

Kutsukake Tokijiro

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reviewed by [Mitchell Conway](#) · November 12, 2011

Kutsukake Tokijiro was so much fun to see! A lone drifter kills fellow yakuza Mutsuda-no-Sanzo out of obligation to honor, then that same drifter goes on to protect the family of his victim. The drifter, Kutsukake Tokijiro, played with the pensive squint of an old western hero by Yasu Suzuki, is tempted back to crime after Sanzo's wife realizes she is pregnant and lacks the resources to support the child.

What jumps out at me right away is the excellence of Jun Kim's direction. Moving into a dance, cutting to narration, focus on the video, moving from dramatic to comedic, all felt rightly balanced. Whether you call the show's stylistic flexibility postmodern or whatever categorization, it is richly theatrical. For example, after a tense confrontation at the front door, when Tokijiro enters to duel Sanzo, game show music comes on accompanied by an announcer welcoming him. I cackled loudly for a while, but this is not the sort of cheap humor that sometimes is used because a story is not compelling enough on its own; such impression-based choices are consistently in service of the story.

Kayoko Sakoh's stylized fight choreography has no obligation to follow the typical rules of attacking and receiving a blow. Fights move as dances without ever losing the sense of conflict and aggression in their grace. I've never seen anything quite like it on stage. A line dance that emerged following a captivating song performed in a seedy club by Angela Tweed was surprisingly original and magical (this was no "Cotton-eye Joe"). The live music composed by Ryo Yoshimata meshes with the pre-recorded music excellently. Right at the beginning, the thundering trot of Kae Reed's drumming jolts us into the action.

My friend who attended with me said it felt like characters had comic book speech bubbles popping up next to them. The show moves between English and Japanese; some actors stuck to one language while others would switch. Subtitles are well placed.

Yoan Trelly's projected video is smoothly incorporated into the onstage action. A moment where an army of all white body outlines slowly marched on screen was frightful.

I really hope to see another show from the Kurotama Kikaku Company back in New York soon.