

OBITER

JAPANESE DANCERS. How strange, how odd, how *alien* they are, had been the burden of critics' voices after Edinburgh and the first London programme of the Azuma Kabuki dancers; so one approached the first night of the second London programme with a certain wariness, ready to recoil with surprise or shock or repugnance. In the event, the whole evening turned out to be very much less peculiar and more enjoyable than one had been led to expect. Admittedly the music—or a good deal of it—is very strange with tones and intervals as disconcerting as a trip in the dark, but even here there was one instrument, as it might be first cousin to a zither, which was strung to the diatonic scale and sounded more familiar than much Magyar folk music. And as for the dancing, any one who has watched some ballet, however infrequently; who has seen any dancers from the east or been to even one Japanese film should appreciate much of it without difficulty. This second programme began with *Dammari*, described as a Kabuki pantomime which gave us a foretaste of delights to come with the tremendously energetic and exciting dance of Tsurunosuke Bando, as the Giant Frog who was really a magician. After the interval, however, came a Kabuki drama of love, death and retribution which was full of splendid things; and as so often in ballet the most poignant were those moments of stillness which lay between movement and movement, as the dancer grows taut like a breaking wave before the long and beautiful frozen line melts into gesture once more. *Flower*, *Snow and Moon*, linked into a dance suite, seemed immensely remote from each other and, indeed, from us. 'Flower' was cherry blossom at three removes and of a coldly symbolic eroticism; 'Snow' was a puppet dance, only the puppet was human and the manipulator, sinister in black, stood behind her to organize her despair. Not so far, as you can see, from Petruschka and his magician and the movements very similar too, as she jerked and shuddered in her agonized indecision. 'Moon' was an eternal adieu between a Samurai and his beloved, and its formal, hieratic beauty and the decorum of its sadness came as a relief after the abandonment of the puppet dance. It paced out a kind of holy minuet, archaic and remote, and of an extreme beauty of movement. One felt, rightly or wrongly, that this suite of three dances was probably making the most cerebral demands on the audience, and that in it we missed point after point in the grave conventions of its gestures; be that as it may, it would be a dull clod indeed who could see no immediate beauty in the dancing, or feel no fellowship with the beings engaged in these human situations.

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