

TimeOut | Lifestyle & Culture



'Crazy Camel' helps butoh over the hump

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SPECIAL TO THE JAPAN TIMES

Many people have a preconception about butoh — that it is performed by dancers whose bodies are painted white. So when we debuted our current program, 'Crazy Camel,' in France, and we came on stage covered in gold-colored powder, the fans and experts there thought we were pioneering a new style," 72-year-old butoh master Akaji Maro says in a recent email interview. "In fact, this gold-powdered showy performance style has existed as a cabaret-show flip side of orthodox butoh since not long after the genre was started in 1959. It was developed by two trailblazers — Tatsumi Hijikata (1928-86) and Kazuo Ohno (1906-2010)."

Maro founded the butoh dance company Dairakudakan (Great Camel Ship) in 1972, and the astonishingly athletic dancer has since also become well known to the non-butoh world as both a stage and screen actor. He was delighted by the audience's enthusiastic reaction to "Crazy Camel" at the Maison de la Culture du Japon in Paris in 2012, and his company went on to perform the same *kinpun* (gold-powdered) show to similar great effect in 2013 at the Montpellier Dance Festival in the south of France and the Festival Automne en Normandie in and

Above: The gold-dusted Dairakudakan performers sparkle on stage for the "Crazy Camel" at the 2013 Festival Automne en Normandie. Right: Akaji Maro performs in a Japanese school-girl uniform for "Crazy Camel."

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around Rouen in the north, before returning to Poitiers in west-central France last May.

Ironically, though, as the golden dancers helped make the captivating art form of butoh familiar to European theatergoers, "Crazy Camel" was never staged in its original home of Japan.

"In the early days, Dairakudakan used to do short *kinpun* shows, mainly in cabaret theaters, and we toured the length and breadth of Japan with them," says Maro, who explains some of the history of the golden butoh. "Back then, its main purpose was simply to earn money in order to keep (the troupe) going and buy equipment.

"Performing in places where people were drinking and having fun, however, also trained us, as dancers, to remain mentally, as well as physically, strong. The *kinpun* shows really supported butoh culture and were a very important part of its history."

As the 1970s gave way to the economic boom of the '80s, however, many cabaret theaters closed as nightlife trends changed, and soon *kinpun* shows could only be seen at Nagoya's famous annual street-performance festival. Just when the



sparkling butoh variant seemed to be teetering on the brink of extinction, groups of Dairakudakan dancers calling themselves "goldens" began performing at local street-performance festivals — and from there they soon found themselves invited as special guest acts at wedding ceremonies and other parties.

In Tokyo, goldens began performing at the annual spring Koenji street-performance festivals, and the popularity of the shows led to media coverage that helped the dancers attract even bigger audiences, which included many viewers who had never seen butoh before.

Kinpun shows that started as side projects of the dancers, it appeared, turned out to be an effective way of attracting a new audience to the company's regular, white-painted indoor butoh performances.

"When our bodies are entirely covered with golden powder, people imagine the dancers as statues of Buddha, warriors in

armor, androids, characters from a 'Terminator' movie or other non-human creatures," Maro explains. "So it's a simple means to help expand the imagination. I suppose that's why many people love the *kinpun* shows so much.

"Someone once told me it was just like seeing the hundreds of statues of Buddha at Kyoto's famous Sanjusangendo Temple magically stand up and start to dance."

For the Paris world premiere and subsequent shows of "Crazy Camel" in France, Maro says that he created an hour-long version of the work, which was inspired by Antonio Vivaldi's violin concerto "The Four Seasons." When asked about Japan, though, he says, "In this staging, I especially want to emphasize the splendid effect of the golden powder, so I expanded the story and I've tried to express the magnitude of the venue, the vast expanse of the main stage at Setagaya Public Theatre."

Those heading to see the show can expect something dazzling and unique. Maro has not only added several scenes but he has also asked the renowned contemporary jazz shakuhachi flute, player Keisuke Doi to write new music for the program.

"Crazy Camel" at Setagaya Public Theatre in Sengenjaya, Setagaya Ward, Tokyo, plays on Feb. 4 and 5, 7:30 p.m.; Feb. 6, 3 p.m., 7:30 p.m.; Feb. 7, 3 p.m. Tickets are ¥5,000 at the door, ¥4,500 in advance. For details call the theater at 0422-21-4982, or visit <http://bit.ly/dairakudakantickets>.

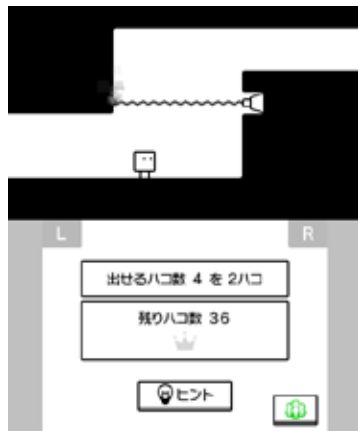
On: Games by Brian Ashcraft

Nintendo thinks outside the box, again

It's only been a year, but "Hako Boy" is already back and it's even better than before. "Hako Boy," which was released for the Western audience as "Box Boy," features a box-shaped hero, who solves puzzles and clears stages thanks to his ability to squeeze out boxes and use them to scale platforms. The game's retro graphics and monotone palette also helped it become one of the most popular DS titles of last year.

So how has Nintendo improved on it? "Hako Boy! Mou Hito Hako" is able to make two sets of boxes instead of just one set, and therefore has more challenging puzzles. Once again, the game is also a master class in design. Nintendo proves that simple graphics and a reduced color palette — largely black and white, with some flourishes of green and teal — not only looks good, but also offers a truly inventive and exciting video game experience.

"Hako Boy! Mou Hito Hako" is currently available in Japanese only



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and can be downloaded for ¥680.

www.nintendo.co.jp/3ds/dl/kcaj

A re-make, gangster style

Nearly every year, Sega churns out a new "Yakuza" ("Ryu ga Gotoku" in Japan) game, and for the most part, they have been terrific. The series and its spin-offs, renowned for excit-

ing game play and storytelling, are set within the Japanese underworld. This latest entry takes players back to where it all started.

"Yakuza: Kiwami" is a PS3/PS4 remake of the original game, which was released back in 2005. The makeover includes spiffy new HD graphics, a fleshed-out storyline, different music and a new power-up system that involves extra fights with the unhinged gangster Goro Majima as well as other mini-games.

Don't think of it as simply a garden-variety HD remake. Look at "Yakuza: Kiwami" as a way that developers get to show how much they've grown and improved as game creators.

The first-printing edition of "Yakuza: Kiwami" also comes with a demo for the upcoming "Yakuza 6," so you can

expect even more in the future. "Yakuza: Kiwami" was released this week for ¥7,009.

<http://ryu-ga-gotoku.com/kiwami>

Keeping up the fight

Capcom's "Street Fighter V" is the first cross-platform version of Street Fighter to be released, and it's heading exclusively to PS4 and PCs (sorry Xbox One owners!).

All this is a big deal since "Street Fighter" started out as an arcade game and has always embodied arcade culture. There have been home versions released, but none for the latest generation of consoles, and this is the first time that all players, whether on PS4 or PC, can play each other online.

Capcom has tweaked the gameplay, too, adding a V-Gauge, which brings with it three new unique attack techniques and skills for each fighter.

New characters, including a tornado-spinning Rashid from the

Middle East, shows that Capcom is hoping to appeal to fans in all regions.

To make sure it got Rashid right, Capcom collaborated with Pluto Games, the "Street Fighter" distributor in the Middle East. The game is slated to get regular updates, with the introduction of new characters that can be bought using real-world cash or with "fight money," the in-game virtual currency.

With esports becoming more and more popular, Capcom, no doubt, is hoping that the vibrant "Street Fighter" community will keep SFV thriving online for years to come.

"Street Fighter V" will be released on Feb. 18. The PS4 retail version is ¥8,629, while the download versions are each ¥7,989.

www.capcom.co.jp/sfv

