Tetsuji Takechi (1912 – 1988)

A theatre critic, producer, director and innovator, Tetsuji Takechi used his family’s wealth to reform kabuki during the postwar period, developing a style and repertory known as “Takechi Kabuki.”

Born in Osaka to a wealthy family, he studied economics at Kyoto National University, graduating in 1936. He became a theatre critic, publishing his own journal, *Stage Review*, while the Second World War interrupted his theatrical activities, in the post war period of the Occupation and after he used his family fortune to establish his own company.

He taught western theatrical techniques, as well as inviting masters of Japanese traditional performing arts such as nō and gidayū to teach the kabuki actors new techniques of voice and movement. Between 1949 and 1953 he developed and produced twenty-five productions of Takechi Kabuki in Osaka, launching the careers of several well-known postwar kabuki actors. The plays themselves were classic kabuki texts given new life by infusing them with elements from other performance traditions. From western theatre he took the idea of focusing on social circumstances and psychological background and development of the characters. As a direct result of his work, audiences for kabuki increased and engaged the art with great enthusiasm and the traditional kabuki artists began to employ some of his methods to invigorate their performances as well.

Takechi began to work with kyōgen as well, collaborating with the Shigeyama family on invigorating that form as well. In addition to his work in production, Takechi also performed in various forms of plays, including kyōgen and shingeki, believing every form of art should be accessible to and popular with the public. He directed plays by Kinoshita Junji and Mishima Yukio, another artist who sought to use the modern to invigorate traditional theatre. He also gathered his earlier writings into published collections and wrote new works about theatrical innovation and history including *Kabuki no reimi* (Dawn of Kabuki, 1955), *Dentō to danzetsu* (Tradition and Disruption, 1969), and *Mishima Yukio: Shi to sono kabukikan* (Mishima Yukio: His Death and His Kabuki, 1971). His work inspired both traditional and modern artists to be experimental in form and work in fusion theatre, blending different genres and forms. He served as an important mentor to the postwar generation of kabuki artists and his influence has been felt for the several decades since.

Tetsuji eventually worked as a television presenter in the fifties and sixties, and became an innovative film producer whose work was primarily in pinku eiga (soft core pornography), constantly running afoul of the government cinema censorship boards.

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