

SANKAI JUKU

HIBIKI

RESONANCE FROM FAR AWAY



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Direction, choreography and design: Ushio AMAGATSU

Music: Takashi KAKO
(piano and contrabasses composition)
Yoichiro YOSHIKAWA
(synthesizer composition)

Dancers: Ushio AMAGATSU
SEMIMARU
Sho TAKEUCHI
Akihito ICHIHARA
Taiyo TOCHIAKI
Ichiro HASEGAWA

Assistant to dancers: Dai MATSUOKA

Stage manager: Kazuhiko NAKAHARA
Assistant stage manager: Kiyonaga MATSUSHITA
Lighting technician: Genta IWAMURA
Sound technician: Junko MIYAZAKI
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Co-production: Théâtre de la Ville, Paris, France
Hancher Auditorium, University of Iowa, U.S.A.
Biwako Hall Center for the Performing Arts, Shiga, Japan
Sankai Juku, Tokyo, Japan

in collaboration with : CNDC- L'Esquisse - Angers

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World Premiere at Théâtre de la Ville in 1998
Length: 1 h 25. No intermission

Amagatsu was granted the Laurence Olivier Award for HIBIKI, best choreographic production in London 2001.

Scenes:

I	Sizuku: drop	The sinking and reflection of a drop
II	Utsuri: displacement	Most furtive of shadows
III	Garan: empty space	Air is like water, calm and quiet
IV	Outer limits of the red	The body metamorphosises into the object it beholds
V	Utsuri: reflection	from the <i>eikon</i> to the image
VI	Toyomi: resounding	More light!

HIBIKI – Resonance from Far Away

*Walking like a single form,
Fixing eyes straight forward,
Two people walk slowly,
Each like the other, their destination shared.
Together, they need no sign to stop or start;
They may be more than two,
They may travel at speed,
it is the same.
Understanding not of words,
A resonance in fact,
Through a dialogue of consciousness.*

*Resonance springs from tension,
This tension from collision,
Two tense bodies hit.
But if one loosens, so; the other,
and the resonance disappears.*

*Some say that ontogeny resembles phylogeny.
An embryo, one month after conception, will change
From ichthyic to amphibian,
Reptile to mammal.
This million year drama,
Emerging upon the shores of the
Paleozoic era,
Is enacted by an embryo
Within a matter of blood circulating inside a mother's womb
Is like the motion of the waves,
It is the Primal Resonance which arrives to us.*

Ushio Amagatsu

Press References

International Herald Tribune (Tokyo)

Like Dancing in Dreamscapes.

Japan's Sankai Juku Blends Movement, Light and Shadow

All is still, stiller than a windless sky, at the start of "Hibiki".

On a stage of unparalleled simplicity, water drips slowly from suspended glass urns into 13 large glass lenses, the drops magnified in the score by Yoichiro Yoshikawa and the avant-garde jazz pianist and composer Takashi Kako. The scene is a dream landscape by the choreographer and dancer Ushio Amagatsu.

Four dancers uncurl on lotus leaves in caramel lighting. There is a sense of primeval as they move, supple and fluid, into a standing position, only to collapse and rise again. The dancers metamorphose from statues in granite poses into terrifying vibrant dervishes, pulsing through sand and shadow or splashed by water in an animist appreciation of its purifying powers.

Amagatsu's solos in this newest production is a storm of quiet, broken by single, whiplash gestures of hands and finger and sudden swivels of the torso. He oscillates between movement's external expression and its internal understanding, and the impression is devastating. The control of the movement is so fine it can resemble a mirage, fleetingly teasing the senses.

...In "Hibiki" they reflect the violent theatricality of the water in a concave lens filling with red under uncompromising lighting. The costumes are designed in textiles in earth tones or shades off-white, swirling, rippling skirts on bare-torsoed men or plain full-length robes.

... The epic productions of six or seven free-flowing segments have become even more refined, with fewer distractions in sets and props and an intensified concentration in movements. They retain a luminous, poetic beauty. Yet the dream landscapes never masks the skills of this company of highly trained athletes in structured movement patterns.

Amagatsu calls this ritualized dance style, performed in rice flour makeup whitening the entire body, a "dance of intuition". It involves almost no contact with other dancers, but an enhanced spatial appreciation that seeks an awareness of and response to gravity that legitimizes verticality. The result is an overwhelming sensory experience for the viewer.

The lyrical, epic dimensions of his work, commissioned on a two-year basis by Theatre de la Ville in Paris and more recently in co-commission with Japan's Biwako hall and Hancher Auditorium at the University of Iowa, are fueled by a minute examination of molecular structure.

Amagatsu is to botany as Pina Bausch is to psychology, taking inspiration from the minimalist transformations of cellular tone and texture as she plumbs emotions for their parallel in movement

Every Sankai Juku work is Amagatsu's attempt to measure the relentless beauty of passing time. No millennium programming will seem as fitting.

Gilles KENNEDY, Nov 13, 1999

Midi Libre (Montpellier)

Sankai Juku sous l'emprise des ombres

Le Japon d'Amagatsu n'est ni le pays du rire, ni seulement celui, comme on l'a cru longtemps le concernant, de l'après-Hiroshima. C'est celui d'une pensée aussi délectable que soumise à la torture : le pays de la ferveur retenue et de l'offrande contenue. Mais c'est dans cette castration des ardeurs qu'il fait résider le plaisir suprême.

Hibiki (Lointaine Résonance) s'est emparée de la scène du Corum, pour le dire avec cette intelligence de l'espace caractéristique des "grands" de la danse: Merce Cunningham, Lucinda Childs, ou William Forsythe. Mais avec Amagatsu, l'espace est donné comme un tableau, pour favoriser la lecture des signes qui y sont produits. Il s'apparente à l'espace de l'écriture, pas seulement du théâtre. On en sort fasciné.

... Touches de bleu et ocre, de blanc et rouge, de safran et or... La lumière est diffractée par de grandes coupelles de verre ponctuant le sol qui perd ainsi de sa matérialité. Les corps sont poudrés de blanc pour signifier, en même temps, selon le mot de Roland Barthes dans *"l'Empire des Signes, l'immobilité et la fragilité"*.

"Lointaine Résonance" remonte ainsi une vie qui a l'inflexion des choses vécues que l'on prête aux Ombres – ancêtres, images profondes, apparitions de l'âme libérée des affects.

Que peut-on projeter sur ces images, nous, Occidentaux, pour qui la culture du Soleil Levant n'est ni tout à fait la nôtre, ni son complet contraire? L'image de l'éternité dans les hiéroglyphes des corps ; des figures serpentiformes qui parlent de sexualité et d'androgynie ; des représentations entre sadisme et douceur ; des visions de fœtus, de naissance et de mort. Touchant aux extrêmes, toujours dans l'acceptation. Plus qu'envoûtant, le spectacle est alors véritablement magnétique.

Lise OTT (le 25 Juin 2000)

The Independant (London)

... Sankai Juku set out to disorient. Their sound, lighting and stage pictures have such a minimalist precision and perfection, the resulting images sear themselves on your consciousness. The pace may be slow, but slowness can be mesmerizing, so that when Amagatsu makes his gradual, liquidly imperceptible exit, you feel that you might be hallucinating.

Amid the reduced speed and gesture, you become preternaturally aware of how a spurt into a run or an abrupt gesture can have an earth-shaking impact.

Nadine MEISNER (le 28 Mars 2001)

Le Monde (Paris)

Ushio Amagatsu irrigue sa danse d'eau et de sang

...Ce ne sont ni les corps maquillés de blanc, ni les crânes rasées, pas même la danse ralentie, entre tension et relâchement, qui fascinent : c'est l'esthétique ineffable d'Amagatsu, directeur, gourou, athlète, travailleur secret qui multiplie les métamorphoses visuelles, les effets de lumières à damner les meilleurs plasticiens.

... C'est la première fois qu'on voit si nettement à quel point le japonais permet à l'imagination du spectateur de chorégrapheur: il lance des pistes, puis se retire. Pour preuve : une coupe est remplie d'un liquide rouge. Sang? Feu?

Ce rouge attire comme un aimant les danseurs qui portent des robes-corsets lacés d'écarlate. On croit qu'ils vont s'y plonger. Rien ne se passe, hormis la procession noueuse des corps. Pourtant le public a vu leurs pieds rougeâtres tracer des calligraphes sur le sable fin qui recouvre le plateau. Leur corps dégouttant de sang. Le buto d'Amagatsu est devenu une danse virtuelle, subliminale. Une machine à aspirer les maléfices.

Dominique FRÉTARD (le 22 Décembre 1998)

HA'ARETZ (Tel Aviv)

A Ritual of Absolute Beauty

On stage nine large glass plates filled with water. The performance starts to the music created by the sounds of water drops. The five dancers, heads shaven, their torso bare and painted white (to the best of my recollection, the white make-up is less heavy than the past, but now as then, it serves to erase and to highlight the personality of the individual dancer at the same time) and Amagatsu in the center, in a dress, performing a ceremony in movement, mocking the principles of stability and gravity. And they move on stage, they create continuity and harmony in an endless variety despite – and maybe because – of the ascetic and seemingly emotionless character. It is not dance nor theatre. It is a genre of its own, displayed with all its splendor and developed to return to the point of beginning.

In this 90-minute performance there are six scenes with Japanese titles, describing the action in a simple manner (for example: the outer limits of the red") with an interpretation: "the body becomes the object which it holds". All this arouses our imagination, but what happens on stage is the thing itself: one of the water plates is filled with red liquid, maybe blood, and around it the five dancers in corset dresses and red laces, with earrings, perform a purifying ritual, like the witches in Macbeth or maybe Pontius Pilatus whose hands did not spill this blood.

This is no doubt a ritual but these extraordinary dancers do not worship a god or an aesthetic. They themselves, with their restrained energy, with their precise movement which is slow even when it is fast, precise to the last fingernail, they are the ritual itself. They are not the symbol of something and do not carry – so I think – a message. They are the thing itself, which makes the spectator want to worship their magnificent art.

Michael Handelzaltz, Ha'aretz, April 16, 2004

Ynet (Tel Aviv)

The pleasure of Slowness

With elegance and harmony the dancers of the Japanese dance company display on stage a metaphorical world with visual richness and breathtaking simplicity. A must for all those who admire beauty

Water drips from elliptical water containers hung high from the ceiling into transparent bowls dispersed on stage. Five dancers lie in embryo-like position, their upper torso naked and painted white, as well as their shaven heads.

They spring to life in minute movements, almost un-seen, and sudden bursts. The lighting creates a scenario of light, shadow and a thin fog of soft dust is created by the white sand on the stage as they move.

"I want to envelope the world in dance", said Ushio Amagatsu in one of the first interviews he gave to a Western newspaper. In Hibiki (Resonance from Far Away) he certainly does so, and generously. With heart-rendering beauty and gentleness, in an era that sanctifies only the end result, instant gratification, superficiality and speed and disrespects processes, Sankai Juku is the magical world seen in the crystal balls of our childhood, those filled with snow-flakes that settled down softly when we turned them over. Amagatsu creates visionary worlds which are quiet and turbulent at the same time, teaching the spectator to breath and absorb.

THE JOURNEY BEGINS BEFORE YOU EVEN SEE THE FIRST MOVEMENT

Sankai Juku, created in 1975, originated with the Butoh movement of the 1960s in post-war Japan, that dealt with the apocalyptic potential of human existence. Yet since its very beginnings, the company attracted immense interest from the West, who was drawn to its enigmatic language and extraordinary style, so different from the conventional terminology of other dance languages. Not one can remain indifferent to the metaphorical world, visually rich yet simple like walking and breathing, that is presented by Amagatsu on stage with elegance and harmony that require extreme precision. The

precise movements and repeated phrases like mantras or prayers create a dense and sensual atmosphere.

Beyond the import of Japanese culture, it is a universal piece which deals, if you wish, with birth, life, death and exaltation. Amagatsu shifts between gentle gestures and extreme self-control that denotes violence: between suppleness and firmness, between water and earth and blood.

Constructed like a journey, the piece commences even before the first movement is seen.

In the evolutionary choreography, all body parts participate with small and quiet gestures of the palm, the finger, the bare feet, the back muscles, the pelvis with surprising twists, sudden movements that violently and brutally tear the quiet and the gapping mouth that reveals, against the whiteness of the face – the redness of the throat.

The white make-up is not only a characteristic part of Japanese tradition, but functions, so it seems, to erase sexual identity and thus to enable the spectator to arrive at depths which are beyond the body. The gap created between the internal storm and the external calm only amplifies the emotional dimension.

Despite the fact that Butoh dance is predominantly male, this piece creates an intentional blur between femininity and masculinity, as the dancers wear monks' dresses, fishermen's pants or skirts, while their upper torso is bare, or - corsetted dresses with red laces.

Hibiki is a wonder combining and balancing movement, music, scenery and lighting. It engraves in the spectators' consciousness images of extreme power and impression. It is a unique and supreme aesthetic experience, a "school" for conceptual design of movement, stage, costumes and concept - briefly, a must for all those who admire beauty. Please come fresh because the encounter between the turbulence of life in Israel and the slow development on stage might make you feel tired. Especially moving is the bowing ceremony at the end, when the dancers return the love to the audience with their humane and noble movement.

Merav Yudilevitch, YNET, April 19, 2004