

AMNESIA

Written, directed, and produced by Roger Shimomura

A-KK



AMNESIA

The internment of Japanese Americans during World War II is a subject that I have revisited many times in both my paintings and experimental theatre pieces, however, the writing of *Amnesia* was directly inspired by two fairly recent experiences in my life. The first happened at a College Art Association annual conference where a panel of distinguished American artists of color concluded a lively and moving debate about the kinds of topics and issues that inspired imagery in their artwork. During the question and answer portion of the program, a blonde haired, Asian American lad, twenty something, stood up, and directed a question to the Asian American representative on the panel. "Why do you guys keep bringing up all this old stuff? It's over. Can't you deal with it? Why can't you just be proud to be Asian, like me? What's the problem? Why do you have to make it so heavy?".

The second occasion took place just a few months ago when I saw the opera, *Madam Butterfly*, for the third time in my life. My love for the music by Puccini, had once again, overcome my disdain for the plot line, where the obsequious Butterfly, relents to every whim of the omnipotent white conqueror. This disdain was recently fortified by seeing the Broadway hit, *Miss Saigon*. For those that have seen both productions, I need not say that the only difference between the two plot lines is that at the end of one play, *Madam Butterfly's* son is taken away by the European father, whereas in the other, the son is given away to the Euro American father.

In the writing of *Amnesia*, I have attempted to overlap these two disparate subjects; the attitude reflected by the young, blonde haired, Asian American and the concluding appropriation of the aria, "Un bel di vedremo", from *Madam Butterfly*. While the confluence of these two topics share issues of victimization, the two female roles in the performance, are meant to contrast each other in meaningful ways. While *Madam Butterfly* committed suicide in the opera, her counterpart in *Amnesia*, makes a generational leap from camp victim, to one who sings Karaoke, free from any memory of camp. It is important to point out that I do not pretend to understand all of the implications of the various, enigmatic roles and issues, that are advanced in this piece. I will admit that even attempting to bridge these two disparate subjects may only be permissible (and possible) in a performance art format. Furthermore, I will also admit, that some of the images and juxtapositions that were included, were included just because I thought they were interesting to see, within the context of the piece.

I do hope, that in the end, some of the following questions will be raised. Should the passage of time ameliorate past injustices? Is the burden of one generation's sins, automatically passed on to the next? Why isn't more of the younger generation of Japanese Americans more concerned? Are there greater numbers of Euro Americans keeping the issue alive? Is it constructive to keep bringing it up? Is it ultimately helpful that performances, like this, raises more questions than it answers?

I am indebted to many people for the realisation of this performance. The video, *Skating Manzanar*, was shot by former Academy Award Nominee, film maker, Renee Tajima-Pena, Los Angeles. Our initial conversations on her video was seminal to the overall vision of this piece. The choreography was principally designed by conceptual artist, Keiko Kira, originally from Japan, and currently residing in Kansas City, Missouri. Keiko, who has worked with me since the early 80's, is an amazing performer, that performs with grace and tremendous depth. All vocals were researched and sung by Kari Paludan, now residing in Mclean, Virginia. Kari, ironically sang and toured with the New York Opera Company in *Madam Butterfly* (1999-2000). Kari is a multi-talented performer, with whom I have previously had the pleasure of working in other productions of mine. Thanks to composer Hummie Mann who brought Liz Falconer into this production. One listen to her CD, *Deep Pool*, convinced me that she would add a unique spark to this performance. Thanks also to Jennifer Shontz and Barbara Dove, two stage hands (kurogo). My sincerest appreciation for their important contributions. Last but not least, thanks, to my wife, Janet Davidson-Hues, who edited this audio/video that provided the glue that held the entire performance together. Amazingly, we remain good friends.

Roger Shimomura

BIOGRAPHIES OF MAIN PARTICIPANTS

ROGER SHIMOMURA is currently a University Distinguished Professor at the University of Kansas where he has taught since 1969. He has had over 100 solo exhibitions of his paintings and prints as well as presented his experimental theater pieces at such venues as the Franklin Furnace, NYC, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and the Smithsonian, Washington, D.C. Among the 35 grants and fellowships he has received, has been 4 National Endowment for the Arts Individual Artist Fellowship. He has lectured at 135 universities and art museums across the country. His personal papers are being collected by the Archives of American Art.

RENEE TAJIMA-PENA is a graduate of Harvard-Radcliffe College, she has been an Academy Award nominee, Sundance Film Festival award winner, and recipient of a Peabody Award, James Wong Howe "Jimmie" Award, Justice in Action Award, and many others. Her work has premiered at the Cannes Film Festival, London, Toronto, and Hawaii Film Festivals, and she is currently producing a feature-length documentary for the PBS series, "The New Americans". She currently lives in Los Angeles, California.

KEIKO KIRA is an artist whose installations and performance work address the issues of identity through her experience as a Japanese woman living in America. She received her BA and BFA from the University of Kansas, and her MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She has worked with Roger Shimomura on numerous projects and has appeared nationally in his performance work. She has also worked with the collaborative performance group a.k.a. Since 1997 and has performed with the group at Cleveland Performance Festival, Mobius in Boston, Fringe Festivals in Tulsa and Philadelphia, Urban Institute for Contemporary Art in Grand Rapids and HERE in New York City. She works and teaches in Kansas City, Missouri.

KARI PALUDAN, soprano, enjoys a varied career in opera and theater and as a recitalist and teacher. Based in the Washington DC area, she has performed with the New York City Opera, the Utah Festival Opera, the Lyric Opera of Kansas City and the Washington Savoyards. She is a past regional winner at the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. In Fall 2000, she toured historic venues throughout the Midwest with For Art For Love, a multimedia recital she created to help bridge the gap between the audience and the classical performer.

ELIZABETH FALCONER is internationally recognized as a koto performer, composer, and recording artist. She studied the koto while residing for 12 years in Japan earning a master's license from the Sawai Koto School and holds a Ph.D. in International Education from the University of Iowa. She has performed at the Kennedy Center, and the Moers New Jazz Festival in Germany and has won national awards for her recordings. She is currently a musical storyteller in residence for the Seattle Symphony and resides in Renton, Washington.

JANET DAVIDSON-HUES combines word, image, and object to create paintings, installations, videos, and performances which focus on women and language and the interdependence between the two, and simultaneously examines the representation of women in our society. Davidson-Hues, MFA graduate from the University of Kansas and former Assistant Professor of Art at Indiana State University, has exhibited her work nationally in over 75 exhibitions, and has presented solo and collaborative performances in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Cleveland, Tulsa, Grand Rapids, Milwaukee, and Kansas City. The women's collaborative performance group with which she works, a.k.a., received a grant from the Franklin Furnace.

PROGRAM

Prelude

ACT I: The move

ACT II: The internment

ACT III: Loss of memory (video)

ACT IV: Lost memory

Epilogue

PRELUDE

The audience is held outside till 5 minutes before starting time, then allowed to enter. The master audio/video tape is then started.

- AUDIO: Audio track of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* can be barely heard, staying low for 8 minutes as audience is seated.
- LIGHTS: The room is dimly lit.
- ACTION: Keiko is sitting on a chair, with her back to the audience. She wears a blood pressure cuff on her left arm. She is bent over, staring between a minimal opening between two shoji screens, a video of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. She doesn't move for 8 minutes. A white cloth covers a pile of suitcases, that are on stage. Also visible are an electronic message board and two kotos.
- AUDIO: After 8 minutes, audio track of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* increases in volume over next minute.
- AUDIO: After 1 min. audio track hits full volume that becomes clearly audible to the audience.
- ACTION: With the audio track at full volume, Keiko begins to move, attempting to look at the TV monitor through the screen opening.

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AUDIO: After 1 min. of full volume, video sound track begins to fade out as heartbeat begins.

ACTION: Kurogo Barbara (B), uncovers electronic message board which shows high blood pressure readings going by.

LIGHTS: Kurogo J. then turns spotlight on back of seated Keiko

ACTION: At spotlight, Keiko stands up, faces audience, and begins to take her own blood pressure. After pumping blood pressure cuff, Keiko stares at cuff gauge, tilts head, and sighs deeply.



LIGHTS: Kurogo J. turns off spotlight.

ACTION: Kurogo B. re-covers electronic message board.
Keiko takes her chair and leaves stage.
Kurogos J. & B. remove furniture (screens, TV & cart) off stage.

AUDIO: Sound of heartbeats continue...

End of Prelude

ACT I (The move)

- AUDIO: Heartbeats begin to fade.
LIGHTS: Kurogo B turns house lights off when heartbeats begin to fade.
Kurogo J. turns up yellow spotlight on koto and holds.
ACTION: As heartbeats begin to fade, kimonoed Liz (wearing cowboy hat, and bright kimono), enters stage, sits behind koto and waits for railroad crossing clanging sound.
- AUDIO: Railroad crossing, clanging sound (cue) is heard (3 sec. max).
Liz bows to signal that she is ready to play.
- AUDIO: Liz plays, *Don't Fence me in* (4:45)

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- AUDIO: Liz finishes as train sounds fades in.
LIGHTS: Kurogo J. turns off yellow spotlight.
- ACTION: Liz stands in dark and removes cowboy hat and kimono, which Kurogo B. removes from stage.
Liz moves to bass koto and sits.
Kurogo B. removes white drop cloth covering stack of suitcases.
Keiko moves on stage, behind suitcases and waits for entrance.
- AUDIO: Train sounds fade out.

LIGHTS: After train fade out, Kurogo J. then brings up blue general light on stage that lights up Liz, and stack of suitcases.

AUDIO: At blue light, Liz begins to play, *Moon and Stars* (7:10).

ACTION: Keiko, dressed in 40's attire, 30 seconds after music begins, appears from behind pile of suitcases and begins her solo that references the move to the camps.

VIDEO: Approx. 2:15 after music begins there is a one minute video of railroad tracks.

ACTION: Keiko continues her dance.

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AUDIO: *Moon and Stars* ends.

LIGHTS: Kurogo J. turns off blue light.

ACTION: Liz exits removing one suitcase off stage.
Keiko finishes solo and removes one suitcase off stage.

AUDIO: Coyote howls mixed with rattlesnake sounds fades up then continues for 30 seconds.

Both Kurogos remove rest of suitcases off stage

AUDIO: Coyote howls begin to fade out.

ACTION: Fade out of coyotes is cue for Kari, dressed in evening gown and large brimmed hat, to move to microphone on stage.
LIGHTS: Kurogo J. turns on (non colored) spotlight on Kari.
AUDIO: To background music Kari sings, *Don't Fence me in* (3:08)
VIDEO: Shortly after Kari begins to sing, a 1 min. 30 sec. video of alternating images of camp, begins and ends.

AKP.



AUDIO: *Don't Fence me in*, ends.
LIGHTS: Kurogo J. turns off spotlight.
ACTION: Kari exits stage.
AUDIO: Rattles begins (for 45 seconds).
ACTION: Kurogo remove two kotos from stage.
Kurogo J. Brings blue spotlight to rear door, kneels, and waits for Keiko's entrance.

End of Act I

ACT II (The Internment)

AUDIO: Rattlesnakes fade out.
Reville is sounded.

SLIDES: Immediately after reville, Kurogo B. turns on barbed wire slide which covers stage.

AUDIO: At slide, Kari, from point unseen by audience, sings *Depuis Le Jour* (5:55), acappella.

ACTION: Keiko, dressed in camp work clothes, w/scarf on her head, wearing bag of clothes pins, and carrying metal bucket filled with clothesline, enters back door and slowly walks up aisle. Keiko reaches stage and begins her clothesline/pin solo.

LIGHTS: Kurogo J., walking backwards, leads Keiko to stage and continues to light her while she solos.



AUDIO: Kari continues to sing *Depuis Le Jour*.

ACTION: Keiko proceeds to execute "internment task" of pinning clothes pins on clothes line. This is done in precise, repetitive motions for approximately 4 minutes.

LIGHTS: Kurogo J. continues to hold steady light on Keiko.
Barbed wire slide continues to cover stage.



KDL

ACTION: Kari finishes singing her backstage solo.
LIGHTS: Kurogo J. turns off blue spotlight.
Kurogo B. turns off barbed wire slide.
ACTION: Keiko exits stage w/her props.

End of Act II

ACT III (Loss of memory)

VIDEO: Tajima-Pena video of *Skateboarding Manzanar* (6 minutes) begins.



KSM

VIDEO: Ends to black.

End of Act III

ACT IV (Lost memory)

- AUDIO: 5 seconds after video ends, disco song (*Ladies Night* by *Kool and the Gang*) begins, full volume.
- ACTION: Kurogo B & J. brings out two chairs.
Kurogo B. uncovers and turns on motorized disco ball which begins to rotate, then turns on slide projector with slide of spotlight aimed at disco ball, filling room with polka dots.
Kurogo J. goes to front of stage and mans spotlight.
Keiko (w/Mr. Microphone) and Kari both take seats, and move enthusiastically in their chairs to the beat of the music.
- LIGHTS: Kurogo J. turns non filtered spotlight up on Keiko and Kari after both begin to move to music.
- AUDIO: After about 1 min. 30 sec., audio of disco song fades out.
- ACTION: Kari and Keiko stop moving in their chairs.
- VIDEO: Video (no audio) of *Little Shop of Horrors* begins.
- AUDIO: Momoe's (*Yamaguchi, Momoe*) song (3:48) comes up, full volume.
- ACTION: Keiko is first and lipsynchs first part of the song, doing Japanese girl singer impression.

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ACTION: At exactly 3:10, Keiko stops lipsynching, passes Mr. Microphone to Kari and exits stage.

Kari stands and sings live, to orchestral backing, for last :37 seconds of song.



AUDIO: Momoe's song ends.
VIDEO: *Little Shop of Horrors* fades out
LIGHTS: Kurogo J. fades out spotlight.
ACTION: Kari exits stage.

AUDIO: Sounds of heartbeats begin
ACTION: Kurogo B. turns off slide projector and disco ball and re-covers both.
Kurogo J. removes Mr. Microphone and two chairs from stage.

End of Act IV

EPOLOGUE

ACTION: Kari, (dressed in butterfly kimono and Asian eye makeup, enters stage on cue (clack).

AUDIO: Heartbeats fade out.

LIGHTS: Kurogo J. turns (non colored) spotlight on Kari.

AUDIO: Kari sings *Un bel di vedremo* (from *Madam Butterfly*)(4:09), w/recorded orchestra background.

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ACTION: Kari finishes *Un Bel di*, and exits stage.

LIGHTS: Kurogo J. fades spotlight out.

AUDIO: The wind sounds, coyotes, and rattlesnakes begin again.

ACTION: Keiko, dressed as internee w/basket on her head holding shovel, assumes her position on stage (in dark)

ACTION: Kurogo B. turns on slide projector as slide of guard tower shadow is projected over Keiko on front wall (with big throw slide lens). Keiko holds this position.

AUDIO: Wind, coyotes, snakes sounds continue.



LIGHTS: When rattlesnake sounds begins, Kurogo B. turns off slide projector.

ACTION: Keiko exits stage in dark.

AUDIO: Over the wind sounds, words in Japanese female voice are heard (in Japanese only) saying, "hot:", "cold", "windy", "dusty", "crowded", etc.

AUDIO: The wind continues to blow hard.

AUDIO: Wind continues (volume increases) then the voice says, "Shigatakanai". More winds, then again, "Shigatakanai". More winds, then fades down and out.

AUDIO: Silence

ACTION: House lights are turned on.
Two kurogo unmask, take bow on stage.
Then, in order, Liz, Kari, and then Keiko each takes a bow.
They bow once, together. Exit stage.

End of Epologue

END OF PERFORMANCE