

Butoh and Live Sound for Spring

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Spring is almost here, and the Japanese arts are springing forth.

To celebrate the Shangsi Festival and the Japanese Doll Festival, the Taoist Studies Institute will be hosting a benefit performance of “Butoh and Live Sound for Spring,” featuring dancer Kaoru Okumura. Also performing with Okumura are Jyl Shinjo Brewer (Zen and Butoh teacher), Larry Lawson (Shakuhachi flute), and Ken Lawrence (percussion).

Through this benefit event, Kaoru Okumura continues to share butoh at the Taoist Studies Institute. “Butoh and Live Sound for Spring” follows her recent “Taste of Butoh” on January 7, which included a solo by Okumura and a film screening about butoh founder Kazuo Ohno. Okumura touts Ohno as her inspiration to study butoh: “His existence and presence was just special,” she says. “He just extends his hand, and another world appears there.”

Before that, Okumura had little interest in dance. “I’m not good at sports at all,” she says. “PE was the subject I was really weak in.” But a university performance by a small Butoh troupe changed that.

Her own butoh studies began in 1993 in Tokyo, when she was also employed full-time as a computer researcher. Okumura’s devotion to her twenty-year career in the computer industry led her to postpone her dream of pursuing butoh for fifteen years.

But in 2008, Okumura became acquainted with Seattle’s local community of Butoh performers. “I was ready,” she says. “I was so lucky to see and experience Butoh in Japan, and it would be really my pleasure to share that with people in Seattle.”

Beyond Kazuo Ohno’s foundational work, Okumura also seeks to share the inspiration of Ohno’s son, Yoshito Ohno. “His keen spirituality and unconditional devotion to Butoh is the root and original position I always return to.”



Okumura's four years of training and performance in Seattle have led her to develop a personal philosophy of Butoh: "I believe that Butoh comes from deep inside of the person—movement from inside of your body, and intention and desire from the deep abyss of your soul," she says.

Movement "should be very 'true' in each moment at that time, in that space, with those people who share the time and space together—in other words, improvisational," Okumura elaborates. "Improvisation makes the performer keener and more vulnerable on the stage—which nourishes Butoh."

Okumura plans to bring this practice to her performance on July 7, at the Taoist Studies Institute. "Noh and Butoh: Lecture & Performance" will include a lecture by Ken Lawrence, Noh-style chanting by Kumiko Lawrence, and Okumura's Butoh solo.

According to Okumura, within classical Japanese drama Noh exists a sub-category, Mugen-Noh (or dream-vision Noh). "The story is told as a past memory by the spirits/ghosts," Okumura says. "We focus on the dead body in Butoh as images in the scenes. Watching Butoh or Noh sometimes gives you the feeling that you had tasted or remembered the life from somewhere else."

Within this structure, Okumura hopes to evoke the essence of Butoh: “It is a journey wandering across the boundary of layers of a dark and lonely realm, and calm light in another world ... a kind of performed meditation for the performer and, I hope, for the audience.”

Audience members can continue this journey with Okumura and with other members of the Seattle Butoh community throughout 2012. The Taoist Studies Institute plans to host another event in May, and the DAIPANbutoh Collective will host its third Seattle Butoh Festival in October.

“Butoh is a path for me to pursue the pure wish,” Okumura says. “Please be there to be a witness!”

“Noh and Butoh: Lecture & Performance” runs on July 7 at the Taoist Studies Institute, 225 North 70th Street, Seattle.