

## Japanese culture comes to BPAC with “Salaryman”

By Robert Cambria, senior staff writer  
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**TAKE Dance brought its acclaimed *SALARYMAN* Baruch's Nagelberg Theatre for four performances beginning on Feb. 8.**

"Salaryman," as the Japanese call it, is choreographer Takehiro Ueyama's and his co-creator Yuko Takebe's exploration of the Japanese white-collar businessman. In a suit, white shirt, tie and dress shoes, the bedrock of conglomerates like Mitsubishi and Sanyo fueled Japan's booming export economy from the ashes of World War II until today.

A salary man, even during 20 years of Japan's Bubble Economy, still remains a passage to a stable, middle-class lifestyle. Long working hours, low status in the company's hierarchy and socializing with his fellow workers in after hours has made him a shadow figure to own his family life.

A salary man has no other source of income than what he earns unless he marries well or rises on the corporate ladder. Stereotypically, he lacks initiative and obeys the unwritten law of Japanese conformity: "the nail that sticks out gets hammered." Conforming to expected behavior breeds stress, depression, gambling, binge drinking, depression and even suicide.

Is *SALARYMAN* Ueyama's idea of the spiritual death of a business? Is *SALARYMAN* an attack on the Japanese dream? Through the fluid vocabulary of modern dance, TAKE Dance "explores the life of the Japanese businessman." In a series of vignettes, the dance company fleshes out the life of a modern day corporate Sisyphus

The dancers of the Company: Kristen Arnold, Brynt Beitman, Jill Echo, John Eirich, Kile Hotchkiss, Gina Ianni, Clinton Edward Martin, Lynda Senisi, Nana Tsuda Misko, Takehiro Ueyama and Marie Zvosec, invest in *SALARYMAN* with body and soul.

There is also an immediate identification by an American audience that *SALARYMAN* embodies. For example, the life of grunts working in Big Bracket Banks of Wall Street, hedge funds, venture capital organization and large white-shoe law firms. *SALARYMAN* is, at times, swift, pleasing, interesting and well danced, even though its short impressionistic pieces do not

always add up to the sum of its parts. Ueyama, however, uses his dancers well. The way he positions the leg and trunk of the body apportion the energy so that the urgency of movement, usually frenetic, is well maintained.

The plasticity of movement in *SALARYMAN* is evident everywhere in the athleticism of the dancers' strength, coordination, flexibility and seemingly unending endurance and stamina. TAKE Dance also knew how to take full advantage of Nagelberg Theatre's space.

Since Ueyama's Salaryman is exposed to the harsh laws of the Japanese economy, he is well aware that his audience cannot sustain 90 minutes of gloom. His misery index provides no encouragement, so he lyrically scatters here and there moments of humor, wit and direct feeling through his choice of music in order to relieve the exhaustion of defeat.

A metronome opens and closes *SALARYMAN*. Immediately, we are alerted to the endless clicking sounds that regulate a corporate employee's life, a sound that is more harried and wearisome than balanced and calm. This is expressed in the sequence "the Game," danced with wild abandonment to the pulsating drum of AUN's "Soul Ville,;" a meditation on the battle for life, for getting ahead, or in other words the survival of the fittest in a highly competitive economy.

Suddenly the mood changes in "Ame." Ueyama seeks relief in the gentleness of rain through the medium of "Enka," a sentimental Japanese ballad. The attention is caught by the youthful innocence of courtship by Nana Tsuda Misko and John Eirich, yet the purity of the moment fades.

"On The Way" provokes laughter as we see salary men and women dressed alike in suits and carrying attaché cases on the way to work. They are indistinguishable like ducks in a row, and like ducks they waddle.

"Densha" is a bittersweet piece in a Tokyo subway. The crush of people wedged into a subway car would even make a seasoned New York straphanger blanche. Danced to the strains of Bach's "Goldberg Variations," the piece heightens the mingled disorder.

*SALARYMAN* segues into a lighter moment of corporate group life by a visit to Tokyo's Red Light district. Ueyama does not spare us any detail of this moment of corporate socialite; a salary man's loyalty is to his cohort, to workaday conformity. With wicked amusement, this sequence is danced to "I've got you under my skin" by Joy Askew, dressed in devil red, tempting her client with a shining red apple.

In the brilliant "Silence," a videotape projected on a white cloth, shows dancers like fish swimming under water as though we are observing them from a glass-bottom boat. They dash and dart before the audience's eyes disappearing into a stream of bubbles as though they are swallowed up by a corporate whale.

Ueyama, himself, dances "I'm worried now, but I won't be worried long," a tragic commentary on the life of a salary man. Hitting a brick wall is a recurring concept throughout *SALARYMAN*.

For some, life in a large corporation offers no hope, only despair, ending in suicide. And death by hanging by one's tie is a salary man's revenge.

The metronome appears again in the final piece Salaryman, signaling his complete acceptance that he is nothing more than a cog in the Japanese economy.

Ueyama with great discernment recognizes that in today's economy the salary man has walked into a jungle of greed and heartlessness that chews him up and then casts him aside. His vision is hardly cheerful, but it is a disarming truth.

TAKE Dance is a laboratory of experimentation in modern dance and any program it offers is worth seeing.

**Tickets are \$20 for adults and \$15 for students and seniors.**