

## ARTS

MUST  
SEE

**THEATRE CONFERENCE:** Director Declan Donnellan opens Theatre Shop's seminar on Friday, Liberty Hall, 10 a.m. (01-6704906)  
**The Ticket tomorrow:** Morvern Callar and looking forward to the Cork Film Festival



# The Japanese in space

Our reviewers on  
the Dublin  
Theatre and  
Fringe festivals

## Tokyo Notes Samuel Beckett Theatre

Helen Meany

A camera-happy Japanese woman snaps a vacant seat and names her photograph "absence". One of many comic touches from playwright and director Oriza Hirata, this also alludes to his own theatrical approach. His award-winning play, written in 1994 for Seinendan Theatre Company, Tokyo, celebrates an aesthetic of elimination.

Set in the lobby of a Tokyo art gallery in 2004, as paintings are being evacuated to Japan from war-torn Europe, it consists of a series of overlapping conversations, which initially seem desultory and inconsequential. Characters come and go in formations of twos and threes, speaking very softly, often with their backs to the audience. The rhythms of the dialogue slowly swell to include motifs of family, marriage, love, with a nod in the direction of Yasujiro Ozu's film *Tokyo Story*, as siblings circle around the question of who is going to take care of their elderly parents.

The eldest sister, who constantly takes photographs, is fascinated by Vermeer's use of light and the selectivity of the *camera obscura*. This theme is taken up by other characters: how we see things, what is illuminated by our individual preoccupations, what is left out (such as the rumblings of war in the background), what the mind sees and what the heart sees. In another grouping a young heiress is deciding whether to donate to the gallery her Vermeer paintings, a legacy that means nothing to her.

Hirata avoids all overtly theatrical devices, concentrating on creating patterns of speech and movement that become increasingly absorbing. While initially the style appears strictly naturalistic, the cumulative effect comes close to an intricately choreographed dance, or, more aptly, a musical composition, like a sonata, beautifully unified in form and themes. From the minutiae of everyday life, of body language and conversational cadences, Hirata develops abstract themes, exploring modes of perception and the value



Dialogue and monologue: *Tokyo Notes*, above, is 'a series of overlapping conversations' in which the characters 'keep their distance even in proximity', while 'you need only one guarantee to see this one-man play: Tom Conti', above right, as John Barrymore in *One Helluva Life*

of art, while remaining rooted in the specifics of his own culture. By focusing on how Japanese people actually move and interact, keeping their distance even in proximity, this marvellously performed work expands into a delicate meditation on the spaces between things, between people, between subject and object, audience and spectacle.

● *Finishes tonight*

● Tomorrow's seminar, **Spaces for Plays: A Debate on Theatre and Architecture**, looks at the expanding number of theatre spaces in Ireland and how they are working. The panel of architects and theatre-makers taking part in the discussion includes Jean-Guy Lecat, designer and collaborator with Peter Brook at the Bouffes du Nord; theatre director Lynne Parker, and Ken Hartnett, technical director at the Gaiety. The seminar is hosted by the Arts Council, tomorrow at 3 p.m. in Liberty Hall (to book, tel: 01-8173333)

### Bookings

Dublin Theatre Festival continues until Saturday, October 12th. You can book at 01-8173333, or call into Bewleys Festival Centre, Liberty Hall, Eden Quay, Dublin 1. You can also book online, at [www.dublintheatrefestival.com](http://www.dublintheatrefestival.com)