
Odokumi

THE PIT

Written by Aoki Go

Directed by Miyata Keiko

For the season finale, we present the only previously unpublished work to be produced this season. The NNTT commissioned the play from exciting young playwright Aoki Go, and it will be directed by Miyata Keiko.

Aoki started the production unit "Gring", where he acts as writer and director. In recent years he has written works for several other theatre companies, including Bungakuza, Gekidan NLT, Gekidan Shinkansen, and the Haiyuza Theatre Company. Through meticulous research and smart crafting of scenarios, his work depicts the drama found in everyday life. The humorous dialogue of his characters portrays all manner of conflicts, emotions and human relationships in an idiom only possible in theatre. His work always maintains a positive view of people, while at the same time deftly raising issues which question modern society. Aoki is an important voice in contemporary theatre, and great things are expected of him. This will be his first appearance at the NNTT.

In this family drama, the ordinary conversations of people working the kitchen of a bento (boxed meal) shop prompt the viewer to ponder the question, "What is the Emperor?" Aoki takes a different angle from that of contemporary Japanese theatre up to this point, and makes the Imperial Family seem more human and approachable. In this ambitious work, he probes the question of what Japan has become since the 1980s, and what it is that lies at the heart of the nation.

SYNOPSIS

Set in the mid 1980s, in a shopping district in Hayama City in Kanagawa Prefecture. There, the Iwao family runs a bento shop and struggles to keep up with the daily catering orders. The person keeping everything going is not the husband, Yukihiro, but his wife Yoshiko and Mrs. Sakata, a housewife working part time. Their eldest son Kensuke and eldest daughter Yuiko, and Yukihiro's unmarried younger brother Yoshito round out the colorful cast of characters.

Yukihiro does what Yoshiko tells him to do, but his heart isn't in the work. Whether it's his gout acting up or something else, he is always finding excuses to stay out of the shop. Whatever the reason, he's lost his enthusiasm for business. His brother Yoshito saves enough money for travel and then hits the road for extended periods, which makes him not of much help either. The weight of supporting the Iwao family falls mainly on wife Yoshiko's shoulders. Naturally, the couple have their share of squabbles. It's all part of an ordinary day at the shop.

One day, something happens to shake things up in the Iwao home. Their son Kensuke gets accepted to the prestigious Gakusuhin University. There he becomes friends with the Crown Prince, who is one year ahead of him, and gets invited to visit the Crown Prince's Palace. Yukihiro is all excited. On the morning of the visit, Yukihiro tells his son to take a bento prepared by the Iwaos for the Prince. Kensuke normally pays little heed to his father, but this is one idea he really likes. As it turns out, the bento was well-received, and they receive a bento order from the Imperial Household Agency. This brings the family together as a team, and they throw themselves into their work for a change. The bento are delivered, which would normally be cause for celebration, but then something happens. Yoshito, who has just returned from traveling in India, complains of stomach pains and collapses. And he had been helping make the bento that day. After a doctor examines him and gives a diagnosis, the name of the illness comes as a shock, and dark clouds begin to gather over the Iwao household.