

2019 愛丁堡藝穗節 — 《無耳琴師》 Hoichi the Earless

HOICHI THE EARLESS, C VENUES, REVIEW

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★★★★

HONG KONG-BASED THEATRE RONIN'S *HOICHI THE EARLESS* SEDUCES ITS AUDIENCE WITH THE PRECISION OF ITS ACTORS, AND EFFECTIVE USE OF LIVE NANGUAN MUSIC.

Based on a tale from Japanese mythology, *Hoichi the Earless* focuses on a poor but exceptionally talented flute player seduced by the ghost of a dead Samurai to play for his master, and a friendly monk trying to save the musician from the out-worldly. Although famous in its country of origin, one does not need to be familiar with the story to enjoy the performance – thanks to subtitles that are easy to follow, and available in both English and French.

What makes the show particularly accessible to the foreign audiences is its focus on music, which largely fills the show. Blending cultures, the Hong Kong-based company Theatre Ronin use traditional Chinese Nanguan music – performed live at all times – as the backdrop for their Japanese tale. It is simultaneously calming and frightful, creating a mysterious atmosphere suited for a story involving ghosts and graveyards.

There's an underlying simplicity to *Hoichi the Earless*, which seduces its audience. Set design is kept to a minimum, and almost everything relies on the skill of its actors and symbolism of chosen costumes and props. The style of acting exhibited here is different from our western understanding – much more subtle and primarily based around movement – which, in itself, adds a dose of fascination but also works well to compliment the story and music.

Although there's nothing overly graphic in the show's content, and Theatre Ronin markets it as appropriate for 5+ year olds, the minimalism of *Hoichi the Earless'* storytelling would probably not interest the younger audiences. Instead, this adaptation of Japanese mythology is a subtle show that'll appeal to grown-ups who enjoy ancient mystery stories, and can follow the moderate but crucial subtitles in English and/or French.

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