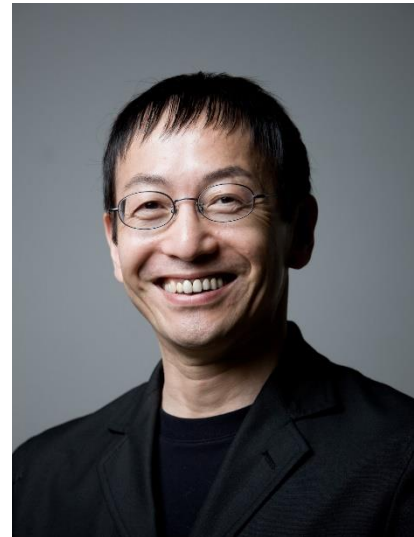




Hideki Noda - A Night At The Kabuki

Acclaimed Japanese theatremaker Hideki Noda is returning to London this September with *A Night At The Kabuki*, a show inspired by Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and samurai legend, set to the songs of Queen's iconic 1975 album *A Night At The Opera*.

Ahead of the show's three-night run at Sadler's Wells, the writer, director and actor – who will be performing in the show in the role of the Nurse – tells journalist Jo Caird about his creative process, getting inspired by Queen, and why he loves introducing British audiences to his work.



Jo Caird: Shakespeare, Queen and samurai legend are three pretty distinctive threads to weave into a show. How did *A Night At The Kabuki* come about?

Hideki Noda: I got the inspiration from *Romeo and Juliet* first. The end of the story is that a young couple commit suicide and the conflict finishes. But I was interested in *after* the story.

Around that time I got an offer from Queen – they wanted me to make a new production using *A Night At The Kabuki* the album. So I mixed the two things.

Queen wanted to make the story Japanese so I came up with the idea of using Japanese history of the 12th-century, the beginning of the samurai era, when two big clans fought each other – it's like the Montagues and the Capulets.

I tried to take some inspiration from each song on the album and that was the beginning of the workshop process. Then I started to write a script.

The end of the story is set in Siberia. After the second world war, Stalin allegedly took more than 300,000 Japanese soldiers to Siberia and half of them died of hunger and forced labour. It's not a well known story because we lost the war so we couldn't say anything about it. I want to focus on after the war because everybody says, 'Oh, the war is finished'. But actually after the war, the war doesn't finish – something happened next. This is life.

JC: What is the attraction for you, as a theatremaker, of interpreting the works of Shakespeare?

HN: I don't know how much I understand Shakespeare's world. The Shakespeare that I know is totally different from your Shakespeare because of translation. But I like Shakespeare's works, in the same way that I like Greek myths, because they have human stories behind them. Audiences all over the world react to his work as human beings.

My first experience of Shakespeare was *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, directed by Peter Brook, in 1971, when I was a high school student. I was impressed with the production but, to be honest, I thought that I would be able to see this type of show again one day. But actually, not so much. Now I can say it was an amazing experience. When I meet friends in the theatre, all over the world, if I talk about that *Midsummer Night's Dream*, everyone always says 'Oh!' I was very lucky to see the show. But I didn't know that at the time!

JC: Do you feel a pressure bringing Shakespeare to British audiences?

HN: Of course! It's challenging, especially for the critics. And also, I twist the story; I damage it. I think British people look down on *Romeo and Juliet* compared to other Shakespeares. If I wanted to adapt *King Lear* or *Hamlet* they would tell me, 'Shhhh'. *Romeo and Juliet*? 'Oh, it doesn't matter'. But I feel that *Romeo and Juliet* is one of the best love stories in history because they misunderstand each other. The best love stories are like that: sex and betrayal, ambition.

JC: What made you want to bring *A Night At The Kabuki* to London?

HN: In Tokyo, audiences know my work. Of course I'm happy about the fact that my work goes down well with audiences, but sometimes I wonder if that response is a true one. Coming here, nobody knows my work. When I come abroad, I feel almost like a monk, engaged in a course of study – of theatre, of acting.

When I came to study theatre in London in 1993 there was lots and lots of fantastic physical theatre here. My work was already very physical but I came here – to Sadler's Wells – to do workshops with Complicité and I met many theatre friends – Kathryn Hunter, Peter Brook, Marcello Magni, Clive Mendus, Simon McBurney – and I got lots of influence from them. After coming back to Japan I started to do workshops. So I think I came up with the idea here, in the rehearsal room at Sadler's Wells, that only chairs on the stage are enough. And sometimes just a big cloth is enough.

JC: How important is that physicality for you today?

HN: Physicality is very important in the theatre but recently here in London, that physicality is just for musicals and contemporary dance. Of course compared to in

Japan, it's fantastic, amazing. But even in straight plays, human beings' bodies and physicality is very important, especially since Covid-19. People should be in front of you live, not online. It's very important, we need to communicate with each other. I want to show our bodies telling something, without words.

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