

Clowning Around

Lovable lunatics Gamarjobat have them rolling in the aisles from Georgia to... Peru?

GAVIN BLAIR

THE silent comedy of Gamarjobat has won them legions of fans around the world. Indeed, the pair's physical comedy shows, which feature expressive grunts and other noises from the performers, along with sound effects, but no words, saw them win fame and acclaim overseas before their native Japan.

Their shows are packed full of stunts, parodies of magic tricks and assorted tomfoolery, all delivered at a frenetic pace and bursting with energy. Usually



Masters of physical comedy, Gamarjobat



Gamarjobat wins over the crowd in Kuala Lumpur, January 2017

decked out in matching suits and dark shades for their performances, the easiest way to tell the two apart is the color of their distinctive mohawk hairstyles: Ketch! sports a red one and HIRO-PON's is yellow.

"I did mime for a long time, mostly serious stories, but when I did funny material, the audience reaction was immediate and I enjoyed that," says HIRO-PON. "I'm a Charlie Chaplin fan and that was a factor too. But mime is very minor in Japan and the audiences are quite small. So I started to bill my shows as 'silent comedy' and then more people came."

After working solo for years, they came together in 1999 and soon ventured to Europe.

"We didn't really aim at performing overseas, but because we don't use words in our act, it can

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Early days: Gamarjobat on tour in Australia, March 2005

be appreciated anywhere, so it just sort of happened naturally,” explains Ketch!. “We received many offers from overseas; however, we had no offers to perform in a theatrical style emphasizing the narrative. We wanted to perform at festivals and went there by ourselves. When we do a theater show, we need a crew, so just the two of us went at first and did street performances at festivals.”

In 2000, the duo began doing street shows at the famous Edinburgh Festival Fringe in Scotland, a hotbed of performing talent from a range of genres.

“We took a video of our theater show with us, but nobody invited us to do it. Then in 2004, we spent our own money to take the theater show to Edinburgh and won the double act award,” recalls Ketch!. “The show was a complete sell-out, which was great promotion for the following year.”

“I thought when we arrived back at Narita Airport there would be photographers waiting for us, but nobody was there,” says Ketch! with a laugh.

Gamarjobat won another award at Edinburgh in 2005, followed by awards in the next two years at the Brighton Festival Fringe on England’s south coast. The success of their Edinburgh shows led to an appearance on the “Comedy Rocks with Jason Manford” UK television show in 2011.

They found their unique, wacky brand of humor worked far better in Europe than it did in the United States.

“Tastes are completely different in Europe and the United States,” says HIRO-PON. “One big difference between the UK and the States is the taboos. In the UK and in Europe, risqué material is fine, but they don’t



like too much violence, whereas in the States, it’s the other way around.”

“We got told off for raising the middle finger on a ‘robot hand’ in a show in New York,” says Ketch! “But in the UK, they like dark humor and kind of mean jokes.”

However, not everywhere in Europe welcomed them with open arms.

“We went to do a few nights in Norway about ten years ago at a 400-seater venue and there were only about thirty people in the place. We were laughing when we came on stage and the audience saw the funny side too. The second night there were about thirty-five people; some of the audience from the first night had brought their friends,” says HIRO-PON.

Back in Japan though, they were yet to make a big splash.

“Then in 2007 we did a sell-out show in Yokohama for about 800 people. And at the end we got a standing ovation from nearly everyone, and that was from Japanese people,” says Ketch!. “I thought, ‘yes, we finally made it in Japan.’”

They now tour every year in Japan, but still want to do more shows overseas.

“I like traveling so I want to do a show somewhere I’ve never been, like Peru,” says Ketch!.

“We’ve performed in thirty-five countries so far, so there are still a lot of places to go,” adds HIRO-PON. 



A scene from Gamarjobat’s Silent Comedy Japan Tour 2016