Paris-based Beckett when Brook took over French theatre company Bouffes du Nord, the fragments of work have a distinctly Gaelic quality. Writer and director are perfectly matched in their ability to create minimal art with maximum impact. The five pieces are austere classical, injected with an appropriate amount of vaudeville and broad farce to keep inaction alive.

In the play **Rough** for Theatre 1, two beggars, one blind and the other lame, unite in the interests of survival but in contemplating suicide one declares he is not unhappy enough. Waiting for an end is a constant theme, and in the play **Rockaby** a woman (Hayley Carmichael) delivers the poetic, repetitively rocking monologue with a Dylan Thomas musicality as she waits to follow her mother who rocked herself to the grave.

In contrast, **Act Without Words II** is a silent slapstick comedy of two men (Spanish actors Cesar Sarachu and Antonio Gil

Martinez) who approach their working day with very different attitudes, one full of fury and the other full of cheer.

The least successful piece is **Come and Go**, where three elderly women meet on a park bench, each to gossip behind another's back. The actors seem to rely on the bland humour of two men being dressed as women instead of the conflict of a perverse friendship.

More in the way of depressing Irish absurdist drama is **The New Electric Ballroom** by Druid Theatre Company (Playhouse). It is a fine example of Irish writer/director Enda Walsh's obsession with telling and retelling stories. The fast-paced, wickedly humorous but deeply disturbing scene of three sisters trapped in an ever-

present past, requires maximum concentration over its 90 minutes as they replay the same story from different perspectives. Essentially monologues, as the three women have long since lost any meaningful relationship with each other, their own "sea of words" is punctuated by the regular visits of a jittery fishmonger, Patsy. Mikel Murfi's brilliant comic delivery of town

gossip at breakneck speed is a highlight in this strange, fractured, ambiguous piece.

WA Ballet's festival showcase, **Ballet at the Quarry**, is always an

uncomplicated delight of fun and sophistication. The amphitheatre, inventively lit by Jon Buswell, provides all the backdrop the dancers need.

The surprising highlight of this year's showcase of six dances was young dancer/choreographer Cass Mortimer-Eipper's short, funny and inventive piece called **It Is**, inspired by films and music videos.

To close an evening of beautiful dance that included Daryl Brandwood's solo performance **Consider the Raven** (Tobin Del Cuore) and fascinating music choices like Devandra Banhart's folk songs for **Lickety-Split**, is Natalie Weir's **Lacrimosa**. This work, seen last year at the Regal Theatre, was created for the Quarry and in this setting is perfect.

Inspired by the spiritual music of Mozart's **Requiem**, it is an emotionally powerful and moving classical work that brings the corps de ballet together in a seamless performance.



■ Nostalgia uses the vast space to great effect.



■ Silent comedy is a highlight of Beckett's writing in Fragments.



■ Mikel Murfi is wonderful in New Electric Ballroom.

