

„Butoh Medea” - sweat, blood and tears

„Butoh Medea” Yokko on the 3rd United Solo Europe in Warsaw. By Krzysztof Stopczyk on kulturalnie.waw.pl

The play „Butoh Medea” was awarded as the best female solo performance during United Solo 2014 in New York. The combination of mythical Medea and Japanese culture didn't promise a pleasant and happy evening. Fortunately, the majority of audience gathered in Teatr Syrena on the second day of the festival was aware of that.

Japanese actress, graduate of a prestigious American school Actors Studio, specialises in Butoh technique. With plays based on it she wins awards on international festivals.

In Poland, Butoh Technique (Japanese buto – dance of darkness) is not very well known and rarely have we got an opportunity to watch performances acted in the convention created in 1950s. The word Butoh consists of two ideographs: BU – dance and TOH – step, and means “stamping with the whole foot”. Performances based on this technique are more “walked” than danced and they seem more to be shaman rituals than dances that we are used to. In its ideological sphere Butoh derives from old ceremonies, beliefs and folk aesthetics of ugliness.

Butoh Medea is just like this. On the empty, shrouded in darkness stage, the spectators see in turns classical and Butoh etudes.

Classical are the texts spoken in English, acted in “European style”, with rush of waves in the background and with light counters of spotlights. The tragedy of Medea is told and acted here. These scenes could be played by any actress, e.g. a European or an American. Of course, Butoh Medea carries the burden of the country and culture in which it was created. In none of the stagings of this myth that I am familiar with, there was such a verbatim description of slaughtering her own children. The first son: “ up into the heart and down”, the second son: “into his mouth and up. He will not scream at his mother”, and beloved daughter with the same knife “ through her right eye, across the bridge to her left”. So many countries so many customs. The generation of 25-30-year-olds brought up on Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, that exterminated everything they encountered on their way, or on princesses, who with a single kick of their long slender legs could deprive of heads, and lungs, a few incidental passers-by, didn't perceive the scene of children slaughter as something unusual. But the rest of the spectators were left speechless.

The half of this monodrama consists of scenes in Butoh technique. FASCINATING! Trans, very loud music, brilliant lights (again mainly spotlights but in combination with a bit lighter background) and the actress who continues to uncover her body during a – and it's not quite clear how to name it – dance/ trans movements/ mystical rituals. These sequences are marvellous. They prove how right the organizers were in deciding to show this monodrama in Warsaw. They are also the essence of international festivals, where within few days spectator has the possibility to watch performances from different cultural circles. Concealed under the nickname Yokko artist was given a long lasting applause, and it needs to be emphasised – she fully deserved them.

„Butoh Medea - sweat, blood and tears [quotation from the performance]”