



Oguri Brings the Japanese Art From Butoh to the REDCAT Stage

By Lea Lion

On a recent Monday morning, the Japanese-born, Los Angeles based choreographer who goes by the single appellation, Oguri is sipping green tea from a delicate, white-and-blue porcelain teacup. He is holding the brew in one hand and using the other to make subtle hand gestures as he discussed his upcoming dance premiere.

The gestures are characteristic of Oguri, who practices an avant-garde form of Japanese dance called Butoh, which relies heavily on just such understated movements. Oguri's new dance work, *Caddy! Caddy! Caddy!* based on two novels by William Faulkner, runs March 1 – 4 at REDCAT in downtown Los Angeles.

The first act depicts *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner's stream of consciousness masterpiece, while the second act picks up the Southern gothic novel *Absalom, Absalom!*. Unlike more conventional dance performances based on literature, Oguri's work is not meant to be representative of Faulkner's novels. Rather, Oguri says it is more like a meditation on the author's words. One thing is for certain: The abstract, butoh-style dance performance will rival the Southern author's propensity for non-linear storytelling



“I learned from working with dancer Min Tanaka how to work with literature” Oguri said in his thick Japanese accent, “The dance is not like a theater company, we are not following the story – not using it as a scenario, not using it that way. It is a metaphor, some depth of image.”

As Min Tanaka, who was a student of Hijikata and Oguri's teacher, once said, “You have to free yourself from the conventional definition of dance in order to extend it, closer to life itself.”

Perhaps this is why when asked if the performance is set in the time of Faulkner, Oguri took a sip of tea before responding. “Faulkner understands there is no past, no future, it's all in the present. That very much connects with dance too. Dance is always in the present.”

For *Caddy! Caddy! Caddy!*, Oguri teamed up with dancers Jamie Burris and Roxanne and Morleigh Steinberg. All three have worked with Oguri for more than a decade. “In reading the first part of *The Sound and the Fury* you really have to just let yourself absorb it because there is no logical sequence and so you have to let the images penetrate,” said Roxanne Steinberg. “That's kind of what the dance is that we do. The words serve as images and we just kind of let ourselves be saturated with those images.”



Caddy! Caddy! Caddy! features a score by Paul Chavez and a set installation by Hirokazu Kosaka. Kosaka has collaborated with Oguri six times in the past, including a quilt-like backdrop of multi-colored blankets for the 200 piece *Flagship Powhatan* and the wet clay stage topped with fresh from the kiln ceramic bowls of *Verandah* from 2001.

For the REDCAT collaboration, Kosaka constructed a stage out of scrap wood that he “charcoalized” or turned into the black, sooty substance. He also built a 20 foot wall that holds hundreds of oversized spools of thread. The idea, Kosaka explained, is for the dancers to slowly unravel the spools.

“It's about Faulkner's different characters, every page has different characters in it,” said Kosaka, who also is the artistic director of the Doizaki Gallery at the Japanese American Cultural & Community Center.

“I want those pages and words and volumes of information and people of different colors different characters to be something like a string.”