



Joe's View

With Joe Meyers, entertainment writer

A late report on the Japanese gangster play 'Kutsukake Tokijiro'

November 21, 2011 at 12:57 pm by **Joe Meyer**

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The Flea Theater on White St. in downtown Manhattan is a hotbed of activity these days. Upstairs, the Dungeons and Dragons play, "She Kills Monsters," has been gathering rave reviews and enthusiastic audiences; downstairs, an adaptation of a popular Japanese gangster story, "Kutsukake Tokijiro," is mixing wonderful live music by composer Ryo Yoshimata with a highly imaginative production that blends stage and film techniques. The play is based on a 1928 story by Shin Hasegawa about a "lone wolf" yakuza — Tokijiro — who kills a rival gangster and then takes on responsibility for the care of the dead gangster's wife and young son. It's a very unusual love story — the widow begins to fall in love with the man who murdered her husband — given a spectacular staging by Jun Kim in the Flea's marvelous basement venue that tends to give plays the feel of a live movie because of the unique oblong space (the audience sits in two long rows in front of the theater equivalent of a Panavision wide "screen").



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“Kutsukake Tokijiro” becomes a very entertaining cultural mash-up as the director, choreographer (Kayoko Sakoh) and the composer mix styles and time periods to make an 80-year-old story feel fresh. A big part of the kick of the show comes from the frequent and unexpected humor in the midst of so much violence and tragedy.

The fight choreography is terrific and is augmented by amazing projections and lighting. Adding to the multi-cultural power of the piece is the presentation of scenes in both English and Japanese (the subtitle projections boost the feeling that we are watching a classic Asian film).

“Kutsukake Tokijiro” opened on Nov. 10 but the run is set to end on Sunday, so you need to make haste to catch this unique piece of theater, along with its rare U.S. appearance by the composer and musician Ryo Yoshimata.

(For more information, go to www.theflea.org)