

The Next Wave Butoh Festival

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First came the Butoh Wave last autumn. And now comes the Daipan Butoh's Next Wave Seattle Butoh Festival, to be held from June 3 – 18.

This upcoming festival will include performances, workshops, and public lectures on the Japanese-originated dance form of butoh, and includes not only local butoh artists, but also a range of national and international guest artists and scholars. The performances and perspectives will reflect that variety.

"At its core, butoh is simply about existence," says visiting performer and scholar Michael Sakamoto, who teaches interdisciplinary MFA students at Goddard College. "Since there's no strict or agreed-upon form, I think of butoh more as a practice, like any life pursuit."

"Many viewers are intimidated when they first see butoh," Sakamoto says. "It's the thoroughly unexpected emotional and psychic honesty. It's the performance equivalent of tough love."

The intimidation factor is something that the Daipan Butoh artists and staff are working to combat, in order to make butoh more accessible to a wider audience. In addition to indoor performances and workshops, Daipan leaders Sheri Brown and Helen Thorsen will perform with other dancers at Whole Foods Market on Westlake Avenue and at Lake Union Park, in three free events.

Daipan Butoh also hopes to bridge the gap with its public forums, in which panel discussions will be held at the Frye Museum, Seattle University, and Cornish College. One panel will be led by local butoh practitioner Joan Laage, Ph.D., whose focus was butoh. Other panels will feature international artists and discuss "cultural cross currents" in this practice.

Tanya Calamoneri, a festival participant who is engaged in Ph.D. research, emphasizes the complexity of butoh. "It initially grew from German *ausdrucktanz*, French Dadaism and Surrealism, Artaud, Genet, Bataille, Mishima, Shibusawa, Terayama, cabaret dancing, and many other sources," Calamoneri says. "It later became caught up in Japanese nativist sentiments and the critique of that."

Festival attendees will likely see many of those influences. "People talk about 'classic' butoh, contemporary butoh or mobu (modern dance and butoh), and post-butoh." But, Calamoneri, says, butoh is "not easy to pin down because it's still growing."

Regardless, the human body is a key focus of butoh practice. Koichi and Hiroko Tamano emphasize this after three decades of practice.

"The Skin of our Body has two surfaces," the Tamananos say. "One faces outer space, the other faces inner space. Outer space is moving on limited life time. Inner space is timeless and unlimited." They work to demonstrate both of those spaces in their performances.

The challenge of bringing these disparate approaches all together in one festival has been generative, says Daipan's artistic director Sheri Brown. "Each performance is developed in different ways. Some use 'butoh fu' choreographic notation, while others use imagery exploration."

Next, the ensembles construct ways to rehearse together. "In the case of the really large ensemble for the June 11 performance, the communication for that started with pre-meetings of co-director and then stage managers, musical directors, videographers and photographers," says Brown. "Then it moved to email communication and instruction prior to two group preparation rehearsals at South Lake Union."

All of this leads to still more creativity. "If you have ten dancers in a room, you'll have at least eleven ways of working." But Brown says this contributes to the vibrancy of the butoh and larger community.

"I hope that the stereotypes about butoh get broken down," says Brown, "and that through the discussions, workshops, and performances onstage and outdoors, we can grow as a community."

"All we have to do is wake up to our own reality," Sakamoto adds. "That act alone is butoh."

"Next Wave Butoh Festival" runs from June 3-18, at various locations in Seattle. See the Daipan Butoh webpage at: www.daipanbutoh.com.