

Review: “Ethereal” at ShapeShifter Lab in Brooklyn NY.

by Sakurako Kataoka
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Ethereal (Photos by Masahiro Noguchi)

The breath-taking, sold-out-performance “Ethereal“ took place at ShapeShifter Lab, 18 whitwell PL, Brooklyn NY on October 18th, 2019. The venue is famous for catering to serious artists. A beautiful video of the show was also exclusively shared for her admirers who were out of town.

This forty-five minutes show was choreographed and performed by Nana Miki, who is a seasoned contemporary dancer/teaching artist. The beautifully told the story is based on her own view of life and death. The show was accompanied by live music from pianist Ms.Makia Matsumura and DJ MEGu, an award winning composer, also collaborated on the music and video art to support this incredible show.

Nana Miki began to learn ballet when she was two years old. She is also trained in other types of dance including modern dance and contemporary dance. During her 33 years of dancing career she was chosen as principal for many subjects such as “Raymonda” and “ The Sleeping Beauty” She also went to a tour of “Goodwill Ambassador Performance” to Switzerland. Also, as a choreographer she worked for many projects and played several leading roles.

Nana Miki has been featured as an accomplished dancer/choreographer by Japanese community paper “NY Seikatsu” This leading paper is most read and trusted not only by Japanese people in NY but also by Americans who do business with Japanese people in NY and who are interested in Japanese culture.

She offers ballet class for small children not only teaching techniques but also kind and respectful manners as a human being which many parents appreciate. She also contributes to the community by working with adults to inspire and motivate them to become better performers. She also generously shared her stage with beginners who are otherwise have no idea where to start.

Nana Miki’s creation “Ethereal “ which expressed her unique view about the ethereal time and space between before and after the death. It is consist of three parts, “yoiyami (almost darkest point of dusk)” “yugen(a profound, mysterious sense of the beauty of the universe” and “Ake no myojo (Venus in the Morning Sky).”

The setting is minimalistic. Nana opened the act with long quiet yet graceful entrance while walking with a long fabric around her neck. The 30 feet long beautiful fabric gradually expanded with certain sense of tension as she walked.

Although it is unknown if she aimed the effect or not, she entered in almost Noh style move, one of Japanese traditional art form where two worlds of before and after the death often coexist on the stage. The energy in her seemingly suppressed yet intense movement was so grounded and serene that it drew the audience into the world she was about to create immediately.

Later in that scene she danced with the fabric. It was amazing to see how well she handled the 30 feet long fabric. Even making a few feet long fabric tells a story while dancing is difficult enough. Nana succeeded to dance with it to let it express various emotion without a hint of getting tangled. It is certain that her extended training and experiences made that challenging choreography look effortless.

In the second scene, Nana cleverly danced by using set-up tapes. It was just impressive to see how precisely the tip of her foot nailed pin sharp spots on the tapes in various heights and angles as a part of dancing without losing balance even once. She also cleverly used her own shadow on the beautiful back ground along with abstract video. The scene was extremely poetic and effective.

After her beloved grandmother passed away Nana once said, "I wonder if the deceased ever think about us just like we think about them...Yes sometimes life is a struggle. I wonder if it is true that going back to become a "spirit" after the death is somewhat easier than living this life? No... Yet striving to stay here and now with a sense of gratitude is the only way out."

The son of creator of Noh art Zeami explained about the concept of "Yugen", which is the theme of the second part of this show, "Yugen is... sad beauty of human suffering." To me her show was an embodiment of that.



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There is not much to tell about the weakness of the performance. Some audience might feel that it was somewhat lacking typical burst of emotion with facial/bodily expression. The general tone was subtle and suppressed. However, because of that the emotion the dancer goes through appeared even more intense and beautiful.

After dancing spontaneously to the live piano for seven minutes in the last scene, at the very end her facial/bodily expression got more concrete hinting a sense of "hope" just like finding the theme of the part "Akeno myojyo, the venus in the morning"

Nana Miki has been so generous to share her talents with other people, both Japanese and non Japanese people from children to older performers. It is satisfying to see bringing together her multiple talents of dance, choreography, staging, video and music to express herself in such a moving and engaging way.

The sensitive, profound yet strong "Ethereal " was a perfect showcase of her creativity and skills as a dancer, choreographer, and creator backed with 33 years training and experience in both Japan and US. I am deeply thankful for the inspiration and motivation.