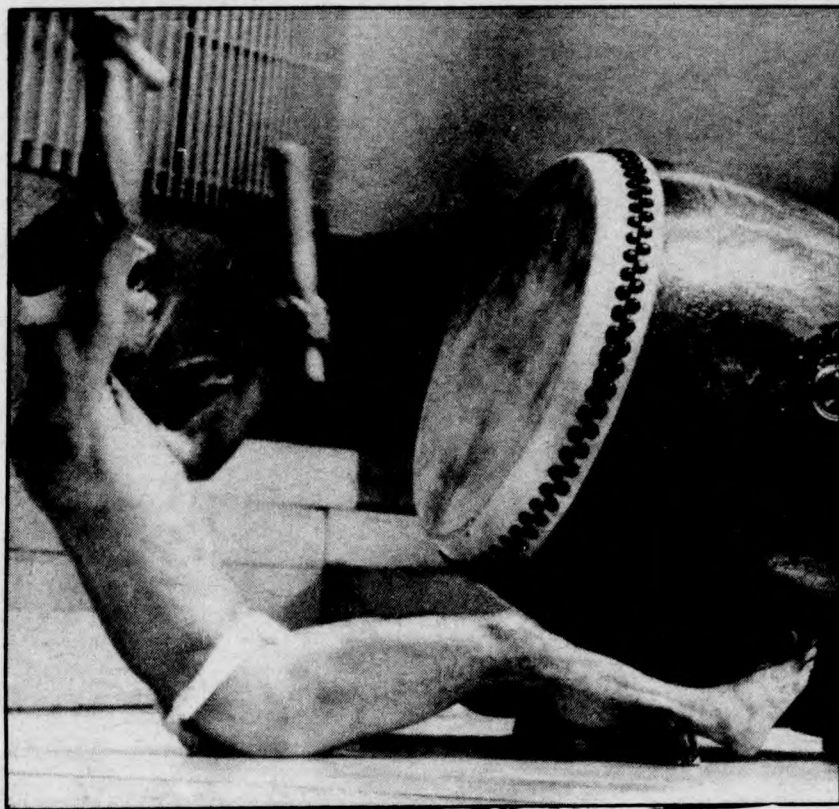


Japan's Demon Drummers and Dancers

Kodo dances to exotic rhythm of a different drummer



Demon Drummers will perform at Ryerson Theatre this weekend.

W. Hurst

The rhythms pounded out by the Demon Drummers of Sado are so dynamic that they will resonate within the bodies of their audiences, when these Japanese drummers appear at Ryerson Theatre this weekend.

Torontonian, John Whales, felt this phenomenon each time he attended a performance of Kodo--the men and women also known as the Demon Drummers and Dancers of Sado. In an interview, Whales declared that the impact never diminished, although he lived and worked with these people.

On a trip to Japan, Whales met the members of Kodo after a performance. On a second trip, when he studied with a puppet master, Whales was invited to live with the company in an abandoned school which had been converted to a home.

As a guest, he witnessed the daily regimen and creative harmony that are essential to Kodo, a word which means rhythm of the heart.

Most of the performers are men, but all members share the work

whether it's preparing food or washing floors. The groups does not adhere to any specific philosophic or religious doctrine. However, the daily regimen involves determination, discipline and endurance. Smoking, drinking and casual sex are, by necessity, uncommon.

Each morning, the company runs 10 kms, followed by a few hours of calisthenics. In the afternoon, they run another 10 kms. They do not jog. Remaining time is used to rehearse drumming and traditional theatre arts. They sleep on mats, not beds.

The members of Kodo achieve a common harmony, although they come from various backgrounds and different parts of Japan. Whales was a welcome guest, but not a member and he realized that he was 'with' but not 'of' the community. Perhaps this contributes to his awe of their theatrical achievements.

The repertory includes both traditional and original works. Ancient temple drumming has been adapted for the stage, drawing the disapproval of purists. Other pieces, based on folk tales or real life,

are presented with masks, dance, and music.

Kodo uses a shamisen, a three-string instrument also used in Kabuki theatre, but there is an important difference. The Kodo instrument is pitched lower, producing a less-refined sound than that of the Kabuki model.

However, the drumming is the heartbeat of Kodo and its performances. The drums, made by master craftsmen, vary from a bongo size to the 'master drum' which is eight feet in diameter.

The drumming has astonished audiences from Boston to Berlin. And John Whales mentioned that it was fortunate that Kodo was not scheduled to play the new Roy Thomson Hall--Toronto's monument to Western art music is so acoustically sensitive that the Demon Drummers and Dancers of Sado could blow the roof off.

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Grease to follow Hair

Independent returning with extravaganza

Nigel Turner

Still flushed with the spectacular success of last winter's production of *Hair* the York Independent Theatre Production plans to return this year with another rock 'n roll musical, *Grease*. The show will run March 8th through 12th.

Although YITP is still short of funds, President Rob Berry says his

organization will soon be able "to begin the task of hiring a director, a musical director and of constructing sets." Berry is confident YITP will receive "favourable support from the Administration. Everyone is involved, every college."

Once it has obtained support YITP will begin auditions, which will be open to all York students. *Hair* was

"able to involve and attract the attention of the York campus and surrounding community", and the company expects *Grease* to have the same effect. Berry says he would like to "involve two out of ten York students in some capacity"--either as one of the 550 people working on it, or as members of the audience.

Although the production is not intended for theatre students alone, Berry believes it provides drama majors with an opportunity to "get out of the classroom and into the market place, to have a trial run at the professional life." In support of his theory, he points to Stewart Hugh and Barb Hugget, former members of the company who now work in professional theatre. He describes his company as a "professionally oriented production, by and for the students.

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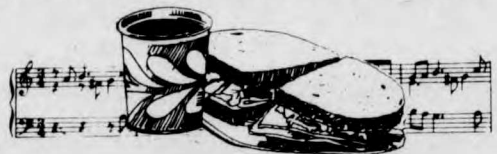
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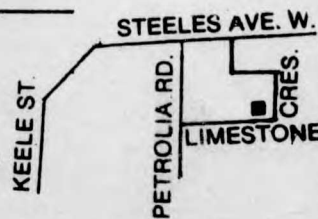


Photo: Nigel Turner

Rob Berry: Trying to raise the funds

Commenting upon the value of the YITP experience Berry says, "So many theatre students walk out with a degree, and think they know the business. But with economic times like they are, and with no practical experience, they just can't find jobs."