

‘GETTING TO NOH’



Kinue Oshima studies the mask of Meilin

In undertaking this production the Oshima Noh Theatre and Theatre Nohgaku, working with the Japan Society and Pagoda author, Jannette Cheong, wanted to deepen the understanding of classical and contemporary noh theatre through this publication and a programme of public lectures/ demonstrations, talks and school-based workshops. All these activities come under the umbrella of the ‘Getting to Noh’ programme.

A TRIP TO THE THEATRE

Punning on the name ‘noh’ (Getting to Noh) has a distinguished history. In 1916 W B Yeats arranged publication of a book of noh translations entitled ‘Certain Noble Plays of Japan.’ To Yeats noh was aristocratic and mysterious. It was aristocratic because for three hundred years in Japan noh had been mainly performed privately before very select audiences, and it was mysterious because its patrons favoured the spirituality imparted to noh by its great pioneer Zeami (1363–1443). But in Zeami’s day noh companies competed strenuously against each other for popularity and like any other theatre were judged on their ability to move their audiences. Noh is simply theatre with a particular way of engaging its audience and I hope you will find that Jannette Cheong and Rick Emmert have succeeded in combining classical form with compelling content. The dancing, the music, the chanting, the poetry, the mystery are all there in *Pagoda*, but, as you admire the virtuosity of the performers, you are allowed to shed a tear too for Meilin.

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EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH



A noh workshop for teachers was held at the Victoria & Albert Museum and attended by teachers from across the country.

In addition, six school-based workshops were led by Richard Emmert and Kinue Oshima for seven schools in London and Oxford to engage students in a practical exploration of noh theatre. Four London schools (Blackheath High School, George Green's School, Negus at Plumstead Manor, Westwood Girls' College for Languages and Arts) also worked on a related arts project which aimed to develop young people's creativity and self-expression through writing and performance. Each school produced noh-influenced 'travel' pieces, based on the themes of identity and migration. The schools attended a joint interim workshop to prepare their pieces for performance at the Southbank Centre in front of a public audience and members of the professional theatre companies.



The 'Getting to Noh' programme also included a number of demonstration workshops and lectures to open up the world of noh to the general public – an introduction to the art of noh, its history, stories, masks, costumes and music – at the following venues:

- Victoria & Albert Museum
- School of Oriental and African Studies
- British Library
- The Japan Foundation
- Samuel Beckett Theatre
- Pitt Rivers Museum
- The Nissan Institute
- The Maison de la Culture du Japon



Finally, *'Elegant Accomplishments: the Art of Noh Performance'* is on display at the Victoria & Albert Museum in the Toshiba Gallery of Japanese Art and Design from 7 September 2009 to 7 March 2010.



Above (top): Teachers' workshop at the V&A Museum

Above (bottom): Rehearsal of students' own work

Right: School-based noh workshops

