

Letters & Notes

Poor Performance

THE EDITOR:

I would like to inform readers of *The Drama Review* that it is my opinion that my article, which appears in T50 under the title "New Japanese Theatre," was badly edited and that the intention of my writing was altered without my knowledge or consent.

The essay as I wrote it was entitled "Some Japanese Theatre." I wanted to make it perfectly clear that it was not my intention to discuss all Japanese theatre or even "new Japanese theatre." I intended only to discuss a specific phenomenon in contemporary Japanese theatre, the appearance of three truly original groups—Theatre Center 68/71 (which performs the work of Sato Makoto and others), The Situation Theatre (which performs the work of Kara Juro), and The Waseda Little Theatre (directed by Suzuki Tadashi, which performs the work of Betsuyaku Minoru, Kara, and others).

My treatment of Kabuki and of the history of Western-style modern theatre in Japan was not meant to be unbiased. It was necessarily selective and balanced and phrased to emphasize the fact that, first of all, where Shingeki had broken rather traumatically with Kabuki and the traditional theatre arts, the three groups with which I was dealing have achieved a new and unique reconciliation with these arts; and secondly that it was precisely the Shingeki "modern theatre tradition" and its political background that served to alienate Japanese theatre's newest generation. The editorial butchery performed on my article not

only obliterated its structural balance and rhythm but also changed the overall intention of the writing from something very specific to something ostensibly general.

Editorial errors on a smaller scale also need to be pointed out. (I should add that I was never shown proofs of my article.) In my original essay I tried to point out that Seigei, The Youth Art Theatre, which was founded in 1959, reflected in the theatre a break with the Japanese Communist Party that had characterized the period between the 1956 de-Stalinization movement and the 1960 demonstrations against the renewal of the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty. The only real significance of this fact in the context of my essay is that during the course of its history Seigei counted among its affiliates Sato Makoto, Kara Juro, Kanze Hideo, and others centrally important to the present creative high tide in Japanese theatre. For some reason the editors of T50 saw fit not only to remove these names but also to bring the discussion of Seigei into the present tense (Seigei folded in 1966) thus making it seem that Seigei continues to exist more or less unrelated to the groups I was describing. This is, of course, not the case. The common ideological point of departure of specific personalities is of major significance in understanding the character of the contemporary theatre movement I was describing in my article.

Readers will also note that a sentence has been edited out of the second paragraph on page 156. In my original manuscript this sentence indicated that

after the first Japanese Communist Party had been decimated in 1923, delegates to a Comintern meeting in Shanghai in 1925 were rebuked severely for not understanding the Marxist-Leninist line and ordered to reform the Party. Without this sentence the paragraph does not make much sense. The phrase, "Betsuyaku Minro, a dropout from the politics and economics department of Waseda University," on page 160 represents another editorial error. I originally pointed out the fact that Betsuyaku dropped out of school in 1960—I did not label one of Japan's finest playwrights a dropout. Readers

will also note that Saito Tadashi and Nakamura Masaki, the two architects of Theatre Center 68/71's tent, did not author the quotation on page 165; the quotation is from a jointly written and unsigned prospectus for the Center's tent theatre and was footnoted in this way in my original manuscript.

David Goodman,
Editor
Concerned Theatre Japan

(Editor's Note: The Special Asian Theatre Issue, T-50, was edited by Erika Munk and her staff. A. J. Gunawardana acted as Special Editor of the issue.)

Working-Class Theatre in Vienna

THE EDITOR:

While traveling in Europe last summer, I often found myself disappointed by shows that had some "reputation." I was pleasantly surprised, however, by the *Tschauner's Stegreifbuehne* in Vienna. I happened to hear about this small theatre from a cobbler, who had repaired the handle of my handbag. He told me that he and his wife liked to attend the performances at this little theatre. His enthusiasm inflamed my interest.

The theatre is located in a small yard in a working-class district on the outskirts of Vienna. The best seats cost 18 Austrian shillings (less than a dollar). These are wooden benches in front of a covered box stage. Informed playgoers bring their own blankets and pillows along to cushion the seats. Faust conjuring Mephistopheles in a cloud of smoke is painted on the curtain. To the left, a woman plays Austrian folk melodies on a piano, while the "house" fills up.

The play I saw was called *Liebeslotterie* (Lottery of Love), a comedy in

the southern rustic tradition. There was a peasant couple and their son (the handsome lover), the village priest, the curious neighbor, and the woman's first lover who returned from America, having become a successful businessman, having never known that he was the father of a pretty daughter. There were various tokens and letters misdelivered and misinterpreted, facts confused, people upset over trifles, etc. Two other main characters were: the idiotic servant, who tried to be extra smart and only succeeded in getting himself and everyone else tangled up in a series of mistakes; and the wealthy innkeeper's daughter, eccentric, blunt and frantically searching for a potential husband.

The audience reacted spontaneously and without inhibitions. There were loud remarks, applause, and of course a lot of laughter during the performance. The actors dealt with any interruption in a remarkably nonchalant and witty way. I could not help but admire the alertness with which they handled occasional street noises (such as the siren of a passing police car), or unex-