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Gamarjobat back on duty

By ANDREW SIA

Hilarious Japanese mime duo Gamarjobat are back on duty in Kuala Lumpur with a zanier show.

What happens when you combine mime and two extremely talented Japanese comedians into a wordless vaudeville show?

On their opening night last Tuesday in Kuala Lumpur, the Gamarjobat duo €“ Hiropon and Ketch €“ had the audience (young, old and those in denial) all reacting with belly-loads of laughter.



Catch Gamarjobat, a hilarious word-less vaudeville show by Japanese mime artistes Hiropon and Ketch at The Actors Studio Bangsar, KL.

This is one show that you definitely don't want to be late for. No, not because you will miss

any crucial elements of the plot, but because you may end up being part of the show!

As mimeartistes, Gamarjobat use facial expressions, body actions, musical exaggeration, guttural emissions and some props (including audience members!) to create their jokes. Above all, it's their superb comic timing that hits our funny bones right where it hurts.

There's no space for polite, diffident audiences here. These guys know how to rev up their viewers full throttle, starting with raucous J-rock music, before "training" us seat-warmers to become the loudest cheerleaders ever seen in Malaysia since we won the Thomas Cup back in 1992. OK, I exaggerate, but to continue the sporting allusions, be prepared to be "yellow carded" (literally!) if you don't shout and scream loud enough!

From the way they interact so skillfully with their audience, I had thought that they were hard-core street performers who had graduated onto a bigger stage. But no, both Hiropon (whose real name is Hiroshi Yoshimi) and Ketch (Keisuke Uchida) went through formal mime school – the Tokyo Mime Theatre in Shinjuku and the Tokyo Mime Institute in Manjuku, respectively.

After hanging out together at a mime festival in Germany, they decided to team up – using the "hello!" word that mimes from Georgia used to throw at them.

The Gamarjobat act transcends mere Mr Bean slapstick. Sure, there is some nose digging and a dash of toilet humour, but their brand of physical comedy is more about pushing mime to its story-telling limits. For instance, how their iconic metal suitcase can weigh both a ton and be feather-light and how their tug of war sequence would put Michael Jackson's "moonwalking" to shame. However, the sequence with the penguin walk and ball juggling was a bit too much like one of those wacky Hong Kong TV talentime shows for my liking.

The last time Gamarjobat showed in Malaysia in 2006, they exploited the melodramatic over-acting of the boxer's movie *Rocky* to full effect. This time, the second half of their show is a full "Western" episode – a cowboy "rides" into town from the cactus and tumbleweed desert, swaggers into a saloon and falls in love with a girl. Her boyfriend returns and the two men fight. Right, you get the picture.

But of course, a mundane storyline can become scintillating in mime. Watch how the cowboy not just "rides" but actually "moves" through the countryside. Or how the cowboy and girl slide whisky glasses across imaginary bar-tops with perfectly taut timing.

Along the way, these two morph into different roles, including as a little birthday boy. And hey, how the heck did flamenco and tango (complete with rose between teeth) get into the American Wild West? Doesn't matter, it's funny!

But I had to admit, the initial energy level (the wild cheering remember?) was difficult to maintain beyond half an hour and perhaps an intermission would have been useful. There

were times during the Western that the pace dragged a bit while the jokes began to get repetitive €“ as reflected in the generally lower laughter levels.

Nevertheless, I admit guffawing when I saw how these two used the audience as part of their tin can shooting duel. And the house was just about brought down when a “KFC barrel” got involved... you’ll have to watch it because I can’t give too much away!

Gamarjobat have had great success at the renowned Edinburgh Fringe Arts Festival, winning the Dubble Act Award and The Tap Water Award. With their word-less humour, they have made several appearances on British TV, including “Blue Peter” and “The Paul O’Grady Show”.

They most recently starred in the opening episode of “The Slammer” - BBC’s sitcom-meets-talent competition show set in a “prison for entertainers”€“ which they won.

In May 2009, the boys start a three-week run on Broadway at the New Victory Theatre. Gamarjobat are clearly on the way to bigger things but hopefully, this will not be their last visit to Malaysia.

Gamarjobat’s Western runs until Oct 19 at The Actors Studio at Bangsar Shopping Centre in KL. Showtime is 8.30pm (with extra shows on Saturday and Sunday at 5pm). Tickets are priced between RM53 and RM86. Reduced rates for senior citizens, disabled cardholders and school groups. For details, call 03-20940400/1400 or browse www.gardnerandwife.com.

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