

## **"Towards interweaving Japanese and Western theatres: Training and its application to performance"**

The lecture/demonstration will concentrate on two directors whose methodology begins with a training method that encompasses the vocal and movement elements of Japanese classical theatre and is aimed at developing the performers' expressivity and specific abilities. Following this preparatory stage, they proceed in the design and direction of new productions of Western classical plays while employing the aesthetics of Japanese classical theatre, but without attempting to create an impression or style of a specific genre of the Japanese classical theatre. The most influential figure in this respect in Japan was the avant-garde director SUZUKI Tadashi, who during the 1970s-'90s staged several Greek tragedies and Shakespearean plays. In preparation for these productions he used a training method (known as the Suzuki method) that he had developed with his avant-garde troupe, in which several elements from Japanese classical theatre were combined as a pattern and then trained as a repetitive practice. My own work during the last two decades has embodied a Western manifestation of the same path: training performers in various elements from Japanese classical theatre and then incorporating these in directing classical Western plays. In the training I employ only a very few components of the Suzuki method, with most of the components being completely different, comprising authentic traditional vocal and movement techniques. These techniques are also combined with an imagination-guided acting approach that enables the performers to accommodate the previously trained traditional performing elements within newly- created acting segments. In this lecture/demonstration I shall analyze the essence, similarities, and differences between these two training methods, and examine how the Japanese traditional elements in both methods featured afterwards in the performers' acting in these productions.

### About the Author

Professor Zvika Serper is Chairperson of the Department of East Asian Studies, and a faculty member at the Department of East Asian Studies and at the Department of Theatre Arts of Tel Aviv University. He is a specialist in Japanese theatre and cinema, as well as a theatre director and actor. He holds a B.F.A. (acting), M.A. (theatre research) and Ph.D. (theatre) from Tel Aviv University.

Serper studied in Japan for eight years during which he pursued his research at the Noh Theatre Research Institute of Hōsei University, Tokyo, as well as undergoing practical study and training in Noh, Kyōgen and Kabuki (the three styles of Japanese traditional theatre) with Japan's leading actors. During those years he appeared in leading roles with celebrated

actors of these traditional styles. He also trained in the "Suzuki Method", and studied and practiced T'ai Chi Ch'uan (Chinese traditional art of movement) in Taipei and Tokyo. During the last two decades Serper has been exploring a new horizon that traditional Japanese theatres may open up for Western theatre. In three major works that he directed - the Greek tragedy *Agamemnon* (1993) Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1996), and the Jewish masterpiece *The Dybbuk / Between Two Worlds* (2002), he incorporated various Japanese aesthetics and techniques into highly appraised productions. Video recordings of his productions of *Agamemnon* and *The Dybbuk / Between Two Worlds* have been shown around the world, mainly in the US.

Zvika Serper has published numerous articles on various aspects of Japanese theatre, on its influence on Japanese cinema and on the similar aesthetic of both arts, in edited books and such journals as *Asian Music*, *Japan Forum*, *Contemporary Theater Review*, *Comparative Drama*, *Cinema Journal*, *Journal of Film and Video*, and *Film/Literature Quarterly*, among others.

He has given lectures/demonstrations and conducted master classes and workshops overseas in acting and movement techniques at major theatres, acting schools and universities. Most recently, he is a Fellow of the "Interweaving Performance Cultures" International Research Center, Institute for Theater Studies, Freie Universität Berlin.