concerned theatre japan

special introductory issue

october 1969

a well-known british playwright was asked at the london airport
why he was going to japan.
"as a representative of western culture," he replied.
upon hearing that an english-language
japanese theatre magazine was in the works, an
eminent professor of drama in america noted,
"i've always wanted to know more about noh and kabuki."

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A Note on Names The Japanese names that appear in **CTJ** are given in the Japanese order: surnames first, then personal names. With names as with other Japanese words, all consonants are pronounced as in English with *g* always hard. *A*, *i*, and *e* are pronounced as short vowels; *o* and *u* are always long. When a sound is to be particularly stressed, consonants are doubled, and vowels appear with macrons.

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1969

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NEW MECHANISM
OLD MASTERS' TONE

The piano world, the pianist's world--that's the world of tradition. Piano construction--that's the world of the craftsman, the craftsman in wood. Yamaha's piano workmanship ages carefully selected woods from Alaska, South America, Africa, Rumania, from around the world and with creative imagination and the constancy of precision engineering puts a perfect finish on the sound of each piano, The Yamaha mechanism, born of tireless research, and the Yamaha tone, born out of the sublime Japanese tradition, have never been spared the virtuoso's adulation,

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コミュニケーション計画・第一番

拠点劇場

[illegible]

壁面劇場

教育・出版

Concerned Theatre Japan is published by *Theatre Center 68/69*, an association of theatre artists, scholars, and critics based in Tokyo. *Theatre Center 68/69* functions as the first repertory theatre in the history of Japanese drama. During the four months, September through December of this year, *Center 68/69* will produce three plays in rotation, running each for one week and then repeating the sequence. During this, our fall season, we will be staging *Trust D.E.*, a musical adaptation of Ilya Ehrenburg's novel by Saitō Ren; *Nezumi Kozō Jirokichi*, a nineteenth century Kabuki play adapted as a farce by Satō Makoto; and *Birdie-Birdie*, an original play by Yamamoto Kiyokazu firmly in the tradition of the Theatre of the Absurd.

Although the number of companies in Japan operating out of their own theatres can be counted on the fingers of one hand, *Center 68/69* is fortunate enough to be among them, and we are presently performing in *The Freedom Theatre*. Because it is extremely small, however, we will design and build our own theatre in consultation with Japan's young and most promising architects and urban engineers by 1971.

In constructing our theatre we will destroy Theatre. We will create an entire world unrecognizable as a theatre, a world of lament and cachinnation, a world of foray and response, a world of sexual freedom and political assassination, and a world where actors and acted upon stand belly to belly together.

Something will happen in our theatre 365 days a year. Ours will be a repertory theatre where work will be produced in continuous rotation. Shakespeare and Moliere will stand alongside Chikamatsu, Satō, and Yamamoto. And we will take theatre out of the realm of entertainment and make it a way of life.

Yet, the very fact that we operate out of a theatre building implies a great deal about the people we will be able to reach with our bodies and our words. In short, whether it be in the tiny *Freedom Theatre* or in our own brand new playhouse, we must remain cognizant of the inherent limitations a theatre and all its trappings place upon us.

The Living Theatre in Avignon. Street theatre in New York. Kara Jūrō on Okinawa. Theatre overflows Theatre and pours like a tidal wave into the streets. Theatre is not television, and it is not Broadway. It is now, it is in your neighborhood, in the parks, in the stations, in the urine-splashed urban alleyways. We are talking about theatre that assaults the complacent bureaucrat as he trudges ill-humoredly his well-worn path to work. We are talking about theatre that cajoles and caresses the children at the corner and gives them something beside the brain-rotting intoxicant of television to surge and explode in the corridors of their imaginations. We are talking about theatre that acts out a news, a history different from that manufactured by the forces that oppress and exploit us. We are talking about a theatre that depicts alternatives to the "good life" that has come to mean little more than freedom from caring.

By next spring, *Theatre Center 68/69* will have its own truck and flat-bed trailer, and we will make the streets our theatre and anyone and everyone who can see us or hear us our audience. Our repertoire will include everything from a 30-second song to a 30-hour carnival. With our mobile theatre we will involve not only the people in Tokyo who never get to our theatre. We will be involving all of Japan's cultur-

ally disenfranchised citizens.

And where a truck can't go, the walls will speak. Out of graffiti, Red Guard wall newspapers, posters from the May Revolution, and the action petitions of striking Japanese university students, the idea of wall-theatre was born. A group of actors--or *an* actor--and a crowd of passers-by. Posters, photographs, news bulletins, or just a piece of white paper on which commuting businessmen scribble their frustrations and their dreams. Instant theatre. At the beginning two-hundred walls, two-hundred theatres; then hundreds of actors and thousands of walls. We will start in the immediate vicinity of our theatre and slowly branch out into the main railway stations, the main intersections, and then into every corner, every crevice of the city. And *Center 68/69*'s committee of artists, designers, city planners, poets, photographers, and architects will plan the wall-theatres' "repertory" and give them continuity.

Theater Center 68/69 also functions as a publications center. The first issue of our monthly newsletter, printed as a poster, described the very wall-theatre that it became. From the first of next year, we will begin producing a quarterly theatre magazine in Japanese which we hope will serve to revitalize the theatre around us. *Dōjidai Engeki* [*Contemporary Theatre*] will also be available to the readers of **CTJ**.

Obviously, we feel we have something important to say and some interesting ways to say it; but the question which really concerns us is whether our plans can be realized if we continue to work on the same assumptions and with the same dramatic techniques that produced the very modernity we are trying to transcend. The answer we feel is a resounding "No!" What we need is training and a constant heightening of our emotional and physical sensitivity. Thus, *Center 68/69* is planning comprehensive training for every one of its members. We will use every available method from those described by Zeami, the "founder" of Noh, to Stanislavski, Brecht, and Grotowski. We will join *en masse* Japan's highly theatrical festivals and carnivals. And we will perform theatre so long forgotten that it will seem as strange to us as it might to you.

We hope that **Concerned Theatre Japan** will allow you to participate in *Center 68/69* and in Japanese theatre. We hope that you will participate not because what we will be talking about is *Japanese* theatre--although we will, of course, be drawing heavily on our heritage--but because we will be talking about *another* theatre, the suggestion of an alternative. Our sole purpose in producing an English-language magazine is to provide Japanese drama, thought, and contemporary culture in a medium more readily comprehensible to a diverse international audience than is Japanese. However, **CTJ** will not be easily read and accepted around the world because it conforms to internationally accepted European patterns; **CTJ** and *Theatre Center 68/69* must not be "faithful islands off the coast of European drama." It is, in fact, our purpose to transcend the limitations inherent in the hegemony established by European drama and to replace it with a new universality. **Concerned Theatre Japan** is but one aspect of *Theatre Center 68/69*'s activities, but we hope that it will quickly become an arena where a fruitful dialogue can take place between us and our foreign counterparts.

BIWA AND BEATLES

AN INVITATION TO MODERN JAPANESE THEATRE

TSUNO KAITARŌ

In 1967, at Tokyo theatres, some unexpected characters made their appearance, and we witnessed their arrivals. First one door opened...

> Paul McCartney. Good evening.
> John Lennon. We're the Beatles.

And then another...

> I beg the indulgence of all those here present. My name has been called, and so I took the liberty of entering. You see before you what has become of Kaison, the priest of Hitachi, who followed Kurō, the illustrious general, Yoshitsune, and who has now travelled from distant Kyoto to this northern highway.

What's more, each accompanied himself on his own particular variety of guitar.

In a tiny basement room reverberating with the unsettling roar of electric guitars, Satō Makoto's *My Beatles* [*Atashi no Beatles*] was performed by a group of young actors about the age of twenty. Akimoto Matsuyo's *Kaison, The Priest of Hitachi* [*Hitachibō Kaison*] was written in 1964 and performed three years later by an almost unknown small theatre group. Kaison accompanied himself on an archaic, Japanese guitar-like instrument known as the biwa. Today the biwa has all but been abandoned, and almost no one able to play it remains. But on those rare occasions when its somber tones and droning rhythm are heard, one feels as if one is hearing echoes from a long dead world.

In Beckett's *Waiting for Godot,* two "little men" hopefully await Godot's arrival. In the end, he does not appear. If one were to say--as I cannot help but say--that a virtual trance has been cast over modern theatre by this image of the savior who, in the end, simply does not appear, then these two plays, each in its own way, stands as a protest against that trance. The long awaited being destroys the sophisticated taboos of modern drama and impudently appears before us. The playwrights have squeezed out every ounce of strength, driven themselves to the limits of dramatic technique, and have endowed their Godots physically and vocally with characteristics peculiar to themselves. Aiming at the idea that no matter how long we wait we will ultimately be disappointed, a notion of incompetence which seems to have thoroughly pervaded our lives, Satō and Akimoto have tried to provide us with that old, but somehow always new, truly theatrical experience--the terrifying instant when someone who is not supposed to appear appears, and when we see someone who has been forbidden us.

Moral: It may be that in order to lure your new perverse Godot out of the gloom of nothingness, you may have to take lessons on the biwa. Then, possibly, eroticism. According to an ancient Japanese myth, Japanese drama began when, in order to lure the sun-goddess out of a

The poster from Kara's *Long John Silver*

cave where she had hidden herself, a young goddess stripped herself naked and sensuously danced herself into a frenzy before the other gods. Fascinated by the commotion and angry not to have been included in the festivities, the sun-goddess once again appeared out of her hiding place.

Thinking back now two years, the sound of those different guitars unabashedly signalled the beginning of a new age in the life of Japanese drama.

II

Born in 1943, Satō Makoto, along with Kara Jūrō and Betsuyaku Minoru, is among Japan's youngest playwrights. Each maintains a small theatre group, and although somewhat limited, their dramatic adventures have continued in basement rooms, in the main halls of Buddhist temples, in coffee shops near the universities, beneath elevated super-highways, and in crude tents set up in the courtyards of Shinto shrines. They repudiate the rules of orthodox dramaturgy, the proscenium stage which divides the theatre in two, and the technology of realism; they further reject spiritless audiences raked up out of mammoth organizations and through all-out public relations campaigns.. They are especially noted for their ability to extricate drama from the theatre, and their peculiar way of telling a story--a careful blend of the gentle and the violent.

Loaded with the red tent that has become as much their emblem as it is their mobile theatre, Kara Jūrō and his group, *The Situation Theatre* [*Jōkyō Gekijō*], are now travelling around Japan--including Okinawa--in a beat-up old truck. They are performing "beggar's theatre" and causing the local police, public health officials, and elementary school teachers to knit their brows in dismay. When one considers that up until now, for economic reasons as well as because of Japan's tremendous "cultural centralization," it has been considered a practical impossibility for any progressive, small theatre to produce continuously outside of Tokyo, Kara's is a most astounding achievement.

But Kara's problems have not been limited to productions outside of Tokyo. In the late autumn of 1966, when Kara first staged his grotesque farce, *Koshimaki O-Sen: A Tale of Forgetfulness* [*Koshimaki O-Sen: Bokyaku Hen*], in the former army-band music hall at Toyamagahara in Tokyo, he took three days during which time, aside from the constant interference of the police, he was only able to attract seventy spectators.

The contemporary theatre of this country--called *Shingeki*, literally "new drama," to distinguish it from traditional forms like Kabuki and Noh--has a history of some seventy years, but it is now being funda-

Kara Jūrō's *Situation Theatre* performing in their red tent

mentally challenged by this group of young dramatists. When Kara asked provocatively on one occasion, "What do we need to go and see in Europe where a woman's period is said to last thirty days a month?!" he not only totally rejected European dramatic modernity; he also spat on Shingeki which has tried to be a faithful island off the coast of European drama.

Over the past seventy years, every generation has tried to do something to bring Japanese theatre closer to the European ideal. Klaus Mann recorded in his autobiography the events surrounding his visit with his sister, Erika, to Japan toward the end of the 1920's and his meeting with the participants in the Shingeki movement of the time. It seems that those of our forbears who went to visit the Manns at their hotel were so eager to observe real, live Europeans and to try to imitate the way they carried themselves that their conversation was devoid of any real content. The results of their efforts, however, were quickly realized. Shingeki flawlessly mastered the vocabulary of modern drama, and accordingly, "naturalistic" and "anti-naturalistic" plays were produced one after the other. The unrefined, boisterous patrons of Kabuki who had formerly inundated small Kabuki theatres no longer appeared. Then as now, Shingeki detracted from the interest taken in Kabuki and other traditional and pseudo-traditional forms and occupied the real center of Japanese theatre.

A little before Klaus Mann came to Japan, the program of the *Tsukiji Little Theatre* which was producing Pirandello's *Each in His Own Way* carried the self-congratulatory comment of one member of the audience: "At long last we have accustomed ourselves to sitting and watching a play in silence." *The Tsukiji Little Theatre* of the time was part of the rather backward "free theatre movement," and consciously attempted to parallel the *Moscow Art Theatre*. Its director, Osanai Kaoru, was Stanislavski's loyal disciple in Japan; he found it laudable that with the success of Stanislavski's *Art Theatre*, the vulgar, riotous atmosphere of the old Russian playhouses had been swept away. Even so, when I recall the passage printed in the program, I can't help being amazed. What was the highly cultured gentleman feeling as he watched Pirandello's scandalous interludes?

Many years later, as we studied Brecht's theories and tried our best to copy him, we were stimulated by the discovery that Brecht, in trying to overcome Aristotelian dramatics in Europe, had taken strong interest in Eastern theatre, especially Noh. As a result, our own dealings with Noh take on the coloring of Brecht's thought or, if not Brecht, Claudel, or, today, Grotowski. We cannot, of course, dismiss these exchanges of perspective with a comment on their sadness and their humor. Transcending the nineteenth century distinctions between East and West, we can find

Toward the end of Abe Kōbō's *Friends*, the central character is saved from loneliness but comitted to an even worse fate.

in these exchanges the structure of the historical dialectic which unites us.

With his short-lived marriage to a French girl as its motif, Iwata Toyō's play, *East is East* [*Higashi wa Higashi*, 1933] brilliantly captures the image of two cultures entangling and then passing. He chose to write his play not with the sodden melancholy of a manipulated household tragedy, but rather with light humor and quick-witted irony. He gave his play the form of Kyōgen, a traditional type of comedy performed as an interlude between Noh plays. He had previously used Brechtian techniques for producing new, free space in drama with considerable originality. Yet, Iwata was one of the rare exceptions, and it was through the 1930's at least that for most of Japan's theatre people Noh and Kabuki remained media to be alienated and not alienating media.

Corresponding to the attempts of Brecht and Artaud during the same period to use Chinese, Japanese, Balinese theatres as means by which the stagnation of their own theatre could be overcome, our predecessors attempted to use European theatre to free themselves from their own creatively powerless, overwhelmingly rigid tradition. A number of difficulties confronted them however. After the collapse of the *Tsukiji Little Theatre* in 1928, foremost among these became the fact that the Shingeki movement, founded by radical young men and women, immediately came to be bound up with the political and labor movements of the violent 1930's. Shingeki, thus, came under severe political and social pressure. There was, of course, another school of thought represented by Iwata Toyō and Kishida Kunio which professed a-politicality and stressed the position of drama as literature.

For better or for worse, in Japan, no system of government or private subsidies exists, and there is no established system of patronage by either wealthy individuals or businesses. In fact, even today, the Japanese tax system militates against such patronage. Obviously, Shingeki had no alternative but to depend upon ticket revenues; but as it was a European import, it was extremely difficult for the Japanese public to accustom themselves to it. They pejoratively called it *akagemono*, a thing for the [Western] red-hairs, and *aka-no-shibai*, commie plays. In short, whether because it was pretentious and tainted with Westernism, or because it was politically dangerous, people ultimately decided that Shingeki had nothing to do with them.

Inescapably, Shingeki turned into a labyrinth. Shingeki's participants often went hungry . They faced imprisonment. And to them, it seemed a matter of course that they should die martyred for the cause. The young men who visited Klaus Mann were this kind of people, and, to tell the truth, I can't help feeling deeply sympathetic with them and their devotion to the theatre.

A *hibakusha* [one affected by the atomic bomb] and his wife embrace in Tanaka Chikao's *Mary's Head*.

The real problems developed later, though. Shingeki survived the interruption imposed by the Second World War and today has come to occupy not only the major position in Japanese drama but also a highly acceptable place in Japanese society. The international language of drama dominates the theatre, and no distinct differences can be detected between Japanese and Euro-American theatre.

Tanaka Chikao's *Mary's Head* [*Maria no Kubi*, 1959] is set in the second city to be decimated by the atomic bomb, Nagasaki. A peg-legged repatriated soldier, a woman whose pubic hair has been shaved off by prostitutes out of revenge, her atomic bomb-diseased husband, the head of a crumbled statue of Mary, the falling snow, a revolutionary movement, and vulgarized Catholicism. Though burdened by specifically Japanese conditions, the numerous dimensions represented by each of these "characters" succeed in creating theatre that is incredibly rich.

In his *Friends* [*Tomodachi*, 1967] Abe Kōbō treats a tragi-comic incident involving a lonely boy living alone in a big city. One night, the boy's room is occupied by a family that professes to have come to save him from his lonely hell. By their absurd good intentions, the boy is ultimately killed.

These plays about nameless little people, while presenting a despairing caricature of the political events which have assaulted Vietnam and Czechoslovakia, also depict the truly individual terror of the solitary man who comprises present day society.

Finally, to touch on Mishima Yukio's work. Not a single Japanese appears in his *Madame de Sade* [*Sado Kōshaku Fujin*, 1965; available in translation] or *My Friend Hitler* [*Waga Tomc Hitler*, 1969]. Nor does the audience experience any particular sense of foreign-ness at the sight of eighteenth and twentieth century Europeans living burdened by Mishima's romantic sentimentality.

Needless to say, starting with plays for the "red-hairs" we have come a long way. Most of the previously impoverished, radical creators of the Shingeki movement seem satisfied with the results of their efforts. Thanks to television and the cinema, actors eat reasonably well; the fact that they are moderately radical does not particularly endanger them in comfortable, prosperous post-war Japan. Large numbers of spectators are guaranteed by a number of "audience organizations," and prospering capitalists are no longer totally unconcerned. Shingeki has thus come to maintain its own "market value;" it insures itself of its proper (!) place in the social order; and, at the same time, it has become harmless and has totally lost its antithetic power. One wonders if this is not also the case with theatres abroad. Here our theatres are always full, and it is because they are always full that they are always empty. In short, over the past seventy years,

Mishima's *Madame de Sade*

Shingeki has become an historical entity. It has its own memories and its own restrictive power implicit in those memories. It has, in other words, come to be a "tradition of the new."

As Shingeki became an historical entity, a tradition, it has had to face the necessity of dealing with modern European drama no longer as an ideal but as a contrasting history, a contrasting tradition. We do not see modern European drama as some golden fruit as yet out of reach. We are already tasting the rotten, discolored flesh of that fruit. It makes us wince as we swallow it, and we can feel inside us the parasites we take it with it.

It goes without saying that the title of Iwata Toyō's Kyōgen-like comedy is a play on Kipling's phrase, "East is East and West is West." Europe for the Japanese and Japan for the Europeans is neither barbarian territory nor paradise. Beneath Shingeki's prosperous exterior there is decadence; but this is not only the case with Shingeki, rather it is decadence within the decadence of contemporary theatre as a whole. Thus, if we consider that even as Kara Jūrō spits at Europe, his sputum is going to land squarely on the Europe within ourselves, then we must also admit that this only indicates his cold recognition that no helping hands are going to be extended him from anywhere. Not only Kara, but Japan's young dramatists in general feel--as if things had once been different--that Shingeki must be alienated and not that Shingeki maintains the power to alienate nature and history. But what might we employ to effect this alienation? Traditional Japanese theatre immediately presents itself, but it is not possible for us to relate to Kabuki and Noh as disinterestedly as, say, have Brecht and Grotowski, if for no other reason than the fact that we still remember the trauma of Shingeki's split with the traditional forms. Even though we say that Shingeki has been traditionalized and historicized, in part it is a tradition of trauma and a history of severence with the past. Shingeki's irrevocable split has put Noh and Kabuki completely out of our reach. For Shingeki dramatists to perform Noh and Kabuki would be comprarable to the Beatles' singing a Wagnerian opera. It has come to the point where the traditional arts are preserved in quarantine apart from Shingeki by a nearly perfect system of hereditary custodianship.

Traditional theatre also modernized differently from Shingeki. Kabuki actors of the Edo period (1600-1868) were called "Kawara beggars;" they lived under poor conditions as pariahs; and they were looked upon by the general population with a combination of fear, awe, and contempt. They still drag with them poignant memories of the past when actors floated from place to place despised as outcasts, and yet when they were feared as those able to don the guise of the gods. They were the objects of the Edo-ites' nearly religious devotion,

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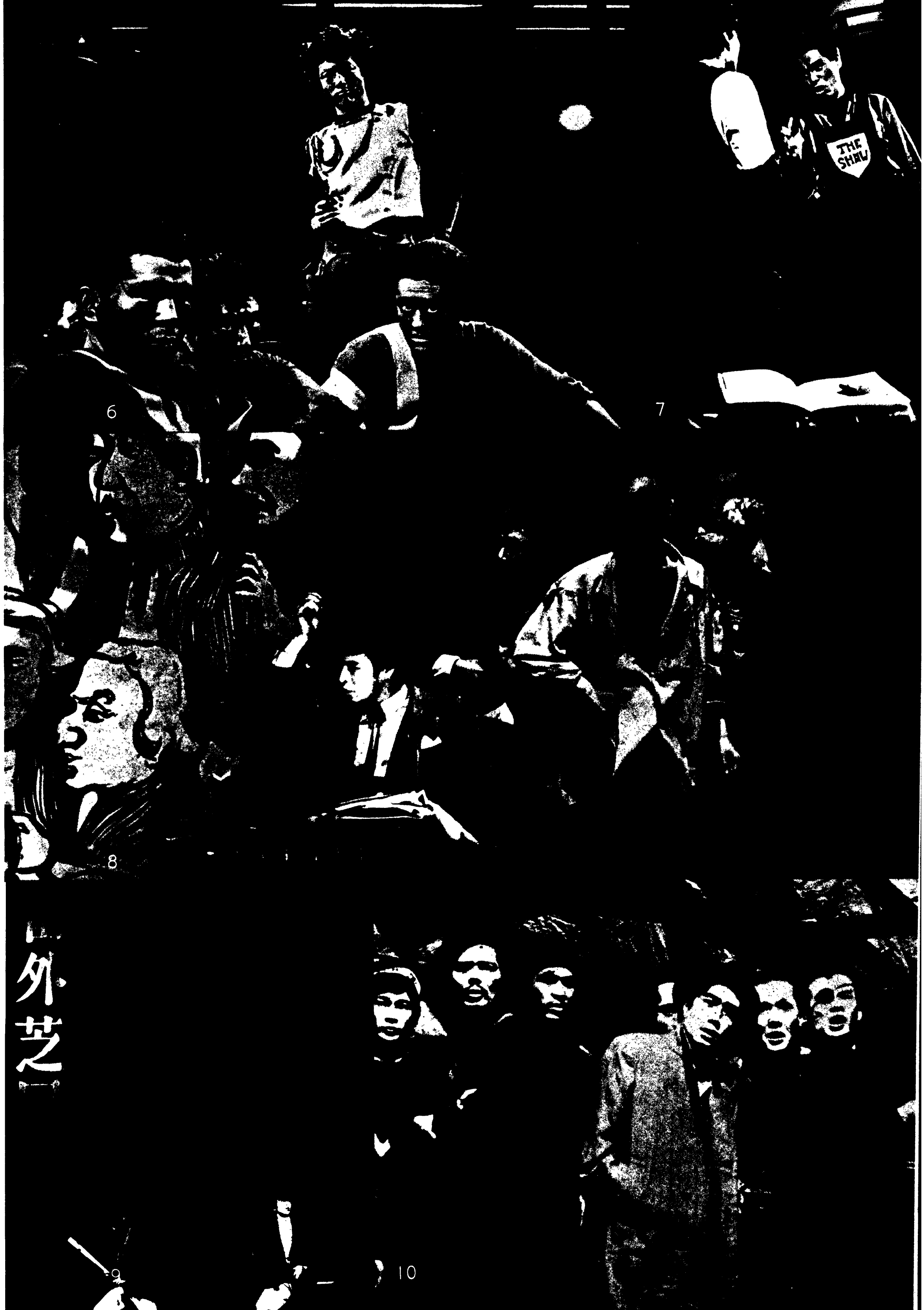
THE SHOW
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All of the photographs on these pages, except for those of Kaison, The Priest of Hitachi, *are those of* Center 68/69*'s past productions.*

1 Kaison, the wandering priest, carrying his biwa

2 Chikamatsu's original, written in 1721, got something of a face-lifting in Satō Makoto's musical adaptation of *Murder in Oil Hell* [*Onna-Goroshi Abura-Jigoku*, 1969] where the central characters became the Hell's Angels motorcycle gang.

3 *Theatre Center 68/69's* first experiment with street theatre

4 Osada Hiroshi's *Kick-Off to the Soul* [*Tamashii e Kick-Off*, 1967]

5 A song from *The Show*, music composed by Hayashi Hikaru

6 Satō Makoto's production of *Emperor Jones*

7 Yank quarrels with the IWW in Satō Makoto's musical adaptation of *The Hairy Ape*. Satō's version is simply titled, *The Show*.

8 Kafka's *The Trial*

9 A farcical interlude in *Legend of a Witch*. The banners up-stage indicate famous events in the history of the Japanese left giving each scene specific time placement. The banner lit up here reads simply "interlude."

10 *Drums in the Night*

11 Kraggler

12 *Legend of a Witch* [*Majo Densetsu*, 1969], set on the stage of the turbulent early years of the Japanese left

13 Andy Cobham, architect, in Arnold Wesker's *Their Very Own and Golden City*

Kara Jūrō's "Kawara beggars" prepare inside their truck.

and the famous actor, Ichikawa Danjūrō, was actually worshipped as the "patron saint" of Edo. In the face of authority, however, Kabuki actors were powerless. After the Meiji Restoration (1868) all they could think about was improving the actor's lot. We can sympathize with them in this, but the method they chose was to eradicate the irrational, the violent, and the erotic from Kabuki, and to make it palatable to the period's wielders of power--the bourgeois and the bureaucrat. The people in power, moreover, in order to establish the appearance of Japan as a modern nation, thought that they should have refined theatre comparable to that of the developed countries. The spirit of this early movement to improve Kabuki continues to exist among Kabuki actors, and today they have succeeded in changing themselves into healthy, popular entertainers.

Kabuki is the nominalized form of the verb *kabuku* and implies the destruction of our everyday sensory balance through grotesque, comic, and exaggerated posturing. Yet, the Kabuki performed today by popularized actors who are the products of the frozen system of passing roles from father to son and who are protected by enormous sums of money, is Kabuki performed by actors who long ago lost the sense of *kabuku* and who seem to stand absent-mindedly erect like a statue of Buddha in a glass case. It is thus that although we must take the opportunity to revitalize modern theatre, existing Kabuki cannot provide that opportunity.

The same is true of Noh. Noh followed the same course as Kabuki but one cycle faster. By the Edo period it had already been boxed and sealed as the art of a particular class. Consequently, we must search for something which has already disappeared from today's Kabuki and Noh--namely, the Kabuki and Noh which grew out of the magical carnival chaos of folk art.

What Kara is trying to do is nothing less than this. And rather than having his actors conform to the image of the conscientious citizen and contemporary artist, Kara seems to have them conform to the Edo period representative images of the male prostitute, the pimp, and the swaggering, loud-mouthed tough-guy. While looked on as a pariah in his own theatre, Kara dons the guise of the gods and is feared as their deputy. He is trying to breathe new life into his actors, the life of "Kawara beggars."

III

Attempts to revitialize the past which has all but vanished from the surface of our consciousness and thereby to make theatre a total, direct experience are not necessarily the sole possession of today's young generation. Akimoto Matsuyo's *Kaison, The Priest of Hitachi* produces the same quality of dramatic experience, and Akimoto is in her 50's.

A Shingeki production of *Mother Courage*

In Japan's northeastern and least modernized area, the legend of Kaison, immortal priest who travels endlessly telling stories and accompanying himself on the biwa, has been handed down through the generations. Kaison was a Buddhist warrior-priest who lived during the twelfth century. He was the retainer of Japanese history's most tragic hero, Yoshitsune. In the last war that ended in Yoshitsune's death, he betrayed his master and fled. Subsequently, he became a *biwa-hōshi*, a biwa-playing, itinerant, priestly story-teller; and from generation to generation stories of meeting the wandering priest have guardedly been handed down.

Akimoto Matsuyo dug up the by now discarded legend and made it the nucleus of her play. And yet, she does not make the time of Kaison's appearance the middle-ages; rather she chose our most contemporary past--1946 and the end of the Second World War. Having lost their parents in the war and having been abandoned by their teacher after school, a group of children, out of despair, call the name of Kaison. In response, a man dressed in an old, worn-out soldier's uniform appears through the door of their dirt-floored room and addresses them, "I beg the indulgence of all those here present. My name has been called and so I took the liberty of entering." This is the moment of arrival which I quoted at the beginning of this essay. The uniformed man, strumming the biwa falls into the rhythm of the traditional story-teller's chant and begins,

> ...You see before you what has become of Kaison, the priest of Hitachi who followed Kurō, the illustrious general, Yoshitsune, and who has now travelled from distant Kyoto to this northern highway. *(He strikes a chord on the biwa)* For the war, even though we advanced like 100 million balls of fire, we met with defeat, unmistakable defeat. *(biwa)* With Yoshitsune at their head, the troups that attacked the islands to the south, China, and Manchuria were routed and died despite valor in battle. *(biwa)* This Kaison you see before you is the worthless coward who betrayed Yoshitsune, abandoned the helpless women and children, and fled the battlefield. I torture myself with the meanness and evil of my deed, but I can never soothe the guilt that aches at the bottom of my heart. *(biwa)* I bathe my guilt in tears, and to do penance I have wandered from village to village, town to town these 750 years. But the more I think on my crime, the more awesome is my guilt. I beg you to hear me.

The female lead in the play is a cunning, old Mother Courage-type temple priestess who makes her living out of the Kaison legend. When she becomes aware that her time has come, she passes her trustee-

The aged temple priestess and her daughter explain the Kaison legend to two awe-stricken youngsters in Akimoto Matsuyo's play.

ship over the legend on to her only daughter, and then, in the ancient style, sits facing the Western Paradise. Without eating or drinking, she sits chanting the name of Buddha for 88 days and slowly becomes a living mummy. The old priestess in whose home the children found a mother-image, was also the one who burned the terrifying yet welcome figure of Kaison into their soft, lonely hearts. In this cacophonous world where folk-magic fantasies and a reality of endless unhappiness and misery are inextricably combined, Kaison appears and relates the history of his betrayal and his wanderings.

But why is he dressed in a thread-bear soldier's uniform rather than his fierce armor and helmet? If one listens carefully, one will immediately realize that what is being related as the legend of a war 750 years past is actually the story of Japan's struggle during World War II. The phrase, "Advance! We are 100 million balls of fire!" is a famous slogan plastered everywhere in Japan during the war. Raw memories of defeat are renewed by the mention of "the islands to the south," China, and Manchuria. There is nothing here if there is not yesterday's Great Japanese Empire and its war.

Then fifteen years pass. One of the war orphans even after becoming an adult, is unable to escape from the sly trap first set by the old woman. He is worked like a slave by the young priestess who cherishes and protects her mother's mummy. For fifteen years, it seems, time has stopped inside him; he is the prisoner of his sense of awe at the image of Kaison and of his masochistic love of the beautiful, cruel priestess. He never realizes that the Japan he had expected to be utterly destroyed had "miraculously" been rebuilt. His precarious mental balance is finally upset when his old friends, now salaried businessmen, with the best intentions, reveal everything. The world he had stopped begins again to turn; he calls the name of Kaison just as he did when he was a child. At some moment during his despairing cry a biwa appears in his hands, and just before the final curtain falls we witness the instant when he becomes Kaison and takes the first step of his endless wanderings. Just as he, bearing the pain of a sin irredeamable by any ordinary means transforms himself into Kaison, so too, the Kaison, epitome of penitence, he had met as a child was actually nothing more than a repatriated member of Japan's vanquished World War II armies.

Perhaps you recall the impressive, mystical episode during the war when at places like Auschwitz the Wandering Jew appeared out of nowhere to help enslaved Jews escape. Implicit in Kaison's case is the suggestion that the Wandering Jew's appearance was the metamorphosis of someone among the inmates of the concentration camps.

In *Waiting for Godot*, the savior does not appear. If in the world we inhabit, there is no alternative either for those who wait or the

awaited but to be fated to poverty and emasculation, there is much reason to Norman Mailer's eccentric view that the collared, crawling Lucky is none other than Godot. If *Kaison, The Priest of Hitachi* is not an elaborate piece of conjuring, then neither is it a beautifully contrived mystery thriller. Slippery phrases putting all enigmata on a logical plane are not about to lull us into a sense of security. Nor is it a witty parody bringing the sublime down to our level. Rather, insofar as she has chosen as her point of departure the structural poverty which forces our age's heroes to be none other than Lucky as Godot, a tired-out soldier as Kaison, and a concentration camp inmate as the Wandering Jew, then she has succeeded admirably well in supplying her hero with a persuasive physique and powerful voice.

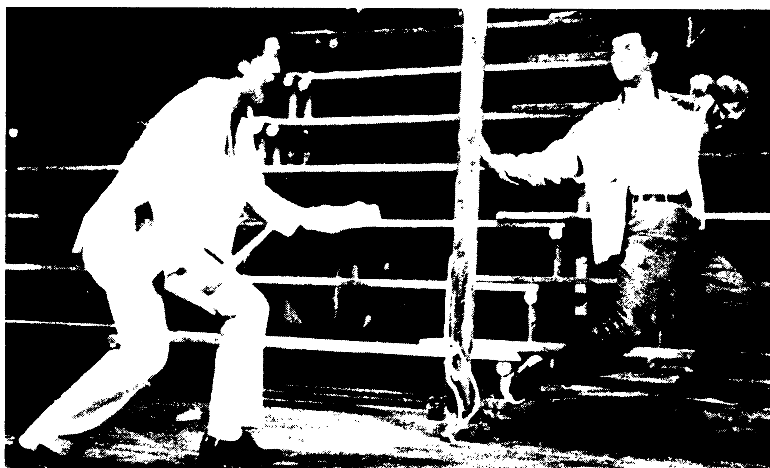
A cherry is still a cherry if but one blooms.
A cherry is still a cherry if but two bloom.
A cherry is still a cherry if but three bloom...

When we realize that Kaison, who we had thought to be a lone individual, is dividing and multiplying into two, three, numberless Kaisons, then when we hear the monotonous repitition of this lullaby sung during the play, it is with horror and yet with fascination. Numberless Kaisons have been born and have died during the course of our forgotten history so that a single character could come to life in a phoenix legend of immortality.

By assuming the characteristics of the oppressed peoples of each age, he insured his immortality. Or, to say the same thing in reverse, in addition to their desolate misery, oppressed peoples have continued to lend Kaison their emaciated flesh. Kaison is time--the invisible, continuing time that exists in the gloomy depths of history. Despite bustling modernization on the surface of history, below the surface nothing has changed. The Japanese who "advanced, 100 million balls of fire" for the emperor--who, for that matter, might be Kaison's mirror image--made an about-face after defeat and adopted the ludicrous government slogan, "100 million penitents." The moment we see Kaison as a soldier or a soldier as Kaison begin his penance, we see the deep, dark, incessant current of time burst onto the surface of history.

Akimoto is not, however, trying to escape today's chaos by dredging up the omnipresent past and feigning intimacy with it. This variety of romanticism has appeared any number of times during the history of Shingeki which has run headlong toward the goal of "modern theatre." Take, for example, Miyoshi Jūrō who was, in some respects, Akimoto's playwriting master. He started as an expressionist poet in the 1920's and later became a bellicose promoter of the Proletarian Theatre Movement. In 1933 he wrote *Senta Cut Down* [*Kirare no Senta*] portraying the

Only recently have Japanese dramatists been able to use Kabuki techniques on the contemporary stage. In this scene from Yamamoto Kiyokazu's *Pirates* [*Kaizoku*, 1969], Kabuki techniques of stylization were used to both exaggerate and mock a stereotypical gangster fight-scene.



Senta faces his samurai compatriots in *Senta Cut Down* by Miyoshi Jūrō

tragedy of the gambler, Senta, born a farmer, who, during the Meiji Restoration years moved from a crude hatred of tyranny to membership in a revolutionary party and who was killed by his samurai compatriots in the name of the party. In the name of mankind, Miyoshi vehemently hurls himself against politics, politicians, and by extension, against the revolutionary intellectual's will to power.

Miyoshi turned away from the Proletarian Theatre Movement amidst the confusion surrounding the production of this play. Despite the vicissitudes of politics, he totally gave himself over to his identification with the long-suffering silent masses. During this period, Miyoshi stressed the love for the emperor which was an accepted value of both traditional Japanese culture and of everyday men and women, and consequently can be identified as a spiritual participant in the day's dominant artistic school, the school which attempted to transcend the "modern" and the European, "Japanese Romanticism." Amidst the endless flow of time and the constantly repeating cycle of birth and death, he clamped shut his eyes, and as a result lost his critical distance from them. And along with the silent working masses he went on to follow the road from "100 million balls of fire" to "100 million penitents."

After the war, having followed this sincere though tragic path, Miyoshi tirelessly portrayed the ugly yet comic life-style of the Japanese who had lost sight of the fact that they were still themselves. The chaotic realities of the Occupation were reflected in his eyes as the results of an historical imperative to modernize which took shape oppressing the "naive masses" and ignoring their needs.

Miyoshi recorded his frustrations in his book, *Japan and the Japanese* [*Nihon oyobi Nihonjin*]. But this reappraisal of superficial modernization and the attempt to reposses one's identity as a Japanese is not only to be found in Miyoshi Jūrō; it is something we can find held in commmon by most of the dramatists of the same period regardless of differences in age and school of thought. Simply by listing the titles of their works--Kishida Kunio's *What's a Japanese?* [*Nihonjin to Wa*], Fukuda Tsuneari's *Japan and the Japanese* [*Nihon oyobi Nihonjin*, precisely the same title as Miyoshi's book], and Kinoshita Junji's *In Order for Japan to be Japan* [*Nihon ga Nihon de aru Tame Ni*]--we can see with what tremendous force this problem entranced them. Why did they stick so tenaciously to the nationalistic construct, "Japan and the Japanese?"
For one thing, because theatre is an act of expression performed before large numbers of people, and because it is an art form which gives group imagination an extremely significant role to play. In one-sidedly denying Kabuki and Noh and other traditional forms, Shingeki had also destroyed the means by which people's group imagination could be drawn upon; and there can be little doubt that their dark age stretching to the nadir of

From Yamamoto's *Pirates*. Simple staging of a typical Japanese summer festival, *O-Bon*, with actors wearing representative carnival masks.

fascism and war had served them notice of their excruciating powerlessness. To yearn after the European and the modern and therefore to be uncertain of one's own national underpinnings; and then to prostrate oneself against the soil of Japan--this was not simply a change amidst changing times; it was an incessant movement of return within these writers themselves.

Beginning with *The Wind and the Waves* [*Fūrō*, 1947] Kinoshita Junji has written numerous plays set on the stage of Japan's 100 years of modern history. With intellectuals and their frustrated dreams of radical change at the center, these plays adhere firmly to the grammar of modern drama. As he tired of depicting the tragedy of those who continually try to climb a stairway that crumbles beneath them with each step they take, however, he has returned to creating lovely little pieces built around old Japanese folk tales.

In these, there is surely a world capable of comforting us. In, for example, *The Twenty-Second Night Watch* [*Nijūniya Machi*, 1947] some villagers are drinking sake and waiting for the moon to rise when a local ruffian bursts in upon them. They simply accept him and all drink merrily together. Then, over their drunken stupor, the moon slowly rises.

Mingei, Japan's largest theatre company, which often produces Kinoshita's work, also produced *Waiting for Godot*. The moon rising at the end of *Godot* held the same comforting vision as did that rising on the night of the twenty-second, and it seemed to me as if the immobile pair of vagabonds stood rooted to the ground confused by the unexpected appearance of salvation. The moon that rises, waxing and waining, over the tranquil agricultural community is itself Godot; and there, at some point, all ruffians and vagabonds, thrashing and bawling, cannot escape salvation.

In his most representative folk-tale drama, *The Evening Crane* [*Yūzuru*, 1950] a crane that has lost a wing is saved from suffering. With this, the crane turns itself into a beautiful woman, visits the pure and true though not very bright man who saved her, and becomes his wife. However, with the profitable sale of a piece of weaving the woman had done in token repayment for her rescue, her husband gradually loses his simplicity. Once again the saddened woman becomes a crane and flies away.

G.S. Frazer said that he was moved by *The Evening Crane* and that he had found in it a limitless plane upon which mystery, the mystery of a crane becoming a woman, did not seem quite so mysterious. Indeed, the play is put on a beautifully simple plane, and it makes us remember values we have lost in our bustling, chaotic modern lives.

But isn't this really a variety of beauty made available to us only

O-Kuni of Izumo, the founder of Kabuki, appears in Hanada Kiyoteru's *Everything Ends with a Song.*

because the invocation of the things we have lost and forgotten has been cut short at an acceptable point? *Kaison, The Priest of Hitachi* was also put on a limitless plane where the sudden transformation of something trapped in the morass of man's good intentions and his self-seeking would be possible. The metamorphosis into Kaison, however, does not hold us in check at the point where we yearn for some primeval state or feel sentimental about what we have lost. Rather, the mystery of that metamorphosis leads us to a plane where we no longer sense its mystery but where we are made to discover a new dimension of the imponderable.

Kaison's appearance no longer comforts us the way moonrise on the twenty-second does. To beautify the sturdy fingers of an old farmer as Akimoto Matsuyo's teacher, Miyoshi Jūrō, did and to fall completely into this task is, for her, impossible. She involves herself unconditionally in the folk imagination that created the Kaison legend; and at the same time, she tries with equal ferocity to maintain her distance from it. She discovers the grotesque in the beautiful and the beautiful in the grotesque; but Akimoto recognizes that these two processes are irremediably incongruent.

Hanada Kiyoteru was the first one to accurately appraise Akimoto's world of double meanings in which he saw qualities corresponding to his own at once simple and terribly complex theory "to make the premodern a negating force and with it to transcend the modern." Hanada, a highly individualistic Marxist, wrote a series of essays in a small magazine during the war on twenty-one Renaissance men. While freely duping the censors with his brilliant, almost acrobatic prose, he dashed the ice water of ridicule on the time's fanatic critiques of Europe and the modern age written by such people as Miyoshi Jūrō which had reached to the depths of reactionary nationalism. He continued to search for some method by which modern times could be transcended on a less wild-eyed and more international basis.

Published much later, *Everything Ends with a Song* [*Monomina Uta de Owaru,* 1965] attempts this quest using Kabuki's founder, O-Kuni of Izumo, as its heroine. Hanada recovered a variety of long buried arts--from Kyōgen to the traditional "vaudevillean" music hall--drew on the energy of an age of historical transition which "postured" and "stylized" everything; and making exhaustive use of totally theatrical open space and of Brecht's techniques of historicization, he captured the birth of a new age of dramatic expression, the birth of Kabuki.

In his novel, *An Actor's Education* [*Haiyū Shūgyō,* 1964] the central role is filled by a low ranking Kabuki actor who lived three-hundred years after the founding of Kabuki during another period of massive historical transition, the end of the Tokugawa Regime and the beginning

Bunraku puppets for which Chikamatsu wrote all of his important work are shown here being used in *Red Eyes* [*Akame*, 1967], Saitō Ren's adaptation of Shirato Sampei's classic adult cartoon-novel.

of the Meiji era. As a whole, the book is an expansion of Chikamatsu Monzaemon's words, "Art lies in the hair's-breadth between truth and falsehood."* Our little hero, Yodogorō, with Chikamatsu's words as his guide, falls victim to the vice of drama, and walks from place to place as a vagabond reporter exploring the complicated relationship between reality and people's dreams during a period of historical, rather than dramatic, Kabuki.

If we look hard enough, we can see the figure of Kaison in this humble travelling actor. For the people who live in the mountains or in villages along the coast, the gods take on the appearance of the "rare guest" who comes from a distant place only to leave for afar again. Actors, actually, were the people who came from far off places to leave for destinations equally distant. Yodogorō is driven off by the residents of one village and dies on its outskirts. Throughout the country, there are numerous festivals that began when villagers, fearing the consequences of what they had done, built a shrine for their victim who subsequently became the village's protective diety. Within Kaison live the fundamental components of the actor--he is despised as he is held in awe as the gods' deputy.

Akimoto Matsuyo's *Kaison, The Priest of Hitachi* like much of Hanada's work, floats in the amniotic fluid of the folk imagination and simultaneously poses the question of whether modern drama in crisis can make good its escape from there. It is thus implicitly a critique of our presently impotent, restrictive theatre.

For a long time, Akimoto has had to work tenaciously in a lonely place away from the mainstream of Shingeki.

IV

A single room in a totally empty apartment. A young Korean and his Japanese wife are beginning to rehearse a play. In the play, the young husband portraying a Korean cruelly murders his young Japanese wife. He, in his turn, is dispatched by a Japanese revenger. And, oh yes, in the dark corners you are likely to see the Japanese murderer sitting alone with a home-made bomb, watching and waiting. In this way, Satō Makoto's *My Beatles* [*Atashi no Beatles*, 1967] begins. With this short, two-act play, Satō vividly describes the dimensions of a new myth born out of the sensitivity of Japan's youth.

Our heroes in this play, though, are not priestly, biwa-playing story-tellers; they are the Beatles, and thus no special words of

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*Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653-1724) was a playwright and theoretician for Kabuki and Bunraku puppet theatre. He is sometimes called the "Shakespeare of Japan.'

introduction to Japanese dramatic history need be given. The duality, for instance, involved in having to start one play with another is not a convention particularly belonging to Kabuki or Noh; it is simply the sort of duality to be found in nearly all varieties of modern theatre. We no longer give credence to the idea of a reality that nullifies fantasy or to the idea of a fantasy that nullifies reality. Both exist symbiotically.

Supposing you were in the audience of *My Beatles* and could understand Japanese, you would immediately be able to predict from the play's beginning the gradual development of fantasy and reality, and the course of events right up until the illusion that all's in fun explodes and theatrical murder turns real. You may very likely squelch a little yawn, but whether or not your predictions are right is another question.

There are several special considerations. First of all, the play that the young couple are rehearsing is not about any ordinary murder; it is modelled after an actual crime that took place in 1958 in one of Tokyo's industrial areas. In the late afternoon of a certain day in the autumn of that year, a young girl reading on the flat roof of her high school was raped and murdered. The culprit was ultimately captured after he had made a number of crank calls to the newspapers. He was an eighteen-year old student of the same high school.

As the details became clearer, the incident became particularly shocking for me, being almost the same age, and for Satō who was easily able to identify with the murderer and his victim. The murderer had read *Crime and Punishment* with great interest; he had been living with his impoverished family in a little shanty on the edge of a polluted, reeking river; he had not been able to bring the sex act to a climax on the concrete roof. However, he maintained extreme clarity with regard to his crime and asserted that if he were temporarily released from jail, he would repeat it any number of times. He died refusing to appeal his case.

This accumulation of facts forced me, almost against my will, to identify with him and to feel as if the crime were my own. But ultimately, young Japanese like Satō and myself were driven forcibly from our identification with the crime. Out of its Dostoevskian facade, its Genet-esque character appeared. During the course of his trial his personal strength demonstrated that the crime was his and not ours. It was the crime of a Korean--no, rather, the crime of one who had been dispossessed of his nationality at birth. His parents, along with hundreds of thousands of others had been brought to Japan during the thirty-odd years before World War II. They were stripped of their language and given new Japanized names. The crime of this boy who shouted, "A language is its country's breath!" and

who first began to learn Korean in prison, was the crime of a Korean who had been born in Japan, who knew only Japanese, and who had been brought to despise his own national origins. To borrow the vocabulary of Frantz Fanon's analysis of the French-acculturized blacks of Martinique, this was the crime of a Korean *évolué*. We enter into his crime, but we are denied participation. We belong to the side that placed the rope around his neck; we find within ourselves "the nation," Japan, which called his act a crime and killed him for it. Along with the murdered girl, we had to be taught that we are not innocents who arrived on the scene after the end of our fathers' and grandfathers' careers as proud invaders of the Korean Peninsula, but that we were born very much in the midst of those careers and remain in their midst today.

For us, the incident is a living wound that will never heal, but I don't believe that the historical wound behind Satō's play-within-a-play will create a barrier to your understanding *My Beatles*. The reason is really too obvious. The murder being mimicked has been importantly influenced by recent Japanese history, but at the same time, all over the world, wherever poverty and racial prejudice exist tangled together, the same sort of thing is taking place. The first "modern men" annihilated the American Indians, pillaged East India, and hunted down the Africans. In this way, it is said, they forwarded the accumulation of primitive capital. Simply put, Japan's modernization progressed according to the same formula, by sacrificing the Koreans and robbing them of their labor. Structurally, the young Korean's crime would fit perfectly into the worlds of Aimé Césaire, Sartre, Genet, LeRoi Jones, and Peter Weiss.

Identifying himself, as we did, with the Korean youth--or someone very much like him--and his crime, the young husband plans to reaffirm his own identity by re-enacting the murder in the play-within-a-play not as the child of madness or impulse but rather as a lucid, deliberate act. The assumption, of course, is that the young Korean would have had to kill a Japanese girl and be killed over and over again in order to constantly reaffirm his identity and that the young husband, by plugging himself into the Korean's role and crime, can achieve the same effect.

Tei (the young husband):

> Bury me in a hole, cover me over with sand so that no trace remains... Cover me, ME who rapes Katsura and strangles her to death... penniless Korean. Then, see, I'll rise from the dead. Magnificent revenge, my blood's atonement...that will be my resurrection. I'll be killed by the "Japanese"--by his rage...that will be my rebirth. I can die smiling and satisfied. I'll die boasting of their revenge. And that will be my revenge.

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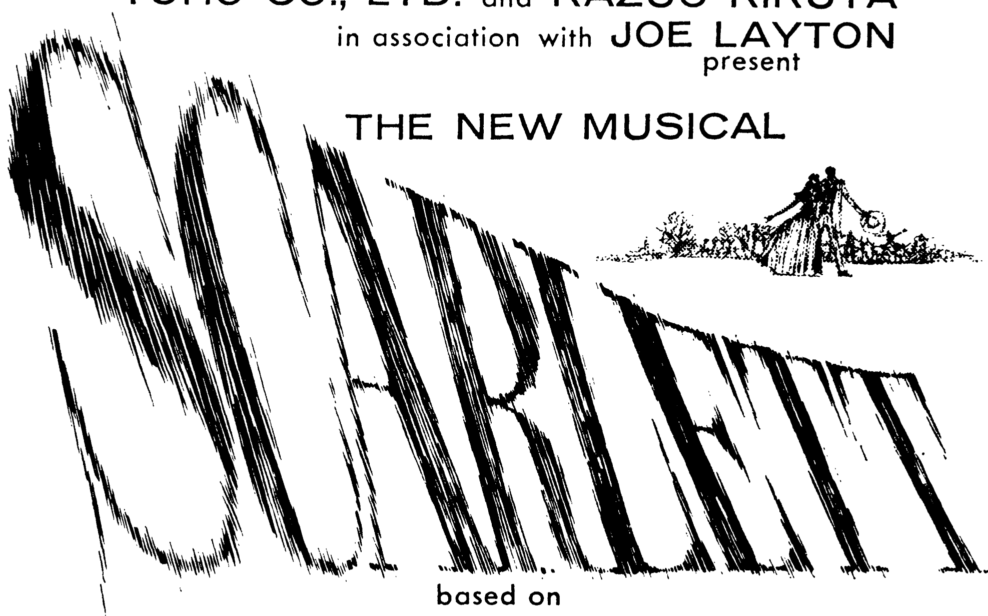

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Two of the Beatles kneel over the raped Katsura in *My Beatles*.

The Japanese:

I understand. Everything. I'll do just as you say. You can rest assured.

Tei:

...Tomorrow. I'm really going all the way. All the way. And then, day after tomorrow...

The young husband tries explosively to alleviate his own unhappiness, for him a kind of guilt, a sin, by killing and being killed as a Korean.

Katsura (Tei's Japanese wife):

Really, will it be tomorrow?

Tei:

Yes, tomorrow. I'm going to play this part right out to the end.

Katsura:

...The Beatles won't make it, will they.

A message like that of early Brecht: "Don't love, hate!" or "If you must love, hate first!"

Another element is casually incorporated here. It is something so much a part of our daily lives that we can only deal with it in the most blatant fashion--the Beatles. Like the girls always around us, the young wife with her flat tummy and soft, doe's eyes dreams of the day when the Beatles will come from the "brilliant green peninsula" and gently lead her away. Her tomorrow and his, his expectations for the day after tomorrow and hers are subtly different. The young man's frustration trying to infuse himself with violence and hate and the girl's longing for the utopian peninsula where the Beatles live, while sometimes overlapping never achieve congruence.

Suddenly, a door opens. "We're the Beatles." While this is an unhoped for fulfillment of her dream it is also the beginning of an invasion of their poor little room, an invasion that bodes nothing but ill. The four, whistling and tapping their feet, brutally interrupt their rehearsal and pulverize the young man's dream of hate, the young wife's of love. Whether murdered by the Beatles, having committed suicide, or having parished for lack of an identity capable of supporting life, the husband dies meaninglessly. His wife cavorts with her idols and is raped.

Before it is even performed, the play-within-a-play ends, and two things are hurriedly revealed. The young husband was not really a Korean but a Japanese. Then, the Beatles. "We're really the Beatles, but unfortunately, we don't appear to be your Beatles. Your Beatles...died."

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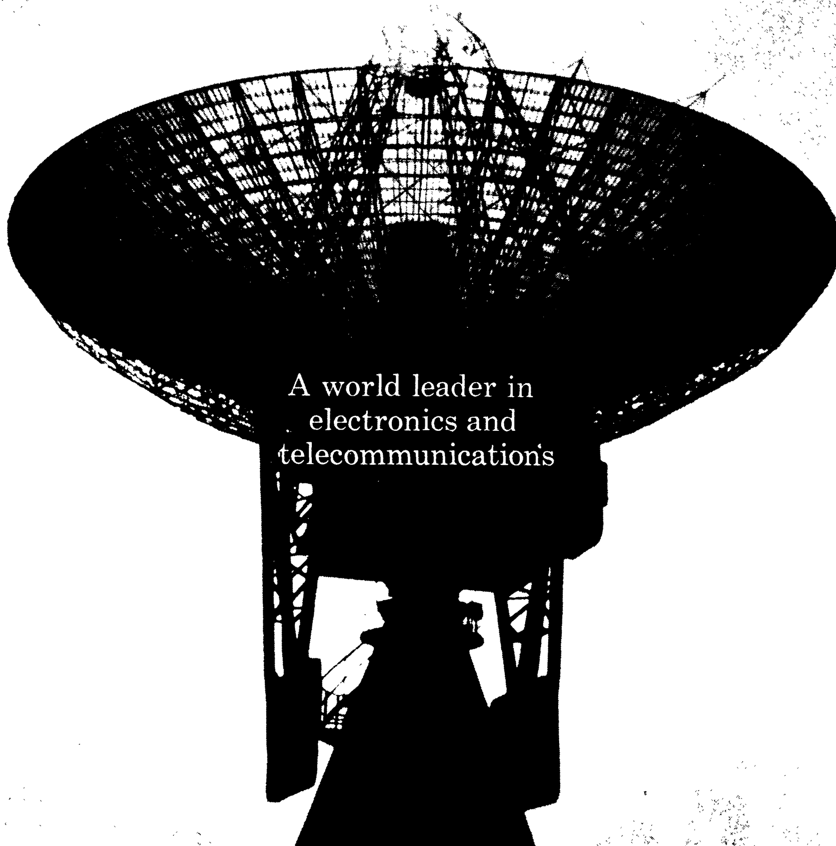

Erratum
The last sentence in the third paragraph on page 31 should read, "between 'we are the Beatles' and 'we are waiting for the Beatles.'"

ly to affirm one's identity, one must follow a difficult, winding path into the dark recesses of one's soul; but even there, one is not safe from unexpected invasions. The Beatles were Tei's unexpected invaders who brought the walls of his soul crashing down upon him.

With *A Hard Day's Night* in the background, the Beatles' entrance (one of them is, by the way, a girl!) is disturbing to the extent that one might feel it a bit overdone and captious. But these are indeed the Beatles, and their entrance is a consummate piece of theatricality. At the instant of their appearance, the point at which reality and fantasy meet is shifted, and something beyond the scope of events has happened.

The Beatles seep in wherever they can whenever they can like a fog of the dreams and nightmares of oppressed little people. "We're the Beatles." But by what they hint, "Your Beatles...died," this quartet, while they are definitely the Beatles, are also the kids at the local movers and corner restaurant. These Beatles' malicious invasion extinguishes the possibility of union between the Japanese and the Korean, for it turns out that that possibility was founded on nothing but the Japanese' naive sentimentality for the Korean. By coming through this experience of negation and betrayal, the Beatles, at the same time that they are poor lads from Liverpool or Tokyo soda jerks and movers, become fated criminals; they are the saviors of the unhappy masses, and they are vipers in their midst. In short, they have taken a tailor-made opportunity to become the heroes of a legend of immortality. As *Kaison, The Priest of Hitachi* has taught us, there's but a hair's-breadth between "we are the Beatles" and "we are the Beatles."

The Beatles actually came to Tokyo the year before this play was performed, in July 1966. Hunter Davies, in his biography of the Beatles, comments that the Beatles' Tokyo audience was the "most knowledgeable of all" and that the Tokyo program was the most lavish and exhaustive for any of their concerts anywhere." But this, I think, misses the point. The teenage girls who were packed into the auditorium smothered the performance with their shrill screams, and on those rare occasions when one thought one had spotted a quiet girl, it turned out that she had fainted. But at least one can say this: Japan's teenage girls went berserk over their idols ("The Beatles are sleeping in this city with us!"), and for the same reasons they were a little disappointed.

On their records and on the photo pages of teen magazines the Beatles seemed warm and sincere, but the real Beatles were just a bunch of "stuck up" foreigners; they spent all their time beside the concert holed up in their hotel; and the concert program consisted

About the Author Tsuno Kaitarō, 31, graduated from Waseda University with a degree in Japanese literature. He worked for a time as an editor at *Shōbunsha*, one of Tokyo's most influential small publishing houses. As a critic, he has contributed articles to *Shin Nihon Bungaku*, *Tenbō*, and *Shingeki*; and he has edited the widely acclaimed newspapers published on the occasion of Arnold Wesker's visit to Japan in 1968. While serving as the director of the *June Theatre*, Mr. Tsuno also edited and contributed to their quarterly magazine. With Satō Makoto, he is presently working as co-director of *Theatre Center 68/69*.

of all new songs, not the old accustomed ones. At the moment when the Beatles were closest to them, they had never been so far away. Within the ambivalent construct of the Beatles in Satō's play--at once the realization of a dream and an assault on the dreamer--the emotions of the girls who were paralyzed, unable to touch the Beatles who were right there before them are compressed and transformed, and at the same time accurately reflected.

For Japan's teenage girls, the Beatles who came from afar only to leave them again were certainly equipped with the fundamental characteristics of our legendary heroes. The longing after life that the Beatles' songs aroused in them continues to exist despite their disillusioning experience and the insult it entailed. What surrounds *My Beatles* and supports it is these girls' imaginations and their longing. In his play, Satō Makoto has brilliantly organized the emotions of the youngsters who loved the Beatles and perhaps the emotions of us all--the Beatles are far away, but they are closer than anything.

So brilliantly did he succeed, in fact, that it seems almost that as he chose the Beatles, the Beatles chose him. Different from Akimoto's hero who comes to us through hearth-side stories from a past so distant as to have vanished from the face of history, Satō's Beatles came from across the sea via LP records and motion pictures. But these Beatles are figures that draw fully upon the imaginations of young people and thereby expand enormously; they are figures impossible to find within the framework of modern drama. Satō involves himself deeply with the Beatles and at the same time forces distance between himself and them; he immerses himself in the amniotic fluid of the folk imagination, and yet he makes good his escape. Conversely, Satō's was an act of taking the Beatles out of the hands of the merchants who control our age. It was an act directed at the Beatles, a slightly breathless lament though not lacking in sympathy: "Throw away your idols' pedastels. You are not Yoshitsune or Jesus Christ or even our puny little dream. By betraying the powers of our age, you must insure your capacity to become the immortal heroes of the twentieth century."

For the 24-year old playwright, it was an act which had to be performed now; an attempt to create Beatles against the Beatles.

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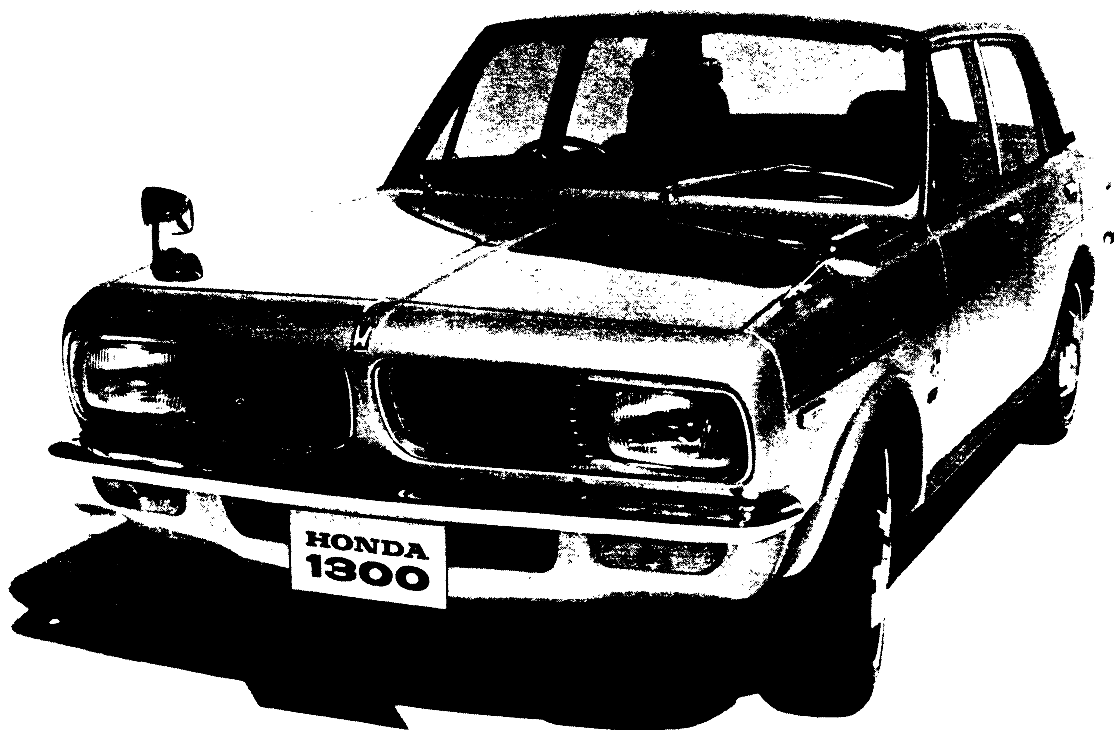

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