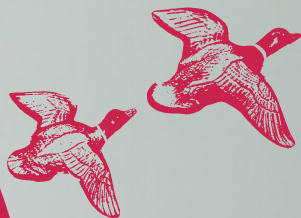


**the wife
who
spoke
japanese
in her
sleep**

by Vivienne Plumb



IN ASSOCIATION WITH
AUCKLAND FESTIVAL 2009

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WELCOME

It's our great pleasure to bring you this premiere production of Vivienne Plumb's latest work for the theatre, **THE WIFE WHO SPOKE JAPANESE IN HER SLEEP**, as Auckland Theatre Company's contribution to Auckland Festival 2009.

Vivienne's first play, **LOVE KNOTS**, won for her the Bruce Mason Playwrights Award. Since then she has established herself as a unique voice in poetry and fiction writing in New Zealand – but she recently focused on writing for the theatre again with a wonderful new play, **THE CAPE**, which has enjoyed professional productions throughout New Zealand. It's the story of four contemporary 17-year-old youths who set off on a road trip of self-discovery.

Nothing could be further from the boisterous language and characters of **THE CAPE** than this new work, based on her prize-winning short story of the same name.

THE WIFE WHO SPOKE JAPANESE IN HER SLEEP is a sort of a 21st century Antipodean Shirley Valentine. It's about a woman and a city in a state of transformation. It's about embracing change and celebrating diversity. It's about the power of imagining and the joy of discovery. In

her reworking of the original short story, Vivienne has made this as much a play about Auckland (though perhaps not quite Auckland as we imagine it) as it is about a middle-aged woman taking control of her life. Here is a work that is serious, funny, touching, magical, domestic and satirical all at the same time; a work that celebrates the miracles we can find in ordinary.

THE WIFE WHO SPOKE JAPANESE IN HER SLEEP has been developed through the ATC Literary Unit – with a Commissioning Grant from Creative New Zealand. My huge thanks to everyone who has contributed to the play's development - actors, advisors, designers and dramaturges - particularly our Literary Manager Philippa Campbell who has been paramount in providing encouragement, provocations and feedback throughout the process.

I would also like to thank New Zealand Post – our Principal Partner, for their vision in

understanding the importance of telling our own stories. New Zealand Post's enlightened support of Auckland Theatre Company has made a huge impact in the creative development of the Company over the last three years. It's a partnership we value.

Love and thanks to my sterling cast – headed by the indomitable Alison Quigan. Also, to the designers of tonight's production John Parker, Nic Smillie, John Gibson and Brad Gledhill. Thanks to Theo Gibson for filming and editing the Yucca sequence; to Yuri Kinugawa, Rie Shabata and Morita Masako for help with Things Japanese; and to John Campbell for being a damned good sport.

Welcome to the Auckland of Honey Tarbox.

Enjoy!

Colin McColl

New Zealand Post is a passionate supporter of the arts and culture in New Zealand.



This story of an ordinary housewife discovering she speaks Japanese in her sleep is magically brought to life through Vivienne Plumb's stage adaptation of her book. It is always a pleasure to see the works of talented and creative writers brought to life.

As Principal Partner of the Auckland Theatre Company, New Zealand Post is pleased to support THE WIFE WHO SPOKE JAPANESE IN HER SLEEP season.

The play is also the Auckland Theatre Company's contribution to Auckland Festival 2009, of which New Zealand Post is the Principal Sponsor.

People living in, and visiting, Auckland are certainly spoilt for choice on the arts scene this month. New Zealand Post is a passionate supporter

of the arts and culture in New Zealand, and we are proud to be associated with this event.

THE WIFE WHO SPOKE JAPANESE IN HER SLEEP — with its many layers of metamorphosis and its mysterious end — is in turn bound to be a highlight of the Festival and of the Auckland Theatre Company's programme this year.

John Allen
Chief Executive
New Zealand Post Group

New Zealand Post 
SEASON OF



the wife who spoke japanese in her sleep

by Vivienne Plumb

IN ASSOCIATION WITH
AUCKLAND FESTIVAL 2009

CAST

Alison Quigan — Honey Tarbox **Bruce Phillips** — Howard Tarbox
Katlyn Wong — Muhabbat, Mrs Wong, Momo **Peta Rutter** — Barb, Miss Florica, Housewife
Stephen Papps — Duggie, Reg **Andy Wong** — Delivery man, Kenta, Gus
John Campbell — John Campbell

CREATIVE

Director — **Colin McColl** Set Design — **John Parker** Lighting Design — **Brad Gledhill**
Costume Design — **Nic Smillie** Sound Design — **John Gibson**
Camera / Editor — **Theo Gibson** Translation — **Morita Masako**
Language Coach / Voiceovers — **Yuri Kinugawa** Cultural Advisor — **Rie Shabata**

PRODUCTION

Production Manager — **Mark Gosling** Technical Manager — **Bonnie Burrill**
Senior Stage Manager — **Fern Christie** ASM — **Birgit Lindermayr**
Kurogo — **Chye-Ling Huang and Jordan Mooney** Operator — **Brodie Quinn**
Properties Master — **Bec Ehlers** Set Construction — **2 Construct**
Patternmaker & Costume Construction — **Sheila Horton**

THE WIFE WHO SPOKE JAPANESE IN HER SLEEP is the second Auckland Theatre Company production for 2009 and opened on 12 March.
THE WIFE WHO SPOKE JAPANESE IN HER SLEEP is approximately 125 minutes long with a 15 minute interval. Please remember to switch off all mobile phones, pagers and watch alarms.

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PLAYWRIGHT Q & A

Auckland Theatre Company's Literary Manager, Philippa Campbell, talked to Vivienne Plumb about the development of THE WIFE WHO SPOKE JAPANESE IN HER SLEEP.

Q: Can you tell us the story of the play?

A: THE WIFE WHO SPOKE JAPANESE IN HER SLEEP is about an entirely ordinary older married couple, Honey and Howard Tarbox. When Honey begins to speak Japanese in her sleep they are forced to confront a metamorphosis of their relationship as Honey transforms into a sleep-speaking media megastar. It was a piece of short fiction published in my short fiction collection of the same title before it ever became a stage piece.

Q: What was the inspiration for the story?

A: The inspiration for the original story came about by the fact that I had been learning Japanese by correspondence and had been really focused on the whole different culture that the language offered. I was on a shuttle from Dunedin airport into the city one gloomy, late-winter afternoon. The shuttle had to drive all over the city dropping off everyone else before me. Looking out of the shuttle bus window, I went into that kind of dreamy trance state you can go into where you suddenly have a good idea. I thought: what if there was a wife, and she started speaking Japanese in her sleep? By the time I arrived at my destination I had the guts of the story in my head.

Q: How did the idea for the adaptation come about?

A: Colin approached me with the idea of adapting the story for the stage. He knew it well and loved the humour of the piece. It has been very popular and he thought it would be great for Auckland audiences.

Q: What were the challenges and special features of the adaptation process?

A: I don't know how unusual it is for a writer to adapt their own story for the stage, but I wanted to do it as I write in several forms — poetry, fiction and drama. The challenge is to lift the story up off the page. The stage is so visual so I had to make the story more visual in a concrete way. Of course, it really becomes an entirely new work; it metamorphoses the way Honey does. I like the idea of one form morphing into another. It's like that sticky jelly you can buy in the toy shops that slips around, shape changing. Intangibles are always interesting.

The story has a lot of "magic" in it. At the time I originally wrote it I was very interested in what I call "everyday magic". I believed that in our everyday human rituals (doing 100 sit-ups, using only the pink pegs first, baking birthday cakes, praying) we produce a kind of "magic". Or maybe it's just what people now call "creative visualization". I found the magic in the story of Honey Tarbox transferred itself well into theatre, as the-

atre is all about magic. Good theatre should transcend the audience into another place, which is a form of magic.

Q: Can you tell us a little about your writing career and how you got started?

A: I attended the writing course at Victoria University's International Institute of Modern Letters when it was still only an undergraduate course. I was required to gain "special admission" to do the course as I never completed high school. What's next is always a new project. While I work on one I am always planning at least two more to move on to.

Basically, writers need someone who can ID them as a writer, and Bill Manhire is very good at being like the head of the Writer Identification Department. We need that ID as an encouragement, as recognition, as a passport into the world of actually doing it. And Bill did that for me.

My career as a writer since? I believe in the process of writing. I have a daily routine, cups of tea, pen and paper, and the sound of my hand moving left to right across the page like a crab. Walks outside succeed in getting the blood to the brain which will hopefully help to sort out problems. In the afternoon it can be nice to lie like a stone on the bed. Writers often look as if they are doing nothing but the cogs are turning the whole time. We never get away from it. I feel totally committed to it.

Q: What's next?

A: Another play OYSTER



The Alternative Plan

Plan A: leave town. Plan B: stay in town but move to another part where no one knows you. Plan C: stay in the old apartment in the old part of town. Plan D: stay in the old apartment and in the old job. Plan E: look for a flat mate. Plan F: look for a new job. Plan G: change apartments, within the same building. Plan H: stay in the old apartment in the same part of town, don't change your job and refuse to look for a flatmate. Plan I: go to Cuba (this plan requires an injection of money to activate it). Plan J: think of another plan. Plan K: get facial surgery (finance department). Plan L: dye your hair. Plan M: go out wearing a variety of hats. Plan N: stay indoors. Plan O: become a recluse. Plan P: become a recluse and stay in the same apartment and in the same part of town and in the same job. Plan Q: never say never. Plan R: this is something to do with running. Plan S: this must be swimming. Plan T: swimming every day and long walks in the weekend. Plan U: with your hair dyed. Plan V: and wearing a variety of hats. Plan W: become a recluse in the same apartment and in the same part of town but walk every Saturday in disguise and swim once a week (not in disguise). Plan X: change nothing. Plan Y: do not walk, run or swim, but stay in the same mankey apartment in the same scodey part of town, flogging yourself in the same boring job, and dream of Cuba. Plan Z: begin your plan for next year.

from
NEFARIOUS
poems and parables
© 2004
Vivienne Plumb

CAST



ALISON QUIGAN

Alison trained with Auckland's Theatre Corporate Actors School in 1978 with, among others, Raymond Hawthorne and Elizabeth McRae. Since then she has acted in a wide range of plays, directed over 60 productions and written 11 original works.

Her favourite roles as an actor include Shirley Valentine, Lady Macbeth, Cathy in MUM'S CHOIR and Marquise de Merteuil in LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES. Highlights of her directing career include OTHELLO, HAMLET, MACBETH, ROMEO AND JULIET, EQUUS, LADIES NIGHT, PACK OF GIRLS, MUM'S CHOIR and WHO WANTS TO BE 100?

In December 2004 Alison completed her 18-year post as Artistic Director of Centrepoint Theatre in Palmerston North. In 2001 she was awarded a Queen's Service Medal for Services to the theatre.

Currently playing the role of Yvonne Jeffries on

SHORTLAND STREET, Alison's association with Auckland Theatre Company includes directing WHO WANTS TO BE 100? (2007) and performing in CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF (2008), MUM'S CHOIR (2006) and TAKING OFF (2005).



BRUCE PHILLIPS

Bruce has been an actor, director and writer in theatre since graduating with a BA in French at Victoria University in 1974. While there he performed in many Drama Society plays before starting his professional life in radio drama.

For the Auckland Theatre Company, Bruce has appeared in TAKE A CHANCE ON ME and DEAD FUNNY and in the 2008 NEXT STAGE workshop production of LE SUD. He moved to live in Auckland in 2008.

Other recent productions include THE CHERRY ORCHARD, DINNER, THE RIVALS, THE GOAT (Christchurch and Wellington), UNCLE VANYA, THE AMERICAN PILOT, THE MAN LOVELOCK COULDN'T BEAT (Circa Theatre) and recently COLLAPSING DARWIN (Free Radical Productions).

In a career that spans over 30 years, Bruce has performed in more than 100 professional productions

at Circa and Downstage theatres in Wellington and 10 at Christchurch's Court Theatre. He was an original cast member of Robert Lord's JOYFUL AND TRIUMPHANT which toured throughout New Zealand and to Australia and London. A long-time member of the Circa Theatre Council, Bruce directed 15 plays for Circa Theatre, including HAMLET, PROOF, A DELICATE BALANCE, MACBETH, TWO BROTHERS and RABBIT. He is a four-time Chapman Tripp Theatre Award winner for Best Actor and Best Supporting Actor.

For television, Bruce appeared in WORZEL GUMMIDGE DOWN UNDER, COUNTRY GP, EREBUS – THE AFTERMATH, SHARK IN THE PARK, SHORTLAND STREET, BERT AND MAISY, FALLOUT, NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH, HERCULES, POWER RANGERS and LEGEND OF THE SEEKER.

His film appearances include OUT OF THE BLUE, IKE – COUNTDOWN TO D-DAY, SHAKER RUN,

ALEX, RAINBOW WARRIOR, WITHOUT A PADDLE, LORD OF THE RINGS and HEAD CASES.

A regular performer in radio drama, Bruce has also written a number of radio plays and over a hundred hours of television, including PEPPERMINT TWIST, OPEN HOUSE and GLOSS.



STEPHEN PAPPS

Stephen first came to prominence after winning Best Actor at the 1992 New Zealand Film Awards for the role of Firpo in Ian Mune's *END OF THE GOLDEN WEATHER*. Since then he has had an extensive career in film, television and stage.

Most recently he was in Auckland Theatre Company's *THE THIRTY-NINE STEPS*. Other theatre roles include Don Brash in *THE HOLLOW MEN*, Spike Milligan in *YING TONG* and Jamie Tyrone in *LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT* for the Court Theatre, Roderigo in Michael Hurst's *OTHELLO*, *LAND WITHOUT SUNDAYS*, *SAVING GRACE*, *BADJELLY THE WITCH* and *THE HOMECOMING*.

He has also appeared extensively in New Zealand television shows such as *LETTER TO BLANCHY*, *INTERROGATION* and *SHORTLAND STREET*. This year will see the release of Stephen Sinclair's feature film *RUSSIAN SNARK*, in which

he stars.

From 1999 to 2004, Stephen performed his co-written solo show *BLOWING IT* throughout New Zealand and internationally, including at the Sydney Opera House and the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and in Berlin, England and Ireland. In 2000, he was nominated Best Actor at the Chapman Tripp Theatre Awards. Stephen is a proud member of New Zealand Actors' Equity.



PETA RUTTER

Peta has worked both in Australia and New Zealand in a career spanning 25 years.

For theatre, highlights include *INLAND* and *FORBIDDEN MEMORIES* (Douglas Wright Dance Company), *THE DENTIST'S CHAIR* (Indian Ink), *MACBETH* (The Large Group), *THE HUMAN GARDEN* and *FLARE UP A FLORAL EXPLOSION* (Human Garden Productions), *4:48 PSYCHOSIS* (Silo Theatre), *CYRANO DE BERGERAC* (Theatre At Large), *DEATH AND THE MAIDEN* and *MILO'S WAKE*.

As the co-founder and director of Nightsong Productions, Peta has collaborated with Theatre Stampede to write, perform and direct *HEAD*. The show won a Chapman Tripp Theatre Award for Most Original Production 2005. Other works with Nightsong Productions include *THE BED SHOW*, *THE HOUSE OF DOORS*, *CAMELS* and *SOFA STORIES*.



ANDY WONG

Andy combines his love of acting with a career in medicine; this is his first appearance for Auckland Theatre Company. Most recently he has appeared in *TAKE ME OUT* for the Silo Theatre and Renee Liang's two-hander, *LANTERN*.

He has performed in feature films *THE TATTOOIST* and *NO.2*. Television credits include *SHORTLAND STREET*, *AMAZING EXTRAORDINARY FRIENDS*, *BURYING BRIAN* and *RIDE WITH THE DEVIL*.



KATLYN WONG

THE WIFE WHO SPOKE JAPANESE IN HER SLEEP is Katlyn's debut performance for Auckland Theatre Company.

After graduating from Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School in 2004, Katlyn was based in Wellington before returning to Auckland last year. Her self-devised solo show *MUI* is her most memorable acting experience to date. Other theatre experience includes *CLOCKWORK ORANGE (AK05)*, *MIGRANT NATION*, *I AIN'T NOTHING BUT/ A GLIMMER IN THE DARK*, *SHE SAID* and *PENUMBRA (AK07)*.

Katlyn's onscreen credits include the acclaimed short film *TAKE 3* and TV3's sketch comedy series *A THOUSAND APOLOGIES*.



VIVIENNE PLUMB / PLAYWRIGHT

Born in Sydney to an Australian father and Kiwi mother, Vivienne has lived in New Zealand for most of her adult life. She is an award-winning playwright, poet and fiction writer, and recipient of both the Bruce Mason Playwrighting Award and the Hubert Church Prose Award for *THE WIFE WHO SPOKE JAPANESE IN HER SLEEP* — a short fiction collection that includes the story for her current play.

Vivienne held the Buddle Findlay Sargeson Fellowship in 2001 and has held residencies at the University of Iowa, USA, and the Hong Kong Baptist University. Her play, *THE CAPE*, which has enjoyed productions throughout New Zealand, has recently been published.



COLIN MCCOLL / DIRECTOR

One of New Zealand's leading theatre directors, Colin co-founded Taki Rua Theatre in 1983 and was Artistic Director of Downstage Theatre in Wellington, 1984 - 1992. He has led Auckland Theatre Company as Artistic Director since July 2003.

Colin has directed for the Norwegian National Theatre and the Dutch National Theatre, as well as most leading New Zealand and Australian theatre companies.

In November 2007, Colin was honoured for his artistic achievements and excellence at the eighth annual Arts Foundation of New Zealand Laureate Awards.

Previous achievements include Best Director for Auckland Theatre Company's 2001 production of *ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD*.

Colin has also won Best Director at the Chapman



JOHN PARKER / SET DESIGNER

"Appropriating elements from another culture - origami, ikebana, the seminal Japanese design classic HOW TO WRAP FIVE EGGS, traditional Japanese theatre conventions, commercialism, kitsch, the genius of Tony Geddes, Asperger's Syndrome, infidelity, bribery, exploitation — all work toward the slight of hand of the magic realism inherent in this exploration of the liberating power of the cult of personality, from the claustrophobia of life and marriage in the hinterland of Auckland suburbia."

John is an award-winning set designer and is as well respected in the world of ceramics as he is in set design. He has a long history of designing for Auckland Theatre Company.

His set designs include *THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE*, *END OF THE RAINBOW*, *SWEET CHARITY*, *DOUBT*, *MUM'S*

Tripp Theatre Awards several times — including for his 2002 production of *WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?*

His many productions for Auckland Theatre Company include *CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF*, *THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES*, *WHERE WE ONCE BELONGED*, *END OF THE RAINBOW*, *THE CRUCIBLE*, *HATCH OR THE PLIGHT OF THE PENGUINS*, *DOUBT*, *DISGRACE*, *THE DUCHESS OF MALFI*, *EQUUS*, *GOLDIE*, *WAITING FOR GODOT*, *SERIAL KILLERS*, *THE SEAGULL*, *UNCLE VANYA*, *DAUGHTERS OF HEAVEN* and *HONOUR*.

Opera directing credits include *QUARTET* (New Zealand International Arts Festival 2004), *LA BOHEME* (Wellington City Opera), *THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO* and *THE PRODIGAL CHILD* for the NBR New Zealand Opera. Colin will direct the NBR New Zealand Opera's 2009 production of *THE ITALIAN GIRL IN ALGIERS*.

CHOIR, *TAKING OFF*, *EQUUS*, *CALIGULA*, *THE BACH*, *MIDDLE AGE SPREAD*, *THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW*, *NOISES OFF*, *WAITING FOR GODOT*, *ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD* and *INTO THE WOODS*.

Other works include *IL TROVATORE*, *TRUE WEST*, *THE THREEPENNY OPERA*, *CHESS*, *ROMEO AND JULIET*, *TITUS ANDRONICUS*, *TWELFTH NIGHT*, *F.I.L.T.H.*, *ASSASSINS*, *WAIORA*, *CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF*, *DECADENCE*, *ON THE RAZZLE*, *CHICAGO*, *THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO*, *BARBER OF SEVILLE*, *COSI FAN TUTTE*, *EVITA* and *TRASH TO FASHION*.

John has also designed for *The Louis Vuitton Ball* and *The America's Cup Ball*, *Bendon's Next To Nothing*, *BellSouth Pharaohs*, *Precious Legacy* and *Peru: Gold and Sacrifice* for the Auckland Museum. He was awarded a Waitakere City Millennium Medal for services to the community.



NIC SMILLIE / COSTUME DESIGNER

"Burberry and Kenzo Fashion Houses; sushi from the local mall; Manga comics and cartoons; Japanese cars; Disneyland; Elvis; Harajuku; Bavarian Gothic Girls and Shiseido makeup... it is interesting to see Japanese and Western cultures intertwine from high-end fashion to malls and suburbia."

Nic has a Bachelor of Design in Textiles and has worked in theatre, film and television as a costume designer for the past 12 years.

For Auckland Theatre Company her designs include CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF, WHERE WE ONCE BELONGED and WHO NEEDS SLEEP ANYWAY?

Nic has also costumed various projects at Circa and Downstage theatres in Wellington including KING AND COUNTRY, TOP GIRLS,

CABARET, SWEENEY TODD and DRAWER OF KNIVES.

Winner of the Air New Zealand Screen Award for Contribution to Design for the television series THE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO LOVE, Nic also designed costumes for THE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO HAPPINESS.

Her costumes for film include FISH SKIN SUIT, TURANGAWAEWAE and STICKMEN.



BRAD GLEDHILL / LIGHTING DESIGNER

"Seeing that the lives of the characters are continually evolving throughout this play, I took this opportunity to closely integrate the audiovisual and the lighting components into one coherent design utilising the set as a starting point. Allowing the world around the actors to be ever changing and redefining itself with some fun surprises on the way."

Brad is a Lighting and Audiovisual designer who has designed for Auckland Theatre Company and numerous dance and theatre productions.

He lectures in the Performance Technology Programme at UNITEC's Theatre, Dance and Film School.

Brad has designed lighting for Auckland Theatre Company productions of THE THIRTY-NINE STEPS, WHO NEEDS SLEEP ANYWAY?, THE

FEMALE OF THE SPECIES, DESIGN FOR LIVING, MY NAME IS GARY COOPER, THE TUTOR, THE SHAPE OF THINGS, THE TALENTED MR RIPLEY, PLAY 2 and PLAY 2.03.

Other designs include THE CUT (Silo Theatre), HEAD (AK07), ALADDIN, MEASURE FOR MEASURE, MINIATURES, LASHINGS OF WHIPPED CREAM, KNOCK KNOCK TURN, CORAM BOY and many National Dance Tours of works by Michael Parmenter, Simon Ellis, Daniel Belton, Raewyn Hill and Chris Jannides.



JOHN GIBSON / SOUND DESIGNER

"In Japan there is a concept that music is the relationship between silence and sound. Sound is the means to listen to silence.

In the singing of the song in this production we discovered that the sound required is nasal and tense. It is very foreign to Western ideas of beauty, but very familiar to the eaters of the wasabi that comes with sushi. The tension of the sound increases the power of the silence.

I have tried to explore these ideas in the sound design using music and sound effects equally, subtly and aggressively, to charge the space around the actors and to make a suspended cultural collision; a kind of suburban Butoh for housewives."

John composes original music for New Zealand theatre, film, dance and television. He has composed over 60 scores for theatre including RICORDI for

the International Festival of the Arts.

For dance, he has written scores for Shona McCullagh and Ann Dewey. Last year, John's first feature-film score premiered at the International Film Festival for Vincent Ward's RAIN OF THE CHILDREN. The score won a Qantas Award for Original Music in Film 2008.

Previous works for Auckland Theatre Company include CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF, WHO NEEDS SLEEP ANYWAY?, WHERE WE ONCE BELONGED, EQUUS, THE DUCHESS OF MALFI and the arrangements and musical direction of SWEET CHARITY.

The Tank

for Victor

I hum and write, I hum under
my breath and keep writing.
A good bit about the goldfish
in the tank at Bats. The tank
sits on one of the Bats booth
tables. There are three fish.
Two look like ordinary gold-
fish, but the third has really
black rings on its eyes, like
it's been bashed by the others.
And Victor remarks: *Heidi says
if you tap the tank, like this,
you could give them a heart
attack.* And he taps the tank.
And i guess that's what it is
we can feel sometimes,
it's Victor's big fat finger
tapping the tank.

from
AVALANCHE
© 2000
Vivienne Plumb



A ROUGH GUIDE TO THEATRE IN THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN.

Japanese Theatre is shaped by rich cultural traditions, folklore and religion, and the two most prominent theatre forms, Noh and Kabuki, have influenced Western theatre-makers as diverse as Brecht, Brook and Le Coq.

Each is characterised by highly stylised movement, gesture, costume and by the blend of various performing arts: music,

singing, mask, puppetry, dance and Shinto rituals.

Noh theatre developed in the fourteenth century under the artistic principles of Zen Buddhism — restraint, austerity and economy of performance — and continues to be performed today. Noh plays are a blend of dance, music and song and the stories are often about gods, warriors, demons or even real people (although they usually reappear as ghosts). Noh dramas are not

constrained by unity of time and place and a Noh play “aims to catch the mood of a fleeting moment by complete rejection of realism and a subtle fusion of technical resources”.

The traditional Noh stage is made completely of wood and housed within a pavilion modelled on Shinto shrines. The stage floor is polished so that the actors can move with a gliding motion, and buried beneath the floor are giant



pots or bowls that enhance the resonant qualities of the wood when the actors stomp heavily on the floor. A chorus accompanies the narrative with a repetitive chant and a musical ensemble, "Noh Hayashi", underscores the action.

Noh actors are almost exclusively male. The actor playing the main role ("the shite") is masked and wears ornate extravagant costumes, whilst the minor characters wear less sumptuous garments and the stagehands are dressed entirely in black. The stagehands often remain on stage for the

entirety of a performance, introducing and retrieving props where necessary.

Kabuki theatre, which also emerged in the seventeenth century, was more popular than Noh, being pure entertainment that appealed to the merchant classes as well as workers, monks and even servants. Initially involving puppets, by the eighteenth century Kabuki plays moved away from puppetry towards realism and Bunraku became the puppet theatre. Kabuki plays were progressively characterised by eroticism and violence. Plots

included romantic trysts, mysterious phenomena and the exploits of outlawed heroes.

In contrast to Noh, the earliest Kabuki performers were all women but later, roles including females, were played exclusively by men. Whilst the actors were frowned upon by the authorities, they became idols for the general public and acting dynasties emerged, including the Danjuro dynasty which survives today. Danjuro I (1660-1704) developed a flamboyant acting style marked by bold black and red makeup and exaggerated movement.





In the mid nineteenth century, following the opening of Japan's borders to the West, the Meiji Government attempted to clean up Kabuki, to make it more acceptable and to suit European realism. Actors were placed under the control of the Ministry of Religious Instruction and the theatre was seen as a platform to improve public morals.

By the turn of the twentieth century, actresses were back on stage in the Shinpa 'new school' political and patriotic plays that were briefly popular and by the early 1930s Shingeki 'new drama' was in vogue — where playwrights adapted Western dramas for Japanese audiences.

Post-war Japanese theatre reacted against this move towards the West and has been described as 'Post-Shingeki' and 'a return to the gods'. Embracing the Japanese popular imagination, Post-Shingeki drama often involved the metamorphosis of a character into an archetypal, trans-historical figure.

Perhaps most influenced by the extravagance of Kabuki and the Japanese flight of fantasy is the Takarazuka (the 'treasure mound') Revue. Originating in 1927 and still performing Western musicals today, Takarazuka is unique in that all the performers are women. Called "an all-girl extravaganza of romance and chivalry", Takarazuka was founded in 1914 by railway magnate Ichizo Kobayashi (top left), as a way to entice visitors to a hot-spring resort on his railway line. He wanted to create actresses "more

suave, more affectionate, more courageous, more charming, more handsome, and more fascinating than a real man." The result is a cultural fixture equivalent to the American soap opera.

Japanese women (the Revue's audience is 95 percent female) flock to see their favourites in WEST SIDE STORY, KISS ME KATE, and OKLAHOMA! In fact, Japan's biggest stars tend to be former 'Takarizienne'.

The most-revered Takarazuka stars are its drag kings, or otoko-yaku. Otoko-yaku are women-as-men and ona-yaku are women-as-women. Performers must hone their performative gender after the first year of training and then spend the next two years perfecting it.

Resonances of the highly stylised movement, voice and music that characterises Noh and Kabuki can still be seen today in the work of contemporary Japanese theatre companies such as Ishinha, which performs in Auckland Festival 2009.

SOURCES:

The Oxford Illustrated History of Theatre
www.artandculture.com
www.japan-zone.com

IMAGES:

- 1 Danjuro I
- 2 Noh Performance
- 3 Takarazuka Poster
- 4 Takarazuka Performance
- 5 Takarazuka Performers
- 6 Noh Performance
- 7 Ichizo Kobayashi
- 8 Traditional Outdoor Noh Stage
- 9 Noh Performance
- 10 Noh Performance



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SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER

By Oliver Goldsmith
30 Apr – 23 May
Maidment Theatre

Michael Hurst will direct this lusty comedy of bad manners. Meet Charles Marlow, a tongue-tied and uptight man who needs a lesson in the art of love. He longs for a wife, but finds it easier to have a bit on the side. The barmaid seems fair game — but there's more to her than meets the eye.

SILO THEATRE

Auckland

LIFE IS A DREAM

By Pedro Calderon
De La Barca
Mar 14 – Apr 10
The Herald Theatre
(Auckland Festival 2009)

Rosaura is a woman disguised as a man. Segismundo is a Prince, who believes he's a slave. The country is in chaos, ruled by a King who would rather sacrifice his own son to feed his own hunger for power.

BACK STORY

By Oliver Driver & Ensemble
Mar 19 – Apr 11
The Herald Theatre
(Auckland Festival 2009)

Storytelling has existed as long as humanity has had language. And if our lives today were truly linear, we would always live in the present moment. But we don't. At any moment, we live in the past, partly in the present, and much in the future.

Today's generation. Today's idiom. Theatre that speaks with its own voice.

CENTREPOINT THEATRE

WHO WANTS TO BE 100?

By Roger Hall
18 Apr – 30 May

Welcome to the Regina Rest Home where the old boy network is alive and kicking, with a retired QC, an ex-All Black, a former university professor and a famous potter amongst the residents. Restless, irrepressible and determined to enjoy their twilight years, they declare war on illness, old age, guilty wives, greedy offspring and the quality of the catering!

BATS THEATRE

Wellington

A BRIEF HISTORY OF HELEN OF TROY

By Mark Schultz
11 - 28 Mar

With her beloved mother in the grave and a father who would not speak to her, Charlotte runs away to a dream-world of power, fame and sex. To make matters worse, she begins to destroy the lives of the few who truly love her.

CIRCA THEATRE

Wellington

HATCH OR THE PLIGHT OF THE PENGUINS

By Geoff Chapple
3 – 21 Mar

Joseph Hatch's biggest venture was the Macquarie Island steaming works which placed him at the centre of an international outcry over cruelty to penguins. SEE the evidence yourself in the breathtaking images! EXPERIENCE the perils of the Southern Ocean! LEARN the horrors of penguin oil rendering! HEAR the man argue his case!

DOWNSTAGE THEATRE

Wellington

MY BRILLIANT DIVORCE

By Geraldine Aron
Mar 26 – Apr 11

Starring Ginette McDonald. This is a wittily observant, achingly funny and heart-wrenchingly real comedy that explores what life is like for Angela, recently dumped by her husband.

COURT THEATRE

Christchurch

THE TUTOR

By Dave Armstrong
13 Mar – 11 Apr

John Sellars is a self-made millionaire who figures that if money can't buy happiness, at least it can keep his son in line. When John hires a Daihatsu-driving hippy to save Nathan's maths grades, three opposing mindsets go head-to-head in a comedy of (bad) manners, modern education and parenthood.

FORTUNE THEATRE

Dunedin

EMMA

By Jane Austen
Apr 18 – May 10

Crowning herself as a matchmaker, Emma comically and shamelessly meddles in the lives of neighbours and friends, usually spoiling their chances at love rather than improving them.

To find out what else is going on in Auckland be sure to pick up the latest copy of





The Washing Instructions

A woman entered a shop. A woman entered a shop and went straight down the back to the lingerie department where Sharon was serving, help a large lady who was a size 40/E decide between black lace or orange satin. When the woman who had entered the shop reached Sharon's counter, she leaned across and gave her a hard smack on the mush. You could hear the sound all around the lingerie department. Smack smack. Whap whap. Sharon's customer looked nervous and said I've made up my mind, I'll take the black. Sharon kept serving and began to wrap the black lace brassiere. The woman who had slapped her turned on her heel and left the ship immediately. She went up the road, ate fast food and then caught a number 58 bus. Sharon thought what was that all about? She continued wrapping. After the customer had hurried away she realised she had forgotten to put in the special washing instructions.

from
NEFARIOUS
poems and parables
© 2004
Vivienne Plumb

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SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER



By Oliver Goldsmith
Direction Michael Hurst
Design John Verryt,
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With Paul Ellis, Esther Stephens,
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MAIDMENT THEATRE

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