

# THE WASHINGTON POST

---

Thursday, March 21, 2013

## GoingOut Guide

### Giving office workers their due in dance

By Lisa Traiger,



Brian Krantz - "Salaryman" focuses on mid-level managers, accountants and bureaucrats confined to joyless cubicles — which some beleaguered Washingtonians are all too familiar with.

When Takehiro Ueyama was a high-schooler in Tokyo, he dreamed of playing pro baseball. Then the 18-year-old shortstop injured his shoulder, and his hopes were dashed.

But Ueyama discovered dance and, with barely a year of ballet training, was accepted into Juilliard's famed dance program in New York. After graduation, he earned a spot in one of the world's preeminent modern dance companies, the Paul Taylor Dance Company, where he danced for the master choreographer for eight years.

"I started dancing late," Ueyama says. "I didn't really know the dance history until I was like 23. . . . I didn't even know who Martha Graham was. Now I'm finding my own voice."

In discovering his own voice, he initially followed the route taken by Taylor (who was a college swimmer before he became a Martha Graham dancer).

"I was so inspired by him," Ueyama says of his mentor. "His dance was in my body. His vocabulary became my vocabulary. So that was, I think, my natural tradition, that kind of style."

These days, Ueyama, 40, has moved on to found his own New York-based troupe, Take Dance (pronounced takay), expanding on his unbridled physicality as an athlete and one-time break dancer on the streets of Tokyo. This weekend at Dance Place, Ueyama is staging his first full-length piece, "Salaryman," which excavates the lives of mid-level managers, accountants and bureaucrats who are confined to joyless cubicles across Japan's business districts.

With "Salaryman," Ueyama pushed himself far beyond his tendencies to emulate Taylor's bold, broad strokes, instead looking to his homeland and its deeply ingrained social and cultural traditions.

The piece is packed with scenes that many a beleaguered Beltway bureaucrat will recognize — the mind-numbing daily commute, the small but consequential office dramas, the daily grind that saps spirit, creativity and imagination. Born in the wake of World War II with the rise of Japan's urban middle class, these university-educated, mostly male office workers became a phenomenon of the new Japan, working long hours in corporate or government offices, sacrificing family time and receiving little recognition.

“Most of my friends [from high school] are salarymen in Tokyo,” Ueyama says. “I talked to them about their everyday life, their schedule, what they like, what they don’t like, what they want to do if they are not a salaryman.”

These workers, he adds, “just don’t care about any other life or hobbies or opinions. They just work, work, work, like slaves. I somehow wanted to capture how hard they’re working for the company, but they’re miserable.”

But there’s something profound, Ueyama suggests, in the way so many Japanese people grow old devoting themselves to a corporation. “I think that there’s some kind of culture that Japanese men have — not only men, women, too — that emphasizes the idea that sacrifice is beautiful,” he says. “In World War II, many Japanese sacrificed for the country and the emperor, their family and loved ones. Somehow sacrificing your life is something we see as a thing of beauty in Japan.”

Traiger is a freelance writer.

### **Salaryman**

Saturday at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 7 p.m. at Dance Place, 3225 Eighth St. NE. 202-269-1600. [www.danceplace.org](http://www.danceplace.org). \$22.