

# H. Art Chaos

By Susan Broili

**H. Art Chaos**  
**American Dance Festival**  
**Reynolds Industries Theater**  
**Duke University**  
**Durham, NC**  
**June 29–July 1, 2009**  
**Reviewed by Susan Broili**

*Photo by Sara D. Davis,  
 courtesy ADF. Sakiko Oshima's  
 Flowers of the Bones.*



A shaft of mist-filled light finds H. Art Chaos dancer Shino Kido

suspended by a wire high above the stage, her body curled into a chrysalis form. This image opens the world premiere of *Flowers of the Bones*, commissioned by American Dance Festival and choreographed by artistic director Sakiko Oshima. The Japanese company's ADF debut brought audiences into Oshima's daring, dramatic, mysterious, and mind-expanding world in a program that also featured her riveting 1995 *Rite of Spring*. ADF students Gabbie Chan Hiu Ling, Ashley Taylor, and Lauren Steinke—chosen by audition—joined company members Kido, Fumika Kobayashi, Kaori Saiki, and Rie Sensui in the new work.

The 15-minute *Flowers of the Bones* suggests a life's journey in which death represents a new beginning. In the ancient Japanese tale that inspires it, a person turns into a butterfly after death. There's no flitting about, however. The work begins with a mid-air birth, as Kido, suspended, unfurls her body. Upside down, she stirs the air with her arms and legs in dreamy, floating motions. When she descends to earth, she flails about on her back, mouth open. Eventually, she climbs onto a coffin-sized, gray gurney and balances on her stomach. On her back, she raises her torso. Her hands start to settle on her chest, then become still as death.

She is not alone on this journey. ADF dancers push, pull, crouch underneath, and balance on top of three gurneys. Soon company dancers turn into creatures with long trains of gauzy black-and-white fabric that resembles tail feathers. On the gurneys, they sit and lean back, elbows bent with upturned palms, as their trains cascade to the floor. The student dancers reappear in bunched skirts. Soon all form a shifting tableau from the top of a gurney to the floor—a portrait that foreshadows a strange, new afterlife.

A scene that begins with the sound of moaning wind signals the winter's end of life. By whipping their trains, the dancers magically produce a snowstorm, hinting at transformation.

The company received a well-deserved standing ovation on Monday (June 29). Kido seemed so at ease in the daring aerial work. ADF students more than held their own even after a mere week and a half of rehearsals.

*Rite of Spring* represents a high-water mark in dance, and not just for the bathtub scene. Oshima's interpretation of Stravinsky's 1913 score incorporates aerial work on suspended chairs in a startling portrayal of a woman victimized by physical violence and the detached curiosity of onlookers. As the victim, Naoko Shirakawa delivers a mesmerizing performance. After the other dancers' attempt to drown her, she retaliates with hurricane-force fury by dipping her hair repeatedly in tub water and flooding the stage, causing one "attacker" to fall. Like major hurricanes, this dance will be remembered for years to come.