

Circus Kinoshita - Nagoya Japan

March 13-May 31, 2010

text and photos from Sara Gordon



Motoki Kazuhara on Balance on a Swaying Bamboo Pole.

History

“Kyokuba Dan”, an early form of circus performance, gained popularity during the Edo period in Japan (17th-19th centuries). In the late 1800s many Kyokuba Dan troupes toured Japan. Always wanting the newest and best for the show, the Kinoshita family gathered various acrobats, bareback riders and other unique acts to fill the performance. Out of this the “Kinoshita Kyokuba Dan” was born.

After a successful visit from the German Hagenbeck Circus, when they toured the world in 1933 with a full menagerie, the word ‘circus’ entered the Japanese language. The Kinoshita family combined the traditional Japanese acts with animal acts creating the Kinoshita Circus. The show was originally set up in Tairen, China. The Kinoshita Circus today is the oldest of three circuses currently touring Japan. This year the Kinoshita family proudly presents the 108th edition of the Kinoshita Circus.

The Kinoshita Circus not only provides great entertainment and lasting memories for the Japanese people, it gives back to the community through service. There are many examples of this throughout the past 100 years. Two examples are worth noting. One occurred in 1943 when a devastating earthquake hit the Tottori area of Japan. Seven performers including show Vice President Yukiji Kinoshita were killed. Despite this internal tragedy, the circus allowed the use of their tent for victims and helped in the rescue effort. A second example of the show’s generosity happened in 1953 when the show helped put out the fire at the historic shrine of Izumo Taisha in Izumo City. The show was honored by the Cultural Properties



Andrea Carr Jewell with Masai.



Cristian Ledezma.



Argentine Dancing Drums.



Hand balancing by Natalia and Irina.



Web during opening.



Kudakebashingo performed by Takayuki Uchida and Kenta Hattori (seen here).

Protection Commission for this act. The show is now billed as "Circus Kinoshita, The Greatest Circus in the World!"

The Show

The 108th edition of Circus Kinoshita starts with a Grand Opening popcorn spectacle of lights, action, aerial and pizzazz! This opening includes web, chiffon and trampoline – all performed by Japanese artists. The varied circus programs include many traditional Japanese acts such as Kudakebashingo, Hanedashi (balancing perch pole), Hashingo (risley balancing a ladder that is climbed), Sliding Tightrope, Seven Chairs, etc.

One of the most unique and different acts is called "Balancing on a Swaying Bamboo Pole". This act is performed by Motoki Kazuhara who carefully and strategically balances herself as the pole moves. It requires a lot of balance and concentration.

The show carries a very special and unique performer. Masai is the only performing adult male giraffe in the world (See his picture on page 4). He is worked by Andrea Carr Jewell who said with a smile: "Masai is such a good boy. He is so much fun. It is an honor to work him. It is a life experience!" Jewell is also working the most docile and good looking group of zebras this writer has ever seen! They work as if they were a liberty act. Jewell makes it look easy! It is truly something to see!

There are many other acts from outside Japan including elephants from the Thai Kingdom (Thailand), Argentine Dancing Drums (Gaucha), Russian Bar, German Wheel of Death, Wacky American Clowns, and an Amazing Safari Spectacle that includes tigers, lions, ligers, zebras and a giraffe.

The Wacky American Clowns are Kelly Van Cleaves and Gregory Parks. They bring in sprite humor and funny gags that even get the reserved Japanese to laugh. Throughout the show their comedic style and acting provide wonderful anecdotes to the otherwise serious show. The show concludes with a double trapeze act performed by a Japanese troupe. This act contains 12 men and a

Japanese clown who all fly through the air.

The show will be in Nagoya, Japan until May 31 and has so many sold out performances that they are adding more to the schedule. When a show sells out in Japan, it is more than just a straw house. The steps leading up to the bleachers are seated with people on mats, people are also standing. In the center of this sea of people is the ring. Having such full shows all the time displays how absolutely wonderful and respected Circus Kinoshita is!

If you are ever in Japan, Circus Kinoshita is a must see for any circus lover! I feel honored to have had the privilege of being a guest! Thank you Mr. Kinoshita for such an amazing experience!

Thai elephants.





Japanese Double Flying Act.

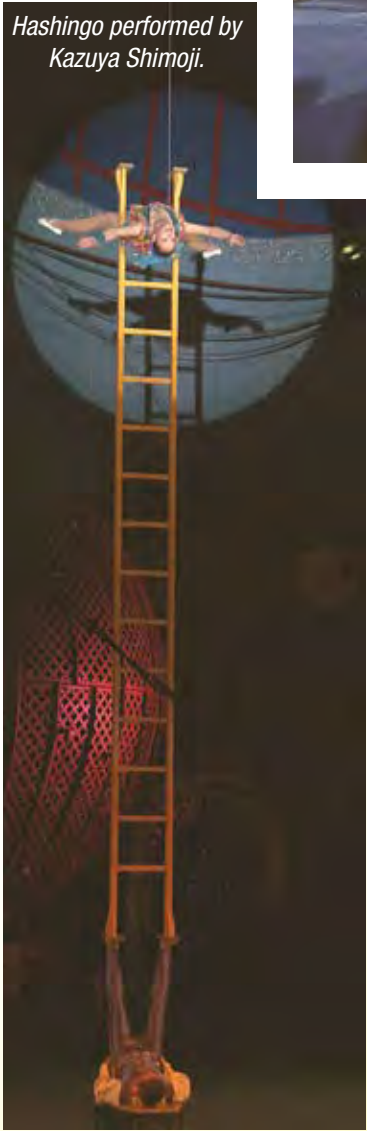


The comedic antics of Kelly Van Cleaves (left) and Gregory Parks.

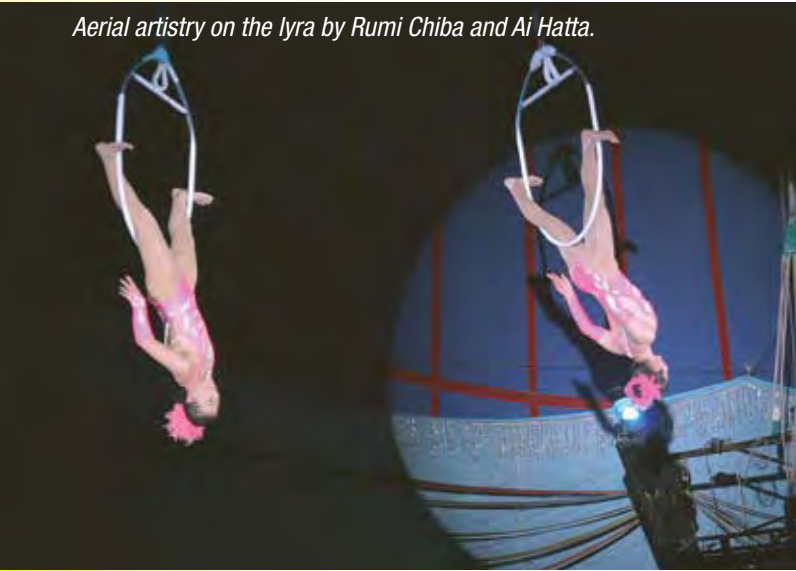


Traditional Japanese costumes worn by some of the stars of Kinoshita Circus.

Hashigo performed by Kazuya Shimoji.



Japanese clown from the double trapeze act.



Aerial artistry on the lyra by Rumi Chiba and Ai Hatta.

Trainer John Illig with four lions, four tigers and two ligers.



Andrea Carr Jewell presents zebras.



Spotlight on Hideki Kinoshita

Fourth generation circus performer and youngest son of Mr. Tadishi Kinoshita.

① *What are you most proud of?*

① We do everything together! We cooperate through all! I am most proud of the circus family community. We respect and are polite to our elders, even though they have finished work. I am also proud of the respect that all employees show towards my father, Mr. Kinoshita, because he knows all sides of the circus and he works together with his employees.



② *What was your favorite part about growing up on Circus Kinoshita?*

② When I was 9 or 10 years old I worked in the concessions and office. I learned a lot from the other people on the show. I wanted to start working right after Jr. High. I went to University. After that I went to Canada for a year. At 23 years old I started to work on the show (office side). I learned everything about the show. It is my father's style. He learned everything, so he understands what is going on. My father gave me the same opportunity.

③ *What ways does the show give back to the community and world?*

③ In 1999 Kinoshita Circus built an Elephant Hospital in Thailand. Every month they send money to support this idea. In each town we give tickets to older peoples homes and to people with disabilities. We want to bring them happiness. One of these people, a girl who couldn't walk, came to the show. After seeing the highwire she practiced every day. Her nurse put a line of tape on the floor for her. After lots of hard work she walked.

④ *What traditions are continued today in Circus Kinoshita?*

④ Kabuchi act...the flying act system of rigging... [was brought over by] my grandfather who went to Russia. He learned this system more than 60-70 years ago. Another tradition is that people live their entire lives on the show. Mr. Kibota is 3rd generation, one of the show girls is 4th generation. When someone is injured or can no longer work due to age, they are still a part of the show and are able to stay within the show family.

Spotlight on John Illig, U.S. animal trainer



⑤ *How did you find yourself in the circus?*

⑤ I started working for Larry Tetzlaff at a park in Ohio. They did circus shows there. I started in the ring in 1980 with chimps and elephants. I have worked with a variety of animals including chimps, bears, lions, tigers, ligers. I have also worked with hoof stock including zebras and a giraffe. Now I am working a mixed group of lions, ligers and tigers from Jim Club and assisting with hoof stock.

⑥ *What is your favorite part about working/performing on Circus Kinoshita?*

⑥ We only move five times a year. Mr. Kinoshita follows the seasons so we don't have the winter break.

⑦ *How is working on a show in Japan different that in Europe or the U.S.?*

⑦ We do almost all matinees. We never do evening shows. We will do as many as four shows a day a couple times a week.

⑧ *What are some of the cultural differences you have experienced?*

⑧ Since I've been here I've married a Japanese woman so I deal with cultural differences every day. It makes life interesting. People are pretty much people who want to make a living. The differences are dance, food, etc.

⑨ *How are the audiences different?*

⑨ The Japanese people are a quiet, shy people. They do not clap a lot, but you can hear them 'ooh' and 'ahh'.

⑩ *What is the craziest thing you have experienced in Circus Kinoshita?*

⑩ I think the strangest thing here is the raw meat. I ate raw liver, raw chicken. It's not just sushi. They can eat anything raw! And, I climbed Mt. Fuji! 🇯🇵